

# TBI Scripted

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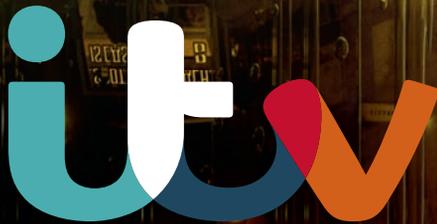
The magazine celebrating television's golden era of scripted programming



DAVID MORRISSEY

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## Contents

4	In the spotlight: Crane and Klarik
8	Interview: Nicola Shindler
10	Feature: Director's chair
16	French drama
20	Script to screen: <i>Deep State</i>
24	Channel 4's <i>Electric Dreams</i>
26	ITV & SundanceTV's <i>Liar</i>
28	Tony Grisoni on <i>The City and the City</i>
30	Movistar+'s <i>La Zona</i>
32	Writer's room: Tony Jordan

## Editor's Note



"I worry about being invisible," Jeffrey Klarik tells TBI Scripted in this issue. The sitcom guru isn't having an existential crisis, but is making a serious point about visibility to the viewer.

With budgets for high-end drama and comedy rising to never-seen-before levels and the number in development or active production at record levels, the issue is no longer getting a show made, but getting a show seen.

Subscription video-on-demand services are at the forefront of this boom, commissioning dozens and dozens of interesting projects, and now hoovering up talent like Shonda Rhimes and Robert Kirkman that have previously worked exclusively for broadcast and cable networks.

The conundrum is, without a linear broadcast slot to market to viewers, how can you guarantee a show reaches the public? Netflix will point to 2016's unexpected hit *Stranger Things* as evidence it can be achieved, but studio execs, writers and creators continue to worry their best work is getting lost in a sea of series and a cacophony of content.

Klarik and his partner, David Crane, offer up some attention-grabbing views on the debate in our regular In the Spotlight feature. Strikingly, and despite their fears over marketing and visibility, the pair plans never to work for broadcast TV ever again.

One way to draw attention to your project is to attach top-level talent to your show, and in our central feature, we speak with four leading directors about their love of television. Rightly or wrongly, directing has never been at the centre of television production. However, with the latest season of *Game of Thrones* taking visual aesthetics to a new level and many shows now handing over more power to the director, it's no surprise the role is becoming a key part of the production chain.

Talent and distribution represent other ways of unlocking audiences. We profile Fox Networks Group Europe and Africa's first commission, *Deep State*, which is to debut regionally next year in more than 50 territories, hearing from stars Mark Strong and Joe Dempsie about their leading roles in the adrenaline-fuelled espionage drama.

Big bangs, star power and directorial giants – surely these elements keep scripted programming right in faces of the viewers. We have them all in the coming pages.

Jesse Whittock

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# In the spotlight: David Crane and Jeffrey Klarik

Among the finest network multi-cam comedy producers of the 1990s, Crane and Klarik reveal why they would never go back

**D**avid Crane and Jeffrey Klarik are behind two of the biggest US network comedies of the 1990s. Crane's much-loved *Friends* (which he co-created with Marta Kauffman) drew an audience of 52.5 million in 2004 for its finale episode, while Klarik was a coproducer and writer on Paul Reiser's *Mad About You*, which ran for seven fruitful seasons between 1992 and 1999.

The producers, partners away from the business, first worked together on HBO comedy *Dream On*, which

Crane and Kauffman devised. Later, they co-created CBS multi-cam *The Class* before heading to cable network Showtime and UK pubcaster the BBC to make acclaimed single cam Hollywood send-up *Episodes*, whose final season began in the US in August.

Their dynamic as both a production partnership and a couple sees Klarik take on an outspoken, whimsical role, with Crane the more pragmatic (but no less opinionated) of the two. Here they tell TBI about their careers in no uncertain terms.



Crane (left) and Klarik (right)

## How I got into television comedy writing

**Jeffrey Klarik:** I wanted to do it all my life, and just assumed it would happen. I lived in my head as a child – I had a wild fantasy imagination and had already practiced acceptance speeches and giving interviews in it. Then it happened, and sometimes I can't believe it. Oprah would make a big thing about this.

**David Crane:** It never occurred to me to do television. I was in my 20s and doing theatre, and an agent,

Nancy Josephson – who remains our agent 35 years later – asked if I had thought of doing television. Marta Kauffman and I were partners at the time, and she soon got us into coming up with stuff and pitching it.

## The series that influenced my writing style

**JK:** I loved *All in the Family* and comedies like *Mary Tyler Moore* and *The Dick van Dyke Show* that had heart and characters you could feel for and believe in. Organic humour versus joke, joke, joke.

DC: Jeffrey and I have very similar sensibilities. Neither of us are what you would call joke writers.

### How I approached entering the business

DC: Most comedy writers have a trajectory where you work as a junior writer on a staff for a show. You do that for a number of years and eventually they let you write your own show. We had this crazy journey where one of the first scripts we wrote, *Dream On*, got picked up. We'd never worked on a show or been in a writer's room, and we got the call that our show was happening, and we didn't know what to do. Soon we were shooting in a warehouse, way out in the middle of nowhere with a tiny writer's room of three, and we just faked it.

### The most influential person in my career

DC: Jeffrey probably is, because there were a number of years where we not officially writing together, and yet we always helped each other with whatever we were writing.

Beyond that, Nancy Josephson and Marta, who was my writing partner for 27 years and that was a major part of my life.

### How I reacted to success

JK: In my sick mind, it was exactly the way it was supposed to be. I told David before *Friends* hit the air it would be huge. I may be a witch. It's creepy sometimes.

DC: Jeffrey said it was just the beginning. Norman Lear was going to pay us to write TV shows, and it was already beyond anything I could have imagined, and Jeffrey said, 'This is just the beginning'.

### The networks executives involved in my early career

DC: The best thing the people at NBC did for us when *Friends* started was to leave us alone. Warren Littlefield and Jamie Tarses managed to keep Don Ohlmeyer, the head of the network, out of our way. He had many opinions. Warren has gone on to do *Fargo* and *The Handmaid's Tale*.





Friends final episode

### **The advice I'd give to my younger self**

DC: Say yes to everything. You don't know what thing will be the thing that leads on to the thing – we didn't even want to take on *Dream On*.

JK: That's a good lesson in life – I can trace back about ten years how I met David. When I was doing *Mad About You*, I did an episode in which [main characters] Paul and Jamie both reach for the same newspaper, and I wondered what would have happened if that news stand had burnt down and wasn't there. How different would their lives have gone? Everything is built on these happenstances.

### **How network television has changed**

JK: The days of having an audience like *Friends* or *Mad About You* are long gone. The finale of *Friends* had 50 million people watching. If you get 1.1 million now you've done great.

DC: We had shows cancelled in the past because they didn't have strong enough ratings that now would be the biggest hits on television.

