

TBI Scripted

Television Business International

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The magazine celebrating television's golden era of scripted programming



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Contents

4	TBI Scripted interview: Steven Soderbergh
10	In the spotlight... Gideon Raff
12	Spanish drama latest
16	Studio Canal's <i>The Last Panthers</i>
20	In depth: <i>Cleverman</i>
22	In depth: <i>Jekyll & Hyde</i>
24	In depth: <i>Fear the Walking Dead</i>
25	Award winner: <i>False Flag</i>
26	Wanted: <i>Procedurals</i>
30	Italian drama in review
36	Writer's room: Hans Rosenfeldt

Editor's Note



FX Networks boss John Landgraf is behind some of the biggest and best dramas of the past decade: think *Fargo*, *Sons of Anarchy* and *Damages*. A constant champion of top talent, his statement at the TCA press tour this summer that there was too much high-end drama on the market shook the industry like a tornado.

His concerns, repeated at the Edinburgh International Television Festival, have since been echoed in private and public by executives concerned the 'golden age of television' groundswell is winding down.

You'd be hard-pressed to get that from this magazine, however. Companies are hitting MIPCOM with bigger, bolder, and more expensive dramas than ever before. Take *The Last Panthers*, the Sky and Canal+ action drama coproduction that features in our lead article. Shot across Europe in a mammoth 130-day shoot, its backers expect major success, in terms of ratings, sales and critical acclaim.

We also speak with *Prisoners of War/Homeland* creator Gideon Raff, and Steven Soderbergh, who has reworked his 2009 movie *The Girlfriend Experience* for US cable channel Starz. The Hollywood director tells us high-end television drama really is the most creative space in entertainment at the moment, while Raff remains as committed to the space as ever.

Fresh off of wrapping FX biker drama *Sons of Anarchy*, Dave Erickson's new project, *Fear the Walking Dead*, has gone into the record books as basic cable audiences flooded to the *Walking Dead* companion series in their millions. Erickson explains how he approached the show, and where we can expect it to go next.

It's good to remember that before the cable drama revolution of the early 2000s, which was followed by subscription on-demand's move into high-end original programmes, procedurals were the staple of the day. They remain that way for broad US network audiences, and for many channels around the world. Perhaps this is where the industry heads if Landgraf's warnings come true and high-end shows slip away, leaving slots bare.

We explore the procedural genre, and find that a hybrid US-European/procedural-limited series genre is emerging.

Maybe television drama is heading for saturation point, but it seems the industry is making a good fist of dispelling the notion.

Jesse Whittock

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photo: Claudette Barius

Soderbergh: 'My plan right now is TV'

Steven Soderbergh is a producer, director and writer best known for movies including *Sex, Lies and Videotape*, *Ocean's 11* and *Magic Mike*. In recent years he has moved into TV, with Cinemax series *The Knick*, and now a major film-to-TV project, *The Girlfriend Experience*, for Starz, with Riley Keough playing the lead. He tells Stewart Clarke why TV is the place to be

You are known for your movie work, but with *The Knick* on HBO and now *The Girlfriend Experience* for Starz, you have two big TV series. How is the TV world evolving?

We are in the midst of a shifting paradigm in terms of television that was probably started by David Chase, with a little bit of help from another David, David Lynch, which is this idea of auteur-driven television. I think the idea of a director-driven show, in a medium that has been traditionally controlled by writer-producers, is going to become increasingly prevalent and is a really exciting thing for viewers. *The Girlfriend Experience*, in particular, will highlight the benefits of that approach.

Is TV now the place for writers, producers and directors with really ambitious ideas?

It is for me. I just want to work in a place where I can follow what I'm engaged by, and be allowed to execute in a way I think is interesting. That place for me, right now, is long-form television.

How will you balance your TV and feature work?

My plan right now is TV. That just seems to be what I want to do, and how I want to do it, and it syncs up with the people who are paying for it. Instead of being in a situation where the way I like to do things makes people feel anxious, I want to be working in a medium in which my way of doing things is exciting to the people who are paying for it.

What's the backstory with *The Girlfriend Experience*?

Philip Fleischman, one of the exec producers, was somebody I worked with 30 years ago on a Yes concert [film]. We were just talking, and he asked if I had ever thought about turning *GFE* into a TV show. I said I hadn't but that it would be an interesting subject for television. We started talking about how it might be done, and I decided let's go out with it. I approached Starz because I'd worked with [Starz CEO and former HBO boss] Chris Albrecht on *K Street* for HBO way back when. He and I stayed in touch and had been trying to figure out something to do together.

What was the approach?

The big idea in the context of this show was finding two independent writer-directors, pairing them together and having the show be an auteur-driven piece.

We got Lodge [Kerrigan] and Amy [Seimetz] to agree to do it and then went to Chris and said this is what we wanted do, to write all the episodes and then split the directing, to have two smart filmmakers and turn them loose. Chris really liked it.

That only works, presumably, if the channel gives you free rein creatively?

Yes, I said we're banking on two talented people, but we have got to let them, within very specific financial parameters, do what they do. The thing has got to feel like it was handmade by two independent filmmakers.

What is the connection between the *GFE* movie and *GFE* series?

We wanted the vibe to be similar, but also wanted them to go narrow and deep with the main character and, unlike the film, go into how she finds her way into this business [high-end escorting].

My other significant contribution was to recommend [lead actor] Riley Keough to Lodge and Amy. I'd worked with her on *Magic Mike*, and she was someone I thought that, given the opportunity, could really deliver, and she does.

One connection to the film was Steven Meizler, who I have worked with on 14 or 15 movies, including *The Girlfriend Experience*. He was director of photography, so there is a connection between the look of the feature and the TV show. There is that strong visual connection, which is the thing that unites what Amy and Lodge are doing. So even though there are two different directors, Steven's work connects the two things.

In the movie you cast an adult star, Sasha Grey. Did you always want a professional actor for the series?

I felt that given the demands of the series, 13 half-hours, and talking to Lodge and Amy about where they wanted to go with character, there was never any question that we were going to need a professionally-trained performer.

And for the show to be good she has to be good?

Riley is the whole show, and she really crushes it. We're talking about a six-and-a-half-hour film, shot in 58 days, so it is really, really intense, and she jumped off the cliff every day. She gave such a fearless performance, and I haven't seen a young actress do something like this in a long time.

What themes does the series explore?

It's about identity, ultimately. [Keough's character Christine Reade] is interning as a paralegal at law firm, and so the piece becomes about fronting. She's got the face she presents as she works, and another as she begins to dive into the world of being an extremely well-paid escort. To what extent those faces are real and to what extent she is creating herself as she goes is an open question.

Because of the style of filmmaking and the performances, there is a sense we are spying on her as she is sorting these questions out for herself. What I like is there is no editorialising at all about what she is doing. You're just watching someone navigate two different terrains.

It's set in the US and made for an American cable channel. Will it appeal around the world?

There's a universality in specificity. If you create something detailed and accurate it will play anywhere.

I've always believed that instead of consciously trying to make something that will have a broad appeal, the idea is to make it as accurate as possible and dive as deep as you can, and people will take that journey.

When you see [*The Girlfriend Experience*], you will feel that 'this is not like anything else I'm seeing on television right now'.

Do you see *The Girlfriend Experience* as a returning series?



Riley Keough starring in Starz series *The Girlfriend Experience*

There are lots of possibilities. I know Starz is really happy with it – Chris called me at home on the weekend after binge-watching it and said, 'Holy shit, this is amazing' – and so we are in midst of having a discussion about what is the best version of it going forward.

We haven't followed the typical paradigm in terms of how the first season was made, so the question is how do we stay true to that independent spirit, because we don't want to do same thing we just did. I think we'd all like to do it again, but part of the appeal is that it is not doing what other shows do.

What other TV projects are you working on at the moment?

I'm putting the finishing touches to season two of [Cinemax series] *The Knick* and am also in discussions about how that might continue.

There are other things I have been developing in the background. One is an adaptation of a John Barth novel I control the rights to, *The Sot-Weed Factor*.

When I started getting into television I thought that if there was a problem trying to turn this 700-page book into a two-hour film, we could do it as a 10- or 12-hour piece so I'm not having these problems of compression. Hopefully something can get up and running soon.

Has working in TV changed the way you would now approach a feature?

Two seasons of shooting has been a great process for me as a filmmaker, I really learned a lot.

