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Fan Cultures

25 April 2008

### A Blond Bond? Divisions within a Fan Community

While Ian Fleming's James Bond book series that begin with 1953's *Casino Royale*, garnered a fan-base of its own, the real boom in James Bond fandom occurred in 1962 with the release of EON Production's *Dr. No*, the first in a series of 21 films that continues to grow. While considered one of the earliest and best examples of spy-fiction in the 1960s, the Bond franchise has changed over the decades in casting, the tone of films, and the increased inclusion of product placement. As the franchise has grown, so has the vocal nature of the fan community, with each installment another opportunity for fans to lavish praise or pour criticism on the producers and stars. One of the more visible debates within this community is over which actor made the best Bond, and how well the producers have cast the iconic film role. While it seems many studies of fan communities make the reductionist (though often unavoidable, given the restraints of making a concise argument) mistake of viewing fan communities as largely homogeneous in how they interact with producers, view their fan-text, and interact with that text. An examination of the controversy within the Bond fan community surrounding the casting of Daniel Craig to replace Pierce Brosnan as James Bond reveals an example of the diversity within fan communities that is seems so rarely pointed to, as well as insight into one fan community's awareness of the capitalist framework in which they operate and the role of mass media in making fans' voices heard.

The now-defunct [craignotbond.com](http://craignotbond.com) called for the boycott of *Casino Royale* and asked “how can a short, blond actor with the rough face of a professional boxer ... pull off the role of a tall, dark, handsome and suave secret agent?”<sup>1</sup> The site also questioned the producers’ decision to ‘reboot’ the series and establish a new continuity, and the decision to make a grittier, (slightly) more realistic Bond film. Such disputes close mirror discussions among *Beauty and the Beast* fans over the casting and narrative changes of the third season (Jenkins, 1992: 120-151). In addition to the most basic element of members of fan communities being sharply critical of producers’ decisions, the reasons for the critique stem fan understandings of the series’ respective canons as well as their generic expectations. Just as Jenkins reports some fans choosing to read *Beauty and the Beast* as a popular romance and demanding a happy ending to the narrative (134), some Bond fans demanded the outlandish plots and sets of late-Connery or Moore-era Bond films, choosing to see Bond as a superspy saving the entire world rather than a more down-to-earth espionage agent. The emphasis among some Bond fans on Craig not being suited for the role mirrors the response of fans who disliked the Diana character on *Beauty and the Beast*: both were viewed by vocal segments as poor replacements for their predecessors.

Many of the criticisms leveled against Daniel Craig online focus on his blond hair and include crude attacks on his appearance as the major reason he is unsuited to play James Bond. At the same time Craig is compared to a Neanderthal,<sup>2</sup> there is more rational discussion of his lack of adherence to the aesthetic of Bond laid down by the novels’ creator, Ian Fleming. Thus, a difference emerges from the phenomenon that Jenkins observed, with some fans invoking the authority of the initial creator to criticize the decisions of the films’ producers. However, there seems to be little real coherence even among the anti-Craig Bond fans, with some using the reverse argument that the producers’ proposed return to the roots of Bond violates the humorous

spirit of the films. The only consistent belief of the fans who created [craignotbond.com](http://craignotbond.com) and other similar sites is their firm opposition to this casting choice. Nevertheless, that diversity of opinion even among the faction that disagree with the producers is precisely the type of activity and belief that it is crucial to acknowledge when making claims even about particular fan communities.

The other important facet of exploring an artifact such as the anti-Craig site is the degree to which the Bond fans who created it recognize the capitalist framework in which their community operates. The success of EON Productions' Bond franchise lies in the willingness of the movie-going public to see the films, and calling for a boycott of the film, seek to resist the producers not with underground fan fiction and attempts at rejecting the capitalist system, but by using it in a very blunt manner. While other studies of fan communities may focus on ways that fans attempt to avoid interaction with corporate powers, the webmasters of [craignotbond.com](http://craignotbond.com) made efforts to ensure that corporate news outlets covering the release of the film linked to their site and mentioned their efforts, and indeed the site itself often linked to stories from the British tabloid press criticizing Craig. Such tactics also imply an understanding of the importance of mass media to the goals of some fan groups, and contrast some of the ideas of fans in hiding that Jenkins explored in *Textual Poachers*.

Perhaps the most intriguing component of this site is the anti-climactic conclusion to the story; *Casino Royale* received generally positive reviews and Craig's performance was especially praised, while the film was the highest grossing in the history of the franchise. As for [craignotbond.com](http://craignotbond.com) itself, the site shut down a few months after the film's release, but the same creators made [danielcraigisnotbond.com](http://danielcraigisnotbond.com), which remains a place for critiques of Craig as Bond as well as other information relating to the franchise.

Thus, while the material goal of this segment of the fan community was not met, they succeeded in voicing public dissent that was noticed by the mainstream media and continue to express their views, not in low-circulation fanzines, but rather online, on a site supported by commercial advertisements. As a fan artifact, it is unlikely that [craignotbond](http://www.craignotbond.com/) is unique, but it certainly provides a telling example of the diversity within fan communities, and the awareness of many fans of the commodified, mass media culture in which they operate, and the idea that fans as objects of academic scrutiny cannot easily be reduced to the familiar refrains of early fan scholarship: marginalized subgroups working against the grain of commodity culture.

#### Notes

1. "Daniel Craig is not Bond!" 26 February 2006. Retrieved April 19, 2008, from Internet Archive: <http://web.archive.org/web/20060226043548/http://www.craignotbond.com/index.html>

2. "Italian Scientist Evaluates Craig's Looks." 26 February 2006. Retrieved April 19, 2008, from Internet Archive: <http://web.archive.org/web/20060226043348/www.craignotbond.com/craignotbondp1.html>.

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<http://web.archive.org/web/20060226043348/www.craignotbond.com/craignotbondp1.html>.

Jenkins, H 1992, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, Routledge, New York.

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