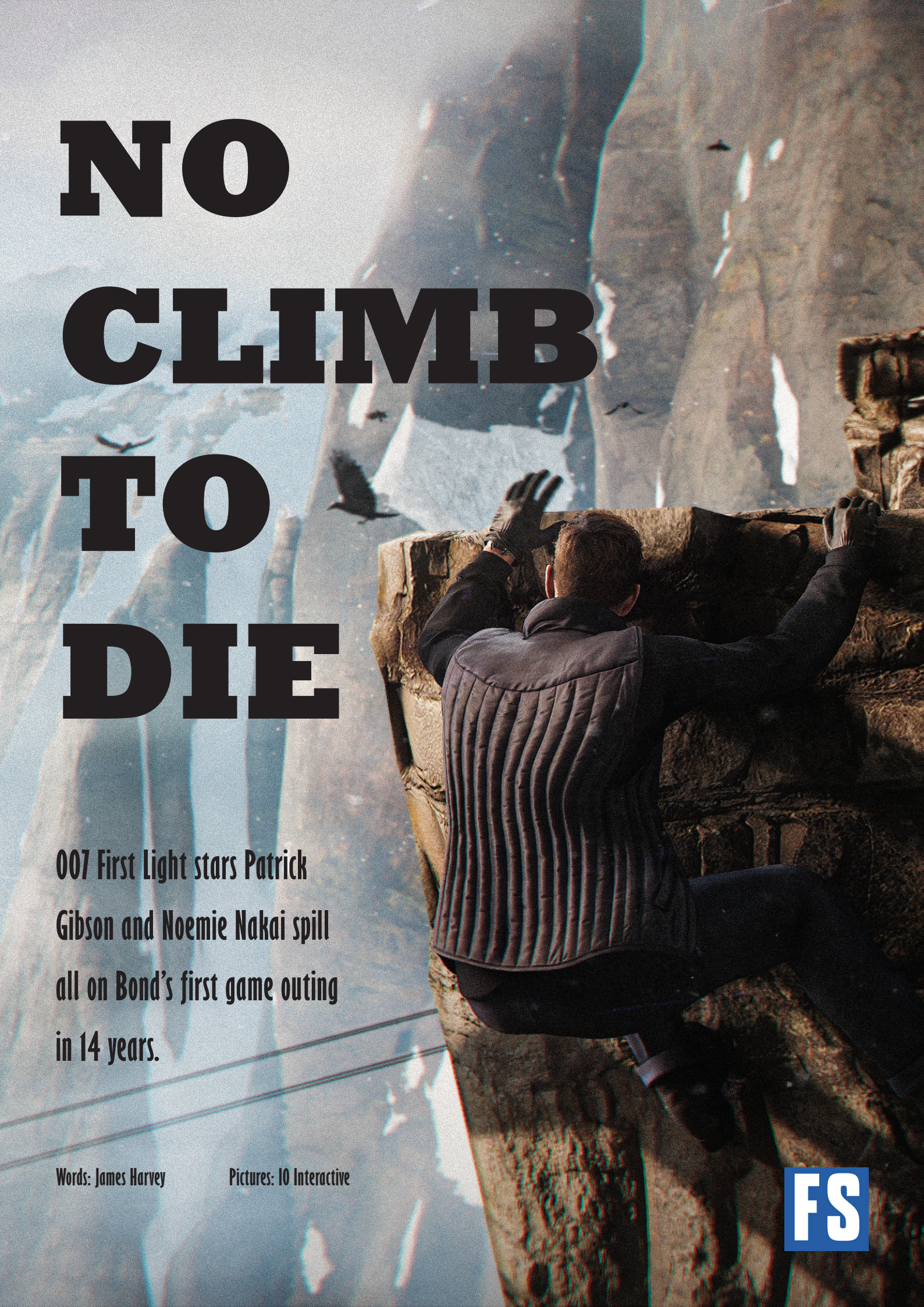


NO CLIMB TO DIE


A man in a dark quilted jacket is climbing a stone wall. He is seen from behind, with his hands on the ledge. The background is a bright blue sky with several birds flying. The overall scene is dramatic and action-oriented.

007 First Light stars Patrick Gibson and Noemie Nakai spill all on Bond's first game outing in 14 years.

Words: James Harvey

Pictures: IO Interactive





“I knew it was about a spy...”

Talking to two stars of *007: First Light*, Danish studio IO Interactive’s first venture outside the *Hitman* series since 2010, gives two very different portraits of what filming was like.

“There was talk of a martini, [so] I put the pieces together”, Patrick Gibson says of an early audition. A good thing, too; as the seventh man to don a very specific tuxedo, his likeness would soon be on posters, billboards and social media feeds across the world. It was probably worth knowing what he was getting himself into.

For Noemie Nakai, who plays DGSE agent Charlotte Roth on at least one mission of international espionage, things were a little less clear-cut.

“It took us several years to realise that me and some people I knew were on the same project, because [it] was called by different names,” she says. “When I was first working on this, it was called Project Knight, and a friend of mine was working on Project Rook, and only after discussing

we realised that everyone was getting piecemeal information.”

It’s a level of secrecy that would put the Marvel Cinematic Universe to shame – and unusual, even in the AAA side of the industry, for a video game.

