

A full-page photograph of Daniel Craig standing on the edge of a swimming pool. He is wearing a green t-shirt with a graphic, blue jeans, and brown loafers. The background is a lush green lawn with trees in the distance. The text 'LICENCE TO THRILL' is overlaid in large white letters across the middle of the image.

LICENCE TO THRILL

First seen as an odd choice to play 007 in the upcoming *Casino Royale*, Daniel Craig is determined to prove his critics wrong. Judging by his interview manner, though, the British actor isn't doing himself any favours, as Joanne Hawkins discovers

Daniel Craig is really trying. The new James Bond is doing his best to appear charming, witty and relaxed – as would befit his fictional alter ego – but it's not entirely working. Outside, Londoners are enduring an unusually hot day, but here in an opulent "hospitality" suite at London's grand Dorchester Hotel, things are decidedly chilly.

Happy to talk about his role as the new 007 in the upcoming *Casino Royale* – the 21st "official" Bond film – the jeans and T-shirt clad Craig bristles when questions veer into any areas he deems too personal. Which seems to be pretty much everything apart from the film.

Even asking him the seemingly innocuous question as to which Bond he prefers seems to be a problem. "The first Bond movies I ever saw at the cinema were Roger Moore's, so they're always going to have a place in my heart," he muses. "But Pierce [Brosnan] did a great job, as did Timothy [Dalton]. But whenever I see *Live and Let Die* [starring Moore], I remember the cinema I was in where I saw it with my father, so..."

That's a vote for Roger Moore then? "Oh no, you're not getting that answer out of me," he snaps, looking down at his slightly daggy white trainers. "I couldn't possibly answer that."

(It's at this point I fantasise about being a Bond villain, stroking a long-haired white cat and purring, "Ve have vays of making you talk, Mr Bond.")

Still, Craig's reticence doesn't come as too much of a surprise because his dislike of being interviewed is well-documented. "I hate self-publicity," he explains. "I make films and I have to promote those films, otherwise what's the point? But if I'm not working, I'd rather have my teeth pulled than go and look for publicity for myself."

"But we all get better at bulls**tting as we get older," he says with a hint of a tight-lipped smile.

His wariness is understandable. Two years ago, Daniel Craig was just another English actor, quietly making a name for himself internationally with supporting roles alongside Angelina Jolie in *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider*, Tom Hanks in *Road to Perdition* and Gwyneth Paltrow in *Sylvia*.

Then came the triple whammy, publicity-wise. First, if you believe the British tabloids, a four-month affair with supermodel Kate Moss, plus rumours a few months later of another relationship with friend Jude Law's on/off girlfriend Sienna Miller while they were making *Layer Cake* (they've both denied it). Suddenly, Craig the thesp was better known as Craig the cad, and he found himself front-page news.

And then last October, after months of rumours in which it seemed every man and his dog were in the running to become the new Bond, came the news that Craig was to replace Pierce Brosnan as the next 007. The announcement was made at a press conference beside the River Thames, at which Craig arrived by speed boat. So far, so very James Bond, had it not been for the fact that Craig was wearing a girlie lifejacket – and was seemingly dwarfed by the beefy Royal Marines travelling alongside him.

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It didn't go unnoticed, and soon Craig was being mocked by the media for his lack of stature (even though he's 180cm tall), his personality ("The name's Bland. James Bland," quipped the papers) and even because of his blond hair. "How very perceptive of them," says Craig, sarcastically.

Some Bond fans even went so far as to set up websites campaigning against his appointment as the sixth Bond. One, the now-defunct www.craignotbond.com, was dedicated to having Craig fired because he was a "short, blond actor with the rough face of a professional boxer and a penchant for playing killers, cranks, cads and gigolos".

It failed – obviously – and Craig, 38, says he wasn't too bothered by the campaign. "I wasn't happy about it, but I didn't lose sleep over it," he sighs. "What's the point? I didn't get the sack; that could have happened. That would've been dreadful. I would've lost sleep over that," he laughs, relaxing slightly for the first time this morning.

Casino Royale director Martin Campbell has a different take on it. "Before Daniel had even shot a

foot of film, people had their knives out and were criticising him, and of course that affected him. Daniel definitely went through a period where he was depressed by it but once he [started filming] the movie, all was forgotten. He just got on with it and did a fantastic job."

The decision to replace Brosnan as Bond was taken after 2002's *Die Another Day*, which, despite being the highest-grossing Bond movie ever, was

considered by some to be too "fantastical", as producer Michael G Wilson puts it. (They had a point – *Die Another Day* featured an invisible car, something Bond author Ian Fleming probably never envisaged.)

"We thought the whole series needed a new direction, so we decided to shift gear into a more realistic style," Wilson explains. "As we were going to do *Casino Royale* [Fleming's first Bond novel], which features Bond on his first mission as a double 0, we thought we had to cast afresh."

Wilson says fellow producer Barbara Broccoli always had Craig in mind for the part – despite recent reports that Ewan McGregor was their number-one choice. "But the studio wanted us to make sure we hadn't missed anyone so we [also] looked at a lot of people."

Names in the mix included Clive Owen, *ER*'s Goran Visnjic and Australia's very own Sam Worthington, who flew to London to do a screen test with Campbell. But, ultimately, Craig was considered the man for the mission – should he choose to accept it. "We wanted someone who was a good actor, sexy and attractive to women but also someone that men would like, and Daniel definitely fitted the bill," says Wilson.

Campbell agrees. "Daniel brings a very gritty, dark quality to the piece, which is very much in line with what Fleming had in mind for Bond. I can't see anyone else in the role, quite frankly."

