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TV Sunday

Why the next 'Agent 007' must come from the TV...

Bond Market

Pierce Brosnan gets tied up with Sophie Marceau in "The World is Not Enough."

By MICHAEL GILTZ

PIERCE Brosnan has one more James Bond movie to make. But who will replace him in 2004 as the British secret agent with a license to kill?

The Bond producers made international headlines when they met with unknown actor Gerard Butler, who played the lead in the miniseries "Attila."

They also made a mistake. Ever since Sean Connery made Bond an icon, the producers have wavered between filling the role with movie stars and unknowns on the one hand and TV stars on the other.

George Lazenby, unknown, flopped in "On Her Majesty's Secret Service." Timothy Dalton, movie star, never quite got a handle on the role and was saddled with weak villains. But TV stars have always clicked.

Roger "The Saint" Moore is still the most successful Bond, starring in more pictures (seven, in all) as 007 than anyone else. And Pierce Brosnan of "**Remington Steele**" was famously picked to play Bond — until NBC revived his all-but-finished TV series for a final few episodes. That meant cooling his heels for eight years.

Brosnan still has plenty of Bond left in him, but the next film will apparently be his last. So, who will be the next Bond? If the producers want to stick to a winning formula they should turn to television for their hero.

Our Oh! Oh! seven choices are...

ROB LOWE

Age: 37. TV role: Sam Seaborn on "The West Wing."

● BEST indication of Bond-ability: Hilarious imitation of Robert Wagner in the "Austin Powers" Bond spoofs.

● CAN he carry a gun? Unclear.

● PLUSES: Lowe has the demeanor of a secret agent who can play baccarat, woo the ladies and dispose of the bad guys all without wrinkling his dinner jacket.

● MINUSES: Pretty-boy looks might tilt Bond toward the unwelcome jokiness of Roger Moore.

M SAYS: Hmmm. Not as silly as it sounds.

JAMES MARSTERS

Age: 31. TV role: Spike on "Buffy."

● BEST indication of Bond-ability: Spike's convincing British accent. (Most people don't even realize Marsters was born in California.)

● CAN he carry a gun? A sword, a gun, whatever. Just don't ask Spike to fight in daylight.

● PLUSES: "Buffy" is very popular in the UK, so Marsters has already won over fans playing a Brit.

● MINUSES: Marsters seems a little slight physically to play Bond.

M SAYS: More likely to play a Bond villain.

IOAN GRUFFUDD

Age: 27. TV role: Horatio Hornblower in a series of TV movies.

● BEST indication of Bond-ability: Hornblower is an iconic British character, and Gruffudd has made it his own.

● CAN he carry a gun? This swashbuckler? Of course.

● PLUSES: Gruffudd is impossibly handsome, very dashing as the can-do Hornblower and, best of all, Welsh.

● MINUSES: None that we can find so far.

M SAYS: Hey! We've got our man.

DYLAN McDERMOTT

Age: 39. TV role: Bobby on "The Practice."

● BEST indication of Bond-ability: Those dashing good looks and his passion to right wrongs.

● CAN he carry a gun? He does in the still-unreleased Western "Texas Rangers."

● PLUSES: McDermott blends in easily, which can be the right attitude for Bond, who's really just the focal point for a three-ring circus of Bond girls, nasty villains and clever stunts.

● MINUSES: He hasn't proven he can command attention on his own.

M SAYS: No.

DAVID JAMES ELLIOTT

Age: 40. TV role: Commander Harm Rabb on "JAG."

● BEST indication of Bond-ability: Rabb's derring-do in emergency situations.

● CAN he carry a gun? Absolutely, though Rabb is more likely to cite legalese.

● PLUSES: Has the dashing hero look down pat.

● MINUSES: He's almost too much of a straight arrow for Bond. No rough edges here.

M SAYS: No. It would be a shame to take him out of those Navy whites.

AIDAN GILLEN

Age: 30s. TV role: Stuart on the British version of "Queer as Folk."

● BEST indication of Bond-ability: Stuart's magnetic, bad-boy appeal.

● CAN he carry a gun? He's definitely packing.

● PLUSES: Gillen is British, already a plus over the other Yanks, and he created a sensation as Stuart, the hateful-but-you-gotta-watch-him center of "QAF."

● MINUSES: He hasn't been able to capitalize on that notoriety, making one wonder if Stuart was a fluke for him.

M SAYS: Too unknown outside the UK.

ROBERT DOWNEY JUNIOR

...if he's free

Age: 36. TV role: Larry Paul on "Ally McBeal."

● BEST indication of Bond-ability: His easy charm with the ladies in the movie "The Pick-up Artist."

● CAN he carry a gun? Yes, in real life.

● PLUSES: He's got that dangerous, slightly out of control Bond aura.

● MINUSES: OK, he's more of a movie star than a TV star, but "Ally McBeal" did revive his career by reminding people how good he can be.

M SAYS: Ideal. The only trouble with Downey Jr. would be getting the completion bond.