

The men who would be Bond

The world premiere is not enough for some 007 fans. **Hugo Rifkind** meets the devotees who find a quantum of solace in living like their hero

At first, I was very impressed by Graham Rye's gun. All his guns, actually, although it was the Walther PPK that impressed me the most. It lives up on his study wall, in among other identifiable James Bond paraphernalia, such as pictures of women painted gold and Grace Jones looking bonkers. The gun was only a replica, apparently, but it felt real in the hand, especially when I pretended to shoot the photographer in the head in an attempt to persuade the world's most devoted Bond fan to smile.

This was before I met a Bond devotee from Sweden who owns a real Walther PPK that fires bullets and everything. And that was before I met another from Oklahoma who owns the actual Walther PPK that first gave Ian Fleming the idea that Bond should own one, too.

Silly me. I now realise that any Bond fan worth shaking a cocktail shaker at owns a Walther PPK. By the end of the week I was in a hotel suite with almost 50 of them. "Do you own a Walther PPK?" became the first question I asked. Most of them did.

"I own a Walther PPK and a Walther P99," said Paul Myers, 54, from Florida. The P99 is the gun that Bond has used since *Tomorrow Never Dies*. Myers carries his every day, in a shoulder holster. "From Galco Leather," he adds, "like the one Bond has in *Licence to Kill*." Myers is the chief of the investigative division of Florida's state attorney. When he arrives in his office, he says, his subordinates say "Here comes 007."

Myers also has two tattoos, one of a Walther PPK, and one of a Bond silhouette. He does not, however, drive an Aston Martin. "Please!" he says. "I work for the real Government." His car, he concedes, has a lot of gadgets.

Here and now, with hype rampaging across the world, almost everybody is a Bond fan. In the fallow years, however, there are some who keep the faith. This week, most of them are in London. *Quantum of Solace* premieres tonight.

Bond comes with baggage. Of those fans mentioned above, many have arrived as part of a Bond-themed tour run by Lee Pfeiffer (American) and Dave Worrall (British), who also run the magazine *Cinema Retro*. For all of them, Bond is a portal to monarchy, Churchill and British history, military or otherwise.

"These guys aren't Trekkies," Pfeiffer says, when I join the group's orientation night in a West London hotel. "They are successful. They're smart. I'd say they know as much about British politics as your average guy in London. It's educational. Bond is just an excuse."