But *007: First Light* isn’t your usual AAA title. In a twist IO may not have predicted when it first pitched the idea to Eon Productions during the development of 2021’s *Hitman 3*, this will be the first outing for its main character since Daniel Craig hung up his radioactive lint five years ago. It’ll (technically) be the franchise’s first narrative title to come out under the stewardship of Amazon MGM, who took over supervision from the Broccoli family when the game was more-or-less complete in 2025. As the first fresh glimpse at what its hero can be since 2006, there’s a lot of pressure, rightly or wrongly, on this story to define a certain spy for the 2020s.

Which spy? His name’s Bond; James Bond. Cue guitar riff.

Resurrection

The last time Bond appeared in a video game was 2012's *007 Legends*, which combined missions from each of the six interpretations of the character and retrofitted Daniel Craig's face over them. Activision's gamble on nostalgia rolled snake eyes, was roundly rejected by audiences and critics, and put the notoriously protective Eon Productions off video games for the foreseeable future.

It's appropriate, then, that *First Light* is the project to rise from the ashes. Telling an original story of how Bond earned his license to kill, it was planned from the very first pitch as a fresh take on the character.

"What was important for everyone involved was that it was a reimagined bond origin," Gibson says. "It was important not to feel like it was synthesising something that had been done before, and that it sat in its own universe, almost."

At 26, the youngest on-screen interpretation of the character is fresh out of the Royal Navy, "immature and reckless," about to be inducted into MI6, and hungry for those two sweet Os.

"[He] evolves to become [so] suave," Nakai says.



Noemie Nakai stars as DGSE (French secret service) agent Charlotte Roth



First Light's Bond hasn't lost his taste for globe-trotting. Or speedboats.

"He knows everything about champagne, wine, cars, women, he's top of his game. [Here] you get to see a version of him before that, where he's still rough and makes mistakes, and he's still figuring out things. That's quite great, I think, rather than just experiencing someone who's the perfect human being."

To achieve that vision of perfection, this Bond will need all the help he can get. Mentorship comes from a series of capable women, from Priyanga Burford's M (again, a younger version of the character than we've seen before) to a Moneypenny (Kiera Lester) returning to the field agent role we last saw in the opening of 2012's *Skyfall*. Plus, newcomer Roth.

"She crosses paths with Bond during a mission in Slovakia," Nakai says, referring to a gameplay trailer revealed in September.

"[She's] actually way more knowledgeable than him at this point about the whole spy game, so it's actually quite great to see women take the lead and pave the way for him to become a spy."

The Living Daylights

Where other actors have voiced Bond on the gaming scene (Craig reprised his role for *Quantum Of Solace*, *Goldeneye 007* and *Blood Stone*, and was mimicked by Archers star Timothy Watson for *007 Legends*), the franchise's long absence from the medium means game production has moved beyond spending a few days in a soundproof box. Using motion capture on a volumetric set not dissimilar to those now commonplace in film and TV production, Gibson is the first actor to inhabit Bond's digital body as well as his vocal cords.

"90% of the time it was the same as filming on set", he says. "The technology now is so refined that you can really just do what you would do on screen, and sometimes even subtler. The characters can feel more human when you see those micro expressions."

As you'd expect, acting around a series of screens and ping-pong-covered morph suits has its challenges – especially when your script has a few pages missing. "I would go to the director, Martin [Emborg]," Nakai remembers. "And I was like: 'Martin, there is a limit to me being able to play around one paragraph, I need a little bit more.'"

"It was very new at the start, getting used to it," Gibson admits. "Whatever you do, they can place the shot afterwards. In film, you know that if you're shooting a close-up, you sort of subconsciously do your performance for that lens or that camera, but [in motion-capture] you know that at all times your whole body is basically involved in the process."



Patrick Gibson plays the eponymous spy

“You know that at all times your whole body is basically involved in the process”



IO Interactive stresses this isn't just Hitman in a tux - gameplay melds stealth, gunplay, and Bond's signature charm. And cars (above).

A Bond for Tomorrow

It's not only the acting process that's changed since 007 last found himself under a thumbstick. AAA game development is almost unrecognisable to the fast-track production which enabled a glut of film adaptations before 2012. Production timelines have since revered; major game titles now routinely take longer to make than most Bond films. Gibson remembers watching *No Time To Die* around the same time as his audition process in 2021.

For a franchise which prides itself on staying true to the moment of its conception, reflecting the status of masculinity, Britain, and the culture at large, that could present a problem. For Nakai, that responsibility meant leaning into the one aspect of modern life unlikely to change between 2021 and 2026: European diplomacy.

"Before I really got into acting, I was studying international relations," she says. "When I was doing a lot of prep for this role, it was way less about going back to the books, or going back to the movies. I did a lot more reading about linguistics, anthropology, politics, international relations, and

it helped a lot to watch even boring things like speeches at the EU Commission. It has nothing to do with the game, but just to get to make sure that what we would do would be really rooted in a very authentic, real world."

As Amazon MGM gears up to reinvent Bond for the big screen, eyes will almost certainly be trained on *First Light* to provide a blueprint. But whether Denis Villeneuve offers Gibson the chance to audition or not (the 31-year-old's name is almost certain to appear on various reputable betting outfits in the coming weeks), the game still looks to make its own mark on the legacy of the world's most famous secret agent.

"It felt very current six years ago when I was first told the story," Gibson says, "and I think there are things about it now that feel incredibly current. I think each Bond feels of its time, and I do think it's the Bond for today, this version, I really, really do."

007: First Light is available now on PlayStation 5, Windows and Xbox Series X/S

