

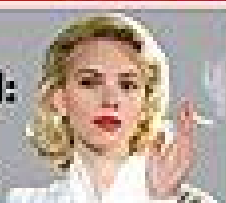
# The Mixed Legacy Of Jackie Robinson

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**WHO CAN SAY WHAT?**

BY JAMES PONIEWOZIK

# Looking for Mr. Adorkable

By JOEL STEIN / LOS ANGELES

Thursday, Apr. 12, 2007



[ENLARGE PHOTO](#)

Adam Brody and Meg Ryan star in *In the Land of Women*.

LOREY SEBASTIAN / WARNER INDEPENDENT PICTURES

If Adam Brody had been around 20 years ago, I would have done a lot better with girls. Here's a guy doing the same nerdy, sarcastic, obscure-reference-laced Jewy thing, only instead of it just impressing friends' moms, as mine did, it puts him in PEOPLE magazine's Sexiest Man Alive issue and makes him the first boy ever on the cover of Elle Girl. What James Dean did for inarticulate antisocial depressives, Brody has done for dorks.

He even broke the cardinal rule of teen soaps; he hijacked school-locker-heartthrob status from the troubled, handsome blond lead character on Fox's The O.C. I couldn't figure out how, until I met Brody. He's not really a nerd. He's tall. He's good-looking. He surfs. He's a drummer in a band. He's got passable scruff. He's from San Diego. He dropped out after a year of community college to move to Los Angeles to try acting for the first time in his life because, you know, he

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**PHILIPS**  
sense and simplicity

really liked movies.

"I'm a fake intellectual," he says while wearing giant sunglasses and eating his first meal of the day--a cheeseburger --at 1 p.m. "I'm not that well read. Which I'm insecure about since I've gotten the [intellectual] niche." He's not even sure how he pulled off the fake-nerd scam. "Maybe the sarcasm reads a little bit as intellect, even if it's not," he says. "My best jokes are so cheap. All I do is say things sarcastically. I just say, 'Yeah. Cool.'" As he says this, I feel the confusing disappointment that I imagine young women painters feel when they find out Joan Miró is a man.

So he's not really a nerd, whatever, guy's my hero. He played one on The O.C. and redefined the type. As Seth Cohen, he was into comic books and erudite references and pushing Chrismukkah onto the national calendar, but he owned it. None of that David Schwimmer cautiousness, that Tom Hanks self-mockery, that Rainn Wilson hipster alternative cluelessness--not even the John Cusack exasperation at the idiots running everything. Brody's nerdiness was unapologetic, So Cal slow and so self-assured, the network let his character have a hot girlfriend. His new archetype was successful enough that two years into the show, he started seeing scripts for pilots describing characters as "an Adam Brody type."

And now, at 27, after playing a teenager for four years, Brody plays the leading-man version of that guy in the \$10 million picture *In the Land of Women*, which opens April 20. As a pouty, heartsick soft-porn screenwriter who moves to Michigan to take care of his grandmother, Brody winds up making out with both the hot mom across the street (Meg Ryan) and her teenage daughter (Kristen Stewart). And somehow he does something that creepy while still seeming like a really nice guy. The same innocent charm made him an US magazine fixture as The O.C.'s breakout star: the sarcastic but decent one. "Adam is the funniest guy you still want to see get the girl," says O.C. creator Josh Schwartz, 30, who patterned Brody's character after himself. "He's able to attract neurotic Jewish writers to write for him, but he's definitely cooler in real life than the characters he's provided. He can be really sweet and adorkable, but there's some anger there. He was able to give the character some dignity. Seth Cohen was a guy who had no friends, but it was almost as much his choice as the Newport Beach water-polo players'." In other words, he's the first nerd to tell the cool kids that giving noogies is lame.

Brody does, in fact, have a kind of geeky weirdness, a slight awkwardness on top of his mellow self-deprecating charm that Schwartz says manifests itself, for instance, when he transforms, as he does often, into a "monologist movie reviewer." Or you can see it in his thwarted dream to produce a remake of *Revenge of the Nerds*. Or, as the neurotic Jewish first-time writer-director

of In the Land of Women, Jon Kasdan (son of Big Chill director Lawrence Kasdan), says, "He's a new kind of nerdy Jewish guy: both self-deprecating and self-possessed. He's taken the New York thing and moved it over to the West Coast--not a bad role to carve out for yourself."

Plus, as Brody points out, his nerdiness didn't hold him back because even nerdiness isn't so nerdy anymore. "Comic books aren't nerdy. You'd have to be an idiot to think computers are nerdy. The nerd now is the Bush Administration--supporting, anti-intellectual dumb ass." Whether that's true or not, it's clear the once desirable macho-jock type hasn't got such pull. There's a reason the Rock and Vin Diesel haven't filled the gap left by Schwarzenegger and Stallone: nobody minds the gap. And in a world without heroes, as the movie trailer voice-over guy might say, the slightly awkward can be slightly cool.

Though he embraces the lovable-loser persona, Brody realizes he escaped a life of typecasting when The O.C. took an unpredicted sharp downward ratings turn two years ago. "We were very fortunate that we got to be on a hit show and not be on it for 10 years. I can't imagine Year 7 being the glory year of a teen soap," he says. He thinks the show's demise was due to stories that moved too quickly ("On other shows, they don't let people kiss for years") and an overreliance on the clever, self-knowing jokes the show was loved for but that came to serve as cover for absurd story lines or clichéd characters. Although he's glad it ended, he still considers The O.C. his college, and had lunch the day before with co-star Benjamin McKenzie (who played the aforementioned blond lead). Even the breakup of his much chronicled, sickeningly cute romance with co-star Rachel Bilson (they share custody of two dogs: Penny Lane and Thurmen Murmen) was a good experience. "I wouldn't date someone who would turn into a psycho," he says. Again, there's the lovable naiveté.

Given, then, the unexpected opportunity to redefine himself when The O.C. went off the air in February, Brody has been carefully waiting for good scripts with a character close enough to himself to be believable and not, at 27, another teenager. Instead of taking the big parts in horror movies or teen comedies that TV stars are always offered, he took small roles in Thank You for Smoking and Mr. & Mrs. Smith and then the lead in In the Land of Women. He wants to prove himself movieworthy, within limits. "I'm not going to rob banks and smoke crack to prove how not-television I am," he says. He's just going to smoke cigarettes, write soft porn and make out with moms and their daughters. Baby steps.