

Arts & Letters

FILM

[*Casino Royale*]

Shaken But Not Stirring

By Steve Sailer

JAMES BOND is the most popular English fictional character since Sherlock Holmes, the hero of 23 movies raking in \$4 billion at the global box office. The essence of his screen appeal has been the paradox embodied in the medieval word “gentleman”: an individual of refined manners, educated in the arts of conversation, dress, and cuisine, whose profession is violence.

The English gentleman was the outcome of a project lasting a millennium and a half to mold the anarchic barbarian chieftains who conquered Dark Ages Europe into the upholders of civilization. Like the Japanese samurai, they were gentled by learning aristocratic culture without, of course, demeaning themselves so low as to have to get a job that didn't involve killing people.

Ian Fleming's 1953 novel *Casino Royale* introduced a rather grim Bond. The charming but deadly gentleman Bond who had such an impact on popular culture was largely invented in 1962 by the director of “Dr. No,” Terence Young. A public-school boy, Cambridge grad, twice-wounded WWII officer, wit, bon vivant, and ladies' man, Young had everything except directing talent. He ended his career helming the seldom-seen epics “Inchon” for the Reverend Moon and “Long Days” for Colonel Khaddafi.

What he did excel at, however, was teaching a young Scottish proletarian, a former milkman and coffin polisher named Sean Connery how to act like Terence Young.

Ever since, the producers of the series, the Broccoli family, have periodically announced that they are junking the jokes and reverting to Fleming's dark characterization of Bond. Even the flippant Roger Moore rebooted after the sci-fi hijinks of “Moonraker” in the lean “For Your Eyes Only” of 1981.

Now in “Casino Royale,” the thuggish-looking British actor Daniel Craig (the blond Mossad agent in Steven Spielberg's “Munich”) plays Bond as a humorless brute with a flat, classless Estuary English accent, and the critics (other than this one) are going wild.

Bond is supposed to be tall, dark, and handsome, but Craig is none of those, so there was much concern among fans. The filmmakers have dyed his hair light brown, however, so the audience's usual unconscious color prejudice—in movies, blond is for leading ladies, not action heroes—is muted.

While Craig is certainly intense, his dry-ice approach suits a film shorter than 144 minutes. “Casino Royale” is mediocre in execution and bloated in conception, wrapping the usual elephantine Bond movie mechanics around Fleming's minimal plot. (In the book, Bond doesn't even get to kill anybody.)

It might have been interesting to shoot “Casino Royale” as Fleming wrote it, as a short, modestly budgeted Marshall Plan-era period piece about a secret agent trying to prevent a French Communist union boss from striking it rich at the baccarat table so he can pay back the money he embezzled from his Soviet masters before they kill him. But

there would be no action, just a scene in which Bond gets tortured.

Instead, the screenwriters have added stunt-filled first and third acts that have only the most confusing relationship with the heart of the movie, in which Bond now outmaneuvers a terrorist banker at a high-stakes poker game in Montenegro. (Isn't the Texas Hold 'Em fad like so 2005?)

We first meet Bond in Madagascar—which has to be the least strategically located country on earth—where he's chasing a villain around a skyscraper under construction, endlessly leaping from I-beam to I-beam like a Super Mario Brother. If you're not a videogame addict, this can get old pretty quick.

After an undermotivated excursion to the Bahamas, Bond is at the Miami airport wrestling with some random bad guy who is trying to crash a fuel truck into the giant Airbus 380, but this whole sequence was done better in “Road Warrior” a quarter of a century ago.

Then it's off to Montenegro for the big card game. Irritatingly, the movie cheats on its location shoots, with the Czech Republic, where practically every European segment is filmed these days (because quaint Prague wasn't blown up in World War II) standing in for the newly independent beach country of Montenegro. And familiar, black-populated Bahamas weakly substitutes for exotic, Malaysian-colonized Madagascar.

One theme the film authentically preserves from the novel is its most distasteful—Fleming's S&M obsession. Craig's character suffers as much pain as the hero of a Mel Gibson movie. It's the Passion of the Bond. ■

Rated PG-13 for intense sequences of violent action, a scene of torture, sexual content and nudity.

BOOKS

[*Showdown With Nuclear Iran*,
Michael D. Evans and Jerome R.
Corsi, *Nelson Current*, 288
pages]

His God Must Be Crazy

By Gary Brecher

IF YOU COULD WAIT half a lifetime before getting revenge, we nerds would die happy because every nerd dreams of vengeance on the guys who beat him up in ninth grade. Then you wake up and realize whoa, I'm a 30-something working man with cardiac issues. My window of opportunity is gone, revenge-wise.

