

How safe do you feel?: James Bond, *Skyfall*, and the politics of the secret agent in an age of ubiquitous threat.

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Abstract

When examining the process of the banalization of warfare, the history of the modern state intelligence apparatus provides one of the most significant examples of such a transition. This article, through analysis of the 2012 James Bond film *Skyfall*, looks at how the world's most successful spy franchise has adapted to this contemporary paradigm of intelligence and cyber-terrorism. Through examining how *Skyfall* engages with issues such as the threats posed by the ubiquity of the internet, the accountability of intelligence services in the wake of the War on Terror, and the continued ability of fictional works to depict conflict and the intelligence apparatus in the modern world, this essay argues that *Skyfall* attempts a significant cultural

intervention into perceptions of the contemporary secret state, offering a staunch defense of Western intelligence services while contesting the skeptical visions that have come to dominate recent spy narratives.

"HOW SAFE DO YOU FEEL?": JAMES BOND, SKYFALL, AND THE POLITICS OF THE SECRET AGENT IN AN AGE OF UBIQUITOUS THREAT

JAMES SMITH

When examining the process of the banalization of warfare in our present society, where once-extraordinary responses to conflict and crisis become accepted and routine, the history of the modern state intelligence apparatus provides one of the most significant examples of such a transition. As writers such as Phillip Knightley (2003) have noted, over the course of the twentieth century perceptions and practices of intelligence gathering underwent a remarkable metamorphosis. At the start of the century spying was largely an ad hoc occupation. Dedicated state intelligence agencies did not exist until 1909, when the Secret Service Bureau of Britain was founded in response to a perceived German invasion threat, and the United States did not create a permanent centralized intelligence apparatus until the founding of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in 1947 due to the looming Cold War. Yet by the latter half of the century such intelligence agencies had become an inextricable part of the machinery of world states, with advances in areas such as communications, computing, and satellite technology providing reach far beyond that available to earlier spies. In the political climate of the "war on terror," previously illegal intelligence methods such as abduction and torture became condoned by Western officials, and in the age of the internet, surveillance practices that were



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