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Opening Extract from...

Goldeneye

Written by John Gardner

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GOLDENEYE

John Gardner

*Based on the screenplay
by Michael France
and Jeffrey Caine*



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COWSLIP – 1986

His head seemed to explode. He felt the great roar in his ears, the pounding of blood, then the sensation that his skull was riddled with holes. Fire poured through the holes, from his ears and nostrils, then his mouth. James Bond jerked awake, realising several things at once. The roar came from two Soviet jets, afterburners guzzling fuel as they passed overhead. He recalled that, at the briefing, they had said military jets often flew low over the mountains heading back to their base near Russia's oldest sea port, Archangel.

He also cursed himself for falling from a doze into a deep sleep. He stretched, trying to ease his aching muscles, then moved very slowly to glance at his watch. It was nearly time to go and he was cold and suffering from cramps. He listened and could still hear the jets receding but no sound of the spotter aircraft which used the airfield far below.

The spotter plane was over sixty years old – a Fiesler Storch captured at Stalingrad from Hitler's Luftwaffe. To watch it would be like seeing an old Roman ballista on the electronic battlefield of the 1980s.

Wide awake now, Bond looked around, alert, becoming orientated. He lay at the top of a high ridge within the bowl surrounded by dark hostile mountains. To his right was the long man-made lake and in front of him the squat concrete guardhouse blocking entry to the top of the vast dam which rose some eight hundred feet from the valley floor.

Below the dam, the ground was a mass of boulders and rocks, but he knew these were only camouflage for they were cemented into almost twenty feet of bomb proof stressed concrete and steel. Beneath those rocks lay the target: BioChemical Processing Plant Number One.

In spite of the 1972 convention, the Soviets had gone on making biological and chemical warheads deep under the earth in this bleak place.

Until now, M had told them, the manufacture was confined to known horrors: anthrax and a number of nerve and more conventional gases, but now the place was being retooled to produce something far more deadly – one of the many viruses which were being isolated as man slowly destroyed the world's rain forests. Within a couple of weeks, the underground factory would be capable of producing a biological agent which was the stuff of nightmares: a fast-spreading virus capable of thinning the blood of its victims, rapidly breaking down the human body so that one by one the main organs would shut down. This was a quick, though terrifying, death.

The Soviets at least had to be slowed down, if not stopped altogether from producing warheads and bomblets containing this catastrophic agent. M had been clear about the urgency. The West needed time to work on some form of immunisation, and it was down to James Bond, 007, and his old friend Alec Trevelyan, 006, to get the job done.

'You are my two best men,' the Old Man had said, 'and we're all aware that this operation gives you only a fifty-fifty chance of return. But I have no other option. The place must be destroyed now. Another few weeks and it'll be too late.'

In the here and now, Bond turned his head and looked down into the valley, reflecting on the repulsive nature of the work going on beneath the brutal earth in this godforsaken bleak area in the far north of the Soviet empire.

The only visible sign of life below him was the rough runway which scarred the ground, like an open wound, ending only

about thirty feet from the edge of a long gorge which ran parallel to the dam, at the far end of the plateau above the valley floor. The gorge was around a mile wide and very deep, with its own valley floor.

The runway, they had been told, was one of the two ways in and out of the processing plant. Workers, security troops and scientists were flown in and out using an old Antonov An-14 Bee which had been modified and given a VSTOL (Very Short Take Off and Landing) capability.

The other entrance and exit was by a crude underground railway, cut in the late 1960s through earth and rock, enabling personnel and product to be linked with the port of Archangel. The rolling stock of this unsophisticated transport system consisted mainly of flatbed cars to carry products, and open carriages with hardwood seats for staff and troops. The journey from Archangel to the processing plant took almost twenty-four hours – a day of intense discomfort.

Alec Trevelyan had been inserted three days before into Archangel itself, and, if all the documents were in order and nobody had questioned his cover, he should by now have made the long underground journey into the processing plant itself.