### **How Hollywood reacted to *Episodes***

JK: If the Hollywood executives lost their shit, they never let on. They would say under their breath that

they'd know who he is, or that we really skewered her. We'd say, 'no, no, no, it's just a character'.

DC: Four years ago, we did a panel at the TCA, and we were nervous because we'd done an episode that made fun of the critics. The first question was, 'What took you so long?' We had gone after specific critics and journalists, and it was still all good.

### **Why cable and SVOD series are a gift and a curse**

JK: The thing we appreciate the most about the experience we've just had, and hope doesn't go away is, they let you do the show you want to do. You can fail, but on your own terms. That said, it scares me. I worry about being invisible.

DC: We drive down Sunset and see billboards for a show we've never heard of returning for a third season on a network we've never heard of. You can be as passionate as you want about the show you're making, but if people have absolutely no awareness of it, you're in trouble. It's the double-edged sword.

On one side you can absolutely get lost, but the flipside is a lot of platforms need product and hopefully they're run in a way to let you do the work you want to do. The biggest takeaway from *Episodes* is we love this model. We love short order, the two of us writing everything and Jeffrey directing the season. It works for us. **S**



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# Different shades of Red

Nicola Shindler is surely the most well known drama producer from Manchester, England, with a credits list including *Queer as Folk*, *Last Tango in Halifax* and *Happy Valley*. She tells Jesse Whittock about finding the perfect story and whether she could produce in the US

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**T**hink of the most influential producers in the UK in the past 20 years and it is hard to get beyond Nicola Shindler. The first series she produced after establishing Red Production Company in the late 1990s, *Queer as Folk*, remains one of the most impactful cultural statements about a modernised Britain. More recently, BBC executives have held up crime drama *Happy Valley* and family melodrama *Last Tango in Halifax* as reaching the standards they want new scripted series to reach.

TBI puts her straight on the spot: what is the secret of her longevity?

“I work very hard,” she answers. “I work with writers and producers to make sure what we make is absolutely the best it can be. We never let one scene get past if it’s not good enough.”

She’s also uninterested in fashion. “I’m aware people want certain things, because you hear it from broadcasters all the time, but ultimately I’m not going to do something I don’t like just to get something fashionable made – I can’t work so hard on something I don’t like. I’m very lucky that I haven’t had to do that,” she says.”

Manchester-born Shindler began her career working for ITV Studios

predecessor Granada Television in the 1990s, where she produced and script-edited acclaimed dramas such as the BBC's *Our Friends in the North* and ITV's one-off *Hillsborough*, which Jimmy McGovern wrote about the Sheffield Wednesday stadium disaster of 1989.

She was representing *Hillsborough* at the International Emmys when she first met writer Russell T. Davies, whom she struck up a working relationship with that lasts to the present day. "We both lost that night," she recalls wryly.

Years later, after Granada drama chief Gub Neal had moved to Channel 4, Shindler and Davies came together to create *Queer as Folk*, a highly stylised drama about the thriving gay scene in Manchester starring Aiden Gillen (*Game of Thrones*, *The Wire*) and Charlie Hunnam (*Sons of Anarchy*) among others. Its impact on the UK public was significant, and has been named among the top UK dramas ever by numerous publications.

"As a fairly unsophisticated 29-year-old, I had no idea people would react to the show that way," says Shindler. "To me, it was a great story of unrequited love, and it didn't matter who loved whom... but the impact was massive. Russell always knew it would be, because he knew there was nothing like it on TV. He went to town on that script."

Recent years have seen Shindler's attentions shifting to the international market, parallel to the entire UK industry. In 2015, she produced Sky's crime drama *The Five* with US writer Harlan Coben – another example of how she aligns with top screenwriters.

Shindler had specifically targeted working with the multi-million-selling author, emailing his agent before receiving an excited response directly from Coben directly just hours later. "We haven't stopped emailing since," says Shindler.

They are now working on *Safe*, a Manchester-set coproduction for Netflix and Canal+–owned free-to-air C8 in France. It stars *Dexter*'s Michael C. Hall as a widowed father whose life is jolted back into chaos after a death in the picturesque gated community he lives in. Danny Brocklehurst, the *Accused* scribe, is writing.

"Harlan knew he wanted to tell a story about how people build a wall to protect themselves and keep the bad inside, and that means you don't know where bad people comes from," says Shindler. "That is incredibly relevant at the moment."

The show is a Red production, separate to the US drama-

### Shindler on...

#### Identifying a great script:

It's an instinctive thing. I grew up reading a lot and watching television, and for me TV was always about story and less about visuals. When I went to work in telly, I worked as a researcher for the BBC locked in the cellar reading a massive pile of unsolicited scripts. From that, I could quickly hear a writer's voice and tell what they were like.

#### How the US and UK production systems differ:

I've never filmed in the US, and that is something I hope to do with *Final Twist*. It would be tricky for me to actually work there, because I'm not a writer. US showrunners are writers and the role doesn't exist over here. I wouldn't be able to not read a script, or get involved with hiring people. Ideally, I'd adapt to them and they'd adapt to me.

#### Selling her business to Studiocanal:

I knew that drama was changing and evolving, and becoming much bigger. I knew I needed support and real backing in order to do that. I had an informal relationship with BBC Worldwide, but it was at quite a distance. I felt like it was the right time to become part of something bigger, but at the same time I didn't want to become part of something that was too established and still wanted to feel independent. Studiocanal allows you to do that.

focused business she and Coben launched earlier this year called *Final Twist Productions*. "We are working on something that we hope will come through that," says Shindler.

Shindler sold a majority share of Red to Paris-based Studiocanal in 2013 after 15 years of independence, which was something of a shock at the time. "What I really liked about Studiocanal, which was mostly a film company when I became involved, was a feeling of authorship and mainstream at the same time," she says. "I like the creative attitude."

Ultimately, all of Shindler's career choices can be put down to her stubborn focus on story and character. "I couldn't care less if a show is set in outer space, down a mine or in a police station," she says. "As long as it's a good story." **S**





# Director's chair

As television welcomes Hollywood's biggest names, four top directors talk to Kaltrina Bylykbashi about bringing cinema to the small screen

**J**ust this year the TV industry has welcomed renowned feature film directors from the Coen Brothers to Nicolas Winding Refn and Yorgos Lanthimos; an extension of the wealth of investment, creativity and talent brought to scripted drama in

the past few years, or the 'golden era of television'.

These directors are flocking to TV, along with a host of high profile colleagues, as opportunities to create great cinematic content shifts from film to smaller screens. One of these individuals is Kimberly Peirce,

the director of the 1999 movie hit *Boys Don't Cry*, who has gone on to direct shows such as *The L Word, I Love Dick* and most recently History's military drama *Six*.

She says: "Earlier on in our world, television wasn't as interesting to us feature film makers because it didn't give us the



*Law & Order True Crime: The Menendez Murders*

chance to shoot cinematically or go deeply into character stories.

