





# THE BOND FATHER

HE WAS A PRIVILEGED  
SOCIALITE, A LADIES' MAN  
WHO DABBLED IN S/M SEX,  
AND A LOVER OF THE HIGH  
LIFE (SHAKEN, NOT STIRRED).  
MEET BOND'S CREATOR.  
THE NAME'S FLEMING.  
IAN FLEMING  
BY EAMONN O'NEILL

**O**n a late windswept August afternoon in 1964, the forlorn figure of a man, aged beyond his years, sits alone on a rain-splashed wooden bench by the Sussex seaside. His blue suit, polka-dot bow tie and polished shoes impress nobody. He is only vaguely aware that he has the countenance of a doubting sinner.

Strangers in his midst are unaware that this ill, transfixed man is commander Ian Fleming, the thriller writer who rewrote the rule book of his genre. But that doesn't matter to him any more because the uninvited spectre of fear is his constant companion; it hangs over him like a shroud and he can smell the stench of death on its breath.

So he watches the sea for hours; listening and absorbing its rhythms. It has become an obsession with him. Even when he eats in a nearby hotel, he insists upon being given a window seat with a view of the sea.

He bows his head, ashamed of the state he's in. He had wanted another ending. Something more grand. With more bravado, panache. Something which involved a final, sweeping, physical act. But ruefully, he knows that won't happen. He now takes pills for his heart, his lungs, his swollen legs. His body is decaying fast. His mind is never at peace and he suffers from irrational fears: of the colour black, of the number 13 and, unbelievably, of the sun itself.

He now hides in the shadows, secretly appalled at the details of his own cravenness. In his panicked loneliness he tries to imagine himself in another setting, a location which seemed to transform him into a separate version of himself.

So he closes his eyes and tries to remember his life in the sun, at his home in Jamaica. He wrenches the spinning and screeching fragments of memories from his fractured psyche: the place where he first moulded his world-famous fictional creation in the tropical shadows; the hour when both of them first stepped forward and sized each other up. And the moment when he first shook hands with an alter-ego named James Bond.

**I board a plane at London's Heathrow Airport to fly to Jamaica in search of both Ian Fleming and James Bond.**

I'm hoping to unravel how a poor, developing country could play such an important role in creating the multi-million-dollar Bond industry, a phenomenon which has resulted in the semi-mythical identity of an author – and established a fictional character who has so far sold over 30 million books.

The books in turn have generated a film industry which has netted global profits over three decades worth in excess of \$1 billion. In the process, the inextricably bound names of both himself and his character – “Ian Fleming's James Bond” – have become a worldwide marketing brand that has influenced the way generations of men think of themselves.

By flying to Jamaica I'm following in the footsteps of both the man and the character; it was a journey Fleming himself made every winter. He wrote all his 14 James Bond books in Jamaica – he even used the experience of flying to the island in his novel *Dr No*.

I arrive in Kingston at night. The soft, silky heat slips its arms around me the moment I step off the plane. I am greeted on the tarmac by my host, Oliver Foot, the son of the late Sir Hugh Foot (the last British governor general of Jamaica and the man who framed its constitution when it achieved independence in 1962), and the nephew of former Labour Party leader Michael Foot. Oliver is now a public relations man for Air Jamaica and Sandals, the island's biggest holiday resort chain. I've latched on to him, however, because of his connection to the Jamaica of Fleming's era.

“Yeah, I met Ian Fleming many times,” he tells me as we load the luggage into an open-topped Jeep. “My mother and father knew him well. He was a nice man.”

We drive into Kingston following the same route that James Bond takes in *Dr No*. Give or take a few petrol stations, little seems to have changed since the late Fifties when the book was written. On the surface, anyway. At the heart of the island, the economy has fragmented, exports are down and imports are up; crime is still a problem and the island's largest industry, tourism, keeps the country afloat. Sporadic reports of murders, stabbings and muggings on beaches and golf-courses have prompted a panic among visitors. Hotel bookings have declined and rumours about soldiers being drafted in to protect tourists on the beaches have thrown a pall over the island.

In the early morning, I drive with Oliver to King's House, the former governor general's residence (and the place James Bond visits in *Dr No* to find missing agent Strangeways). When Fleming, or his relatives and friends, arrived for their annual winter sojourn in Jamaica in the Fifties and Sixties, the governor general always knew about it. The British community on the island was small but powerful. To be white was to be privileged and served. King's