

# 007's real mission continues

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## *Ian Fleming – The Complete Man*

Nicholas Shakespeare

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The latest surge of interest in 007, James Bond, isn't triggered by a new Bond movie, or speculation over who will play the next celluloid Bond, but by the 70th anniversary of the publication of the first 007 novel, *Casino Royale*, the reissue of the complete 007 series – sanitized to make them politically correct – and the release of yet another official biography.

Because it is described as 'complete' and 'definitive', I expected Shakespeare to set the record straight on three key issues the previous biographies get wrong: the characterization of the real James Bond; the reason Fleming began writing the 007 novels; and the actual identities behind the characters that populate Fleming's novels. Shakespeare gets one out of three right, and seems unconcerned about the others. He focuses on Fleming's private sex life, the theft of his friends' wives and his association with celebrities like Churchill, Admiral Godfrey, General William Donovan, Sir William Stephenson and President Kennedy. He also dwells on the overall popularity of the books and movies.

As for the name of his secret agent 007, Shakespeare and others have thrown out dozens of names of real secret agents who they say were the model for 007. Shakespeare even comes up with Rodney Bond, who once saved the life of Ian's brother Peter. But as Fleming himself acknowledged, there's only one real James Bond, the American naturalist and author of *The Birds of the West Indies* (Philadelphia, 1936; London, 1947), from whom Fleming acknowledges appropriating the name for his secret agent. Fleming kept the book on his breakfast table in Jamaica.

As Shakespeare depreciates it:

Most likely out of all the possible progenitors was another American James Bond, a pipe smoking old Harrovian ornithologist based in Philadelphia, whose white jacketed book 1936 *Birds of the West Indies* was "one of my [Fleming's] bibles" when in Jamaica. I [Fleming]

thought, "James Bond, that's a pretty quiet name", and so I simply stole it and used it. (p. 454)

The real James Bond was curator of birds at the Philadelphia Academy of Natural Sciences. He had attended St. Paul's Academy in New England and then Cambridge University in England, where he was a member of the Pitt Club, that later also included double-agent and defector Guy Burgess. After working at a bank for a while, Bond decided to devote his time to his primary interest – birds, and specialized on birds of the Caribbean

What is almost unbelievable is the mischaracterization of the real James Bond by all of Fleming's biographers, who falsely claim that Bond looked on the whole 007 saga as something of a joke. In fact the real Bond never read anything that Fleming wrote and deeply resented 'the theft of his identify', as it seriously interfered with his personal and professional life.

The real James Bond did not have a PhD, and Shakespeare wrongly refers to him as 'Dr. Bond'. Besides the books written about her husband by Mrs. Mary Wickham Bond (*To James Bond, with Love; Far Afield in the Caribbean; How 007 Really Got His Name*), there are a number of good biographies of the real Bond including *The Private Life of James Bond* by Chestnut Hill College history professor David Contosta, and more recently *The Real James Bond* by James Wright, a New Jersey birder. Shakespeare even contacted Wright to ask him about Bond, but still doesn't produce an accurate portrait of the man.

Like Fleming, James Bond also married late in life, at the age of 53 in 1953, the same year Fleming's *Casino Royale* was published and Fleming himself got married.

While Mrs. Bond and Fleming engaged in some correspondence beforehand, the Bonds didn't meet Fleming until February 5, 1964. While on a birding expedition in Jamaica, James and Mary Bond stopped by Goldeneye and dropped in on Fleming, who was then being filmed by a Canadian Broadcasting Service TV documentary crew. As Shakespeare puts it: 'Dr. (sic) James Bond's unexpected appearance was the further intrusion.'

Fleming's housekeeper Violet, answered the door, and when Bond introduced himself, she appeared as if she saw a ghost. Mrs. Bond took a photo of Fleming greeting Bond at the door (see below) as Fleming asked Bond if he was going to sue him. Over lunch, according to Shakespeare, 'Mary chatted with Ian about her husband's birdwatching adventures. Not lost on Ian was that "bird watcher" was slang for "spy".' (p. 477)

But Bond was not a 'bird watcher'. Rather he studied the habitat and migratory patterns of birds, and collected specimens of various types of birds that are now on display at the Philadelphia Academy of Natural Sciences. Lost

on Shakespeare was the fact that Bond actually resented Fleming's 'theft of identity' because of the phone calls by lonely girls at all hours of the night, as well as the problems Bond now had passing through borders with the tools of his trade – a shotgun to shoot birds, a scalpel to clean their hides and arsenic



to coat them – also the tools of an assassin.