“In the last ten years, when you see this explosion of content, it’s extraordinary what we’ve come to be allowed to do. I would even be careful about using the term television, not because it’s a bad word, but

we’re in an area where there’s cable or what we’re calling ‘over-the-top’. The shape and size of what what you consider television is all over the place.

“It’s really in a moment where it’s offering up the opportunity to deal with almost any kind of character.”

Lesli Linka Glatter, a 2017 Emmy nominee as best director for her work on *Homeland* and director for *Law & Order True Crime: The Menendez Murders*, echoes this sentiment when speaking to TBI. She says that it doesn’t matter what medium, we’re in a “golden era of storytelling” across platforms.

“We’re telling incredibly compelling visual stories,” she adds. “As a result, all of the platforms that have arisen have blurred the lines between feature film and TV. These stories are exploring the human condition, they’re complicated, they’re layered and they’re deep.”

Television is now the most likely to look for innovative and creative work, and the area where a range of high quality scripts are administered has shifted particularly to cable and OTT. For this reason, many directors are shifting their attention from feature films, which often does not present as much flexibility in script as new shows, according to a range of directors TBI has spoken to.

Ed Bianchi, who has worked as a director for over 20 years and caught the beginning of the ‘golden era’ working on shows such as *The Wire* and *Deadwood* in the aughts, says: “You have feature directors who are trying to direct television now because the content is interesting to them – its better than a lot of scripts they’re getting for features. It’s a fertile place.

“One frees you up and the other one has too many restrictions. It’s a different type of skillset so it’s really changed the role of the director. You’re now brought into TV to add to the story and then elevate it.”

Bianchi has gone on to direct big hitters from *Mad Men*, *Bates Motel* and Baz Luhrman’s short-lived Netflix show *The Get Down*. He says, particularly for cable or online, TV shows are more frequently looking for a director’s input and what a director can bring to the story or the episode.

The main shift that has brought about this change is the increasing budget currently offered for TV projects across online, cable and networks. Setting the bar are online services such as Netflix, which has proposed a spend of US\$6 billion by the end of 2017 and US\$7 billion by end-2018. Amazon is looking set to spend \$4.5 billion for the end of 2017, Hulu around US\$2.5 billion and networks such as HBO around US\$2 billion.



“When you used to look at television or internet you thought, ‘Well, we can’t really do the work that we do in cinema’, but now we can. The amazing thing when I go work on *Six* is if I need a steady cam for that scene I get a steady cam; if I need a 50-foot crane to be able to carry the characters through the battle scene, I get that. If I need to get mist in the background or I need to have blood or I need an explosion, I can get all that.

“Years ago you probably wouldn’t have been getting that in television, because the budgets weren’t there, but also because the technical expertise wasn’t there. It also cost a lot more to get it done and now we can do it more efficiently and cheaply, and so as a director who loves to tell great stories, using all kinds of equipment and all kinds of people, I suddenly can work either in features or in this other medium of television or internet and still be cinematic.

“*Six* wouldn’t have existed ten years ago because we didn’t have the know how.”

The new extravagance of the TV industry is clearest in Netflix’s recent show *The Get*

*Down*. The show was said to have cost US\$120 million. By comparison, one of the biggest movie features of the year, *Wonder Woman*, had a budget of US\$149 million.

While the show was unusual in its production and was cancelled in May this year after failing to connect, it shows how much is going into these productions. Plus, of course, its creator and director is Baz Luhrman, that well known feature film director of *Romeo + Juliet* and *The Great Gatsby*.

Ed Bianchi directed six episodes. He says: “That was a very unique show. It didn’t run like any other television show that I’ve ever worked on and that had to do with Baz and his process, which was ever evolving. “You had to be on your game, as it was changing all the time, but they did give you the resources to make it happen, which was wonderful.”

However, as *The Get Down* shows, bringing ambitious projects to TV may not always work. The Wachowski sister’s *Sense 8*, filmed across many countries, proved too big a project as Netflix cancelled it earlier this

Peirce says: “When I worked on a feature film I could get the steady cam for whatever days that I needed, could get the cranes for whatever days that I needed, and I could make sure that my special effects and my visual effects were adequate to the story, because I had a lot more money and a lot more days.

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*The Get Down**The Wire*

year, along with *Gypsy* – directed by *Fifty Shades of Grey*'s Sam Taylor-Johnson.

Not all shows are born equal, and Bianchi says that one of the biggest challenges for a television director today is the expectation of cinematic

work and the reality of a budget that doesn't support that vision.

"The big difficulty in most shows is that you just don't have enough money, even in cable, but they still want the material to be

elevated," he says. "They want it to be more like a movie than a television show, but they don't always give you the money you need to do that.

"You really have to be smart in the way you work and I would say that's the most difficult thing – to keep the work elevated with the budget that you have."

For Peirce, the shifts in budget and the accessibility to creative work has made the quality of television production close to independent film in nature, repeating a notion TBI has often heard from film talent.

"Cable is really going down the road of independent cinema and great old time cinema because it's giving you great production values, extraordinary characters, great storylines and deep intimacies."

Despite this move to cinema-like content, the Welsh director of hit UK show *Broadchurch*, Euros Lyn, says that in television, "the writer is still king", with best results coming out of a strong partnership between both writer and director.

"However, more and more, audiences are choosing to watch a series because it's 'directed by' Steven Soderbergh or Jane Campion," he concludes. **S**

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# Altice: invested in originals

French telco Altice has a €160 million budget for its new Altice Studio network and has put €40 million aside for original movies and television series. Pascale Paoli-Lebailly details where the millions are going

**E**ighteen months after subscription VOD service SFR Play kicked off with a library of 10,000 titles, including 1,200 feature films, the mother company of French telco SFR, Altice Group, completed its consumer offering by establishing Altice Studio.

The movie- and TV series-focused linear net began broadcasting on August 22, adding another layer to the group's convergent strategy. Exclusively offered to SFR subs, it will also be distributed as a stand-alone OTT service for €9.99 (US\$12) from November.

In order to stir potential subscribers, Altice Studio launched with a solid €160 million budget, out of which €40 million will go annually to original European cinema and TV series production.

Despite transmitting out of Luxembourg, Altice Studio says it will respect French content quota rules. However, it has made clear it will

not sign any financing agreements with the movie industry. Seventy-five per cent of its movies are acquisitions, 60% of which are from Europe.

Altice is adding the scripted-focused network as a fourth key genre in its channel portfolio, with news service BFM TV, sport-oriented SFR Sport and documentary net RMC Découverte previously established.

Guenaëlle Troly, who also runs RMC Découverte, will run Altice Studio, which is being positioned as a family channel that will air 400 movies each year and two original TV series per month. These will be thrillers, comedies, animated films and blockbusters, but not kids series.

“Our editorial line is based on offering the best content for all, whether European or international, and the maximum number of first windows possible,” says Troly.