M had seen it as a two-handed job. Trevelyan was to get in and provide an entrance through one of the grilles set into the thick roof, close to an air conditioning unit. Inside he was also charged with preparing a safe zone from which he and Bond could operate.

Bond's task was to take out the two guards at their post on top of the dam, then to carry the arms and explosives down to Trevelyan. They were then to blast the secret facility to hell and make their way back to an extraction point some twenty miles east of Archangel. Nobody concerned had any doubts as to the near suicidal nature of the operation. *Operation Cowslip*. Bond gave a wry smile at the code name, thinking it singularly inappropriate for what they were to do. There's many a slip twixt cow and lip, he thought, his smile broadening.

Again he stretched his legs and arms. He had been lying in this position, less than fifty yards from the guard post, for over seven hours after being parachuted – using the High Altitude Low Opening (HALO) technique, from a stealth equipped aircraft – eight hours before. He had landed short of his DZ and it had taken an hour to climb the quarter of a mile up the rocky incline leading to the small outcrop of rock which would give him access to the guard post.

The post was simply a square, concrete and steel structure perched on the edge of the dam's top. There was a window and door on Bond's side of the building, and he knew from the briefing photographs that inside there was room for the two permanent guards to eat, relax and sleep. He also knew that on the far side was a kind of enclosed dog pen constructed of high steel bars, with a sliding electronic gate at the end which led out to the walkway on top of the dam itself.

The soldiers who manned this post were part of the security detail on permanent assignment to BioChemical Processing Plant Number One. These were troops drawn from the KGB Border Guards Department, all of whom had undergone special extra training with the élite Spetsnaz troops. The other end of the dam needed no such guards as it abutted straight onto a sheer rock face.

The pair of guards were changed weekly, making a tough and unpleasant climb up a set of wide D-shaped rungs set firmly into the dam's vertical wall. For a second, he wondered what that climb would be like in the bleakest midwinter. Even Bond shuddered at the thought, then, knowing that the time for his own descent was nearing, he mentally checked off the equipment he carried.

He wore a specially designed wet suit, climbing boots and a long parka. The wet suit and parka were both a stone grey colour and contained more zippered and buttoned pockets than you would find in a poacher's greatcoat. In Bond's case, he carried equipment wrapped around his chest under the parka, and a

long pocket containing what he hoped would be his ultimate salvation ran down the right thigh of the wet suit. Further, a broad webbing belt was clipped around his waist. At least four pouches were threaded onto the belt, plus a webbing holster for his weapon of choice, the ASP 9mm, loaded with ferocious Glaser ammunition and fitted with a long noise reduction cylinder. His face and head were covered in an insulated ski mask, while his hands were protected by skin-tight leather gloves which kept out the cold without reducing his ability to use his fingers for the most delicate of tasks.

In his head he ticked off the contents of the pockets and pouches, as he had done a dozen times before the cold and fatigue had pushed him into a dangerous sleep.

As he went through the items, Bond became aware of noise, the splutter and buzz of the Storch's engine far away below on the edge of the runway. It was the first signal, for the old spotter aircraft ran regular patrols over the area, its pilot making sure that no civilian climbing enthusiasts, or worse, enemies of the state, had made their way just a shade too close to the restricted area.

The Storch flew a pre-set pattern which seldom varied and took around twenty minutes to complete. Its final manoeuvre was to fly low across the lake, passing over the dam at its midpoint. From the large greenhouse cockpit the pilot would scan the guard post, and routine security required that one of the KGB Border Guards would come out into the steel cage and signal an 'all clear' to the aircraft. In spite of the fact that there was both a two-way radio and a telephone in the guard post, this was the kind of instruction beloved of Colonel Ourumov, the officer in charge of security. Arkady Grigorovich Ourumov, a senior officer of the KGB Border Guards, was well known to Western agents such as Bond. It was said of him that his view of security was so paranoid that should he ever get his way, he would have guards watching guards watching guards, and so on to infinity.