There is no substitute for being on set and solving problems all day every day, and you get better as a result. The intensity and the amount of material you have to generate in TV makes it almost like a sport, and it means getting a really, really good workout.

Is working with Starz and HBO a similar process?

I have the same relationship with [HBO president, programming] Michael Lombardo and [Cinemax, president, original programming] Kary Antholis as with Chris Albrecht. With them the bottom line is 'We believe in you and count on you to deliver something distinctive. This is the deal, this is how much money you have, and as long as you stay within that, we encourage you to give us something crazy that people will remember'.

Could you do a network show?

Based on the stories I have heard from friends who have worked in the network world, no, only because they can't let go. I don't think I could operate under those circumstances, where my creative impulses are being second-guessed by the executives at the network.

It would be interesting to know if I made a show with total creative freedom for one of the major networks whether it would rate. It would be interesting to find out; I just don't know if the process would be very pleasant. **S**

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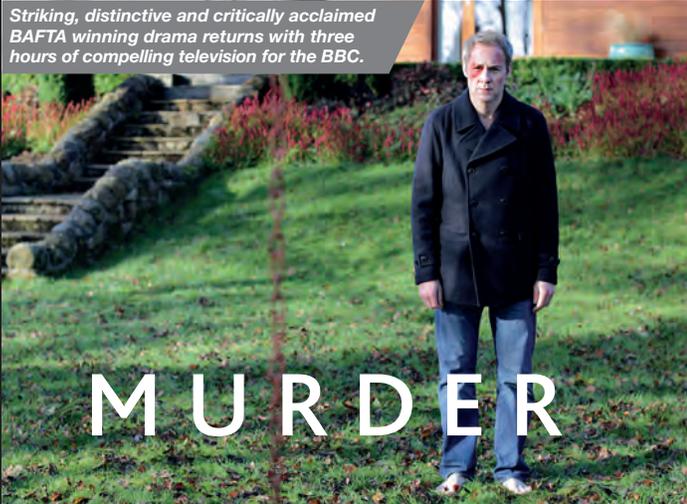
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In the spotlight: Gideon Raff

The writer of *Homeland* precursor *Prisoners of War* reveals the people, programmes and producers that have shaped his career in Israel and the US



Gideon ‘Gidi’ Raff has become the best-known director, screenwriter and producer to hail from Israel since his political spy drama *Prisoners of War* provided the basis of Showtime’s *Homeland*. Born in Jerusalem, Raff spent some early years living in Washington, D.C., before moving back to Israel to work in IT during the first dot-com bubble. In 2003, he moved to LA to attend the American Film Institute, where he created short film *The Babysitter*. This proved to be a significant move as a Hollywood director saw the film and hired Raff as his assistant on the 2005 feature film *Mr & Mrs. Smith*, which brought together Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie. He worked as a features director until 2008,

when he returned to Israel after writing *Prisoners of War* to produce the show. By this point, he had sold the script to 20th Century Fox Television and *Homeland* was born. Five seasons later, Raff is one of the most sought-after producers in Hollywood for both TV and film. He created FX drama *Tyrant* and co-created USA Network’s *Dig with Heroes*’ Tim Kring. Here, Raff recalls the moments that have defined his career.

The drama series that has most influenced my producing style

I don’t know of there’s one show; it’s all of the shows I’ve ever seen. This boom in television is because



Prisoners of War and
Homeland (inset)



creators who've been influenced by cinema are now in television. In my work, you've got the influence of European 1970s cinema and American thrillers. If you forced me to mention a few, HBO prison drama *Oz* was one I thought had depth in a time when television didn't. *The Sopranos* is another, and going way further back *M.A.S.H.* was an influence, but it's much more than one show for me.

The person that has most influenced me

Straight out of film school I started working with Doug Liman as his assistant on *Mr & Mrs. Smith*, which was really film school for me, and opened my eyes to how production and direction is done. Doug has been a big influence on my career ever since. In terms of producers and executives, there are so many: Avi Nir and I have so done many things together. He is brilliant and I always trust his opinion. There are many others who I've worked with on the executive producer side, such as Gail Berman and Tim Kring, who I admire and have worked with, and often consult with. I should also mention my agent, Rick Rosen, who recognised the potential of *Prisoners of War*, and Showtime president David Nevins.

The company that has influenced television the most

At the forefront at this 'golden age of television', you can't take the throne away from companies like HBO and Showtime, who have been brave enough to dive into content that is extremely untraditional in terms of what came before. The idea of highly serialised shows as opposed to procedurals came from there, and many

creators have wanted to work with those companies because they've allowed stories to be told in very deep and cinematic ways, with deep exploration of character and not just plot.

Where I always look for inspiration

I have a big paperweight on my desk, which has a line from Churchill: 'Never, ever, ever give up': that's a big tip! Also, before I directed my first feature film, Doug Liman called me and told me not to listen to the naysayers. I think about that all the time in terms of what is possible and what is not possible, and to remind myself never to comprise and give in to people who say you can't do that. So I guess I'm somewhere between Churchill and Doug Liman.

The source material I would love to make into a television drama

There are a lot of Israeli books and plays that would adapt perfectly. However, the one book that would be a dream to bring to television, but feels like an impossible dream, which has had a big impact on me is Indian-Canadian writer Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*. I always wanted that story in the visual medium, but I think it might a little too huge for film and a little too subversive for television. *A Fine Balance* is a book I hope one day to have the privilege to make. The way it is written means you can smell the streets of India. **S**

Spain takes a thrill ride

The influence of international series on Spanish TV producers, broadcasters and viewers is being felt in a new generation of riskier, homegrown scripted shows that are vying for slots in primetime. TBI reports from Madrid

If there is a clear trend in Spain among the 2015-16 primetime series, it is the proliferation of thrillers. The trend started becoming noticeable last year, when thrillers including Bambu-produced *Under Suspicion* and Globomedia's *Locked Up* were both successfully broadcast by Atresmedia's Antena 3. Plano a Plano-produced *The Prince*, meanwhile, was the biggest fiction hit for Mediaset España's Telecinco.

Spanish channels announce their new programming at Vitoria's FesTVVal, an early September TV showcase; and this year Spanish pubcaster TVE presented cop thriller *Elms and Oaks*.

With a dose of comedy in the show, it was described as TVE's "most risky drama bet of the quarter" by fiction director Fernando López Puig.

The series, produced by 100 Balas, centres on Olmos, played by Pepe Viyuela (*Aida*), a chaotic but friendly Civil Guard officer in a village in La Rioja. When Lieutenant Robles (Rubén Cortada, *The Prince*), an urban, modern, but introverted, agent, arrives both are forced to work together to solve a major international case.

The risk is paying off for TVE. Aired in a Tuesday primetime slot on La 1, (at the time of writing) the series generated a strong 19.2% share and 3.3 million viewers on average after two weeks.

Upcoming TV drama *Plastic Sea*, is a *True Detective*-esque thriller produced by Boomerang TV, with a top-rate cast headed by Rodolfo Sancho (*The Department of Time*). It is scheduled to debut simultaneously September 22 on all Atresmedia family networks, including the jewel in the crown, Antena 3.

Set in Campoamargo, a fictional village on the coast of Almería in Andalusia, where the economy is centred on greenhouse-based agriculture, *Plastic Sea* starts when the young daughter of the town's lady mayor is murdered and a Civil Guard sergeant with a complex

personality comes to direct the investigation.

"Thrillers generate huge loyalty from TV audiences, making them feel part of the series as they discover the keys of the story alongside the protagonists," says Sonia Martínez, Atresmedia's head of fiction. "In *Plastic Sea*, the big difference is in the environment. Here, the place represents another character

forward for Boomerang, since the Spanish company has become part of the Paris-based firm's international expansion.

Producing TV drama with global appeal is key not only for Boomerang but also for many other top Spanish TV prodcos, who find in thrillers an effective TV genre that travels easily.



Plastic Sea

and how the characters' reactions are totally influenced by the environment."

The series makes its market debut at MIPCOM and marks Boomerang TV's strongest fiction bet since the acclaimed period drama *The Time in Between*, also aired by Atresmedia.

"*Plastic Sea* is one of the most international TV dramas we have produced to date," says Beatriz Setuain, head of international sales at Boomerang TV. "In terms of concept, characters and cultural references, it is easily exportable, and viewers from around the world will feel familiar with the atmosphere it creates."

Acquired in May by French media giant Lagardère, international looks a logical step

"Trends that come from the international market have had a great influence on television in Spain," says Setuain.

