

# *TV Review: ‘Fleming: The Man Who Would be Bond’*



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*BBC America's handsome Ian Fleming miniseries is shaken, yes, but not especially stirring*

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Shaken but not particularly stirring, “[Fleming: The Man Who Would be Bond](http://variety.com/t/fleming-the-man-who-would-be-bond/) (<http://variety.com/t/fleming-the-man-who-would-be-bond/>)” is a better title than a miniseries — a fact-based story (albeit fudged, as the disclaimer notes) that never quite takes flight despite nifty touches, first-rate leads and its World War II backdrop. Granted, getting to know more about [Ian Fleming](http://variety.com/t/ian-fleming/) (<http://variety.com/t/ian-fleming/>), the man who created [James Bond](http://variety.com/t/james-bond/) (<http://variety.com/t/james-bond/>), inevitably wasn’t going to rival 007’s fantastic exploits, but the author’s wartime work in Naval

**Intelligence almost takes a back seat to his prolonged romancing of his eventual bride, complete with plenty of rough (if that's the word for it) sex.**

The four-part project opens in 1952, with Fleming (Dominic Cooper) on his honeymoon in Jamaica with wife Ann (Laura Pulver), who looks on somewhat disapprovingly as he finishes banging out the first Bond book, "Casino Royale." But is Bond "you as you'd like to be," as Ann suggests, and is Fleming accurate in an opening quote that says, "Everything I write has a precedent in truth."

Flashing back to 1939, Fleming is presented as something of a rogue and ladies man, the black sheep in an aristocratic family in which his brother Peter (Rupert Evans) is already a successful author. Soon enough, Fleming is recruited to work in Naval intelligence, though his swashbuckling tendencies and wildly imaginative ideas run somewhat counter to his drab desk job, where his boss (Samuel West) is an ersatz M and his office-mate Lt. Monday (Anna Chancellor) a veritable Miss Money Penny.

Perhaps foremost, though, Fleming is repeatedly drawn to Ann, who's not only married to an absent military officer but already the mistress of a wealthy man. This complicates their prolonged mating dance, and their interaction is a trifle fligid, with each tryst half-heartedly resisted before she succumbs in a very Pussy Galore-like "No, no – Yes!" manner. (A particularly outlandish interlude, almost unintentionally comic, has the two grappling as a German aerial assault explodes around them.)

Written by John Brownlow and Don Macpherson and directed by Mat Whitecross, the project does contain some clever callbacks to Bond lore, from the vague tinges of Monty Norman's signature theme in Ilan Eshkeri and Tim Wheeler's score to a U.S. military man referring to a Fleming spy memo as "a page-turner."

Ultimately, though, "Fleming" works only fitfully, despite conjuring an impeccable period look and feel filming in a trio of locales.

Given Bond's influence and endurance in popular culture, it would be nice to know a little more about the man who birthed him. But with relatively little to love about this spy yarn, the same itch could easily be scratched by watching a documentary — or, better yet, reading a book.

## TV Review: 'Fleming: The Man Who Would be Bond'

(Miniseries; BBC America, Wed. Jan. 29, 10 p.m.)

### Production

Filmed in Hungary, England and Spain by Ecosse Films for Sky.

### Crew

Executive producers, Douglas Rae, Michael Parke, Robert Bernstein; producer, Sarah Curtis; director, Mat Whitecross; writers, John Brownlow, Don Macpherson; camera, Ed Wild; production designer, Sophie Becher; editor, Peter Christelis; music, Ilan Eshkeri, Tim Wheeler; casting, Gary Davy. 4 HOURS

### Cast

Dominic Cooper, Laura Pulver, Annabelle Wallis, Lesley Manville, Anna Chancellor, Samuel West, Rupert Evans, Camilla Rutherford

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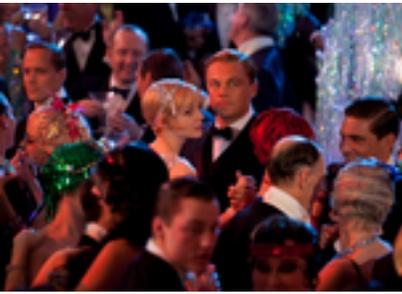
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