An exclusive content deal inked with US major NBCUniversal gives it first access to drama series *The Sinner*, starring Jessica Biel, and movies



*The Sinner*



*Riviera*



*Sirens*

such as the Jason Bourne franchise. Another agreement with Paramount will become effective in September 2018, while Altice Studio has also picked up titles from the French and European distributor libraries such as EuropaCorp, Gaumont and SND.

Original creations will comprise both movies and TV series. “The €40 million annual investment will break into €20 million for French-speaking productions and €20 million for European content,” says Troly.

Current plans are based around a minimum of three films and TV series per year.

Original productions already commissioned include two 26-minute series based on the movie and television drama industries. These comprise in-house production *Ciné Séries le Mag*, and another from Bonne Pioche.

Altice Studio already shows international productions previously commissioned by Altice’s director of original creation, Nora Melhli, that are also available on SFR Play. These include EuropaCorp and Universal Television’s *Taken*, Big Light Productions and Lux Vide copro *Medici*, UFA Fiction and Beta Film-coproduced *The Same Sky*, and Sky drama *Riviera*. TV dramas such as *Sirens* and *Judo*, from Israeli subsidiary telco HOT, are lined-up to launch shortly.

Though no international roll out has been announced, Altice Studio has hinted the channel could be transmitted in all territories the company operates in (this includes the US). However, there are no official plans yet.

“We’re working on French series with local screenwriters and producers,” says Troly. “Our plan is to keep delivering strong brands such as *Riviera*.” **S**



# English class

**The rise in high-end English-language drama has seen well-financed French producers enter the space, despite Brexit and growing taste for Gallic shows**

**E**ighty per cent of our slate is English-language,” says Odile McDonald. Nothing unusual about that statement, except it is a Canada-born, French-language drama specialist saying it.

McDonald and the other co-founder

of Paris-based Wildcats Productions, international distribution executive Valérie Pechels, are among a growing number of French producers that have decided to enter the world of high-end, English-language coproductions.

The trend arguably began with Canal+ drama *Versailles*, which French prodcos Capa Drama and Zodiak Fiction coproduced in English with Canada’s Incendo, to the derision of French cultural commentators and the delight of Banijay Rights, which successfully sold the show around the world.

Launched in 2014, Wildcats’ first show was *Ransom*, the hostage crisis drama that the US’s CBS, France’s TF1 and Global Network in Canada co-financed, along with Sienna Films and Entertainment One Television.

Focusing development on the US and UK along with some French-language shows, McDonald says the international market is an “optimistic” sector at the moment, and is a great time for Wildcats with opportunities arising in cable, digital and (whisper it) linear broadcast TV too. “Traditional networks need to find ways to bring back audiences, and we can find them,” she explains.

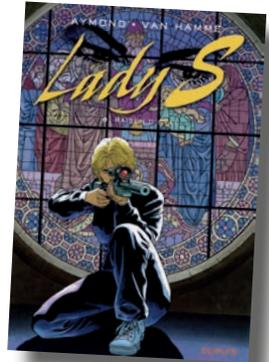
Next up for Wildcats is *Lady S*, a Belgian spy novel series it is adapting in English with *Episodes* producer Hat Trick Productions from the UK and a US partner.

Wildcats is also working with a major American TV company on an adaptation of a book about Christian Dior. “We’re telling the story of the great man before he was as is he now,” says McDonald.

Finding the right UK partners is also the key for TF1-owned Newen Group, which recently launched a €50 million (US\$55 million) production fund for the territory’s producers. Executive VP Julien Leroux has moved from Paris to London to find projects and partners, including returning series and limited dramas, and tells TBI it is “a brilliant challenge”.

Newen Distribution managing director Malika Abdellaoui says the model is of benefit to both France and the UK. “We’re able to take risks at this time,” she says. “We can take quick decisions, and we offer this to the producers. We also offer them access to European broadcasters.”

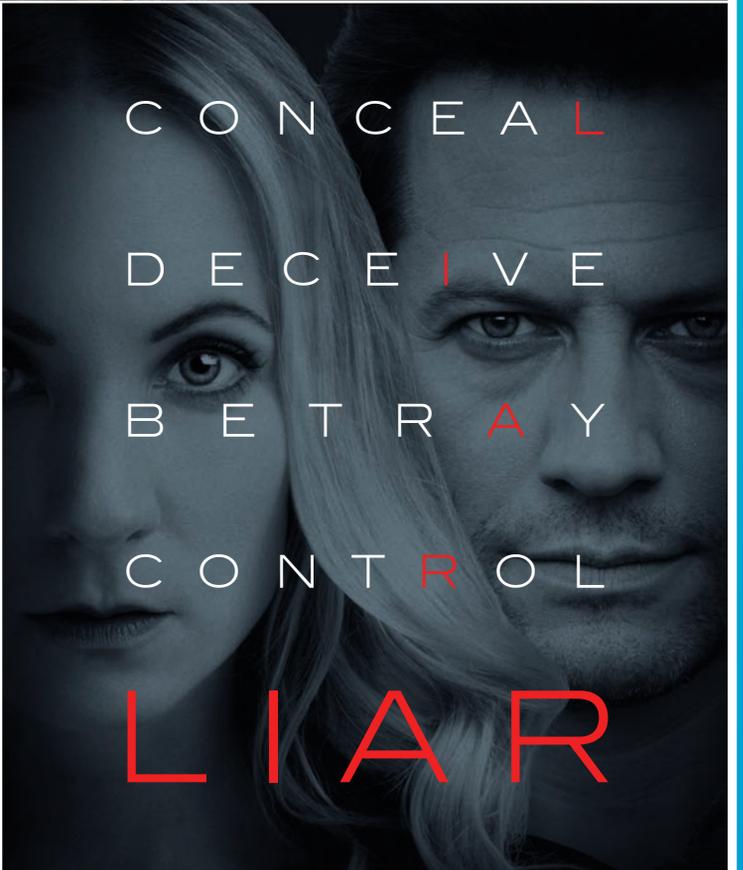
Newen is targeting to three or four series per year, meaning the union of Franco-Anglo drama will continue despite Britain’s economic future outside the European Union. **S**





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# Deep

Mark Strong

**Mark Strong and Joe Dempsie star in Fox Networks Group Europe & Africa's first original drama, an espionage thriller exploring the shady underworld of spies and politics**

**Act 1** It's a warm August morning near the Strand in central London, and a gaggle of European journalists have congregated around Mark Strong, the British film actor. Behind him, *Game of Thrones*' Joe Dempsie prepares for another take behind the wheel of a stationary car with a smoking bonnet.

TBI is on the set of *Deep State*, a political espionage thriller series that marks Fox Networks Group Europe & Africa's debut in wholly owned original content out of London. The story comes from showrunner Matthew Parkhill, who's best known for Audience Network police drama *Rogue*, which starred Thandie Newton and ended this year after four seasons. Red Arrow Entertainment's Endor Productions is producing and Channel 4's international drama chief, Simon Maxwell, is co-creator, executive producer and co-writer.

