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Contents October/November 2019

4. Inside the multi-million dollar drama trap

High-end scripted product has never been more lucrative but it also carries increasing risk, so how can producers and distributors navigate these challenging times?

8. Duking it out with global drama

TBI takes a trip to Ireland to find out about A+E Networks International's uniquely funded drama *Miss Scarlet And The Duke*.

12. When writers revolt

Creative talent might be in demand but writers from LA to Berlin feel they aren't being given the recognition they deserve.

16. Austen untold

Adaptation stalwart Andrew Davies discusses filling in the gaps on his latest work.

20. Sally forever

Happy Valley and *Gentleman Jack* scribe Sally Wainwright on creative control, becoming complacent and working with streamers.

24. Expanded thinking

Brazilian giant Globo has just spent \$50m on a sprawling new studio complex, but what does it say about the broadcaster's domestic and international ambitions?

28. Writer's Room: Franck Philippon

The creator of *Mirage*, the first show from Europe's Alliance of public broadcasters.

34. Scripted Hot Picks

TBI's take on the hottest scripted series shows heading down to Cannes for MIPCOM.



Contact us

Editor Manori Ravindran

manori.ravindran@informa.com

Direct line +44 (0) 20 3377 3832

Twitter @manori_r

Managing editor Richard Middleton

richard.middleton@informa.com

Direct line +44 (0) 20 7017 7184

Contributor Kaltrina Bylykbashi, Tim Dams

Sales manager Michael Callan

michael.callan@informa.com

Direct line +44 (0) 20 7017 5295

Art director Matthew Humberstone

matthew.humberstone@informa.com

Direct line +44 (0) 20 7017 5336

Marketing executive Abigail Dede

abigail.dede@informa.com

Direct line +44 (0) 20 7017 6018

Editorial director Stuart Thomson

stuart.thomson@informa.com

Direct line +44 (0) 20 7017 5314

Commercial director Patricia Arescy

patricia.arescy@informa.com

Direct line +44 (0) 20 7017 5320



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Inside the multimillion-dollar drama trap



Producing high-end scripted product has never been more lucrative, nor more risky. Richard Middleton explores how producers and distributors are balancing their options

Netflix CEO Reed Hastings might have sent his company's share price down 6% last month when he alluded to the "whole new world" emerging in streaming, but a more populated SVOD universe is something scripted producers and distributors have been awaiting for some time.

Entrants such as Apple TV, Quibi and HBO Max are just three deep-pocketed entrants poised to join incumbents Amazon and Netflix in what is fast

becoming a crowded SVOD market, with scripted a key part of the play. And then there's the broadcasters, which are just about managing to keep pace in an increasingly pricey sector.

But unlike in the early days of SVOD, this growing gaggle of buyers have been shifting the tectonic plates of the global drama business by offering a variety of disparate models. While broadcasters by and large remain unable to shift their budgets, those making and selling the content are adapting accordingly with



The days of Netflix covering production costs plus 30% are “by and large gone” say some execs

drama financing models quickly changing as a result. “Not long ago, the ideal template used to be getting a greenlight from your broadcaster, who would fund something in the region of around 70% of your budget,” reminisces Hakan Kousetta, COO at *State Of The Union* and *Top Of The Lake* prodco See-Saw Films.

“Then there’d be a tax credit of around 17-18% and then a distributor would offer 10-12% of your budget. And there it is, that’s your fully financed show.”

How times have changed. As streamers entered the market, costs began to skyrocket and broadcasters have struggled to keep up.

“Over the last few years, shows have almost doubled in price so it just doesn’t work anymore,” Kousetta continues. While you might be able to get the same subsidy – or more, if you pick the right country to produce in – broadcasters’ budgets have remained static, he says, meaning they tend to offer around 35% of a budget. “And that means you need another broadcaster.”

This is the path See-Saw has chosen for 10-part euthanasia drama *The End*, which is set in Australia and the UK. It will air on Fox Showcase on Foxtel in Australia and Sky Atlantic in the UK and Ireland, as well as on streaming service Now TV, with Endeavor selling globally.

“Most independent producers are finding that there are two ways to go in this market: you can get a global SVOD commission and that is then generally a single source of financing and can pay sufficiently to meet the rising costs of production and talent,” Kousetta says.

“The other is to get a non-SVOD commission but the challenge, as everyone knows, is they don’t have enough money to match what the SVOD pays. And that means for people like us, we have to look at co-commissions to secure sufficient funding to make the show at production level.”