"Spanish TV audiences have become accustomed to dramas from all countries, especially from the US," says Manuel Sanabria at Isla Producciones, the creators of sci-fi drama *Star Crossed*, which bowed on The CW in the US. "They still like traditional series but also look for another kind of fiction that, in the past, only came from abroad.

"The Spanish TV fiction offer was not adjusted to meet local demand, because of a lack of genre series. Luckily, today that disconnect has been favourably settled."

Isla produces *Rage* for Mediaset España, and it is a sci-fi thriller with a strong

international profile. Its US adaptation and coproduction rights sit with Captivate Entertainment, the California-based company responsible for hits including *The Bourne* film franchise.

Already one of the drama highlights at MIPTV, *Rage* follows the journey of a group of outlaws who, after undergoing a clandestine and experimental treatment to save their lives, become infected with an unknown virus that causes dangerous behavioural disorders. The fugitives are forced into hiding, to escape the authorities while striving to find a cure.

Toni Sevilla, Mediaset España's head of fiction, recognises that *The Walking Dead* was a reference point for the new series.

Slated for an autumn release, it will also mark the return of Spanish fiction to a primetime slot at Mediaset España's network Cuatro.

Following the genre-fiction path, Mediaset España has also unveiled the production of *I Know Who You Are*, a suspense thriller that teams helmer Pau Freixas and Barcelona-based shingle Filmmax TV, the director and producer behind *Polseres Vermelles*, the original version of Fox's TV drama *Red Band Society*.

The series centres on the mysterious disappearance of a young girl. The search for her pits two families against each other as her uncle, a renowned lawyer and also an amnesiac, becomes the prime suspect.

Pau Freixas says the series has influences from international series such as *Murder*

One, *The Killing* and *Homeland*.

Mediaset España has also partnered with César Bénéitez and Aitor Gabilondo's outfit Plano a Plano to produce thriller series *La Verdad* (*The Truth*). “Somehow, thrillers portray the troubles of people today, with their fears and phobias,” Mediaset's Sevilla says. “We bet on them because they have always worked for us.”

Spanish TV audiences are not only switching on to thrillers. Comedies such as Mediaset España's *La que se Avecina*, *Anclados* and *El Chiringuito de Pepe*, Atresmedia's *Allí Abajo*, and dramedies such as TVE's *Remember When* have a large and loyal audience base.

Also, historical dramas are preserving their market share, after filling primetime grids in recent years.

Carlos, King Emperor, dubbed by TVE's fiction director Fernando López Puig “our little *Game of Thrones*” is a spin-off from *Isabel*, the period drama that sparked the renewed recent interest in the genre.

It focuses on the life of Charles of Habsburg, Isabella I's grandson. Also produced by Endemol Shine Iberia's Diagonal TV, the new series averaged a solid 14% share in September after two episodes in La 1's Monday primetime.

Atresmedia's upcoming series *Apaches* is also getting attention. The TV adaptation of the novel of the same name by Spanish writer-journalist Miguel Sáez Carral is produced by New Atlantis, part of the Secuoya Group.

The novel aspect of this Madrid-set male-friendship story lies in the fact that the goodies are outside the law and the baddies are inside it, according to Atresmedia's Martínez.

The series revolves around a man who teams up with the street gang of his youth to exact revenge on the people who ruined his father, applying their own moral code in the process.

“Since people refer to Nordic TV dramas as ‘The series that come in from the cold’, we could start to talk about ‘The series that come in from the Mediterranean’, because Spanish TV fiction is building an identifiable brand, is open to places, emotions and characters, with a great variety of issues and cost-effective production... as well as continuing to be successful in Spain,” Martínez says. **S**



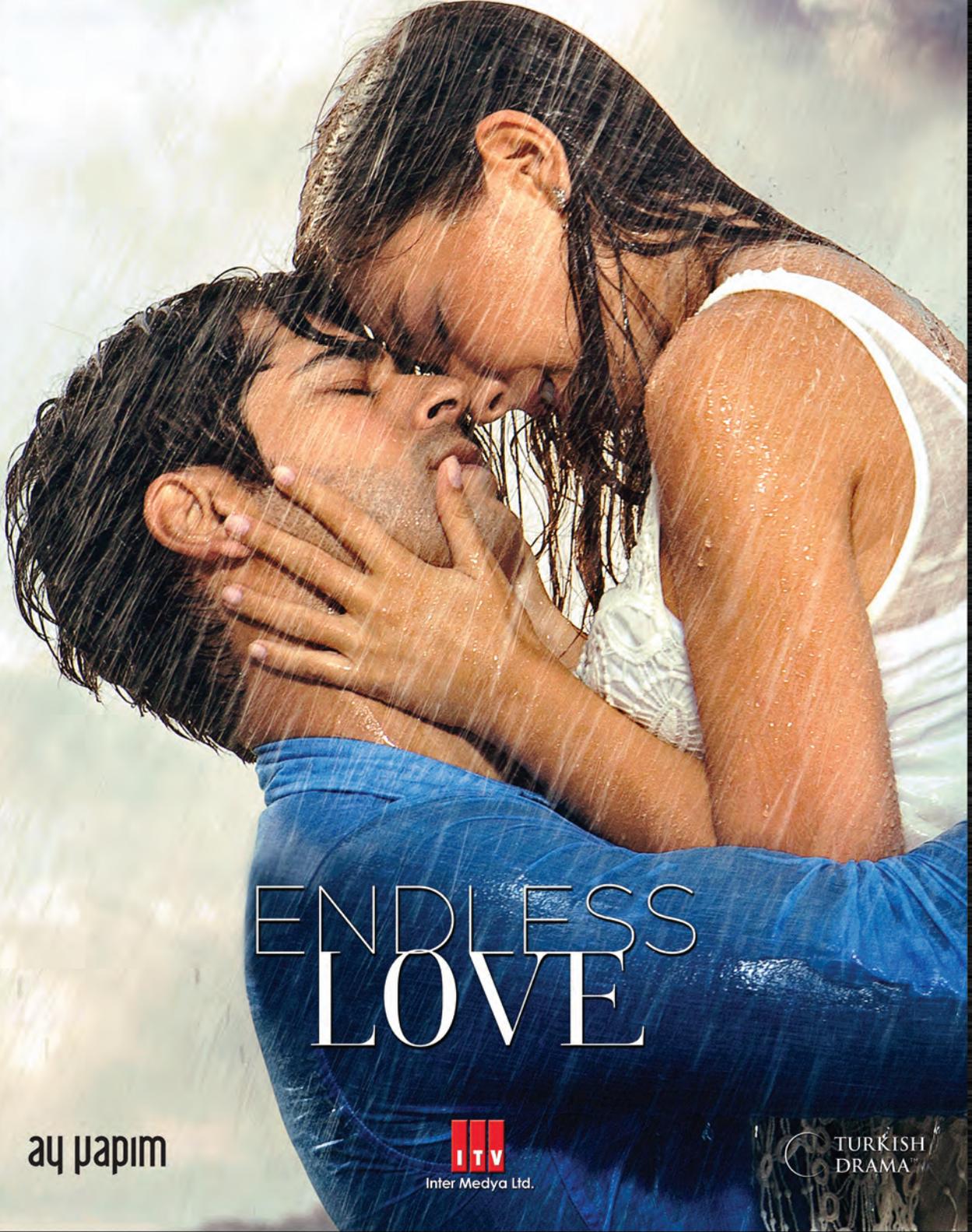
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The Last Panthers

Act 1 Sky and StudioCanal are hoping for rich international pickings with starry new international drama series *The Last Panthers*, but receipts from sales of the show will come nowhere near the estimated US\$500 million value put on the jewels that the titular gang stole through their high-profile career.

The work of French investigative journalist Jérôme Pierrat is the cornerstone of the six-part drama. The European crime expert took his idea for a film about the Pink Panthers – a moniker Interpol bestowed upon a group of prolific diamond thieves – to Haut et Court, the French production company behind numerous features, and TV series such as *Les Revenants*.

Caroline Benjo, co-managing director of the Paris-based prodco says Pierrat's initial idea was for a movie. A 2013 feature, *Smash & Grab: The Story of the Pink Panthers*, had committed some of the gang's activities to

film, but with years of primary research and interviews in hand, Pierrat offered the producers unrivalled insight.

Recalling the birth of the project four years ago, Benjo says she knew immediately that it should be a TV drama and not a movie. "We felt it was so international and multilayered it would work best as a series," she says. "There are the jewellery heists and those entertainment aspects, but what we were really interested in was the hidden story of the Panthers that was inside Jérôme's mind."

