

(‘Bill’) Tanner (yet another Amis pseudonym) is also under curate at Ransom. Offered for research on the latter title are the “Composite notes and outlines, typescript photocopy of Forward, and corrected and annotated typescript fragments of each chapter.”

Fans of the James Bond film series have often expressed their desire to see COLONEL SUN to be developed as a film property and, indeed, EON Productions did secure the rights to the novel for a potential film project. Sadly though, EON has thus far not chosen to exercise that option. In September of 1976 Amis wrote to his novelist wife, Elizabeth Jane Howard “that I’d been to Pinewood Studios to be talked to about the new James Bond film, which they want me to write an article on. Don’t know that I will, but it was fun to go, meet Roger Moore, etc.” (On July 1, 1977 Amis did, in fact, contribute a book review of Christopher Wood’s film-novelisation of *The Spy Who Loved Me* for the arts magazine the *New Statesman*. Wood had co-written the screenplay (with veteran scribe Richard Maibaum) for the 10th oo7 film and had been asked by the filmmakers to write a movie tie-in as all the elements of Fleming’s original novel were (by his own request) to be totally discarded by the filmmakers. Amis was somewhat – uncharacteristically – charitable to Wood in his essay noting “Mr. Wood has bravely tackled his formidable main task, that of turning a typical late Bond film, which is basically facetious, into a novel after Fleming, which must be basically serious. To this end he has, by my count, left out nine silly gadgets and sixteen silly cracks which were in the script.”

On the 16th of September Amis wrote Howard again and offered “Meant to tell you that while I was a Pinewood I mentioned COL. SUN to the PR chap, saying quite innocently that I’d heard long ago that Salzman (sic) had more or less specifically rejected the idea of filming it. PR chap said well, you know Salzman (sic) has left the organization now and, er, let’s say I’ve heard people mentioning COL. SUN. So there may be something in store for us there.” Though Amis continued to remain hopeful throughout the 1970s that EON Productions might yet consider COLONEL SUN as a viable film property, when asked by Raymond

Benson in 1982 if he thought the novel may yet be developed into a film he answered, bluntly and with finality, “The filmmakers have for some reason shown no interest in it.” By 1982, of course, even Fleming’s Bond novels weren’t really being adapted to the screen – only his titles, a character name and the occasional sequence were being appropriated. In any event, the Greek island settings required for COLONEL SUN had only been recently (and beautifully) photographed by the filmmakers for the 12th oo7 screen opus *For Your Eyes Only* (1981). And the idea of a British-Soviet intelligence alliance – an idea so politically charged and debated in 1968 – had also been recently co-opted by the filmmakers for *The Spy Who Loved Me* in 1977. When the 20th James Bond film *Die Another Day* was released in November of 2002 and Pierce Brosnan as oo7 encountered the sinister Colonel Moon in the film’s opening reel, I couldn’t help but wonder how many folks in the audience were even aware of EON’s little in-house joke. Chances are we’ll never see COLONEL SUN on the big screen – and that’s a shame as it’s a terrible waste of a great Bond villain.

Sadly Robert Markham’s contribution to the James Bond continuation series proved to be a one-shot offering. I can’t say with any certainty that it was a decision made by Kingsley Amis or the board of trustees at Glidrose, but the result was the same. The literary James Bond would, in fact, *not* be back – at least not for sometime. Just as the cinematic James Bond closed the 1960s with the odd-man-out *On Her Majesty’s Secret Service*, COLONEL SUN proved to be that decade’s last ‘old-school’ Fleming-styled Bond literary undertaking.

Then in 1981 Glidrose announced the return of the literary James Bond in LICENCE RENEWED. John Gardner, a well respected and established author of espionage thrillers, accepted the offer to update oo7 as a counterspy of the 1980s. Gardner brought his own style to the new Bond series. Unlike Amis, Gardner was no authority on Fleming and, in fact, admitted to having “not really liking the Bond books very much.” But the financial success that writing the new Bond novels afforded Gardner, gave him the opportunity to

