

coverstory
BY JAY BOBBIN



Joe Cole stars in the AMC+ series version of "The Ipcress File," which premieres Thursday.

'The Ipcress File' opens anew in AMC+ espionage drama

Harry Palmer may not be James Bond, but he's had his own longevity in the spy game ... with a number of common threads.

Novelist Len Deighton's working-class sleuth has displayed investigative smarts over a six-decade history in literature and film, and the story that introduced him – "The Ipcress File" – gets a fresh workout in a limited series premiering Thursday, May 19, on AMC+. Joe Cole ("Gangs of London," "Peaky Blinders") assumes the role Michael Caine famously played in a series of films, as military veteran Palmer is arrested for smuggling in early-1960s Berlin.

His only way out of a long prison term is to agree to act as an operative for British intelligence, with his first case apparently linking someone he knows to the disappearance of a nuclear scientist. Lucy Boynton ("Bohemian Rhapsody"), Tom Hollander ("The Night Manager") and David Dencik ("No Time to Die") also star as the globetrotting tale takes Palmer to Beirut and the Pacific over its six episodes.

The executive producers of "The Ipcress File" include Hilary and Steven Saltzman, a highly notable fact since their father Harry – who, in partnership with Albert R. Broccoli, also made the early James Bond movies – was the producer of the Harry Palmer screen capers in the 1960s. (The elder Saltzman also enlisted such Bond-series staples as composer John Barry,

production designer Ken Adam and editor Peter Hunt for the first version of "The Ipcress File.")

Though Christopher Plummer and Richard Harris reportedly were among the first choices to play Palmer, Saltzman is said to have started considering Caine after seeing the actor in his first major movie role in 1964's "Zulu." Spotting Caine at another table while eating out, Saltzman summoned him over ... and by the time Caine returned to dining partner Terence Stamp, he had the part of Palmer.

For the new "Ipcress File," star Cole has retained the bespectacled look associated with Caine, who went on to portray Palmer in two other Saltzman-produced theatrical pictures in successive years, "Funeral in Berlin" (1966) and "Billion Dollar Brain" (1967). As it turned out, he wasn't done with the role after those projects: He would reprise it in two mid-1990s cable movies originally presented on Showtime in the United States, "Bullet to Beijing" and "Midnight in Saint Petersburg" (both teaming him with Jason Connery, son of Sean Connery, who played Bond for Saltzman).

Whether the remake of "The Ipcress File," which already has been shown in England, prompts further revisitings of the adventures of Harry Palmer remains to be seen. For now, fans of the 1965 movie are likely to find it interesting to see the new take on a truly classic spy story.

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