Premium French network Canal+ soon came on board and Benjo, aware that this needed to be a coproduction, sought out a UK partner, with Warp Films joining the project.

Warp and Haut et Court knew that as Jérôme was a journalist, he needed to be partnered with a TV writer: step forward Jack Thorne. Very much in-demand after his work on *Skins* and *This is England*, Thorne says he knew very quickly that he wanted the Panthers job.

"I was sent a document about Jérôme and his idea and thought it was an incredible story," he says. "I pitched harder on this than anything I have ever done to impress everyone involved. I even wrote a full treatment in advance of meeting them."

Canal+ has been in the big-ticket drama game for some years, while Sky, which subsequently took it for the UK, is newer to originals on this scale. Anne Mensah, Sky's head of drama, was clear from the first meeting what the UK pay TV operator required from *The Last Panthers*, recalls Warp Films co-CEO Peter Carlton. "She told us it needs big stars, to move people to tears, and that we need to blow shit up," he says.

In terms of stars, the producers duly delivered. Samantha Morton (*Sweet and Lowdown*, *Minority Report*) plays Naomi, the former soldier and insurance investigator and who works under Tom, played by John Hurt. Tahar Rahim (*A Prophet*) plays Khalil, a cop.

Casting the third lead, the Serbian Panther role of Milan, proved more challenging. "We said, 'Let's get the best actors from the different countries involved,' but the main problem was Serbia, because there weren't major stars to choose from," says Carlton. "We ended up having to expand the casting process."

Having "seen every man in their 20s to 40s in the country", he says that the Balkan actors ended up giving everyone a run for their money. Goran Bogdan was ultimately brought on as Milan, in what looks like being a breakout role for the Croatian actor.

Act 2 The real-life Panthers story offers more action than most Hollywood blockbusters, and *The Last Panthers* duly opens with a heist, in the southern French city of Marseille. As well as the opening set piece, there are other action sequences as the story unfolds ("We were conscious we didn't want the budget to go in the first episode and have people standing around talking for the rest of it," says Carlton), but the series sets out to provide more than a straightforward crime/action offering.

The starting point is at the end of a decade of Pink Panthers raids, when the famed gang, which in reality has completed hundreds of daring heists, has gone off the radar. When the opening episode's jewellery robbery, bearing all the hallmarks of the Panthers, goes wrong and a little girl is killed, it triggers a series of events across Europe that draw in the three main characters: an insurance loss-adjuster, a French-Algerian cop and a Serbian soldier-turned-jewel-thief. The episodes span numerous locations as the story touches on high finance, organised crime and politics in modern-day Europe. The show was filmed across Europe in 130-day shoot that took in locations including France, the UK, Bosnia and Serbia.

"Our thinking was, this is a thriller and a portrait of Europe," says Warp's Carlton. "Some of the best

US TV feels 'state of the nation', and we wanted that on a European scale. We also said at the start that this couldn't be a dry thriller. I knew Jack and that he had studied the politics of the EU, and that as a writer he is not scared of big emotion."

The Pink Panthers are better known in France than the UK, and Thorne says he was largely unaware of their activities ahead of working on the series. The writer's vision for it was built around two things: the work done by the insurance agents tracking the diamonds – effectively the money police – and Serbia, as a prism through which to see Europe and as the place that spawned this crack criminal gang.

Thorne speaks warmly of Pierrat, who took him to various European locations during research and writing phase of the show, including the notorious 'Les Catalans' housing estate in Marseille, where the team, having spent over a day negotiating their way in, had bottles thrown at them on the way out as rival gangs disagreed about





their presence (Marseille replaced Paris as a key location as the writing team finessed the story).

The pair at the centre of that team, Thorne says, also had bust-ups as the worlds of reportage and drama writing collided. “The truth is important to Jérôme, and we did have some furious arguments, but I found that the truth can be freeing [as a writer],” he says, adding Thorne that working closely with Pierrat has altered his approach to writing. “It has changed the way I will work in a massive way, in terms of research and a constant search for authenticity,” he says.

One major shift from the initial treatment is from a historical to a present-day setting, although the series still goes back in time to delve into the stories of the characters. “We go back to explore how the characters got to be the people they are, and if the series has a theme, it is how history can define people and places,” says Thorne.

There are big action set-pieces, but another key element, Thorne says, is place: today’s Europe. “We wanted to tell the story of modern Europe,” he says. “The writing was being done as events in Greece happened. Everyone in the room was quite political, and as well as looking at the idea of ‘gangsters versus banksters’, the series is also about what we want Europe to be, and asks how we ended up where we are now.”

Carlton says that despite his and Benjo’s filmmaking experience, *The Last Panthers* was not made with feature film-sensibilities. “You could say it is a hybrid, in that it has one director (Johan Renck, who counts *Breaking Bad* and *The Walking Dead* among his credits) and a sense of global storytelling and mise-en-scène that comes from our background in film, but this has the rhythm of TV,” he says.

Act 3 The show is the second Canal+ and Sky copro after *The Tunnel*. It bows on the French channel in early

October and on the Sky Atlantic channel in the UK soon after. Quizzed by TBI on a recent industry panel about the three-language set-up of *The Last Panthers*, Sky’s Mensah noted there are actually seven used in total throughout the series. “Our Sky Atlantic viewers are very savvy drama viewers, and very happy to watch [partly] subtitled drama with authenticity at its heart,” she said.

Thorne has impressive drama credits, but *The Last Panthers* was the first time he has worked on a multi-language copro of this sort. The scripts were put together in English, but linguistic idiosyncrasies meant plenty of rewriting, he says. “When you translate English to French, the script becomes three pages longer,” he says. “When you translate it to Serbian it becomes three pages shorter.”

Haut et Court’s Benjo says the series was always going to be multilanguage to reflect the real, increasingly multicultural, world. In practice, this meant scripts had three columns, one for each of the core languages, so each actor could read the others’ lines. As a French producer, Benjo says she has no problem making a show in which the lead language is English, not least as it opens up the sales potential. “If you want to do this kind of storytelling, you need to open yourself to the world,” she says.

As local drama increasingly wins favour among viewers over US fare, *The Last Panthers* achieves a local feel that will resonate in many of the territories in which it was filmed, which can only help the sales effort. Sky’s distribution arm, Sky Vision, and StudioCanal are co-distributing the series internationally. It will get a marketing boost at its international launch in Cannes by taking the MIPCOM World Premiere TV Screening slot on the Monday of the market.

“Just like the relationship between Haut et Court and Warp, the [co-distribution] is based on collaboration between the two teams; we might, for example, work together on some larger territories,” says Leona Connell, head of global sales at Sky Vision. “One of the great things about this series is its ambition. It is a modern crime thriller, but different to other shows out there.”

Big serialised drama works well for cable channels and SVOD services seeking defining series, but StudioCanal’s executive VP, sales and marketing, Katrina Neylon, says *The Last Panthers* could also work for free-to-air channels. “It definitely has a broad appeal, and [buyers can see] the quality is definitely there as it is for Sky and Canal+,” she says. “Being based in Europe means it is ‘international’ for the rest of the world.”

It is not she adds, tonally in the same place as a lot of Scandinavian drama. Peter Carlton agrees. “It is not dark and difficult,” he says. “A lot of [high-end] drama now is beautiful, but a little bit restrained, the programme makers do not let it all hang out emotionally. This is accessible and has heart.” **S**



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The ongoing Syrian refugee crisis is a real-world issue reflected in new ABC and SundanceTV drama epic *Cleverman*. Executive producer Rosemary Blight from prodco Goalpost Pictures points out the similarity between the often-vicious country border control responses towards those fleeing persecution in the Middle East, to the show's backdrop: a world in which near-human creatures are distrusted – and increasingly hunted – by fearful humans.

“This is at a time where the world has changed, where creatures, which before lived in the world but didn't reveal themselves, with very human traits, have started to emerge in the open,” she says.

“How does society deal with them? What happens if they pass off as us? Do they effect our children? Will they take our jobs? That's quite topical at the moment,” she says of the themes *Cleverman* explores. “What do we do when people come into our country? Do we welcome them or build walls?”

The points raised are played out through two estranged indigenous brothers, who are brought together to fight for their survival. One brother is destined to inherit special powers currently controlled by an elder, ‘Cleverman’, while the other has rejected his past to become a bar owner and playboy.