*Deep State* follows Strong as former British spook Max Easton, who is dragged into a covert war and Middle Eastern conspiracy after he receives news his estranged son (Dempsie), who followed him into the underground intelligence world, has died while on an overseas mission.

"The thing that struck me about Matthew's script was the scale," Strong says. "It is layered, exotic and engaging, and if it watches as well as it reads, it will be fantastic."

There are similar sentiments from Jeff Ford, the Fox exec who has been overseeing the project with his number two, Sara Johnson. "We began conversations around our new original content strategy two years ago at MIPCOM," he says. "In January 2016, we had our first meeting with James Baker and Red Arrow about *The Nine*, as *Deep State* was known then. It was the meeting you dream about, and we fell in love with the project immediately."

For Fox, *Deep State* comes out of a regional strategy that apes the US studio model, allowing it to produce premium content to which it controls the rights and can play on its various Fox channels in Europe and Africa.

"SVOD players are throwing lots of money at distributors and it's been very obvious that it's becoming much, much harder to secure the content," says former ITV, Channel 4, Channel 5 and TV3 veteran exec Ford. "This was the perfect show for us to kick-start this process, and we have more scripts in development."

For Ford, *Deep State* has taken on a deeper meaning, as it will be his final major play as an international TV executive. He recently announced his retirement, meaning he will soon leave his post as managing director of Fox UK and senior VP of original content for Europe and Africa (though he will remain as a consultant on the latter role next year, and his input on *Deep State* will continue).

Johnson, who joined Fox from Keshet UK, says viewers will recognise the scale of *Deep State* that Strong references. “Matthew Parkhill has been so ambitious with this,” she says.

**Act 2** “One of the inspirations behind the show is the film *Syriana* – you have to watch it about five times to understand it, but it’s really amazingly complex,” says Parkhill. “It is a grounded and true conspiracy thriller, just like *Deep State*. Both have that strong emotional story, but are rooted in the real.”

Though Parkhill had developed the show as *The Nine*, the true possibilities opened up when it became *Deep State*, a term that originated from Turkey’s turbulent political environment in the 1990s.

“The show started out as about the Iranian nuclear deal, but because

of what’s happened in the real world, it has grown in much more interesting directions,” says Parkhill.

Central to the story is questioning the connections between politicians and major companies that profit from global conflicts, as Parkhill explains: “The notion of defence contractors, intelligence services or financial institutions existing irrespective of what government gets into power is something the show explores.”

Though the series is set in the UK, US, Iran, Lebanon and France, shooting took place in London and Morocco, a decision Endor’s Hilary Bevan Jones made due to the number of different countries the North African territory can double as, thanks to its varied terrain.

Endor led production, while ex-ICM exec Alan Greenspan and his 6 Degree Media prodco and Helen Flint of *Snatch* producer Little Island Productions worked on development.

Bevan Jones says filming in Morocco, especially in the noisy and bustling Casablanca, posed an unexpected problem: “The noise was like nothing we’ve heard before. There were hundreds of spectators banging around and whooping, and we’re trying to focus on the absolute precise timing of blowing up a car or a motorbike stunt. It was extraordinary.”

Dempsey says this led to major action sequences taking more effort

# State



Karima McAdams



Joe Dempsie

than is usually necessary. “In London, you can just close a road for an afternoon to shoot,” he explains. “Not in Morocco.”

Bevan Jones says she looked for inspiration from *State of Play*, a Paul Abbot drama starred David Morrissey and John Simm she produced for the BBC. “*State of Play* was one of the earlier espionage thrillers to have a sense of family and an emotional spine running through it,” she says.

**Act 3** There’s no doubt some will – for better or worse – compare *Deep State* with the BBC’s slick spy miniseries *The Night Manager*. Endor head of television Tom Nash acknowledges “similarities”, but suggests the Fox drama is more rooted in reality. “There was a sense of escapism with *The Night Manager*, with the lavishness of the sets and locations, and we’re on a different sort of scale,” he says. “Ours is more about the realities of being a modern spy, whereas *The Night Manager* is based on book written in 1989.”

Whether the comparisons are helpful or not will become apparent at MIPCOM, where Fox Networks Group Content Distribution is to launch the eight-part series to significant fanfare, including a themed



party on the opening Monday (October 16).

Fox Networks Group Content Distribution chief Prentiss Fraser says owning all rights means Fox can “partner at an early stage to ensure we can jointly maximise the exposure of the brand and make it a global success for Fox as well as its international partners”.

She and Strong will be in Cannes, rubbing shoulders with the assorted buyers, with that gaggle of journalists surely somewhere close by. **S**

STARRING

ARCHIE PANJABI JACK DAVENPORT

# NEXT OF KIN

A FAMILY TORN APART



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Brand New Drama

# Dream sequence

*Philip K. Dick's Electric Dreams* brings back the sci-fi anthology

**P**hilip K. Dick's *Electric Dreams* is this year's latest ambitious anthology series, bringing together the author's range of short stories based on the human experience and human consciousness.

The ten-part series continues two TV trends that have been returning to screens worldwide after a significant period away: the sci-fi genre and anthology format.

Ronald D. Moore, renowned *Star Trek* director and executive producer and writer of *Electric Dreams*, tells TBI: "I've watched [the sci-fi genre] go up and down cyclically for a long time. I think we're seeing it come up.

"There's not a lot of straight up science fiction shows on TV. You know the new *Star Trek* series has launched, but other than that there's not a lot of space shows out there. There's not as many as there are serialised dramas and quirky detective shows, which somehow are always en vogue."

Similarly, Moore and executive producer Michael Dinner say that anthology has long been a "dirty word" in TV. However, a new audience may be able to revive the trend formerly seen in shows like *Twilight Zone* and *Tales From the Crypt* and more recently in *Black Mirror*.

Moore adds: "At the moment, most long-form TV is serialised – it's very serialised – and so the audience knows that if they start one of these shows it's a commitment for many, many hours.

"With an anthology series, it's just a different game. It's like



watching ten little movies. Viewers can feel like they can watch one, or watch them out of order. There's flexibility and there's freedom and there's a part of the audience that is looking for that."

The show's format has leaned itself to the collaborative nature of the production, which was filmed in London and Chicago. It was brought together by Sony Pictures Television and Channel 4, and hosts talent from across the UK and the US from writers, to actors and producers.

It is written and adapted by Dinner and Moore, as well as *This is England's* Jack Thorne and *Doctor Who's* Matthew Graham, among others. Furthermore, it hosts a breadth of acting talent from Bryan Cranston (*Breaking Bad*), who also serves as executive producer, to *X-Men's* Anna Paquin, Holliday Grainger and *Fargo* star Steve Buscemi.