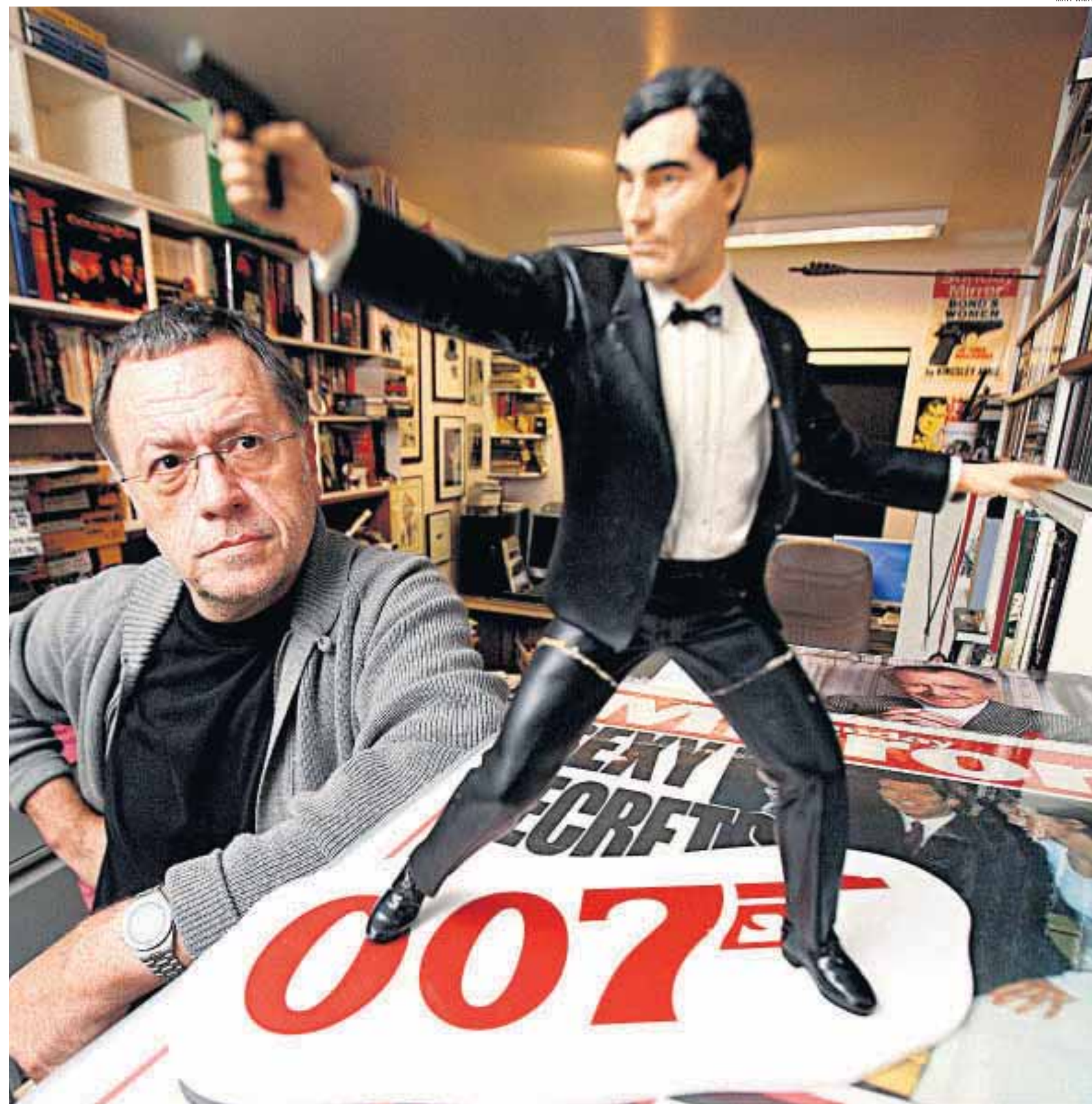
Worrall and Pfeiffer have run similar tours every time a new Bond film has come out since 1996. Later this week, the group will meet Ken Adams, the architect behind great Bond sets such as the hollowed-out volcano of *Thunderball*. Tonight the guest speaker is Justin Llewellyn, who is here to talk about his father Desmond, the actor who played Q.

All the fans here are men, obviously, but many have brought their wives. It's no movie-buff freakshow. After all, go to your office dressed as Han Solo or Batman, and people are going to notice. Go in dressed as a Bond character and you'll still look pretty suave. Unless it's Bloufeld. Unless you're a dentist.

Nonetheless, let's be honest. It's not like these überfans are normal. Take the aforementioned Swede, Anders Frejdh, 34, who runs Sweden's premier (and perhaps only) James Bond fan site, www.jamesbond007.se. Frejdh has relatively Bondish hair and a smart suit, but he tells me that is because he is an accountant. He drinks cider rather than a vodka martini, and, as we talk Bond in a London hotel bar, I'm initially a little disappointed. Fleming is always going on about Bond's "cruel mouth". His mouth is perfectly friendly.

Then we start talking about his past holidays. "Portugal," he says, "where they filmed *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*. Corfu, for the beach from *For Your Eyes Only*. I have been to Amsterdam for *Diamonds Are Forever* and Sardinia for *The Spy Who Loved Me*. Many places in the United States. *Live and Let Die*. Harlem, New Orleans. And if I ever have a honeymoon, that would be in Jamaica."