Sydney-based Goalpost put the show together after one of its interns, Ryan Griffen, pitched the story to management over a dinner during the shooting another series, says Blight.

Sally Riley's indigenous television arm of Australian pubcaster the ABC then came on-board, before Goalpost secured financing from Screen Australia and Screen NSW. Next, Blight went looking for a post-production specialist in LA, but ultimately found the partner much closer to home in the shape of *Lord of the Rings* VFX house Weta Workshop and production subsidiary Pukeko Pictures. Speaking to TBI from a Weta studio in New Zealand, Blight says: “I walk down corridors of Oscars. We've got the best in the world working on this TV series.”

After further funding came from the New Zealand Screen Production Grant, Germany's Red Arrow International boarded the project as coproducer and distributor. Red Arrow was able to bring on the US partner, SundanceTV, whose sister channel AMC had a hit this year with a similarly dystopian near-future coproduction drama about outsiders, *Humans*.

Further to that complicated financial picture, getting permission to tell the stories, which are inspired by indigenous Australian fables, was no easy task. “We couldn't break the protocol of the way the stories should be told, and had to get permission to use some stories from all over Australia. In one case Ryan had to go out to the middle of the Northern Territory to a crocodile-infested river to get permission to use a story that an elder told him.” **S**

In focus

Format: 6x60mins sci-fi drama from ABC Television and Goalpost Pictures in Australia, SundanceTV, Red Arrow International, VFX giant Weta Workshop and subsidiary Pukeko Pictures. Red Arrow distributes

Plotline: Humans in a near-future dystopia become increasingly hostile to near-human creatures that have emerged

Big test for Cleverman

Producer Rosemary Blight on the themes that make new sci-fi drama *Cleverman* so relevant to today's global and political worlds



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01: LEADING BRANDS



Jekyll

ITV's new

Writer and actor Charlie Higson and ITV Studios drama chief Francis Hopkinson on ITV's big-budget fantasy-drama series inspired by the classic gothic novella

Since the relaunch of *Doctor Who* on the BBC in 2005, the fantasy-drama-sci-fi hybrid has been one of the most successful brands of British drama. Many of these programmes have been for the UK's public broadcaster (*Merlin*, *Torchwood*, *Atlantis*), but ITV is set to muscle in on the space with one of this year's biggest-budget new launches: *Jekyll & Hyde*. The design is for both UK and international audiences, and the hope is it will become a long-running returnable series.

Based on the 1886 Robert Louis Stevenson novella *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, the series is set in 1930s London. It pays homage to its source material by focusing on newly qualified doctor Jekyll, the grandson of the titular book character, who lives in Asia with his foster parents. Unaware of his past, the naïve Jekyll begins to slip between a pair of alter egos, which leads to a journey of discovery in London as he begins to unravel his family history.

"My starting point for it all was trying to do the type of show I used to watch in the Sixties when I was growing up, which were big, had lots of elements of fantasy, and amazing sets and locations – something with a feel of fantasy," says Charlie Higson, the ten-part-show's creator and writer.

As Jekyll's superpowers emerge, a larger plot unfolds concurrently as a group of monsters living among humans and a shadowy British government division vie for his allegiance. This marks a major departure from the source material, and is akin to the kind of mythologies built around modern-day superhero franchises.

"The original book is quite small; you can read it in one sitting," says Higson. "What I quickly realised was Jekyll and Hyde was the starting point to so many other stories, in particular the idea of the superhero alter ego. I put it into that sort of *X-Men* world of opposing forces of good and evil."

There is also something of a 'monster-of-the-week' element, though not strictly in every episode. "The 1930s was the golden era of Hollywood monster movies with *Frankenstein*, *Dracula*, the *Wolfman* and the *Mummy*, and we have versions of all of those characters," says Higson.

& Hyde : superhero (es)

Tonally, Higson attempted to avoid “the foggy, Victorian, penny dreadful, Guy Ritchie Sherlock Holmes-type approach”, preferring “the 1930s represented in the *Indiana Jones* adventure films. I wrote a series of young James Bond novels and enjoyed that era, which is recent enough that people can talk and behave in a recognisable manner but can be treated as a fantasy world”.

Early scenes were shot in Kandy, Sri Lanka, which in the series is the British colony Ceylon (David Lean’s classic *The Bridge on the River Kwai* was shot here in the mid-1950s). Francis Hopkinson, director of drama at producer ITV Studios, says the location offered “great value for money” and a “beautiful place to film”.

This, Higson says, highlights the scope of the project, which is being tracked closely by overseas buyers ahead of its debut in the UK this autumn and launch at MIPCOM.

“ITV had always said they wanted it to be big and to have international appeal that could not be mistaken for a small-scale domestic drama,” he says. “I wrote the Sri Lanka segment and expected we’d end up shooting in Wales or somewhere, but they really responded well because they wanted something big. Normally in TV the question is whether you can scale things back or tone it down. ITV very much wanted a show with cinematic feel and scale.” **S**

In focus

Format: 10x60mins Period-cum-fantasy drama based on famous gothic novella

Positioning: UK broadcaster ITV’s biggest play in some time to find a meaty but broad family drama with hi-concept action elements

Talent: Acclaimed novelist and actor **Charlie Higson** (*Young Bond*, *The Fast Show*) is the writer and, according to **Francis Hopkinson**, “effectively showrunner... he’s the heart and the brains, and is in charge of the vision”. *Da Vinci’s Demons* alumnus **Tom Bateman** plays the conflicted title character Robert Jekyll, with **Richard E. Grant** (*Doctor Who*, *Withnail & I*) playing the chief of a shadowy government organisation known as ‘The Invisible Men’



Fear takes over

***Fear the Walking Dead* smashed basic cable records in August. Showrunner Dave Erickson explains how he handled the onset of another zombie apocalypse**

The world, it seems, cannot get enough of Robert Kirkman's zombie horror tales. The launch of *Fear the Walking Dead* on August 23 in the US blew apart the previous the basic cable ratings record with 10.1 million total viewers (its predecessor, *The Walking Dead*, took a then-record 5.3 million). Critical response has also been largely positive.

Anticipation for the series had been building since US cable channel AMC revealed *The Walking Dead* creator Kirkman would tell the story of how his calling card series' brutal zombie apocalypse had come to pass. That AMC's new global channel then acquired the show from distributor Entertainment One Television drummed up industry headlines, as did a flurry of lucrative sales to channels where AMC Global was not yet available.

Showrunner and executive producer Dave Erickson humbly describes the eye-watering numbers as "very good", adding: "If it maintains the number we have taken it would be an unqualified success. It was never an expectation for me that it would do numbers akin to the original *Walking Dead*."

"The original universe is the foundation, but you can come to this having never seen *The Walking Dead*," he adds. "We're coming to the show, loosely speaking, in the time before [*The Walking Dead*'s main protagonist] Rick Grimes wakes up from his coma."

The location has also switched from the woodlands of Atlanta and Washington to sun-soaked Los Angeles, with new group of lead characters facing a new world dominated by flesh-eating monsters.

Kim Dickens (*Deadwood*, *Treme*) and Clifford Curtis (*Missing*, *Body of Proof*) play an LA couple trying to bring together their equally dysfunctional families, as reports of a mystery virus in the US surface. Before the end of the 90-minute pilot, they are left in no doubt that something awful is taking hold.

The remainder of season one follows the breakdown of society as the zombie outbreak destroys America, but with the luxury of a second season commissioned before launch, Erickson says *Fear* will delve "deeper" into the mystery and mythology created through the original series and the comic books that launched the franchise.

"One of the challenges of season one is trying to capture the crash of a major city, and what the first days of an apocalypse might look like with the confusion and the violence," he adds. "We had to compress elements, but it has worked really well. Having 15 episodes for season will allow us to follow things a bit more."

One question raised has been how *Fear* will be sufficiently different to *The Walking Dead* once the outbreak phase is over and the characters are left to survive in their horrific and dangerous new reality.

