

Fleming: A rollicking romp

Sky Atlantic's new biopic of James Bond's creator was stylish, cinematic fare, not to be taken too seriously, says Michael Hogan

★★★★★



Fleming (Dominic Cooper) and Ann (Lara Pulver) Photo: Justin Downing

By Michael Hogan

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The trailers for Fleming (Sky Atlantic), a new four-part biopic of James Bond's creator, featured a dinner-jacketed smoothie looking up from a casino table and smirking: "The name's... Fleming."

The opening episode was equally playful with 007 tropes. Fleming (**Dominic Cooper**) pompously barked at a bartender: "Martini. Three measures of Gordon's, one of vodka, half of Kina Lillet. Shaken not stirred. Served in a champagne goblet." The hired help shrugged and handed him a beer. Reality is rarely as neat as fiction.

INTERVIEW: Dominic Cooper: "There's too much gravitas given to people who dress up in frocks and dance around"

You can't make a sub-Bond film on a shoestring, so this was a big budget production which looked lavish and rather lovely. We opened with a Bond-esque underwater scene, all bikini-clad girls,

harpoon guns, speedboats and swelling John Barry-style strings. There were tropical islands, rattling train restaurant cars and swooshing skis on pristine snow. Fleming wore well-cut suits or silk robes when he was being louche and dissolute, which was often.

Back in Blighty, the evocation of wartime London was rather more glamorous than, say, *Call The Midwife*'s. It was like Chummy and co had gone "up West", bumped into flighty Rose from *Downton Abbey* and fallen in with a bad crowd. Cue Soho jazz clubs and free-flowing booze. Chain-smoking seemed to be compulsory: before and after meals, before and after sex. It was a wonder they restrained themselves during. Fleming, naturally, puffed on "custom-made Morland cigarettes blended from three Turkish tobaccos".

There was also a lot of sex. Well, this was subscription cable. Within this first hour, Fleming slept with two women, seduced another and flirted with a few more. He wanted his fictional spy to be "a brute" and wasn't averse to the rough stuff himself, indulging in slaps, spanks and a spot of light bondage (pardon the pun).

IAN FLEMING: the man who would be Bond



Cooper pulled off the lead role with aplomb. He'd be too boyish to play Bond but was just fine as Fleming, all raised eyebrows, cocky insouciance, daddy issues and "healthy disregard for authority". We were repeatedly told what a rogue he was. He collected rude etchings, had been thrown out of the army for contracting gonorrhoea and when he swaggered into a jazz club, "You Rascal You" struck up. Subtle.

War was the making of him, providing an outlet for Fleming's imagination, insolence and taste for "playing dirty". Recruited by Naval Intelligence, he used an air raid siren to get a noisy office's

attention, dreamed up Operation Mincemeat and interrogated Nazis by plying them with Riesling in the Café Royal Grill Room. Everything was a game to him.

The female cast were more than a match for Cooper. As Fleming's future wife, **Lara Pulver recalled her memorably icy turn as Sherlock's adversary Irene Adler**. Anna Chancellor was typically terrific as Money-penny-esque secretary Miss Monday. **Lesley Manville** gave it the full Lady Catherine De Bourgh as Fleming's disapproving mother and **Annabelle Wallis** (The Tudors, **Peaky Blinders**) shone as leather-clad, lovestruck Muriel "Moo" Wright. Samuel West, who played Fleming's M-like boss, is becoming more like his father Timothy with each role. This, just to be clear, is a good thing.

Director Mat Whitecross has a background in music videos and it showed with some of the whizzy camerawork and "bullet-time" slo-mo. This was stylish, cinematic fare. Sure, it played fast and loose with historical accuracy but it was "based on a true story" drama, not documentary. An energetic, enjoyably rollicking romp, not to be taken too seriously – a bit like the Bond films, in fact. We've been expecting you, Mr Fleming.



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