Below, the enigma pitch changed on the Fiesler Storch as it began its take off run. Bond slowly rose, flexing his limbs, then he noiselessly ran towards the building, flattening himself against the wall to the right of the grimy window. As he did so, he was aware of the aircraft climbing out of the valley.

Quickly he leaned inwards, peering through the window. The two soldiers sat opposite one another concentrating on a chess game. What happens, he wondered, if they miss their cue by not signalling to the plane?

The aircraft noise was receding; now he detected another change of engine noise and an increase in sound as, far out over the lake, it began to line up with the centre of the dam.

Pressed against the wall, he clearly heard the guards' voices and the scrape as a chair was pushed back.

Once more he leaned towards the window. One of the men was opening the door on the dam side and walking out into the steel enclosure, the other soldier still sat at the table, his entire concentration on the chess board.

Listening for the aircraft's approach, Bond removed the automatic pistol from its holster and edged towards the door. As he passed the window he could see that the guard outside was shielding his eyes, looking upwards.

In one fluid movement he opened the door, stepped inside the building and lifted his right hand. The man puzzling over the chess board was so engrossed that his reactions were considerably slowed. He turned, looked blankly at Bond as though he were someone from another planet, then began to push his chair back, his face a mixture of surprise, fear, and disbelief.

The automatic made little noise, just a quiet phut-phut. In fact the metallic click of the mechanism seemed louder than the actual rounds being fired. Bond winced slightly as the two Glasers blew into the man's chest, right over the heart, the pair hitting within a quarter of an inch of each other. Overkill, Bond thought as the twin odours of gunsmoke and blood twitched at his nostrils. His lifetime experience taught him to always fire two

rounds, in the traditional manner. With Glasers you only needed one, for ninety per cent of victims hit by this round ended up dead within seconds, it being virtually a shotgun cartridge, the No. 12 shot floating in liquid Teflon within a thin cupronickel jacket, the bullet sealed with a plastic cap. It was the sudden outward explosion of the No. 12 shot once the bullet entered the body that did the damage.

The dead soldier's chair had been pushed back, almost to the wall by the impact. Now the body slumped to one side and fell to the floor, one arm flapping against the chess board, scattering the pieces.

The spotter aircraft was passing overhead, and as Bond stepped over the body so the telephone began to ring.

Bond hesitated, a fraction too long, his eyes searching for the incoming point. The telephone rang five times before he reached down and ripped the jack from the socket. By then he heard the other guard running back towards the building. He could hear the man's boots thudding on the paving and could imagine him unholstering his pistol.

'Definitely not officer material,' Bond murmured. The man was just rushing back without even making a tactical appraisal of what might, or might not, be happening inside the guard post. He exploded through the door, the little Stechkin automatic waving, almost out of control, in his hand.

This time, Bond fired only once. The second soldier spun to the left, hit the wall and collapsed, leaving a trail of smeared blood behind him. In the silence that followed, two of the chess pieces rolled at his feet.

'Checkmate,' Bond muttered, taking stock of the situation, looking specifically for the control to the gate out on the top of the dam. The big metal button like an unpolished silver mushroom was set into the wall high to the left of the door, just where they said it would be. He glanced at his watch, seeing there was not much time left. If all had gone smoothly, Alec Trevelyan would be in place waiting for him. The plan had been to set the

charge and get out while the bulk of the Plant's staff were on their one hour's mid-morning break.

He unzipped the parka and began to unwind the cumbersome thick elasticised rope from around his body, curling it across his left arm, making certain that the entire length was free and there was no danger of it getting tangled. In the next few minutes his life would depend on the strength and pliability of this piece of equipment which he coiled so that the strengthened noose was in his left hand and the big spring clip in his right. Reaching up, Bond banged the big button which controlled the outer gate, hitting it squarely with the spring clip.

He heard the whine of the metal from the far end of the cage, looked out and saw that the way onto the wide top of the dam was clear. Taking a deep breath he began to sprint forward.