"The rules remain the same, and there are connections with elements of the comics, but even those who make connections and recognise the look of full survival mode will be immersed in our own characters and dynamics," says Erickson. **S**



In focus

Format: High-end zombie horror drama; six-episode first season, followed by 15 for the second run in 2016

How it differs from *The Walking Dead*:

"We have managed to maintain a level of the unknown. People know things have gone very, very bad - they're hearing the news reports - but we're dealing with characters who don't understand what's going on." (Dave Erickson)

Israeli thriller takes chequered flag



Israel's Keshet Media Group is hoping spy thriller *False Flag* can emulate the success of *Homeland* precursor *Prisoners of War*. The fact that it won the Grand Prize at France's *Séries Mania* suggests that this optimism is not misplaced

A drama loosely inspired by the real-life political assassination of Hamas military leader Mahmoud Al-Mabhouh in January 2010, *False Flag* is Keshet's new effort for the international market. It heads into MIPCOM with the prestigious Grand Prize from France's *Séries Mania* and a screening at Berlinale 2015's Special Series Selection to its name.

Shkufim, as the show will be known in Israel, beat off competition from the likes of Emmy-winning Showtime drama *The Affair* to jointly win the *Séries Mania* prize with HBO's *Olive Kitteridge*. In a sense, it has even more momentum than Keshet's most famous export, *Prisoners of War*, had at this stage of its gestation.

"*Prisoners of War* had its success after the success of [Showtime remake] *Homeland*," says Limor Gott Ronen, Keshet International's director of marketing. "Here, without having a US version as popular as *Homeland*, there is extreme popularity for the original tape, which is almost unprecedented."

The Hebrew-language eight-part series follows five Israeli citizens who wake up to find themselves the principal suspects in the kidnapping of an Iranian politician in Moscow, with their identities and passports splashed across the media. Assuming a huge journalistic mistake, the five are shocked to find the Israeli government and its secret service, Mossad, deny all responsibility and accuse them of the act.

"This is a thriller in which the main characters are people like me and you, who've never been Mossad or FBI agents; people who wake up one morning and find they've been used in a big, secret operation," says Keshet Media Group's head of drama and comedy, Karni Ziv. "That's where the story starts, but the question is whether some of these people are truly innocent or not – why them?"

The plot plunges its leads into a whirlwind of speculation and publicity, as the general public sways between adoration and admiration, curiosity and mockery. Even family members become suspicious of their motivations, and the upshot is a mystery thriller designed to keep the audience on its toes.

"What's unique is every other thriller has a central character that is for sure part of that story," says Ziv. "In this case, the question is, 'Could this happen to me?'. This is what makes you want to see all eight episodes."

Amit Cohen and Maria Feldman (pictured below) are the show's creators, with Oded Ruskin attached as director and local indie Tender Productions producing for Keshet. The creators had approached Keshet soon after Mabhouh's killing with the idea, which was followed by a long period of development.

So far, the screenings of episode one at *Séries Mania* and Berlinale are the only public showings, with Keshet set to launch the series locally after MIPCOM. Those that have seen it point to tightly framed shots that reflect the feeling of the world closing in on the leads, who have been praised for their portrayals.

A US-developed remake is in the works at Fox International Channels, which has partnered with Keshet International and *Parkland* writer Peter Landesman on the project. This will see the lives of eight supposedly ordinary American citizens thrown into turmoil after a dangerous international crime is committed.

For the Israeli version, Ziv says the next key step is the audience on Keshet. "After that, it's about the international market understanding and feeling the story," she says.

"Winning the award shows us there is something very international and very human about the story. It's great recognition for us and confirms what we feel about the series: that is a big, wide story that is very Israeli, but also very universal. The key is you can feel part of it anywhere in the world." **S**





Wanted: procedural series

Demand remains high for procedural drama, but the supply from the US is slowing. Stewart Clarke investigates how the procedural genre is being reinvented and how international producers and distributors are increasingly getting involved in a genre that was once the preserve of the studios

While *Breaking Bad*, *House of Cards* and *True Detective* exemplify the golden age of TV drama, a look at the ratings in many international territories reveals that it is not this new wave of dark, demanding and edgy scripted series that get the biggest audiences, it is the common-or-garden story-of-the-week procedurals.

While Netflix viewers are binge-watching *House of Cards* to see if Frank Underwood

can hold on to the US presidency, millions more are tuning into to see Patrick Jane (*The Mentalist*), special agent Seeley Booth (*Bones*) or Dr. Gilbert Grissom (*CSI*) work through, and solve, their latest cases.

There is, however, a problem in the world of procedurals: there aren't enough of them. Michael Edelstein, president of NBC Universal International Television Production, brought together the studio and RTL and TF1 for a unique procedural copro

deal (see page 33). He also played a key part in the launch of *CSI*, the granddaddy of the procedural genre, while director of current programming at US net CBS.

Edelstein says the dynamics of the US markets mean fewer procedurals are coming to market. "There is a disconnect between what the audience in the US is watching and what audiences in Europe respond to," he says. "In the US there are far more viewing options than in most European countries.



Vera



The Blacklist



Crossing Lines

The likes of RTL and TF1 take a huge portion of the audience, but in the US a cable channel could beat a broadcaster on a given night.” In that environment, the NBCU exec says, channels want to “create content that, if you miss an episode, you are out of the conversation”.

Procedurals rarely fit that description, with their reliable storylines, and steady flow of cases, all resolved in an hour.

“I call it boring programming and I love it, it’s great, because it repeats,” says Jens Richter, CEO of FremantleMedia International and formerly part of the ProSiebenSat.1 group in Germany, a procedural hotspot, alongside France. “We do boring drama and uber serialised. They work for different platforms,

and you launch them in a different way, but both can fly.”

The FremantleMedia sales boss adds that while movie talent continues to move to TV, this A-list group does not want to do episodic cop shows. “If you are the cool writer and maybe come from the theatrical space, you want to do movies in TV form, so you want to do serialised stories over the arc of the season,” he says. “For a writer that is the bigger challenge; it is more fun creatively.”

FremantleMedia is developing procedural dramas out of the US, and the procedural, by and large, remain a US phenomenon.

“Not only do you have bigger creative pot of stories you can pull out in a city like New York,” says Richter, “but it is also that the

viewers want to see America in those slots. That is what they want to see, and that is what you want to give them.”

One of the few international hit procedurals not hailing from the US is *Crossing Lines*, which came out of Germany-based Tandem Productions, now part of the StudioCanal group. The series has sold well around the world and, defying the logic that SVOD platforms want only binge-friendly serialised drama, all three seasons of the show have been sold to Netflix.

Tandem rebooted *Crossing Lines* for season three with a new cast. It is also behind *Spotless*, US cable net Esquire’s first drama commission.

“[*Spotless*] has big character arcs and



CSI Cyber



Rookie Blue

satisfactory moments at the end of each episode,” says Tandem Productions boss Rola Bauer. “It has that story-of-the-week but with a hybrid narrative.”

The hybrid form is a middle ground also taken by shows like ABC’s *Scandal* and NBC’s thriller *The Blacklist*.

French studio Gaumont is ramping up its European production and one of its new continental division’s offerings will be *Crosshair*, a hybrid procedural.

“European broadcasters are looking for [procedurals] because they don’t find them at the US studios anymore,” says Gaumont vice-CEO Christophe Riandee. “The US market is so competitive that all kinds of channels and broadcasters need content they can use to brand their service. One way of doing that is to use an existing brand, which is why you see old TV series getting revived and so many shows with superheroes that the audience recognises. The other way of doing that is with ultra-edgy serialised shows with complex characters that explore the dark side of humanity. In Europe, broadcasters are looking for procedurals, and not just the *CSI* type, but also those like *The Blacklist*, with complex characters who have backstories.”

When Tandem sought to make a Europe-

based procedural, it still hauled in US talent, in the form of Ed Bernero, who had honed his craft as exec producer on CBS series *Criminal Minds* and its spin-off *Criminal Minds: Suspect Behavior*.

Likewise, Gaumont went over the Pacific Ocean for its European procedural. The 13-part *Crosshair* series comes from Ken Sanzel, the showrunner behind US hits including CBS’ *Numb3rs* and *Blue Bloods*. The show will, Riandee says, be more akin to *The Blacklist*, with strong episodic and serialised elements. “It’s about an ex-CIA agent operating in Europe, and when it starts he is questioning everything he has done and all of the choices he has made. You have the procedural element with the action and case of the week, but also a very nice arc that plays out over the season.”

UK-listed Entertainment One’s procedural *Rookie Blue* is unusual in that it hails from Canada, where it is on Global, and is also shown in the US, on ABC. As the number of procedurals available to broadcasters in their American output deals falls, eOne Television International president Stuart Baxter says opportunities for other distributors open up. “The big broadcasters do huge volume deals with studios to get programming for their

primetime slots, and as the US networks commission fewer procedurals they now need to find them elsewhere,” he says. “We have *Rogue* [DirecTV], *Haven* [Syfy] and *Rookie Blue*.”