But other than saying he hadn't read any of Fleming's books (though Mrs. Bond read them all), Bond remained quiet, indifferent, and didn't reveal his true resentful feelings. Fleming did get the message, and presented Bond with a copy of his latest novel inscribed, 'To the REAL James Bond, from the thief of his identify – Ian Fleming February 5, 1964 A Great Day!'

As for why Ian Fleming began writing the 007 books, the official story is that Fleming began to write 'the spy story to end all spy stories' in order to 'take his mind off an impending marriage'. While marriage for the long time bachelor was certainly in the

works, other more important things were on his mind. Noel Coward, Fleming's Jamaican neighbour, close friend and best man at his wedding, noted in his journal that at the time Fleming began writing his first 007 novel he was preoccupied with what they called 'the case of the missing diplomats'. And Shakespeare devotes a chapter to it. He writes:

Bond was born out of a turmoil at a moment when the (Guy) Burgess and (Donald) Maclean story was still unsolved. The news of their disappearance was a seismic event for Ian.

He created

a contemporary novel hero in the tradition of Drake, Morgan and Nelson, loyal to the crown, who would reaffirm England as a world power, wipe out the shame of the Burgess-Maclean defections, and reestablish the Secret Intelligence Service as the most dangerous Secret Service . . . (pp. 403 and 445)

So the real mission of Ian Fleming's Secret Agent 007, James Bond, was to increase the prestige and morale of SIS, disgraced by the treasonous betrayal of the Cambridge spy ring. And according to most accounts he exceeded beyond all expectations.

The British Secret Intelligence Service were extremely concerned about, and the media was preoccupied with, the sudden disappearance of civil servants Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean, both of whom possessed key intelligence secrets. The fact that Maclean was suspected of being a Soviet KGB spy and was about to be arrested by MI-5 was a closely guarded secret and something that Burgess was unaware of. So they must have been tipped off by someone much higher in the intelligence service, who warned Maclean via Burgess. This person was referred to as 'the Third Man'.

Burgess had been living in Washington D.C. with his good friend Kim Philby, the British SIS liaison with the American intelligence agencies, and Philby knew that Maclean had become suspect and MI5 was closing in on him. Because of his close association with Burgess, Philby became the primary, if not only suspect as the 'Third Man'.

All three had attended Cambridge together in the 1930s, and Burgess and Maclean had expressed communist sympathies in the pre-World War II era, when it was fashionable to be anti-fascist and pro-communist. But being sympathetic with communists fighting fascism was not the same as being a spy.

During the war Ian Fleming knew Philby when he served as the MI6 man in the Iberian peninsula (that included Spain and Portugal), and Fleming was the Assistant to the Chief of British Naval Intelligence Admiral Godfrey. Fleming had to know Philby when he devised the plan – Operation Goldeneye – to ensure that Britain could continue to communicate with Gibraltar if Spain joined the war.

Fleming had christened his Jamaican beach house 'Goldeneye', after that operation, and he spent his two months vacation there every January and February. And that is where, in 1952, he sat down at his Royal typewriter and began his first novel, *Casino Royale*, while consumed by the betrayal of the missing diplomats and the Cambridge spy ring.

*Casino Royale*, and all subsequent stories featuring James Bond, are *romans à clef* – novels in which real people, places and events appear with fictitious names or details, blurring the line between fiction, non-fiction and reality. I first came across a 1948 newspaper article about the real James Bond while researching the background of CIA bursar Cummins Catherwood, a multi-millionaire whose Catherwood Foundation was used to finance CIA covert

operations. Catherwood's Fund also paid for the construction of a sailing yacht, the *Vigilant*, on which Bond accompanied Catherwood to some remote islands of the Caribbean. That certainly associates the real Bond with the CIA, and it comes as a surprise that Bond was hunting for birds at the remote Baya de Conchos in Cuba, a few weeks before it became better known as the Bay of Pigs.

After Kim Philby showed up in Moscow, his book *My Silent War* was published in which he details his career as the most notorious double-agent of all time. He included the fact that former head of CIA's Operations Division, Frank Wisner, once explained to him how the CIA was covering their expenses for covert operations by utilizing rich, patriotic Americans who created non-profit philanthropic foundations that served as a cover for the distribution of CIA funds. The CIA's use of the Catherwood Fund for such purposes was first revealed in David Wise and Thomas Ross's *The Invisible Government*.<sup>1</sup>

Fleming even alluded to this sort of CIA funding and must have also known about Catherwood, as he based one of his villains, Milton Krest, on Catherwood's unique profile. In the short story 'Hildebrand Rarity' (in *For Your Eyes Only*) Fleming quotes 'Krest' as explaining the Foundation system to James Bond while they are aboard 'Krest's' yacht fishing for rare species.

