WHAT makes a psychopath? Is it having a dungeon in your house? Or living a double life among the elite of New York society? What’s striking and scary about the serial killer in upcoming BBC2 psychological crime thriller The Fall is how normal his life appears.

For Gillian Anderson, who plays the glamorous, unconventional detective draft in to track him down, the apparent normality of the man her character is hunting, is an ingredient of the show’s mystery. Speaking to MIPCOM News ahead of the show’s release, Anderson said: “One of the interesting things about The Fall is that it explores the parallels between the two, and asks the question, how close are “normal” people to this man. We all have elements of him in our personalities.”

Writer Allan Cubitt said that part of the challenge was in presenting the killer, played by Jamie Dornan, as a normal man with a normal life but subtly drip-feeding clues to the savage psyche that lurks beneath. He said: “Inevitably there are conflicting feelings about Jamie’s character, he doesn’t fit the stereotype of serial killers. You see him interacting with people and living his life, but there are little hints that he isn’t normal at all underneath it as the plot builds.”

The series is set in Belfast where Dornan’s character preys on young women but eludes the local police, forcing local detectives to bring in DS Stella Gibson, played by Anderson, as the only detective expert enough to hunt the hunter.

“For me writing is everything and the series is just incredibly well written,” she said, “I fell in love with the character straight away. She’s quite unique, she’s brought into this world and just gets on with it.”

Making its debut on BBC2 in the UK, The Fall is being distributed jointly by German distributor ZDF Enterprises, which is handling the continental Europe circulation, and Content Television, which is overseeing the global distribution.

For Cubitt the project represents a culmination of elements of his previous work, which includes Prime Suspect, Murphy’s Law and The Runaway. He said: “This feels quite personal; it’s more fascinating to me in lots of ways and my aim is to keep exploring the idea, keep bringing it back and developing it more long term.”