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

He had not anticipated the stiff breeze blowing off the lake, but the top of the dam was wide enough, and there was no question of doing a balancing act as the wind whipped around him. There were strong metal guardrails running along either side, so Bond had no worries about falling off and hurtling through the eight hundred feet of space onto the rocks below – even though this was basically what he was about to do.

He reached the centre of the high curved structure, glanced down and felt his stomach turn over. In the short period they had been given to prepare for *Operation Cowslip*, he had done this only twice, and then dropping less than half the distance he was about to attempt. You only got one chance with this method, and there were no things like reserve parachutes or wrist clamped altimeters.

Initially he had suggested abseiling down the face of the dam, but quickly realised that this tried and true method would leave him exposed to detection for longer than anyone wanted – including himself.

He banged the spring clip onto one of the metal guardrail uprights, and gave it a quick pull, quietly hoping the iron to which he was tethering himself was bedded firmly into the top of the dam as the experts claimed. Hardly stopping to think about anything else, Bond slid his right foot into the noose at the other end of the bungee cord and pulled the long piton gun – assembled lovingly by Q's people – from its special holster in

the thigh of his wet suit. Ducking under the rail, he glanced back to be certain the cord was free of any obstruction, and could not get tangled. Then, expelling his breath in a loud *whaaa* sound, James Bond launched himself from the top of the dam.

This was nothing like free fall parachuting because you did not have the comfortable knowledge that, when the moment came, there was a 'chute on your back. Bond's stomach was still up on top of the dam as he plunged downwards. The drop seemed endless. He could feel his body moving faster and even felt the resistance of the air through which he moved. His ears sang and his facial muscles ceased to be of any value, his cheeks forced back and his mouth stretched in what he knew was a kind of hideous grin.

As he plummeted with the dam's wall only a foot or so from his body, he pushed the piton gun forward, his hands firmly holding its twin grips which eventually would be his way to safety. The use of this piece of equipment had to be timed to the second. If not, the bungee cord would reach its maximum length and he would be sprung back, lifted by the cord then falling again and, in all probability, smashed into the hard wall of the dam.

Struggling against the pressure, Bond forced himself to look down at the rocky ground hurtling up to meet him. He relied solely on instinct to judge the moment to fire the piton. There was no accurate way of calculating the optimum second, and he knew that his sense of self-preservation could now easily override accuracy.

Then, right or wrong, the moment was upon him. He clung to the handles of the piton gun as he pressed the trigger and felt the projectile charge thump, the tingling of the small explosion running up his arms. The barbed arrow that was the piton shot down, trailing a snake of around a hundred feet of ultra strong climbing rope behind it, moving with a speed that was a fraction faster than Bond's downward momentum.

The piton smashed into the camouflaged concrete at the foot

of the dam at just the moment that the bungee cord had paid out its normal length, but with around two hundred feet of elastation to go. Bond felt the pull and, for a second, thought his arms were going to be torn from their sockets. The muscles of both arms and the right leg screamed pain through him, and he wondered if this had been the kind of thing men first felt on the rack in those days of intense physical torture. He reached forward hand over hand, beginning to haul himself downwards to the bottom of the dam, his face contorted with agony as he fought against the pressure from the bungee cord which was now taut, pulling, trying to drag him back up the dam wall.

Finally Bond reached the bottom, strung between the rope and the thick bungee cord. Looking down, he could see the strain on the piton which was moving slightly in the concrete in which it was embedded.

If the piton was ripped out by tension on the bungee, he was well aware of what could happen: he would be catapulted upwards, against the side of the wall. His body would be scraped as though someone held him against a huge Black & Decker sander. In the end the bungee would leap into the air, eight hundred feet above, and what was left of him would be thrown down onto the top of the dam.

Even now, he felt himself being torn apart by the bungee's tension and the anchored rope around his left arm. He reached up to free his foot from the loop and the bungee shot back up the dam wall, flying upwards like a long fast-moving snake.

