

# Jason Bourne (2016)

Rated R. Running time: 2 hours 2 min.

Our content ratings: Violence 2; Language 3; Sex/Nudity 1.

Our star rating (1-5): 3.5

*Remember the days of old, consider the years long past; ask your father, and he will inform you; your elders, and they will tell you.*

*Deuteronomy 32:7*

*Like a city breached, without walls, is one who lacks self-control.*

*Proverbs 25:28*

Like the four other films in the Bourne series, the premise of this new one is that Jason cannot remember “the days of old.” During his transformation by an ultra secret project of the CIA, he has been turned into a super agent just short of a Marvel Comics super hero, able to kill with his bare hands and never suffer from a bad conscience. The process took away his memory, and thus he has lost control of his personal life. His goal in the series is to wrest both memory and control from the CIA before he is, in the agency’s euphemistic term, “terminated” because he is such a threat to the agency’s extensive conspiracies.

Teaming up again with action director Paul Greenglass, Matt Damon returns to his role after almost nine years. During this long interval Jason has been living off the grid, earning his living participating in underground bare knuckle fights near the border of Macedonia and Greece. (His transformation

apparently toughened his skin and bones, because there seems to be no lasting physical affects that are experienced by real life boxers.) He is contacted by former lover Nicky Parsons (Julia Stiles) who while in Reykjavik Iceland had hacked into the CIA's super computer and copied files of Treadstone, the assassination program for which Bourne had been recruited, and its successor, Iron Hand – information that points to Bourne's own father Richard Webb (Gregg Henry) being involved in their creation.

Parson's hacking is immediately discovered by the head of the CIA's Cyber Ops Division, Heather Lee (Alicia Vikander). Reporting to and advising CIA Director Robert Dewey (Tommy Lee Jones), Lee manages to convince her boss that she be placed in charge of the pursuit of Parsons and Bourne. Dewey pretends to go along with her plan to lure Bourne back into the Agency rather than to "terminate" him, though in reality he has assigned the coldly efficient contract killer known only as "the Asset" (Vincent Cassel) to silence Bourne forever.

The action moves from Iceland to Athens (where Parsons contacts Bourne) to Berlin and London, on to Washington, D.C., with a suspenseful conclusion at a high tech convention in Las Vegas. There is a seemingly endless series of fights, running, car chases, shooting, explosions, dead bodies, and all the other exciting things expected of an action flick today. The scenes are made all the more thrilling by the choppy editing style of Greenglass's longtime editor Christopher Rouse.

However, unlike most action films, some serious issues are imbedded in this popcorn movie. Although the once heroically portrayed CIA has long been negatively depicted, it was usually a rogue agent or division head who was the villain. This time it is the very *director* of the spy agency who is the bad guy. The film suggests that too much secrecy and unlimited power can lead to very bad consequences. The CIA in this film is as brutal as the KGB during the days of the Soviet Union!

The sad state of the world economy is seen in the Athens segment where thousands of demonstrators against government austerity measures form the background for the attempt on Bourne and Parson's lives.

The way in which the CIA can use the vast number of surveillance cameras employed everywhere to track down Jason is intriguing. Although 1984 has come and gone, George Orwell's "Big Brother is watching you" apparently has arrived. "Smile," you probably are on camera and being checked out by someone somewhere.

And the climactic segment at a tech convention in Los Vegas involves a character who is a good stand-in for Edward Snowden, Christian Dassault (Vinzenz Kiefer), head of a tech firm about to make a speech along with Robert Dewey. Dassault has been cooperating with the CIA on a Facebook-like social network called Deep Dream. However, concerned that the government is secretly violating the privacy of millions of his customers, he has told Dewey that he will confess his deal and apologize for it. Thus Dewey has ordered the Asset to take out the CEO when he gets up to make his speech. Of course, Bourne is there, and...

I still cringe at the casual killings and celebration of speed and violence of the series, and yet there is no doubt the film provides escape from one's problems or ordinary life. Our grandparents had their dime novels and fairytales from the Brothers Grimm for their thrills. We have the Bourne series and its like.

*This review with a set of discussion questions will be in the Oct. issue of Visual Parables.*