

INTERVIEW WITH NEAL PURVIS AND ROBERT WADE, SEPTEMBER 2012

Interview by Anders Frejdh, Editor of From Sweden with Love.

What are the films that inspired you to want to write? Who are your favorite actors?

Neal:

Bogart movies. Spartacus. Hedy Lamarr. Alien. Halloween. Elephant Man. Godfather. Apocalypse Now. Anything by Nic Roeg. Diner. Michael Mann. The movies of Bergman, Ferreri, Blier, Bertolucci : those may seem pretentious now but they didn't at the time – I don't think.

Actors: Depardieu, Deneuve, many many American stars from 1940-70s. Not so many now. Ryan Gosling is good now.

Rob:

My tastes happened to be very similar to Neal's when we met and that might be why we hit it off. There were mainstream films that just got me excited about a good story well told – Butch Cassidy, Where Eagles Dare, Marathon Man, Outlaw Josey Wales – then the ones you discovered for yourself – Don't Look Now, High Plains Drifter, Bad Timing, The Servant, The Swimmer, A Matter of Life and Death, Sweet Smell of Success, Point Blank , Repulsion, The Hill, Charley Varrick, Mean Streets, – and classics like North By Northwest, Casablanca, Angels With Dirty Faces, The Glass Key, It's a Wonderful Life, Bridge on the River Kwai...

Actors: Spencer Tracy, Cagney, Cary Grant, Jimmy Stewart, Lee Marvin, Eastwood, Newman, Hackman, DeNiro, Katherine Hepburn.

Can you talk about how you came to work on the Bond series?

We wrote a film script we're proud of that no-one will ever see called Plunkett & Macleane. Butch & Sundance in 18th Century London. Characterful, actionful, it was one of the best things we've done. The film that was made from it was very different from the one we wrote – but Barbara & Michael got hold of the script and called us in. We had also had some success with a period drama called Let Him Have It.

M & B were looking for a little more drama after Tomorrow Never Dies.

You could say we were lucky (and we would!) but on the other hand we were suited to the job. We have tried with varying success to write characterful Bond films, trying to find the balance between action and drama – which then go through the filmmaking process.

Can you talk about the process? How ideas are developed?

It is different every time – our basic TWINE storyline was in place within two weeks and never really changed. DAD was our attempt to do another YOLT – which was an overblown film – but in the film making process it grew and grew even bigger than we imagined it would. Casino Royale was a great opportunity to tackle one of the

original books – the primary challenge being to make a cold war era plot that’s settled by a game of cards work in a contemporary setting – while adding action that scaled it up. We’re very happy with our work on that with the sinking Venetian house providing a spectacle, yet somehow in keeping with the tone of the novel.

Quantum however changed a great deal from what we wrote. We tried something quite ambitious and perhaps too self-indulgently-linked to the events and characters of Casino – but when those elements got stripped out, the film sort of fell between two stools. With Skyfall the process was different again, with the director involved from the off - it was a slow evolution, but always with a common ambition and intention for the type of film we were making. And it's looking very good!

How closely involved are Barbara Broccoli and Michael G. Wilson in the development process?

Sometimes very, sometimes a little less – they are ‘creative producers’ but also support/encourage creativity from their directors and writers. They like to be involved but they also expect you to do your job!

Do you work with Greg Wilson, and what is his role?

Greg has worked in various capacities – music department, script department, editing – he’s a friend and a valuable part of the team.

Michael is very technically oriented. How much research do you have to do when coming up with a Bond plot?

You’re right. Michael is very knowledgeable. It has to be a possible/reasonable idea to get past him. The research side is both vital and fun – just as it obviously was for Fleming. Who knows, if he had learned that the Russians had experimented with mirrors in space to provide cheap street lighting in Siberia – good cover for a secret super-weapon if you then focused those rays – then we might have ended up with a Fleming story called Die Another Day!

What have been the biggest challenges of your involvement with Bond over the years, and with writing a new film? From where do you get ideas and inspiration?

Harder every time – with Casino it was great to finally get a book. Hence our desire to make two films from it (although it didn’t work out that way). The challenges are what you might expect them to be if you were asked to come up with a Bond plot. To make it a true Bond while not repeating what’s gone before. The crucial aspect is you’re making the real thing – not a pastiche. And you must stick to Fleming.