He stood for a moment, orientating himself, then moved in a crouch over the rocks, zig-zagging between them to reach the air conditioning pump which stood like a grey painted drum about twenty yards away. The grille, next to the pump, had been opened and he could see the marks where Alec Trevelyan had used a metal-cutting instrument on the big padlock. As he pulled the grille back, Bond found himself looking into a dark square hole with the top elongated D-shape of a series of rungs set in the side of the wall below.

Swinging himself into the darkness, he began to descend, not rushing but moving slowly, his feet feeling out the rungs, his mind focused on finding the bottom of this black well, for he had no idea how far this maintenance shaft went down.

It turned out to be a long haul, for the wide duct seemed to go down forever. Though his eyes were gradually getting used to the blackness, Bond – for the first time in his life – started to experience a kind of vertigo, his senses stretched to the limit. His muscles still ached and his mind felt detached from what he was actually doing. Everything had happened so quickly that a part of him was still high up above the ground, plunging towards the rocks and cement; his hands on the rungs felt bruised and there was a musty damp smell in his nostrils. It was an odour that became stronger the further he moved downward.

After what seemed to be ten or fifteen minutes and hundreds of metal rungs, his feet touched solid ground. A floor? Or was it a ledge from which he could easily fall into some bottomless pit? By now he had ceased to trust his senses, and his mind became obsessed with heights.

Very slowly he adjusted to the blackness of his surroundings. He appeared to be in some small chamber which he presumed was the access point to the maintenance shaft. To his right, Bond could just make out the shape of a door. His feet scraped loudly on the stone floor as he crossed to the door, gently pulling it open and moving through into what felt like a larger chamber.

Two steps in he stopped, frozen like a statue. He could smell the scent of blood and death. More, he was conscious of the cold metal of a pistol gently resting in his neck, just under his ear.

‘Don’t even breathe,’ a voice said in Russian. Then, ‘Where are the others?’

‘I’m alone.’ His voice a fraction more relaxed.

‘Aren’t we all?’ There was a faint chuckle and the lights came on, almost blinding him with their brightness. He turned to see his old friend, Alec Trevelyan, grinning at him, still looking like

the eternal schoolboy. Many had said of Trevelyan that he had a picture in the attic, like Dorian Grey.

‘Glad you could drop in, James.’

‘It was a slightly longer journey than I’d expected, but most of it was downhill.’

Trevelyan motioned towards a second door, open and revealing a curved metal stairwell.

‘You ready, James?’

‘Let’s do it.’ Bond moved first, through the door and down the spiral stairwell. ‘You come up this way?’ he asked of 006.

‘Yes. There’s a door at the bottom to your right and another facing you. That’s the one with the electronic locks. Behind it you’ll find Aladdin’s cave. After a fashion anyway.’

Already Bond was unzipping one of the pouches on his belt. By the time they reached the electronic door he had the little oblong box in his hand. The box was magnetic and he clamped it onto the side of the door, throwing a small switch as he did so. Immediately a series of lights began to pulse and a small digital read-out started to move very fast. ‘It’s really quite simple,’ Q had said. ‘It works very like an autodialler, except it sorts through every known permutation of numbers and letters at a speed of around five hundred a second. When it detects part of a matching pattern it starts to configure the entire electronic code. Even on a cleverly invented system it shouldn’t take more than fifteen minutes to hit the right numbers or letters. As soon as it’s done that, the lock will be activated.’

‘A very handy little gadget to take on a picnic,’ Bond had replied.

Q had given him the ghost of a smile. ‘I had it tested on the vaults below the Bank of England,’ he said, ‘The people there didn’t like it one bit.’

By the time Bond’s memory took in the conversation, the box gave a final little beep and the door clicked open.

They were on a high, suspended walkway, looking down on what seemed to be a huge manufacturing plant. On the far side a

row of some six massive stainless steel vats stood in line, linked together by slim metal tubing. This line of vats ended in a mass of tubes and pumps which went into a much larger container like some kind of pressure cooker. More tubes and pumps disappeared through the wall area to their right. By this time, Bond was completely disoriented. He had no idea of his position in relation to the ground above.