Not only do procedurals repeat in a way serialised shows do not – “There are platforms that haven’t been invented yet that will be carrying *CSI* in years to come,” CBS distribution boss Armando Nuñez recently told TBI – they can be stacked together, and offer schedulers a flexible option that will deliver predictable ratings.

Only the very top serialised shows, however, stand a chance of becoming international hits. “Procedurals play almost anywhere, and there are more potential buyers as they deliver the broadcaster better economics over the long term,” says Baxter. “With serialised, unless you have one of the very top shows it won’t fare well internationally.”

John Grisham adaptation *The Firm*, a procedural hybrid with a story-of-the-week and ongoing conspiracy narrative arc hailed from eOne. It was produced for Global in Canada, Sony’s AXN and NBC in the US. ITV Studios, meanwhile, worked with NBC on an adaptation of British series *Prime Suspect*, which it made as a US procedural. In both

RTL, TF1 and NBCU create their own procedure

Germany's largest broadcaster RTL, has output deals with NBCUniversal and Sony Pictures Television. However, with the flow of procedurals from the US slowing, it forged an alliance with its French counterpart TF1 and NBCU, and the trio are taking matters into their own hands to bolster supply. In April, the two broadcasters and US studio announced a copro deal to make US procedurals that will bow on RTL in Germany and TF1 in France.



"Multiple buyers were coming to us and saying they wanted more procedurals," says Michael Edelstein, president of NBCU International Television Production. "I know how to make procedurals, and my team in LA know how to make procedurals, so we thought, why not do it ourselves? We then agreed the creative parameters for what we wanted in the first round, agreed the genre of the first show, and then set about developing multiple ideas."

TF1 and RTL both have output deals with NBCU and audiences with similar procedural-loving tastes, so the alliance of two like-minded broadcasters and a studio well-versed in making and selling those genre shows made a lot of sense.

When TBI speaks to Joerg Graf, RTL's executive VP productions and international acquisitions, he reels off the previous night's ratings, which saw the main RTL channel win the night with *Bones*, the procedural about to enter its eleventh season on Fox in the US. "Everyone talks about *True Detective* or *Fargo*, and the art and the writing in those series is at a high level, but there is also a problem because you need time to watch them," says Graf. "They are not popcorn, relaxing TV, which people like. In Germany, the big mainstream audience, and especially females 30-plus, love procedural crime. Our challenge is it is no longer part of our big US output deals."

Even though there are two European copro partners in the pact, the resulting shows will not hark back to earlier days of Euro-coproduction,

with each party demanding a certain number of actors from its territory, or location shoots in its country. Graf, who like Edelstein sits on the creative board of the new initiative, says: "By definition that approach is a no-go. These shows should look like any other from Disney, Universal or Fox and should be produced like a *House* or *CSI*. Viewers should have no idea this is a coproduction; we only want shooting in Europe or European actors if it makes sense to the story."



Without revealing costs, the RTL exec is also clear that this is about making procedurals at the same budget and quality as a show made for a US broadcaster. In reality, that equates to about US\$3 million per episode. The resulting series are likely to run to 12-14 episodes, making the scale of the financial commitment, which will be met entirely by the three partners, clear. One difference to the US model of getting shows on

air, meanwhile, is that there will be no pilot and pick-up process: they will go straight-to-series.

Each of the partners will benefit from secondary sales, with NBCU's team distributing. France and Germany are, understandably, off the table, with RTL and TF1 taking all rights across all windows, giving the broadcasters genuine exclusivity on their home turf.

A couple of scripts are being worked on, and while the partners won't divulge any details, the first project will almost certainly be a crime drama. The expectation is it will be announced early next year with a view to making the broadcaster's autumn schedules. If things go according to plan, there will be two more shows in 2017.

With hybrid procedural-serialised series coming through, the RTL-TF1-NBCU initiative will likely spawn more widely-watched, classical procedural shows. "We like the idea of 100% self-contained episodes, because this is what is missing," says Graf. "The challenge is to do that and evolve the storytelling and film and edit it in a 2015 style, so that it has a modern feeling."

cases, the series didn't get beyond a first season, and the aforementioned *Rookie Blue* is a rare case of a returning procedural on US network TV that hails from beyond the States.

Prime Suspect proved, however, that the procedural is not the exclusive domain of the studios. ITV Studios has several UK shows in the genre on its books, including *Lewis* and *Endeavour*. In terms of UK-originated story-of-the-week and procedural shows, the aforementioned sit alongside the likes of BBC Worldwide's *Death in Paradise*.

"People think serialised shows are sexier and they do often get more buzz, in part because of the platforms they are on, but procedurals are as important as ever," says Ruth Clarke, executive VP, global content

and coproductions at ITV Studios. "*Lewis* and *Endeavour* have sold in over 150 countries and keep returning and filling people's schedules. They offer a sense of reliability and stability."

She adds that there is a shortage of procedural drama in the market at the moment, but that the phenomenon is exacerbated by the fact that these shows get talked about a lot less than serialised in the press, at industry gatherings and by viewers.

"There is a shortage and absolutely an opportunity," she says. "We talk to international buyers and then task producers with developing new things. We also go through the catalogue and see what we can reinvent."

While there is a clear business, scheduling and ratings case for procedurals, it does not help their case that TV industry and the media spend so much time talking up the noisy serialised shows. "I just watched *Narcos* on Netflix and loved it," one big European acquisitions chief recently told TBI. "Would I put it on a flagship free-to-air channel? Of course not."

With a host of international producers now developing in the contemporary procedural space, and the likes of NBCU, TF1 and RTL joining forces, the pipeline of shows is about to fill after a dry spell. And, with the US channels still favouring serialised, the next global hit stands every chance of having a European flavor. **S**





Drama, Italian style

Italy has emerged from the doldrums to become a leading European drama producer in recent years, largely down to investment from the pay TV sector. New developments look set to take things a step further, reports Jesse Whittock

The Young Pope

The idea that Italy would give birth to what is set to be one of the biggest international television dramas of 2016 would have been something of a joke five years ago. That's exactly what's happened this year, however.

Launching internationally at MIPCOM, *The Young Pope* is sure to be an attention grabber. HBO, Canal+ and Sky are all already attached to the drama, as are A-list actors Jude Law and Diane Keaton and Italian Oscar-winning director Paolo Sorrentino.

Law plays the world's first American pope, Pius XIII, who struggles with his new responsibilities. Keaton plays Sister Mary, a nun who raised Pius and helped him become the head of the Catholic church.

Sky, which has long been the key player in the Italian high-end drama market, has first-run rights to the show in Italy, Germany, the UK and Ireland after the merger of the Sky pay TV businesses in those territories.

"We are incredibly proud that Paolo Sorrentino has chosen the new Sky as his partner for his first TV project, coupled with the unique talents of Jude Law and Diane Keaton in the lead roles," says Sky Italia's executive VP, programming, cinema, entertainment and news, Andrea Scrosati, who initially commissioned the show.

"The script is very strong and has a unique and completely original approach to the topic of faith, to the role of the Vatican church and to the emotional journey of someone that overnight becomes the spiritual leader of over a billion people across the world."

"We hope that the show will be received as we conceived it from the beginning: a very original, very high-concept drama that is also slightly different from the traditional US standards," says Lorenzo Mieli, CEO and co-founder of *The Young Pope's* Rome-based producer Wildside. "What we're trying to do is push the boundaries of what is usually expected to be found in a TV show a little bit further.

"We can't say what the results will be in terms of success or ratings, but we're pretty sure that the storytelling and the production design of *The Young Pope* will surprise the audience."

Wildside was so sure of the piece that it undertook and financed the first stage of development in-house with Sorrentino, while keeping the broadcasters aware of progress but initially distanced.



1992

“This means that we decided to make a huge investment in order to have a first draft of all eight scripts – entirely paid by us – and then close the deals with the broadcasters,” says Mieli. “I’d say that we took a risk, but it was a good risk.”

The story of international Italian television drama goes back further than one might think. As Oliver Bachert, senior VP of international sales and acquisitions at frequent Italian backer Beta Film, notes, dramas such as *La Piovra* were selling globally as far back as the mid-1980s, though not in great quantities.