"It's difficult doing an anthology because you're starting from scratch every time," says Dinner. "It's ten movies, but that's the difficulty and the exciting part about it. There's no standard sets and every episode has a different cast." **S**

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# Modern Lies

**F**or the Williams brothers, the team behind hit shows such as *Fleabag*, *The Missing* and *Rellik*, *Liar* explores the modern tale of false truths that human beings feed to one another.

The drama explores this concept in the binary tale of Laura (Joanne Froggatt) and Andrew (Ioan Gruffudd), a teacher and a surgeon that go on a date and the next morning have very different memories of what happened the evening prior.

Unlike in *The Missing*, which featured multiple timelines and suspects, *Liar* looks to explore the concept of truth in a simpler narrative between two people. At a micro-level, it highlights the complexity of non-truths in the world today.

One half of the two brothers, Harry Williams, says: “We live in the era of fake news and people lying very publically about very big global issues. This is sort of a microcosm of that.

“In the show, it’s not just the central characters that focus on lies. Everyone involved is lying in some form or another, and we’re trying to explore what the lie means in myriad ways.

“There are good lies – those used to defend people – and bad lies that hurt people, and *Liar* explores the power of the lie and the impact it can have on people.”

The theme is one that currently reflects the global mood, touching on key issues of the moment from gender politics to truth bending. To that end, *Liar* is aiming for a global audience, and as a coproduction between the UK channel ITV and US network Sundance TV and with a cast that stretches across the pond, it is a naturally international title.

“It’s a very relatable story internationally,” says Jack Williams. “It’s not specifically English or anything like that. Particularly with the casting it has that appeal for the UK and the US.”

Global television is the norm now, according to the brothers, and they have seen a rise in the increase of coproductions, which they say just helps producers achieve the best result.

“It does seem to be happening a lot more,” says Jack. “It’s something we’re very pleased about, frankly, because it gives you a show with better production values and wider audience reach.” **S**



# THE INCIDENT

A mystery where a big storm threatens humanity

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**SERIESATRESMEDIA**

Writer Tony Grisoni on his approach to adapting China Miéville's 'weird fiction'-meets-detective noir novel *The City and the City* for BBC Two

China Miéville's 2009 novel *The City and the City* takes some effort to comeprehend. The premise is that it follows a European city-state, Bezel, housing two cities that occupy the same geographical space, but do not recognise or acknowledge each other.

The story, which won Miéville the 2010 Hugo and Arthur C. Clarke Awards, brings together sci-fi, detective fiction, romance and thriller elements. Transferring all of that to television will be no easy feat, but it is one *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* screenwriter Tony Grisoni is undertaking happily.

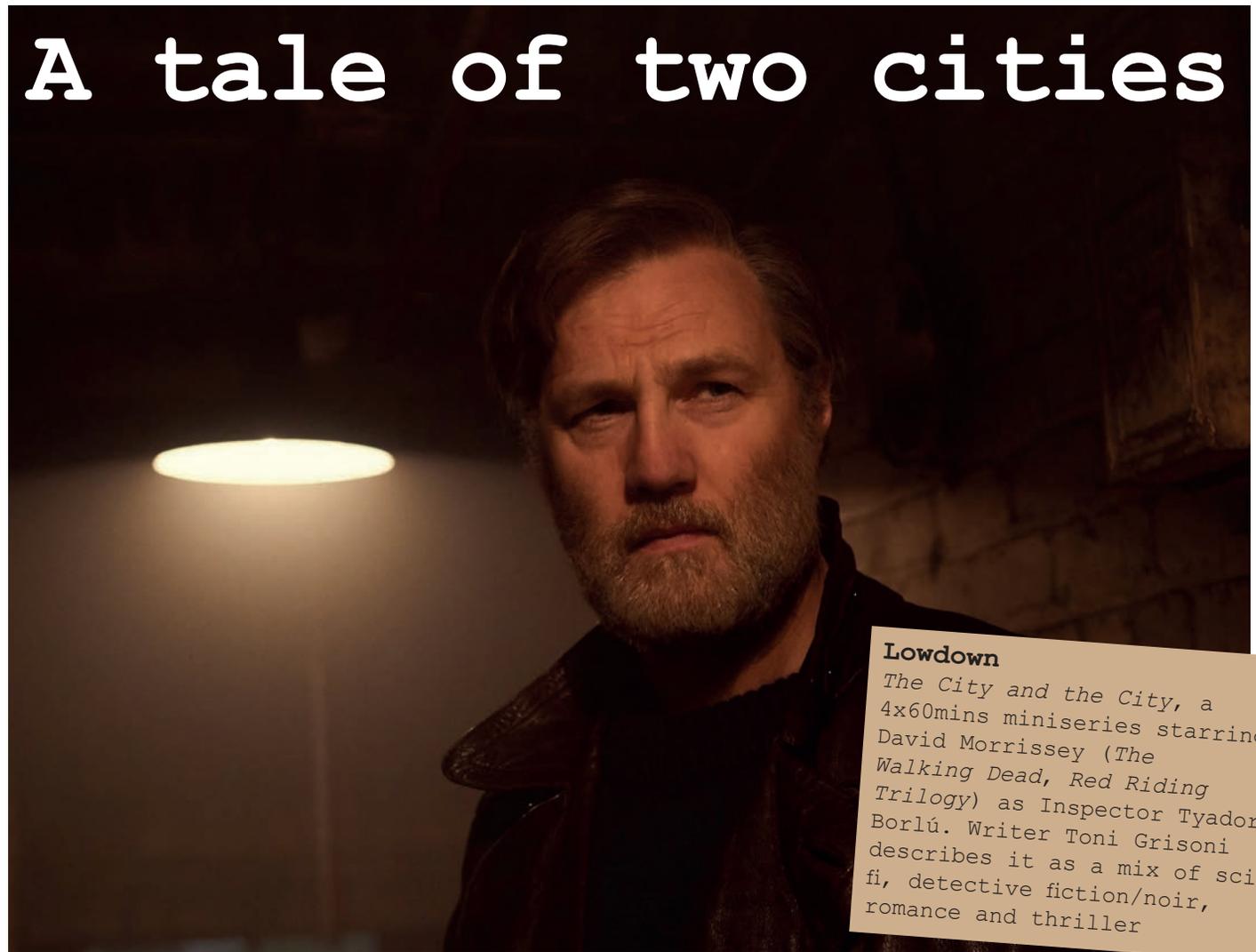
Producer Mammoth Screen had approached Grisoni to adapt the novel for the small screen in 2013. "I knew about China's other novels, and had seen him speak at a literary festival," recalls the screenwriter. "His novels fall under the genre what some call 'weird fiction', which includes authors such as Brian Catling. This liberally describes a kind of science fiction, but is not set in a separate, imaginary world."

Grisoni read the book while staying in Cairo, Egypt, which he says was a "great place to read about divided cities", says Grisoni.