“Every Bond fan wants to be the best, and they all hate each other”



With a restrained sort of sadness, Frejdh tells me that James Bond has never been to Sweden. "Although in the new Sebastian Faulks novel, he goes to Helsinki. So we shall see."

If this sounds geeky, I'm not doing my job properly. To speak to a man who would be Bond is to ask yourself, "Why wouldn't I be Bond?" Agent 007 is a connoisseur of luxury, even if he does it, like the Queen or John Prescott, at the nation's expense. He goes to the best places, he owns the best things. "I would love an Aston Martin Vanquish," Frejdh sighs. "But I drive a Volvo. Because I am Swedish. Everybody in Sweden drives a Volvo."

Ajay Chowdhury, 37, edits *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang*, the magazine of the James Bond International Fan Club (www.007.info). He doesn't drive an Aston Martin either, or own a Walther PPK, although he says that this is because he lives in North London. "There are fans, and there are civilians," he says. Chowdhury tells me that Bond fans can be subdivided

into five types. You get the Lifestyler, the Bond Scholar, the Collector, the Cyber-Fan and the Grouch. Most Bond fans, he says, are a mix of two types or more.

"The Lifestyler spans all ages," Chowdhury says. "Schoolboys have it. Executives have it. Fathers pass it on to sons. Although when there is a new film, there is a spike. They wear their black knitted tie, they buy their Brioni suits, and if they can afford it, they drive a BMW Z3, or even an Aston Martin." The classic Lifestyler is hard to track down. The more like Bond a Bond fan becomes, the less willing he is to admit that he is like Bond at all. Just like Bond would be. Chowdhury and his friend Brad Frank tell me of another fan of their acquaintance who dresses only in outfits specified, down to the tiniest detail, in Fleming's books. "Although he denies it," says Frank. "And he's really short."

Frank is probably somewhere between a Scholar and a Collector. He's 46, and a retired rare books dealer from Tulsa, Okla-

The Joy of M16
Graham Rye is the British Bond world's greatest veteran. He used to run the James Bond International Fan Club and has met every 007

homa. Aside from the Walther PPK which inspired Fleming, as already mentioned, he also owns the .38 Smith & Wesson, with customised trigger guard, from the cover of *From Russia With Love*. Both are on display in the Imperial War Museum, as part of the Ian Fleming and James Bond exhibition that opened in April. Both also used to belong to Geoffrey Boothroyd, a gun aficionado from Glasgow. Boothroyd advised Fleming on firearms and was the inspiration for the Armourer, who evolved into Q.

Several Bond fans tell me that Lancelot Narayan, the wonderfully named chap who handles publicity for www.007magazine.co.uk is a classic Lifestyler. Alas, we never meet. "It's a running joke," he tells me, via e-mail. "I think it may appear that way to certain people. I just don't like pubs, I prefer bars. I smoke copious quantities of Gitanes. And I can't help it if I cut a dash on Jermy Street."

"By the way," he adds, "I'm off to Monaco on Saturday."

Many different web addresses in this article, you will notice. The Bond fan world is a factional one. Every spook needs a SPECTRE. "It's more political than politics," says Graham Rye, he of my first Walther PPK. "Everybody wants to be the best, and they all hate each other."

Rye, in his late fifties, edits *007 Magazine*, and very cheerfully appears to hate almost everybody. Although he has a soft spot for Daniel Craig, Rye is somebody Chowdhury would call a Grouch, somebody who thinks it was all so much better in the old days. The British Bond world's greatest veteran, he used to run the James Bond International Fan Club, has met every Bond, and remembers first seeing Sean Connery in a crowd from up a lamp-post, aged 11. For many years, he had the semi-official side of fandom to himself. These days, his home is a warren of boxes.

On the wall above his desk, a page from the magazine (which now exists only online) displays the headline "ODDJOB'S BOWLER SELLS FOR £62,000". Sold, that was, by Rye, at auction, to the Bond producers Eon. Another picture shows the Moon buggy from *Diamonds Are Forever*. That was his, too. He found it "in a field in Kent", renovated it, and sold it to Planet Hollywood. Rye fell out with Eon some years ago. It sounds like a messy divorce — the emotional ownership of Bond versus the actual ownership. Actual won.