To the left, at the end of these gigantic containers was another electronic door, while directly underneath them Bond could make out a wide conveyor belt, running the length of the floor and rolling through a fringed rubber flap.

'What's through there?' Bond indicated the electronic door.

'The rest of the laboratories, I should think.' Trevelyan gave another chuckle. 'I just went missing into the connecting passages when I got here. The map M gave us was pretty accurate, so I hid up where you found me. I played at being a kind of phantom of the labs so to speak. The music of the night down here isn't really my thing though.'

Bond indicated the big red signs, decorated with skulls and crossed bones which hung everywhere. In Russian they said: 'DANGER. HIGHLY INFLAMMABLE.' 'And those?' he asked.

'They're scouring out all the equipment. I gathered, from what I heard on that quite disgusting underground train ride, that this is all new stuff. Has to be absolutely clean before they start processing the new horror.'

'Smoking in here could seriously damage your health then?'

'Definitely, and the second-hand smoke would kill very quickly indeed.'

'Let's get the place rigged up.' Bond headed towards the steps that led down onto the deadly factory's floor and clamped the electronic device onto the door at the end. Then he began emptying his pouches and pockets of the neatly packaged timers and charges which he had carried in with him.

Together they set about placing the explosives behind the vats and on the connecting tubing.

'I'll do the last one,' he called to Trevelyan. 'If I set it for three minutes or so that should give us plenty of time to get out. The rest'll go up by spontaneous combustion . . .'

The device on the door gave its final little beep, signifying that it had unlocked the electronic password, and as it did so a piercing, shrieking warning klaxon went off.

Bond swore. 'Get behind this stuff, Alec. No time to . . .' He was cut off by the sound of a voice, magnified by an electric loud hailer—

'This is Colonel Ourumov,' the disembodied voice grated. 'You are surrounded and there is no way you can escape. Just drop any weapons and come out with your hands on your heads. Now!'

'No way,' Bond muttered, continuing down the line of steel vats that towered above him. Aloud he called, 'Alec, put that bit of high-tech gadgetry into reverse. Just hit the switch on the left side.'

He had almost reached the final high pressure cooker device. 'Alec?' He ducked down and peered around the corner of the drum.

His old friend 006, Alec Trevelyan, knelt on the floor. Behind him, with the muzzle of a pistol against Trevelyan's cheek, stood a tall, sinister Soviet officer wearing the shoulder boards of a colonel. He was backed by half-a-dozen heavily armed troops, one of whom loosed off a round in Bond's direction.

'Fool. Stop that,' yelled Ourumov. 'If you hit any of the hardware, you'll blow us all to hell and gone.'

Bond drew back, and looked at the timer he was about to insert into the final charge, the one that would bring about a chain reaction and blow most of the place to pieces. He glanced across to the other side of the factory floor towards the conveyor belt. The start button was set into a metal post near the fringed rubber flap.

'I give you a count of ten,' Ourumov shouted. 'If you're not out by then, I will shoot your comrade.'

'And set off an inferno?' Bond set the timer for one minute and plugged it into the explosive charge. Then he removed a grenade from the belt pouch that contained four of these lethal little bombs.

'One . . . Two . . . ' Ourumov began counting.

Bond pulled the pin from the grenade, holding down the safety lever.

'Three . . . Four . . . '

Bond stepped from behind the massive steel pressure cooker. His arms were wide apart, the grenade in his left hand, pistol in the right.

'Five . . . '

'You kill him, we all die.' Bond knew that was pretty near the truth. Apart from the grenade, the main charge would blow in about thirty seconds.

'You think I'm not afraid to die for my country?' Ourumov snapped. Then he pulled the trigger and Bond saw his old friend topple over.

Without a second thought he dropped the grenade, leaped to his right onto the conveyor belt, his free hand smacking the start button on the metal upright.

He heard Ourumov yell at his men to hold their fire, and thought he saw him backing away, dragging Trevelyan's body with him.

The conveyor belt started to move with a jerk and, now that he was away from the vats and cylinders filled with inflammable cleaning fluids, the Russian colonel fired two shots. The bullets smacked into the woodwork above the rubber skirt just as the belt carried Bond out of the processing room, angling upwards and moving fast.