Like silk the water slid over their bodies

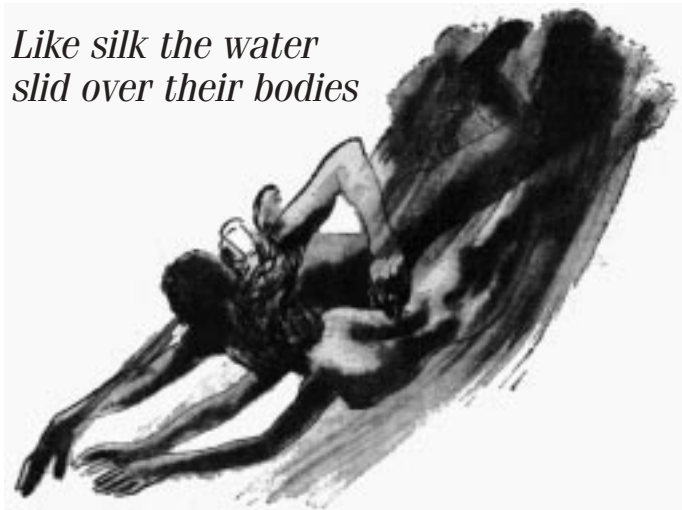


Illustration by Robb

work on what he described as his more “serious work,” an unfortunate comment that must have assuredly made a Fleming-purist such as Amis wince.

Amis did, in fact, take the new Bond author to public task in his review of Gardner’s second Bond offering FOR SPECIAL SERVICES. In an article that appeared in the *Times Literary Supplement* (September 12, 1982), Amis wrote “Quite likely it ill becomes a man placed as I am to say that, whereas its predecessor was bad enough by any reasonable standard, the present offering is an unrelieved disaster...” Uncharitable words, perhaps, from a man who might have understood better than anyone the daunting and thankless task of filling Ian Fleming’s literary shoes. Amis was unsparing in his criticism of Gardner, remaining faithful to the original Fleming-concept of how the writing of Bond novels should be undertaken. “Perhaps I can claim the privilege of at least a momentary venting of indignation at the disrepute into which this publication brings the name and works of Ian Fleming,” Amis scoffed.

The truth be told, Amis wasn’t alone in his assessment of Gardner as Bond novelist. On April 9, 1983 *The New York Times* reviewed Mr. Gardner’s third oo7 literary offering ICEBREAKER, and it’s reasonable to describe that essay as not what U.S. publishing house G.P. Putnam would have hoped for. “When Kingsley Amis, surely a competent novelist, wrote a rather boring Bond book, was surprised,” wrote Anatole Broyard in his article ‘James Bond Revised’. “I could only suppose that he was over qualified for the job... But if Mr. Amis was overqualified, Mr. Gardner seems to me to be at the other end of the spectrum.” In retrospect, that assessment too is unfair. Gardner carried the Bond continuation series from 1981 through 1996 producing no fewer than fourteen novels and two film novelizations before Glidrose passed the torch onto Raymond Benson who penned six novels, three short stories and three film novelizations of his own between 1997 and 2002. Though both authors brought their own particular charms and writing styles to their

Bond efforts, neither really – really – made any attempt to write a Fleming-style pastiche. The truth is Glidrose wouldn’t have allowed them to had they tried. The James Bond continuation novels of 1981 through 2002 were, perhaps unconsciously, influenced more by the film series than by Fleming himself. Of course by now the cinematic James Bond had become such an iconic totem that most of the readers of the new novels were fans of the films and, in truth, many in this audience may have never have read the original Fleming’s at all, let alone the decidedly ‘old-school’ and dimly remembered COLONEL SUN.

In his critical essay of some thirty years earlier detailing THE MAN WITH THE GOLDEN GUN, Kingsley Amis noted that the critics – with their dogged allegations of sadism and wanton violence of the original oo7 novels – moved Fleming to take “such charges seriously.” In response to such accusations, Amis contended that the “violent and bloody action, the infliction of pain in general...was very much scaled down in what (Fleming) wrote after 1958.” Amis was saddened that Fleming had seemingly capitulated to his critics since the “sex and snobbery and the memorable meals and the high-level gambling... however unedifying, were part of the unique Fleming world”. In COLONEL SUN, Kingsley Amis tried, as best as he was able without benefit of Fleming’s own unique and personal gifts, to carry on that tradition. If Amis failed – and I’m of the opinion that he most certainly did not – it was probably due to the fact that the critics were less versed in those traditions than Amis was himself. “Nobody can write at his best,” Amis concluded with profundity in his essay on THE MAN WITH THE GOLDEN GUN “with part of his attention on puritanical readers over his shoulder.” Of all the oo7 continuation novels, only Kingsley Amis’s COLONEL SUN captures the spirit of the original literary James Bond – of Ian Fleming’s James Bond. Kingsley Amis seemed to intuitively understand how “a man who is only a silhouette” can still cast a long shadow.

Glancing up she saw the two men close in



Illustration by Robb