Ya see, fellers, it's like this. In the states we have this foundation system for lucky guys that got plenty of dough and don't happen to want to pay it into Uncle Sam's Treasury. You make a Foundation – like this one, the Krest Foundation – for charitable purposes – charitable to anyone, to kids, sick folk, the cause of science – you just give the money away to anyone or anything except yourself and your dependents and you escape tax on it. So I put a matter of ten million dollars into the Krest Foundation, and since I happened to like yachting and seeing the world, I built this yacht with two million of the money and told the Smithsonian that I would go to any part of the world and collect specimens for them. So that makes me a scientific expedition, see?

But the real Bond is not only associated with the CIA through Catherwood, he also attended Cambridge University, and in 1938 he sailed on a tramp steamer with British author and WW1 British intelligence officer Somerset Maugham. Bond told me that Maugham said he was on his way to Devil's Island, and I noticed that Bond kept a complete set of Maugham books on the shelf of his Philadelphia apartment.

Besides Bond himself, and Catherwood-Krest, other Fleming characters

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<sup>1</sup> New York: Vintage books, 1977; p. 247.

have their real life counter-parts, including 007's CIA associate Felix Leiter. Shakespeare goes to great lengths to describe how Fleming came to meet and have dinner with then Senator John F. Kennedy. When Kennedy was recovering from back surgery he received a copy of *Casino Royale* from Marion Oatsie Leiter, a Georgetown, Washington D.C. neighbour whose husband sold the land on which the new CIA headquarters was built. She was also a seasonal Jamaican neighbour and friend of Fleming, and arranged for Fleming to accompany her to a dinner at Kennedy's Georgetown home. At the dinner, JFK asked Fleming what James Bond would do about Fidel Castro, and Fleming replied, 'Ridicule him'.

In *Live and Let Die*, on a visit to Harlem, Fleming describes Felix Leiter as a classical and jazz music critic, as well as an intelligence officer. That profile fits Henry Pleasants, another Philadelphian who served in the OSS during WWII. Pleasants debriefed Nazi General Reinhard Gehlen and became the CIA officer in Bonn, Germany, after the war, all the while writing classical and jazz music reviews. In their book *The Invisible Government*,<sup>2</sup> Wise and Ross wrote:

Pleasants, once the chief music critic of the *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, and a contributor to the music pages of the *New York Times*, was a highly literate and respected musicologist. His wife Virginia was one of the world's leading harpsichordists. He also probably had the distinction of being the only top U.S. spy to become the center of a literary storm. He had continued to write books after joining the CIA, and in 1953 his *Agony of Modern Music* (Simon & Schuster, New York) caused considerable controversy for its attacks on all contemporary music except jazz. (p. 79)

When I met Pleasants in New York and read him the excerpt from Fleming's book, he confirmed that Fleming did indeed use him as a basis for Felix Leiter. And after thinking about it, told me that his harpsichord-playing wife Virginia once performed in the same chamber group as Fleming's cello-playing sister, so there was a direct connection that Fleming must have known about.

Now we have three Fleming characters known to be based on real persons: the ornithologist James Bond, his CIA millionaire associate Cummings Catherwood, and Henry Pleasants, whose fictional name he took from Oatsie Leiter.

One actual associate of Fleming that Shakespeare acknowledges as a character in his books is Mercury news correspondent, the Australian Richard

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<sup>2</sup> <<https://shorturl.at/dfkq7>> or <[https://archive.org/stream/HourOfTheTime11012013TheInvisibleGovernmentDavidWise/Hour\\_Of\\_The\\_Time\\_11012013-The\\_Invisible-Government-David\\_Wise\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/HourOfTheTime11012013TheInvisibleGovernmentDavidWise/Hour_Of_The_Time_11012013-The_Invisible-Government-David_Wise_djvu.txt)>

Hughes, who is portrayed in *You Only Live Twice* as Dikko Henderson and is also featured in Fleming's non-fiction *Thrilling Cities*. After visiting Europe, Hughes was heading back to the orient, but Fleming suggested he pass through Moscow, where it was arranged for him to meet Burgess and Maclean, confirming their defection, a big scoop for Henderson that Fleming helped arrange.

