

Bond **BLASTS** into box office

By Jathan Fink
The News Record

Casino Royale opened in theaters on Friday, and James Bond is back and in better form than audiences have seen him in years.

In the opening scene of *Casino Royale*, the screen is barely illuminated in black and white, a tool that effectively tells the audience that they are in for a different Bond experience.

Director Martin Campbell, who directed *The Legend of Zorro* and the previous Bond title, *GoldenEye*, took a new approach to Bond in the 21st film in the 44-year franchise.

In this interpretation of Ian Fleming's very first Bond novel, Campbell banished the fancy gadgets and trite dialogue that had become the primary focus of the latest films in the series.

Instead, Campbell returned the focus to the storytelling, and propelled the story's action with character development. The result is that in *Casino Royale*, Bond is swept back to the time before he gained his "double O" status.

Despite this regression in the chronolo-

"Gone are the sinewy female bodies that have melted into each other during the opening credits of previous films."

gy of Bond's career, within the first few minutes of the film Bond, played by Daniel Craig, quickly establishes that even early in his career, he is unremorsefully dangerous and thus quickly earns his license to kill.

When blood saturates the screen, the recognizable chords of the Bond score begin to play, and yet that is all that is familiar. Gone are the sinewy female bodies that have melted into each other during the opening credits of previous films. Here, the credits unfold in a style reminiscent of an earlier era in the franchise, with the focus clearly on 007.

As *Casino Royale* unfolds, Bond is sent on his first mission with "00" status to Madagascar to spy on the terrorist Mollaka, played by Sebastien Foucan.

What ensues is a breathtaking chase scene, but this time there are no futuristic vehicles involved. Rather, Campbell brilliantly has Bond chase the terrorist on foot, in a scene that builds tension in the film and yet maintains the storyline's plausibility.

Despite the changes Campbell makes this time out, Bond's character remains recognizable. He still revels in his womanizing ways as he gets involved with the lovely Solange, played by Caterina Murino, and the reserved but enthralling Vesper Lynd, portrayed by Eva Green.

Thankfully, one of the things that Campbell did not change in this Bond film is "M," the director of MI6, played rather severely by the wonderful Dame Judi Dench. Although she sets rules for 007, it is

See Bond, Page 6

Bond,

continued from Page 3

clear that Bond is the one holding the cards as he unabashedly breaks them one by one.

When it was announced that Craig was to step into the shoes of Ian Fleming's celebrated secret agent, many people on this

side of the pond wondered who the actor was.

Craig, however, is regarded as one of Britain's finest actors, and has performed a variety of roles in theater, television and film. Most recently, he was seen in the Steven Spielberg film, *Munich*, and with Nicole Kidman in the Oliver Hirschbiegel film, *The Visiting*.

But from the moment he first appeared on the screen, Craig's

rugged good looks, cerulean eyes and disarming grin won over audiences on Friday. Yet it was his quiet, understated charm that frequently infused the character with the sly brilliance that is Bond, a luminosity that went missing in recent incarnations of the character. In *Casino Royale*, the pairing of Campbell and Craig brings Bond back with a vengeance.