For his part, Craig said he initially resisted the chance to jump into Bond's custom-made Italian suits. "It took a while to get to the point where they wanted me and I wanted it," he says, between mouthfuls of scrambled eggs (coincidentally one of Bond's favourite dishes). "But it seemed the



Daniel Craig shows his Bond credentials: (clockwise from above left) he can handle a gun, reels the women in, looks suave in a suit and doesn't mind the odd action scene.

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right thing to do. I had been fighting, well, not fighting against it exactly, but trying to get as much as possible out of [the producers] as to how they were going to portray Bond. There was no point repeating what had gone before, so I just didn't consider it an option if they weren't going to take it somewhere else. But I think we've done that, and rather beautifully as well."

Some actors might get excited at being signed up for a three-picture deal worth a reported \$45 million. But not Craig, apparently. He says the prospect of driving flash cars, snogging beautiful Bond girls (*Casino Royale* may have gone "back to basics", but there are some staples a Bond film demands) and generally looking quite cool thank you very much, didn't excite him at all. "No, not at all," he asserts. And what of the pressure of living up to the Bond tradition? "There's no point getting freaked out in situations like this because you just blow it. When I got the job it was like, 'OK, here we go. I'd better get on with it.'"

Press him a bit further and ask if there were moments during shooting when he thought, "Oh my god, I'm James Bond," and he responds, "Well yes. But I'd never tell you about it because that's mine. Certain things do have to remain secret," he says, with one of his rare smiles.

The publicity-phobic Craig admits he doesn't relish the attention his increased profile as Bond will no doubt bring. "But what can I do? I can't start pressing the panic button now. Yes, it will be s**t at times and other times it will be wonderful, so I can't dwell on the negatives."

His down-to-earth attitude to fame and fortune was shaped by his working-class upbringing in the north-west of England. He says his childhood was happy, despite his publican father Tim and mother Carol divorcing when he was four. "I'm not going to talk to you about any of that s**t," he says firmly, his pale-blue eyes narrowing into a steely stare. "But I had a fantastic youth. Both of my parents are still alive, thank goodness, and they

supported me in their own way. I could make up stories for you and some of them are true, but I don't consider my life tough in any way."

His mother, an art teacher, took him along to the theatre from an early age. "I think it had a profound effect," he remembers. At the age of six, after making his debut in the Frodsham Church of England Primary School production of *Oliver!*, he declared he wanted to become an actor. "But it changed. At 10, I wanted to be a marine biologist but that was probably because I'd seen *Jaws*. I always came back to acting though. I think I was initially influenced by movies like James Bond – and the thought of dressing up and showing off. But when I got older, I came to believe acting was kind of a worthwhile thing to do."

At 16, Craig moved to London, where he joined Britain's National Youth Theatre. "They were a huge influence on my life," he recalls. "They give people like me the support zone to concentrate on acting, because London's such a bastard of a place to live in if you're 16 or 17. Actually, it can be awful at any time of life if you don't have any money."

After a couple of years of "doing every job known to man", he got into drama school on his third attempt. Theatre, TV guest roles and a small part in the 1992 film of Bryce Courtenay's book *The Power of One*, set him on the road to stardom, but it was his role in the BBC drama series *Our Friends in the North* in 1996 that made his name.

Campbell describes Craig as "very intense. He's a very serious actor, and he takes his roles seriously, so working with him is intense to that extent. He needs to know precisely what's happening, and have input in terms of the character and what should be happening. We would often disagree about stuff, but it made for a very exciting kind of relationship."

Unfortunately for Craig, this serious actor is now as well known for his relationships – real or rumoured – as for his career. Predictably, he won't discuss his personal life, apart from offering, "One

has to work on that all the time. You've got to look after it to keep it in good shape."

What is known is that he was married briefly in his 20s, to British actress Fiona Loudon, with whom he has a teenage daughter. He then had a seven-year relationship with German actress Heike Makatsch (who played Alan Rickman's predatory secretary in *Love Actually*) before, if you believe the rumours, he hooked up with Moss. He's now rumoured to be seeing Satsuki Mitchell, an American film producer. We can only imagine whether he'd like to get married again because he clearly isn't keen to start chewing the fat about such matters with a journalist.

"It gets twisted," he says. "The awful thing about it is, you ask me a question like that, and you print my answer, and then it can hurt people. I know this to my detriment, and I don't want to hurt people."

And as for those Moss/Miller rumours, let's just say that when I ask if there's any truth in them, I feel the temperature in the room drop by a couple of degrees. "I'm not going to talk to you about press speculation," he says icily. "That's why they call me James Bland, because they asked me about that at that first press conference and I wouldn't answer, and I'm certainly not going to start now. So you can call me James Bland if you like."

He will talk about Nicole Kidman, with whom he stars in yet-to-be-released sci-fi thriller *The Invasion*, and with whom he's reunited on *The Golden Compass*, which they've been filming in London. "She's fantastic," he says. "I like her a lot."

So what else makes Craig happy? (Apart from finishing this interview, of course.) He mumbles something about travel ("I like to invest in a plane ticket; that's the best thing you can do") and "the health of his family". He won't attempt to describe himself ("Could you?" he asks testily) but was once described as having a fondness for beer and four-letter words, the first of which he had to give up to get buff for Bond. Is that fair, I wonder? "I don't drink beer, I prefer Guinness actually," he smiles. And the four-letter words? "Yes, f**k you." He may be joking, but I know when to take a hint. ■

Casino Royale opens in Australia on December 7

“There’s no point freaking out in these situations because you just blow it”

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