The grenade exploded with an earshattering blast. He thought he could hear screams, then, suddenly, he found himself being deposited onto a loading bay, outside the facility, only some fifty yards from the runway where the little Fiesler Storch was

slowly taxiing, its tail towards him, ready to make the ninety-degree turn onto the threshold for take off.

The first explosion came from deep within the earth behind him, almost throwing him forward onto the unfriendly ground. Nobody was going to get out of the complex alive, that was a sure bet, so he began to run, heading towards the aircraft.

With bursting lungs, Bond reached it just as it started to turn and begin rolling. Behind him another explosion. This time a blossom of flame, smoke and debris seemed to erupt from the ground. He leaped forward, catching the wing strut on the right hand side of the Storch. The pilot, concentrating on keeping the aircraft straight as it began to gather speed, glanced towards him and retarded the power, trying to abort the take off, as Bond reached out to the handle on the cockpit door.

The pilot, hitting the brakes to slow the plane, banged the rudder to the left, making the Storch yaw violently in an attempt to throw Bond from the wing strut, but when that did not work, he opened the door on his side and rolled from the cockpit, pushing the throttle to full power as he went.

With a push, Bond catapulted himself from the strut to the right hand seat, then leaned over to ease back on the throttle as he pulled himself across to get behind the controls.

The aircraft was turning in a wide circle, out of control, bumping along the rough ground, lurching and dipping first one wing and then the other, leaving Bond in no doubt that it would cartwheel any second. He snatched back on the throttle, pressed the rudder pedals to gain control and, as another explosion fountained behind him, he swung the nose onto the runway, fishtailing violently until the Storch pointed down the centre line.

He was almost two thirds of the way down the runway and at a standstill, desperately looking around the cockpit to acclimatise himself with the controls when he felt the plane being rocked violently by another explosion.

Bond pulled down on the flaps lever and saw that the wide

extensions to the trailing edge of the wings became fully extended. As they did so, he opened the throttle to full power and moved his feet back, easing off the brakes on the rudder pedals.

The Storch leaped forward, gathering speed, and eating up what was left of the runway. He felt the tail come up as the machine reached the end of the metalled section and bounced over the twenty odd yards of turf, heading straight for the long wide crevasse. Even with flaps fully extended, Bond knew he had not quite made enough speed to lift the Storch into the air. He eased back on the stick and felt the aircraft claw for its natural element. It rolled off the end of the solid ground, hung in midair for a second, before the nose dropped as she stalled and began to lose height, falling into the deep fissure.

He saw the rock face rising on both sides, great boulders and a stream less than two hundred feet below, getting closer with each second. Gently he eased off on the power, tilted the straining aircraft to the left, lifting the nose slightly so that he could gain enough airspeed for the plane's wings to take over the weight.

It seemed an eternity before he could ease back, and feel the nose come right up, the whole machine stabilising. Slowly he began to climb from the gorge and turn back over the facility which was now rubble and fire leaping from under the ground.

As he climbed away, Bond thought he saw the dam begin to split and crack, spilling water across the entire valley. It was no time to feel any sentiment. Alec Trevelyan had taken the same risks as anyone else in the Double-O Section. If not for a twist of fate, it could have been himself down there, shot through the head, his body being slowly covered by the water that was now crashing white from the lake.

Flying as low as he dared, Bond began to play tag with the mountains as he steadily made his way back to the area where in a matter of hours a submarine would take him back to England with *Operation Cowslip* successfully accomplished. On reflection,

the one thing that pleased him was the fact that there had been no biological or chemical weapons actually in the complex. If there had been, the idea of blowing the place up was just about as foolish a concept as you could have. So, he presumed, M had already known there was little likelihood of deadly germs or toxic chemicals at the plant.

There was no way he could know that, in less than a decade, Colonel Ourumov would rise from the dead to become a thorn in his side and place him in even greater danger.