From my research, I understand you were not involved on the set once filming commenced on Casino Royale and Quantum of Solace. Could you tell us a bit more on your involvement on The World Is Not Enough and Die Another after shooting started?

DAD was the only Bond in which we were involved during shooting – mainly because there was a major change to the third act very late in the day, which led to huge rewrites as we went into production. As on any movie you try and support the director with his vision. If he wanted a funny line we’d give three or four - and he’d

choose the one he preferred.

As to the others, you can still be called in after the film has been shot for extra lines and adjustments.

How different is the finished result to your original idea regarding the Bonds? (Whether in actual changes to story or dialogue, or just in the tone of the piece.)

Very different. The film you shoot in your head is so different. It even took us a while to realize that Casino Royale was going to be good.

How much of the action is created by you vs. stunt ideas imposed on you?

We always strive for the action to evolve from the settings, as part of the developing story, something like the chase at the Palio in QOS being a typical example. We write our version of the action and stunts – eg the free-running on the construction site in Casino Royale – then the stunt team get to work and use some things, discard/improve others. We loved the crane fight/jump and Bond running through the wall – not our ideas.

The helicopter saws were suggested to us as an action element for TWINE – we then came up with the caviar factory on the water as a way of making it work. The hole jump had been suggested to us but we weren't the ones who put it in Quantum.

How do you feel about the good reviews for CR vs. the criticism of QOS?

Most of the criticism of QOS was fair enough – it was following a hard act.

How likely do think it is that we will ever get to see scenes such as [Bond checks into hotels and flirts with the female staff] again?

Very.

Can you tell us about the difference in writing Pierce Brosnan's Bond vs. the Bond for Daniel Craig?

Pierce was great at emotion and humour. The tricky part was character development – he was part of the series where Bond was already fully formed.

Our script for Casino was originally written for Fleming's Bond – there was no actor in place. It gave us the opportunity to try and start the formation process – how he became Bond and how he continued to struggle with being Bond. And Skyfall has been written very much as a vehicle to explore Daniel Craig's Bond – an unpredictable loner who tries to hide any warmth because he's scared it's a weakness...

Do you know the current status with SPECTRE and Blofeld now that Kevin McClory is no longer with us? What are the chances of using that concept again?

We're not really sure but we think it's unlikely. One day that might be sorted out.

Have you ever considered to take Bond to Sweden or any other of the Scandinavian countries in your screenplays?

Well Daniel's been there already. Might mix his films up? We haven't been to Sweden but loved working in Denmark on a movie. If we ever did another Bond we'd love to bring him to Scandinavia.

Can you tell us an anecdote, a special memory of your time on the Bond films?

Rob: There are many, but you can't forget how surreal things are when you're first thrown in the deep end; we had been in meetings on TWINE for four or five weeks in LA, just us and Barbara and Michael, and they were excited that they were going to be able to book Pinewood for the shoot, having not been back there in force for fifteen years. And the Associate Producer Tony Waye was on the line from England, asking 'Should we book the tank? There are other people after it' (the vast water tank on the back lot) – and Barbara and Michael looked at us knowing there was no specific idea and said, 'Well?'... And we looked at each other and said – 'Book the tank!'. Spool forward a year and we're on a night-shoot, Zukovsky's caviar factory on the Caspian Sea - the largest set they'd ever built, the largest crane in Europe brought over to dangle a helicopter from...

**What is your view on the Jason Bourne and Mission Impossible film series?
Competitive or complementary to the Bonds?**

We like them both. How they survive, reinvent and develop will be interesting to watch. Particularly when they reach Bourne 23.

Are there any other authors in the thriller genre you enjoy and would recommend?

Eric Ambler, Geoffrey Household, Jim Thompson, Richard Stark (Donald Westlake), Dashiell Hammett.

What are your hobbies outside the films?

Playing music. Occasional golf. Tennis.

How does your Bond work impact your daily lives?

Unintentionally your ears are highly attuned to every reference on the radio, other people's conversation, mentions in newspapers... There must be at least one Bond reference in the media every day. But also one's mind becomes attuned to developments, technologies, character traits and bizarre episodes that would fit into the Bond world.

What do your families make of the fact that you guys actually write Bond films?

Pleased.

Finally, on a personal note, what are your thoughts about the *From Sweden With Love* website?

Love it!

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR ANSWERS GUYS, YOU ROCK!

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