That's the first problem with this new book arguing for an invasion of Iran and with the entire let's-invade-Iran choir that's gaining ascendancy: it's 2006, not 1979. Everything's changed between Iran and us since they first attacked our embassy and deserved a good smack-down—and it hasn't changed in our favor. That probably explains why these authors spend so little time actually discussing an invasion of Iran—they know it's just not possible—and devote the bulk of their book to discussing Israel. In fact, it almost half reads like some kind of travel diary by one its authors, Michael Evans, describing his tour of Israel during the August 2006 border war with Hezbollah.

Evans tries to confuse the issue by saying it was "Iranian militants" who kidnapped two Israeli soldiers and took them into Lebanon. It's a pretty brazen lie, right there in the first paragraph of the book: "I'm in northern Israel, which is under a rocket attack by the Hezbollah terrorists of southern Lebanon on this bright summer day. A few days ago Iranian militants staged a raid into northern Israel, ambushing an Israeli Defense Force patrol, killing three sol-

diers, and abducting two as hostages for ransom."

Notice how in the first sentence he says "Hezbollah terrorists" are rocketing Israel, but in the next one he says "Iranian militants" kidnapped the IDF soldiers. I've searched all over the Internet, and I can't find anybody who claims that Iranians took those soldiers. Everybody in the world except Michael Evans says Hezbollah did it. And Hezbollah is not Iranian. It's pro-Iran, but that doesn't mean it's Iranian any more than the Iraqi Kurds are Americans just because they (sort of) support us.

Hezbollah's membership consists of Shi'ite Arabs from South Lebanon and Beirut, people who were born a few miles from the Mediterranean—a thousand miles west of Iran—and can't speak a word of Farsi. You would think a so-called "Middle East expert" like Evans would know the difference.

I suspect he does, actually. He's just trying to persuade his Bible-oriented readers that Iran is threatening the Holy Land. So he plays this shell game with the suckers: one minute it's Iranians capturing Israelis, next minute it's Hezbollah. Eventually he compromises by calling Hezbollah "a proxy of the Iranian government."

That's another lie, of course. Even if you don't know recent Middle Eastern history, you should be able to see through this "proxy" nonsense. If there's anything that recent military history shows clearly, it's that nobody, not even a superpower, can create a proxy army that will really fight—and Hezbollah proved pretty clearly that they can fight.

America and the USSR tried creating proxy armies all through the Cold War years. The only time it worked was when the locals had their own reasons to want to fight. In those cases, it's just a matter of sliding the cartons off the C-130's and cracking 'em open. Local war-lust will do the rest.

But when the locals are only fighting because some foreign power pays them, they're worthless. I hate to bring up painful memories, but anybody remem-

ber our old pal ARVN—the Army of the Republic of Viet Nam, aka South Vietnam? We poured so much blood and money into the South Vietnamese Army that it still hurts to think about it. At its peak, ARVN had 544,000 soldiers, one of the biggest and definitely one of the best-funded armies in the world. But without U.S. combat troops to provide some spine and USAF sorties to run their offense, ARVN collapsed as fast as Enron—and for pretty much the same reasons.

The Soviets tried the same technique in Africa and Afghanistan, with the same results. It's hard to believe now, but back in the 1970s people thought the USSR was going to take over Africa because those Soviets were funding so many proxy wars. All those African safaris got the Russians were tropical diseases and a huge cash drain. Most of the money went right into the pockets of the commanding officers of these proxy armies, and the armies either never existed in the first place or melted away the first time they met real troops.

That's exactly what happened to our worst-ever proxies, the Contras. They were supposed to be our Latin American version of the Colorado kids in Red Dawn—freedom-loving rebels who would overthrow the Sandinista commies. Instead they spent your tax dollars on fast boats and clothes—they were the only insurgents in history who dressed like extras on "Miami Vice." And as for how they behaved, it was more like Tony Montana, who would happily talk about how "I keel a Commyunis' fo' fun!" but then lose interest after the coke money started flowing.

So let's drop the nonsense that Hezbollah is just a stand-in for Iran. You can tell stand-ins by the way they fight, or rather don't fight. And Hezbollah has proved again and again that it's a serious army. It was Hezbollah that drove the IDF out of Lebanon in 2000. It was Hezbollah that launched the first suicide-bomb attacks on the IDF, long before any Palestinian even dreamed of doing anything that extreme. And in the 2006 border-war Evans is writing about,