"It was a really wonderful read, and got me thinking about how you could possibly write a screenplay that is based around an image," he adds. "In the end, I decided to take the project on because it scared the hell out of me."

The resulting script relies heavily on the inherent drama in the novel, with little focus placed on making it CGI-heavy, and was drafted as a four-hour story to fit the miniseries format that broadcaster BBC Two had commissioned. "The beauty of this form of TV is you can tell a long story," says Grisoni.

Despite the freedom, condensing a 312-novel into 200-odd minutes is still a challenge for any writer or producer. Grisoni, therefore, wanted to understand Miéville's thinking, so the pair met before scripting. "The story changes we have made are very in keeping with China's source material," he says. **S**



**Lowdown**

*The City and the City*, a 4x60mins miniseries starring David Morrissey (*The Walking Dead*, *Red Riding Trilogy*) as Inspector Tyador Borlú. Writer Toni Grisoni describes it as a mix of sci-fi, detective fiction/noir, romance and thriller

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**Season 3**

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**Lowdown****The show:** *La Zona***The producers:** Jorge & Alberto Sánchez-Cabezudo**The concept:** Mystery crime drama set around the meltdown of a Spanish nuclear reactor.

# In *La Zona*

**B**uyers around the world may be interested to learn of the latest premium pay TV series from Jorge and Alberto Sánchez-Cabezudo, whom Beta Film executive Christian Gockel describes as “the Spanish Coen brothers”.

The show, *La Zona*, is set three years after the deadly meltdown of a Northern Spanish nuclear reactor. With locals in mourning, an inspector who lost his son in the tragedy, Hector Uria, uncovers a smuggling racket linked to politicians in the contaminated no-go zone, just as a spate of murders begin.

The Madrid-born Sánchez-Cabezudo brothers are best known for series such as Canal+ España’s *Crematorium* and 2006 thriller movie *The Night of the Sunflowers*. They have also directed episodes of *Velvet*, *Grand Hotel*, *Víctor Ros* and *Desaparecida*, further developing their reputation as leading Spanish writer-directors.

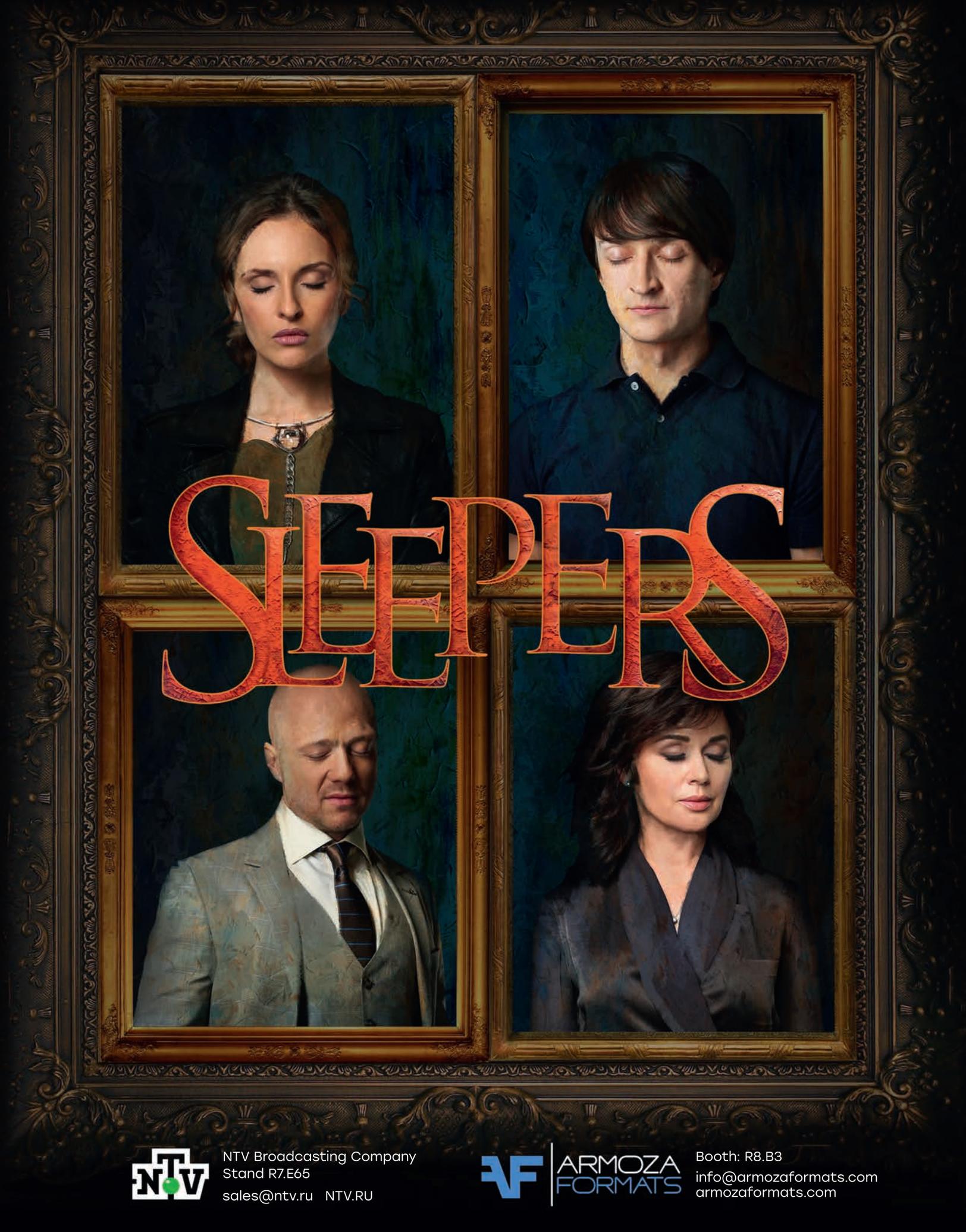
Their latest series is one of a number that telco Telefónica is launching through its Movistar+ service as it builds out its subscription VOD service and aims to keep pay TV numbers up.

While the 8x50mins show centres on the damaged inspector, focus is also placed on the spiritual and mental journeys of his wife, Marta, and daughter, Ester, and of his doctor and public health official Julia.

“The uniqueness of *La Zona* is that it gives Jorge and Alberto Sánchez-Cabezudo the financial means and backing to tell a story of collective despair and political corruption from the perspective of the ordinary man and woman in the gripping guise of a serial murder investigation with overwhelming visual imagery,” says Gockel, Beta’s executive VP of international sales and acquisitions.

Germany-based Beta has worldwide rights, having found success with Spanish-language dramas such as *Velvet* and *Grand Hotel* in recent years.