It is a similar story from Caryn Mandabach, who says she left the US for the UK to gain greater ownership on shows. She now operates Caryn Mandabach Productions (CMP) and one of her standout series, *Peaky Blinders*, has become a hit for the BBC and Netflix, which offers it in the US.

The series is into its fifth season but Mandabach says surging costs are making life tough for broadcasters and producers alike. She admits the BBC in the UK is the “greatest platform if you can possibly afford it” but adds that the problem is “there are so many forces against you”. Central to these has been its inability to increase budgets and compete with US entrants.

Yet as Mandabach suggests, broadcasters can still offer a major platform for marketing a show and they

normally offer development funding too, something that Kousetta says is “crucial”.

“Most broadcasters are healthily funding development. They understand the value of that and it is a godsend in terms of getting shows away,” he adds. “It is a big risk to spend that sort of money – and we do it sometimes, we have to make that choice – but if a broadcaster likes your idea, the concept and the writer, then normally they will be happy to fund development.”

Mandabach and Kousetta both agree, however, that financing high end TV drama is now increasingly reminiscent of the way independent films are put together – and if it involves a broadcaster, the chances are that the deficit will be large.

To date, distributors have tended to step into the void and take increasingly big risks to ensure projects can get off the ground, as highlighted by Entertainment One’s president of international distribution Stuart Baxter, whose company sells shows such as ABC drama *The Rookie* and *Upright*, from Australia’s Lingo Pictures.

“Deficits are absolutely growing because the costs are escalating and the amounts being paid by broadcasters aren’t going up,” he explains.

“This has increased the need to find early partners for those more expensive pieces in the form of co-productions,” adds Cathy Payne, chief executive at Endemol Shine International, which has sold shows such as *Black Mirror* to Netflix. “Higher budgets also bring increased focus on extracting value from subsidy financing and cashflow facilities.”

Baxter says he breaks the current options to get shows off the ground into three categories. “There’s the model where you produce a show with low risk for a streamer or network [that takes all rights] such as we did with *Sharp Objects* and *Run* with HBO,” he says.

“We currently have other projects with Amazon and Apple with that model and it guarantees you revenue, a certain amount of profit and means everything is covered. It’s great but the upside on that project is capped and limited.”

Yet while Baxter admits it is good to have a smattering of such deals, he adds that he “wouldn’t personally want to have a production company that only had those types of shows on its book”. The days of Netflix covering production costs plus 30% are by and large gone.

“You get a small return but how do you cover development for other shows and your overhead costs?,” he continues. “You don’t. The model is great to have but it is only part of the formula”.

Model two involves a more traditional commissioner-led approach. “If we are really happy

“We did *Anna K* with HBO Max because we really love that project. WarnerMedia only wanted domestic US rights so we could keep international”

Stuart Baxter,
Entertainment One



State Of The Union aired in August on BBC Two

with the size of the deficit – well, not happy, but if we accept that the risk and reward is in balance, even with a growing deficit – then we have two choices: either take it to market or do one or two presales which will mitigate that risk; or take it to a streamer, such as ITV Studios did when selling BBC drama *Bodyguard*.”

Then there is model three, “when we develop a show right from the beginning, creating the series, packaging it and generating scripts, securing talent and producers. And we obviously fully believe in those shows.” A commissioner is found and the product can then be sold globally or territory by territory, as happened with *Anna K*, which is with HBO Max.

“We did it with them because we really love that project,” Baxter continues. “We had offers from broadcasters and streamers but WarnerMedia only wanted domestic US rights so we could keep international and some of the upside. And that’s why we went with them.”

How that changes if and when HBOMax goes global remains to be seen, but it is clear that SVOD models are changing and there is no such thing as a typical deal. Some, such as Amazon Prime Video, are more open to regional co-productions for example and Payne says their approach to deal-making has “matured” in line with their offering.

“They are flexible in how they approach projects: they will have the bigger global properties that are clearly a global play, compared to other commissions that may be clearly more focused on how they perform in their domestic market.”

Regional SVODs are also offering opportunities: earlier this year, Kew Media Group struck a deal with Nordic-focused Viaplay to produce *Margeaux*, which

explores the 1972 Munich Olympics massacre from the points of view of an Israeli Mossad psychologist and the Palestinian coordinator behind the attack.

The show is ambitious – it has Adi Hasak attached to write and produce – but Kew’s EVP of global scripted series Carrie Stein says it makes sense financially.