Some of the elements that have held back sales of Italian drama are ebbing away, expanding its reach, says Bachert. “Perhaps because of the language [some shows] didn’t reach the English-speaking world, but some of those barriers don’t exist in the same way in the UK and North America now,” he says. “They have opened up to foreign-language drama for a certain type of viewer, and there is more momentum in the international market.”

Italian dramas, especially those from paycaster Sky, have become big business for Germany-based Beta. The firm sells *Romanzo Criminale*, *Gomorra* and *1992*, all of which have made waves on the international market (Sky CEO Jeremy Darroch described the latter as “the most successful original scripted series” in Italian drama in 2015).

“Italy is prolific for us,” says Bachert, whose firm invests early in many of the Italian dramas it sells. He says VOD sales are becoming big business, which is exemplified by Netflix’s recent deal to acquire *1992* as an original series in the US.

“The more local a show is, the more international appeal it has,” he says. “You can’t imagine something more local than *Gomorra*,” he adds of the Neapolitan mafia story. “It has to be a good local story, but good product will find a way to market.”

“The market has opened up to event miniseries and limited series, which is a development driven by the pay TV platforms,” adds another distribution source.

Other distributors are now seeing the opportunity that Beta identified some years back. In August, FremantleMedia acquired 62.5% of Wildside, securing international distribution in non-partner territories of *The Young Pope* at the same time.

“Wildside is fast becoming one of Europe’s most sought-after drama producers and will complement our existing primetime drama businesses [around the world],” said FremantleMedia CEO Cecile Frot-Coutaz at the time of the deal.

One production source describes developments in Italian drama as “moving fast”, and it’s easy to see why. Earlier this year, the Italian government gave the local production community a seal of approval by expanding a film tax credit to television. This covers 25% of expenses incurred in Italy, and is primarily designed to bring in international coproductions such as the model that allows HBO to film *Game of Thrones* in the UK.

“This measure will bring back big international productions to Italy, thus



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Romanzo Criminale



Oriana

promoting our country abroad,” according to Riccardo Tozzi, president of ANICA, an umbrella organisation that represents Italy’s film, audiovisual and multimedia sectors.

Several Italian regions have now developed “efficient” film commissions that support production funding, says Sky’s Scrosati. “In general, I believe that quality will always be

the key driver, though, and if we can maintain this high standard the required investment will follow,” he adds.

This increased focus on international coproduction is even attracting attention from Italy’s pubcaster, Rai, which is best known internationally for long-running procedural *Montalbano* and its spin-off, *The Young Montalbano*.

“We are keen to seek more international coproductions for the appeal these would have on the international market and for the strong interest we have in the domestic market,” says Luigi di Siervo, CEO of Rai’s commercial division, Rai Com. “We are open to review any new projects and talk with new partners.”

“Rai is becoming more and more interested in high-profile, internationally appealing projects, which is good for us,” says Mieli. Bachert adds: “There is also more movement in the free TV market, which is trying to embrace the high-end [original drama] trend to see how that works.”

At MIPCOM, Rai Com will launch the



Gomorrah

27th and 28th *Montalbano* telemovies, which will be available to broadcast from next year. The launch comes after presales for the latest season of *Young Montalbano* in the US, Australia and the UK, and a deal in Canada for season three of *The Family*.

“Sports dramas are in a good position on the international market,” says di Siervo. “*Pietro Mennea the Gold Sprinter* was announced at MIPTV and sold in the Middle East and Spanish-speaking US, and for in-flight.”

Oriana, meanwhile, is a miniseries for Rai 1 that is based on the life of trailblazing Italian war journalist Oriana Fallaci, while another mafia-themed series, *Anti-Drug Squad*, sold to US channel MHz Networks. Di Siervo says such deals represent an increasingly lucrative business for Italy’s distributors.

“The American market is indeed interested in Italian drama, and the demand is growing year by year and on many different platforms. Also, Canada has significantly increased its demand for Italian drama, so we are focusing on North America right now.”

Meanwhile, commercial broadcaster

Mediaset created the ‘International Drama Project’, an in-house development unit dedicated to scripted drama. The first fruit of this was *Lucky Luciano*, a twelve-part series coproduced with French drama house Federation Entertainment that chronicles the life of the mobster Charles ‘Lucky’ Luciano. Alessandro Camon (*Bullet to the Head*) has been tapped to pen the script.

Other new products for the market include the second season of *Gomorrah*, which is again based on the mafia exposé novel from journalist Roberto Saviano.

Rai also remade Spanish period drama *Grand Hotel* after acquiring it from Beta, another sign the market is becoming markedly more outward-looking.

“There are different, new impulses from the broader market,” says Beta’s Bachert, who says these are part of a move away from high-end shows. “We should not forget there is also space for shows that are not highly serialised,” he says. “Maybe not every viewer wants to spend 30 hours watching a very specific story.”

However, for Sky’s Scrosati, the opportunity – and key test – is in the competitive high-end pay TV space. “The real challenge today is to deliver credible, high-end products,” he says.

“In this period, Italian productions are creating impact and interest in the same way that Scandi drama generated attention a few years ago. The key element is to continue to meet the quality standards that this international attention deserves.”

Sky is aiming to have 35 new dramas aired over the next three years in its operating territories, and the key will be managing quality versus quantity.

“Our ambition is to increase our slate, but in this business I believe that more does not necessarily mean better,” says Scrosati. “The volume of series coming from the US, for example, is reaching a potential ‘bubble point’ where volume is not always matched by consistent high quality. This is something we always need to be focusing on. I am confident that Italy will play an important role in helping to deliver against these goals.” **S**

Writer's Room:

Hans Rosenfeldt takes it to the bridge

Hans Rosenfeldt is the prolific writer behind award-winning Swedish-Danish drama *Bron* (*The Bridge*), though you might not get that show's darkness from his cheerful picture on the right. *Bron* has been remade as French-Anglo and US-Mexican coproductions, making it one of the foremost Nordic Noir exports. Here he writes about the experience of writing his first show for a UK audience, the ITV-commissioned 'British noir' *Marcella*



You know those wishes you have that are so far from ever coming true that they are more like dreams than wishes? To write directly for a different market was like one of those wishes for me. I have three Danish and Swedish TV series behind me, but I am referring to a wish to write for markets outside the Nordic countries. We do a great job at exporting actors and directors, but we don't seem to do so well when it comes to writers.

So you can imagine how excited I was when, after a chance meeting with Nicola Larder at a seminar in Turin, she wondered if we could create a show together. She was in the process of making *The Tunnel* – an adaption of *The Bridge/Bron*, which I had written – so we already had something in common.

The initial idea was to incorporate the Jason and Medea myth into a contemporary police show. However, after a few more collaborative meetings, we further developed the show, *Marcella*, into a something quite different from that initial idea.

The fact that it was set in London didn't concern me that much. The procedure is the same as if I'm writing for audiences back home: a plot is a plot and a character is a character. If the idea is compelling and the people in it are interesting, you've got the framework for a hit regardless of where it is set.

It becomes challenging when you start to write. The tone has to be right –

Swedish and Danish may sound similar to a UK ear, but they're not, and sometimes we express ourselves very differently

that's probably why we export directors and actors, but not writers. I write in Swedish and my scripts get translated, but a precise, literal translation and what works very well in Swedish might not work at all in English. We had the same problem on *The Bridge*. Swedish and Danish may sound very similar to a UK ear, but they're not, and sometimes we express ourselves very differently. The same is true with some Swedish expressions in English.

Even if we got British TV drama with our breast milk (a Swedish expression you're no doubt unfamiliar with, but hopefully you get my point), and even if we Swedes think we know so much about the UK and feel that we have so much in common, there are bigger cultural differences than you might believe. It's hard to write for a different market, but that is where Nicola and Tony Wood from Buccaneer Media, who are producing *Marcella*, come in. Great help. Great people.

We were very fortunate: ITV liked our idea and the first script I wrote, but I'm also pleased that I could introduce some of the Swedish way of working to the process. In the UK one writer often pens an entire series, but in Sweden we are more used to episode writers who write two or three drafts and then I take over as a head writer. No matter how much or how little I rewrite, the episode writer gets full credit and the money, and I get to keep absolute control of the content of the show. Everybody's happy. Hopefully.

In Sweden the industry is a lot smaller, and so for someone like me, who just writes for TV and doesn't do feature films, you get to know pretty much the entire industry after 25 years in the business. *Marcella* has given me the opportunity to work with new interesting people like Nicola and Tony, so if wishes actually do come true, then I wish to do more work in the UK with them. **S**

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