Beta CEO Jan Mojto will take part in a Telefónica keynote session featuring Movistar+ programming chief Domingo Corral on the opening Monday of MIPCOM (October 16) in the Palais des Festivals’ Grand Auditorium at 12.05pm local time. Later that day, Beta will host a screening of the show, giving international executives a first taste of a completed episode. **S**



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# Writer's Room

## Showrunners: learn to take a note

Tony Jordan has been one of the UK's leading mass audience writers for decades after swapping life as a market trader for life as a scribe. As well as helming BBC soap *Eastenders*, he is the creator of *Life on Mars*, *Hustle*, *Hooten and the Lady* and *Dickensian*, and founder of Red Planet Pictures

**I**n the UK, we are currently in negotiations to leave the EU, something akin to picking up your football and taking it home in the middle of a game. It is also the polar opposite of what we are doing as an industry.

Working with partners across Europe and the rest of the world is what makes it possible for independent production companies like Red Planet Pictures to do business. Only by coming together can we hope to meet constantly rising production budgets and the demand for ever-more sophisticated drama.

For me, the trick to making these coproductions work is to ensure that above all else, you have a single creative vision and that when there is a fork in the road – as there always is – the decision about which direction to choose ultimately rests with one person.

Only once that concept is agreed and the parameters are set, can the true creative collaboration begin. The presence of a showrunner, whose job it is to guard the creative vision, is not an excuse for him or her to ignore notes or input from their partners, however.

The showrunner who sees their production partners simply as financiers or treats them as interference or an annoying distraction is simply not doing their job properly.

Just as the coproducers must buy into a single creative vision, the showrunner has a responsibility to make the best show they can, and so to view creative input from what may be very smart and experienced people on the basis that it's intrusive to 'their vision' moves beyond arrogance into stupidity.

As a writer, I understand how to take a note, but also how to explain to a producer why their note is wrong. I also understand that you can't always take notes literally, and sometimes you just need to understand



why the note was given in the first place. It's not rocket science: you do the notes that will make the show better and fight the ones that won't.

It's called creative collaboration. If you can't do it, stop flying around the world convincing people you can, only to renege on that assertion once you have the money.

I remember the first season of *Death in Paradise*, which at that time was a coproduction between two public service broadcasters: the BBC in the UK and France Télévisions.

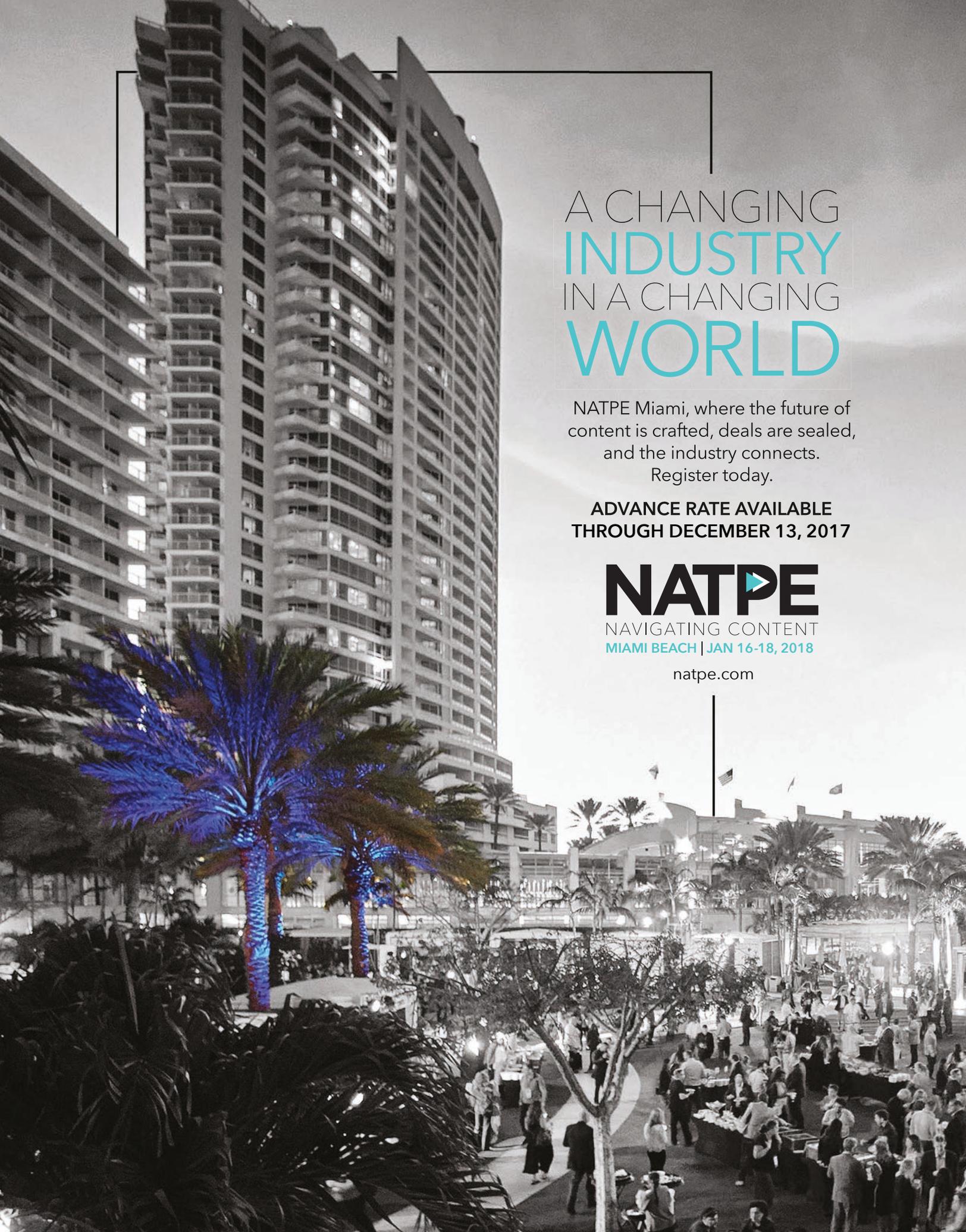
I can assure you there were no shortage of notes or creative input from either broadcaster – at one point I recall negotiating the number of goats in a Caribbean police cell. The British sense of humour was slightly more reserved and so one goat seemed right, whereas the French sense of humour is slightly heightened and they asked for three. We settled on two.

We had healthy discussions on every script, on characters and tone, then on casting, crew, costume, even catering. The point is, both partners felt like they had a voice, which they did, and that their notes – big or small – were seriously considered, which they were, but ultimately someone had a firm hold of the creative reins. That way the broadcasters could spend time on the other shows they were making.

We all need to understand the meaning of the word 'partners'. As coproducers we can each have our own opinions and creative sensibilities, but we must always accept that our partners do too.

A showrunner who manages notes well is the sign of someone who is confident in their creative vision. Those that don't are usually not. You can spot them though, because they pick up their football and take it home. A bit like Brexit... **S**

**Good showrunners will consider the views of everyone involved in the creative process**



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