“There are new models. With *Margeaux*, we are 50/50 partners and we are co-funding the series. It isn’t \$3m an episode, it’s more like \$1m partly because we’re shooting in Israel and Eastern Europe and we’ll follow the Israeli model for making their dramas a bit more.”

It’s not just that production costs less, though, Stein says. Rather, it’s a “well-oiled machine” that locks in scripts early and ensures actors are on set for less time by encouraging longer rehearsals. “Then when we are all on set they know exactly what they’re doing.” And partnering with Viaplay means Kew, which is selling the show globally, will also get back end.

“There are different models for different projects,” adds Kousetta, whose company has worked with all the major players in one form or another. “It really has evolved recently and they are all offering different structures. There is none of that cookie cutter-type of deal from the early days, it depends on the project and the longevity.

“There will be one deal for a single-run, closed ended series that is very different to something that could go and go. And then it is very different if you are bringing big talent to the table – you have the leverage there to get different structures.”

But there are also concerns that as the business becomes increasingly vertically integrated, the options for non-affiliated producers will be limited. With US studio-backed streamers striking overall deals and streamers increasingly look to tie up talent, too – recent examples including Netflix and Shonda Rhimes and Amazon and Phoebe Waller Bridge – some suggest the ecosystem could be closing in.

“There is this amazing vertical integration with content, telecom and tech companies,” says *Homeland* co-creator Howard Gordon, who recently agreed a deal with Sony Pictures Television, which has not yet entered the direct-to-consumer game. He highlights the “big grab for talent from those verticals” but also poses the question of “how many layers down” that goes.

“How long can a studio tie-up a low or mid-level writer and keep them from working on other things? Will there be a universe where Netflix has its five tiers of deals and you wear a Netflix jersey, or you wear an HBO Max jersey?” he questions.

The implications of this for producers and the





HBO took global rights to eOne show *Sharp Objects*

“I know a few shows that should have done better but just didn’t. And it isn’t because the show is bad – it’s because if you’re a Northern European buyer, you now have 50 shows to choose from rather than five.”

Hakan Kousetta,
See-Saw Films



industry as a whole is clear but Baxter points back to the pre-streaming days, when networks were “incredibly” dominant. “They were vertically integrated too, they’d have their shows produced by their own studios but guess what, we were still making shows for ABC.”

Payne adds: “While the US studios will be focused on supplying their DTC streaming services, in particular for the first exclusive cycle/window, it is likely they will maintain a balanced production slate.

“The US studios have always been agnostic in that not all their output is exclusively for their own services. They will still apportion value to all forms of rights exploitation and will exploit rights outside of their OTT services during the life cycle of a property.”

And with numerous entrants set to storm the market, Baxter believes the drama business as it stands is sustainable for the next three years at least. Other execs, who did not want to be named in this feature, said the real impact would be on Netflix, which will be forced to further shift its strategy and its stance on rights as competition surges. Some suggested this increased flexibility has been a long time coming.

But while competition for product is growing, so are budgets and deficits on broadcaster-led projects. It is a point that Kousetta expands on, because as deficits increase for distributors, the options available to producers also change.

“The distribution model is very tough,” the See-Saw exec says. His company has eschewed any tie-ins with distributors to date, instead picking partners on a project-by-project basis, but he believes the days of increasing deficits will not continue.

“It will be hard for them to put up as much money

as they did in the past and that will be a reality in the next few years – there will be a cutting back on that,” he predicts.

Several execs, who also did not want to be named, are clear that they believe the sums do not add up and will cause serious problems soon because every deal is now based on a show going gangbusters, rather than simply selling well. Others privately admit that the sheer amount of content is posing problems for distributors, with companies burned after laying out healthy advances for shows that then failed to recoup the investment in sales.

Kousetta adds that he too has seen the distribution model creak under the strain of surging deficits, even though demand for shows is high.

“Yes, they are selling shows but some that they might have counted on selling really don’t do quite as well now as they should have done because there is so much more competition. The quality bar is going up and quite a few distributors have been caught out as significant advances have been put up but they haven’t made the returns that those advances should have justified.

“I know of a few shows where that has happened, where it should have done better, but it just didn’t. And it isn’t because the show is bad – it’s just because if you’re, say, a northern European buyer, you now have 50 shows to pick from rather than five. That is the reality.”

It is also partly why distributors have been taking stakes in production outfits, securing product and taking more back end, but like Kousetta, numerous execs in the scripted business TBI has spoken to think deficits have to stabilise or even decrease.

Payne says: “Our rule of thumb is that we require our primary commissioning broadcaster/platform to be locked before we secure the production deficit, in particular for larger-budget scripted.