Rye's spiritual successors are the Cyber-Fans. This is another world. Paul Dunphy, 24, who records a regular podcast for www.commanderbond.net, tells me that he first got into Bond through the computer game of *GoldenEye*. This makes me feel old. God knows what it does to Graham Rye.

The men behind that site's main competitor, www.m16.co.uk are a few years older. They also deny being passionate Bond fans — as all passionate Bond fans do — but they all run the site on the side of other jobs. Also, one of them describes himself as the Corporate Liaison Officer, which provides an insight, I feel, into a certain militaristic psyche.

James Page, the site's lead editor, tells me that their inbox is a sight to behold. "We get a lot of ex-Army trying to apply to the real M16," he says. "Guys, you failed the first test." Much as Page denies feeling like a spy, he does occasionally talk like one. "You don't rub against the people who support you," he says conspiratorially, of Eon. "And sometimes it's helpful for them to sneak things under the radar."

So yes, Bond fans can be obsessive, but there's much to be obsessive about. Fourteen Ian Fleming novels, remember, dating back to 1953. Twenty-two films, going back almost half a century. The older generation will always mention the Beatles alongside Bond, as part of the Great British 1960s. With a shift of emphasis, these guys would be historians.

Back in our West London hotel, Justin Llewellyn is about to begin his talk. He's a fan, obviously, but a restrained one, probably much like you or me.

"I don't really have any memorabilia," he tells me. "Although I used to have a poster of *Licence Revoked*."

Licence Revoked was the original, abandoned name for *Licence To Kill*. Driving ban connotations, apparently.

"That," Lee Pfeiffer says, "would be worth a fortune."

"Thought so," Llewellyn says, cheerfully. "Shame I hung it in the bathroom. Totally fell apart."

Pfeiffer is appalled. But there are fans, and there are fans, and Llewellyn doesn't own a Walther PPK either. ●

sexy maths



Count, Dracula!

While other kids dressed up as ghosts or zombies on Hallowe'en, I always chose to don false fangs and my grandfather's tails. Recently I discovered that my desire may have been an early sign of my obsession for all things mathematical, as vampires are said to suffer from a condition called arithmomania: a compulsive desire to count things.

Although less well-known than garlic or crosses, one way to ward off the Prince of Darkness is to scatter poppy seeds around his coffin. Theoretically, before Dracula finishes trying to count how many are scattered around his resting place, the sun will have driven him back to his resting place.

Arithmomania is a serious medical condition. The inventor Nikola Tesla, whose studies into electricity gave us the AC current, was obsessed by numbers divisible by three: he insisted on 18 clean towels a day and counted his steps to make sure they were divisible by three. Perhaps the most famous fictional depiction of arithmomania is the Muppets' Count von Count, a vampire who has helped generations of viewers in their first steps along the mathematical path.

Vampires are said to have their own numbers: these are defined as a number that can be written as the product of two smaller numbers of half the length which contain all the digits of the larger number. For example 1395=15x93. The two smaller numbers are called the vampire number's fangs. Although this is little more than a numerical curiosity, mathematicians have proved that there are an infinite number of vampire numbers.

However, research into the science of Hallowe'en has also proved that vampires cannot exist. Vampires need to feed on the blood of a human being at least once a month to survive. The trouble is that once you have feasted on the human, the victim too becomes a vampire. So next month there are twice as many vampires in the search for human blood to feast on.

The world's population is estimated to be 6.7 billion. Each month the population of vampires doubles. Such is the devastating affect of doubling that within 33 months a single vampire would end up transforming the world's population into vampires. Even if one factors in the effect of the birthrate, humans can't reproduce quickly enough to counter the mathematical effect of doubling.

So forget the garlic and the mirrors, it's mathematics that is your best protection against the Prince of Darkness. ●

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