Shakespeare quotes Christopher Moran<sup>3</sup> as saying 'Mercury looks like a spy operation. It smells like a spy operation, ergo, I think it is a spy operation.' Though Shakespeare describes the Mercury news syndicate as a virtual intelligence network, he doesn't do the same for the North American Newspaper Alliance (NANA), owned by Fleming's friends and wartime associates Ivor Bryce (SIS) and Ernest Cuneo (OSS), whose names are also used for characters in 007 novels. In *Dr No*, Bond goes to Jamaica as 'Ivor Bryce'. NANA hired Fleming as a foreign editor.

One of NANA's correspondents Priscilla Johnson (McMillan) interviewed former US Marine defector Lee Harvey Oswald in Moscow. Shakespeare mentions Priscilla Johnson as the author of *Marina and Lee*, which portrays Oswald as a lone nut, but one who, like President Kennedy, was also an avid reader of Ian Fleming's James Bond books.

Shakespeare makes much of the fact that Fleming's *From Russia With Love* was listed in *Life* magazine as being among President Kennedy's ten favourite books. JFK originally got a copy of *Casino Royale* from Oatsie Leiter while he was recovering from back surgery. Jackie Kennedy – a reporter, photographer, editor and later publisher herself – gave an 007 book to both Allen Dulles and her husband. JFK read a lot, six newspapers every morning. (He took the Evelyn Wood speed reading course, that I also took in grade school.) He read a Fleming novel in one sitting, and while enchanted, it was his secretary, Mrs. Lincoln, who added *From Russia With Love* to the President's list of ten most favoured books because the others were all high brow history and philosophy books. She thought it would make him more appealing.

Soon after becoming President, JFK requested that the CIA send over 'America's James Bond' and the portly, pear-shaped William Harvey showed up at the oval office, leaving his pistols with the Secret Service at the door. While Harvey didn't look like James Bond, he was just as lethal, and has been considered a suspect in the murder of JFK. After attending a party at Philby's apartment in Washington, Harvey also was one of the first to claim that Philby and Burgess were Soviet spies.

And JFK did play an unintentional role in the exposure of the Cambridge

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<sup>3</sup> <<https://www.andrewlownie.co.uk/authors/christopher-moran>>

spy ring. As president, JFK appointed Michael Straight to head a new arts commission. But when Straight found his background was to be closely vetted by the FBI, he confessed that there was an attempt to recruit him into the Cambridge spy ring while he was a student there. Besides Philby, Burgess and Maclean, Straight threw another name into the spy ring – Sir Anthony Blunt, the Surveyor of the Queen's Pictures. While Straight claimed not to have provided the Soviets with any useful information, as publisher of his family's liberal *New Republic* magazine, he did print some of Philby's articles.

With Michael Straight's confession, passed on to the British MI5, it was decided to have Philby's closest friend and fellow SIS officer Nicholas Elliott confront Philby, get him to admit his sins and, in exchange for a full pardon, get a full accounting of everything he knew. While Elliot did get a sort of confession, he also allowed time for Philby to disappear.

Shakespeare puts Fleming in the upper echelons of the SIS during WWII, saying that both Ian and his brother Peter were in on the fact that the allies had broken the Nazi German Enigma coding machine, a fact that was kept from the general public for thirty years after the war. Fleming alluded to in *From Russia With Love*, having 007 steal a similar Soviet Lector device.

In the 1970s, when some of the CIA's operations were exposed, one of the items that raised public concern was the CIA's use of journalists as intelligence officers and assets. The Fleming brothers, Ivor Bryce, Ernest Cuneo, Graham Greene, Somerset Maugham, Richard Hughes, Kim Philby and other journalist-spooks, are only the tip of this iceberg. As Shakespeare says: 'The precise nature of the inter-relationship between journalists and MI6 is known only to those involved.'

Both of the biographers of the real James Bond, the naturalist – Professor David Contosta and James Wright – told me they think Shakespeare is just a sloppy researcher. Shakespeare may be sloppy, but he doesn't explain what became of the document Fleming created for Bill Donovan, an outline of a basic intelligence agency; nor why Fleming's history of the Arabian royal family was never published. Why does he write that Kim Philby's best friend Nicholas Elliot was Fleming's main contact with the Secret Intelligence Service but never mentions him again? And why are Fleming's war records still sealed? The Cold War may be over but the psychological war continues, and James Bond is still in the fray.

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His manuscript *The Mystery of Goldeneye* –  
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