“Any primary commissioning broadcaster/platform will want to be locked in early for a variety of editorial and business reasons – I don’t believe funding scripted deficits and then securing partners retrospectively is sustainable at all.”

But if distributors become averse to funding such large deficits, how will non-SVOD shows get made? Some suggest the slack will be taken up by media-focused finance houses, a view Kousetta subscribes to – but there will be costs attached.

“The prospects for producers not being commissioned by SVODs is increased cost. It means more financing, which means more financing costs, and that equals less profitability. But that is definitely not the end of the world – it’s just a change in the shape of the business.” **TBI**

Duking it out with global drama

A+E Networks International's soon-to-launch series *Miss Scarlet And The Duke* is not your typical period drama, but then neither is the way it's been produced. Richard Middleton reports



Demand for original scripted series has driven a proliferation of product on screen over recent years but also a huge shift in the way shows are made.

While SVODs might have fuelled the boom, broadcasters and studios have quickly adapted to new ways of working as the market develops at pace and creatives have become increasingly empowered. Take A+E Networks International: earlier this year, the company greenlit its first scripted co-production, without a traditional commissioner on board.

Miss Scarlet And The Duke is a 6 x 60-minute crime drama centered on the first female detective in 19th-century London. Created by *Grantchester* writer Rachael New, who is also attached as showrunner, the show stars *Peaky Blinders* actor

Kate Phillips as detective Eliza Scarlet, with the story delving into her father's private detective agency and the murky world of policing at the latter end of the 19th century.

But despite the time period, it tackles an array of contemporary issues and errs away from the more traditional aspects of a period drama.

"Essentially, I wanted to write a female Sherlock Holmes," says the personable New, who speaks to TBI as the show's frenetic production schedule powers forward while on location at a grand country house south of Dublin, Ireland. The project has been produced by Element 8 Entertainment's team including Patty Ishimoto, Todd Berger of *Bandidos Yanquis* and 87 Films' Patrick Irwin, while Ireland's ShinAwiL has overseen production in Dublin.

Miss Scarlet And The Duke has no commissioning broadcaster

”There is one Victorian detective who everyone knows, which is Holmes, and I wanted to give a different version. Holmes is a superhero; I wanted to write a character who was flawed, a bit more human and more relatable. And in particular, a woman.”

New adds that while Sherlock is known for his brilliance, Eliza Scarlet “has to prove herself a hell of a lot more just to gain respect. This is set in 1882, when women had very few rights. This woman is in a man’s world, she is the engine of the show and I thought it is a great time to tell this story.”

The show is not, however, a response to the Me Too movement, New says, adding that she had started writing the series before it began. “I didn’t want to tick any boxes, what you see really is what was written and it hasn’t been influenced [by Me Too]. Lots of drama now seems to be wish fulfilment and it can feel a bit forced.

“Now you have meetings with broadcasters and producers, talking about ideas and everyone in power has to be a woman. It’s just not the reality, you feel like it is going too much the other way. If everyone watches TV and thinks we’re sorted, we have women in positions of authority, then it kind of devalues it, because obviously that is not the case.”

Yet the show does tap into timely themes, albeit perhaps from a less engineered perspective.

“Eliza is the first female detective,” New says. “Her father was a private detective but died and left her penniless. So her only option for financial security is to marry someone she doesn’t love [Rupert Parker, played by Andrew Gower] or pay her own way.”

She decides on the latter path, using her sex to remain “invisible,” as New puts it, in a world still dominated by men while using her “emotional intelligence,” her smarts and her “forensic mind” to compete.

New says the show “rocks along” and readily admits that it is aimed at viewers who might not necessarily watch period dramas. And she is clear that the way the series will look on screen has been largely driven by those behind the camera, rather than those behind the pay cheque for the series.

“Creative has been at the core of this and that is quite unusual in lots of projects,” continues New, who has previously worked on forthcoming BBC drama *The Mallorca Files* and Sky comedy *Trollied*. She adds that “everyone has had their eye” on the show – in a positive way – which has been one reason why it has managed to attract talent such as Phillips, who stars as Miss Scarlett. Elsewhere, Stewart Martin plays the formidable Duke, part-love interest part-dominating male, while Gower is Rupert, Eliza’s potential suitor who has an overbearing mother.

The freedom given to creative has also been possible because A+E is the central company on the series, funding it up front on the hope that the show will then resonate and sell globally, allowing it to recoup its investment and some. To date, deals have been struck with PBS in the US and UKTV, with others – essentially pre-sales agreements – including CBC in Canada, Seven Network in Australia and Lightbox in New Zealand on board, too.

“We have done it in a very different way,” explains Richard Tulk-Hart, MD of international content sales and co-productions for A+E Networks International. “We were asked to take it down the commissioning road but we decided not to because of the length of time that would take.

“So we have no one commissioning broadcaster, which is a very different way of doing things and ultimately, it has allowed for this creative freedom.”

In place of the traditional lead broadcaster has been A+E, which Tulk-Hart describes as a “big financing partner” that allows “people like Rachael to do what they do best.” He stops momentarily, before adding: “Within boundaries.”

“Without the commissioning broadcaster in the traditional sense, the voice of the creative is much louder from the A+E side as well as from Rachael,” Tulk-Hart continues. “And it’s not true that the broadcasters don’t have any voice. We of course listen to our major networks – they read the scripts and see the dailies.

“But it is a lighter touch and therefore there are lighter notes and it becomes our show. It is great in one sense, scary in another,” he says, admitting, however, that the entry of PBS and UKTV, and

“We have no one commissioning broadcaster, which is very different.”

Richard Tulk-Hart,
A+E



Grantchester writer Rachael New was involved in all aspects of production



discussion of primetime slots, suggested the project was on the right tracks.

New has also been empowered by the production allowing her to take on a US-style showrunner role, again providing her with more control over the look and feel of the series.

“My take on the showrunner role was in simplistic terms – the US guys see it very differently and because it was Element 8 who championed the project and took it on, it was very clear they wanted a US version of the showrunner,” she explains.

“That was music to my ears of course, because what writer wouldn’t want their fingers in every part of the pie. And they have been completely true to their word; they have completely bought into that from the get-go. I have been involved in pretty much everything,” she says, from location and casting to set design.

Working with her has been director Declan O’Dwyer, who has been key to ensuring the show captures the period but also welcomes viewers in who might not be typical costume drama fans.

“For people who wouldn’t necessarily watch costume drama it has that nice modern take,” he explains while on set, surrounded by countless monitors, booms and cameras. Eliza, he adds, is not a superhero and the show is not an action series, rather one based around circumstance. “But there is a lot of sparring,” he adds, “the story is constantly moving forward.”

For Phillips, the allure for taking the show on is clear. “The opening title sequence is so punchy, it’s not really like anything I’d seen before when reading,” she says, dressed in a turn-of-the-century outfit inbetween takes on a warm summer’s day in Ireland.

“I was within two or three pages of the script, and I’d never really met a character like her before. She is dynamic, and as we find out, she’s quite different with each person she meets. This has been the most exciting job from the beginning, and it has turned out to be the best job.”

That is, of course, not the same as an easy job and Phillips admits the cast has been “working at a pace”. She adds: “There’s not much time to rehearse but it is easy – we do a line run, quick rehearsal and then the scenes are so beautifully crafted that they flow beautifully, too.”

Whatever way you cut it, though, *Miss Scarlett And The Duke* is a risky proposition in a market swimming in new scripted content fighting for attention. Tulk-Hart says his division has almost 100 shows on the slate in one form or another, but he only envisages three or four shows emerging each year.

For Patrick Vien, group MD of international at

“Many players want financial models that are manageable, and that is what we have.”

Patrick Vien,
A+E Networks
International



A+E, *Miss Scarlet* represents a chance for both his company and other broadcasters looking to tap into the world of buzzy scripted product.

“[Competing] with super funded shows like *Game Of Thrones*-level productions, we see a wonderful opportunity to create very strong, cinematically attractive work in scripted that also fits into the realm of mainstream TV.”

He describes the series as “premium mainstream, inspired by what is expected from TV today but attractive to a broad audience” and differentiates his product from shows on the drama-rich environments of the streamers.

“The fact is a lot of those super shows fit onto platforms that are in fact more niche. Distribution has us in touch with broadcasters worldwide and they are all hankering for a model like this. We can find writers, we can put together the package and our US side can bring a lot of resource and experience too.

“The cost of scripted has exploded to such a level for those who are funding it, for different reasons. But many players in the market want financial models that are manageable and that is what we have,” Vien adds, highlighting *Miss Scarlet* on the scripted side and one of A+E’s other plays, Damian Lewis-fronted *Spy Wars*, on the unscripted front.

“It is part of our plan to play more ambitiously outside of the US,” he continues, adding that he still works closely with US-based A+E Studios to take series commissioned Stateside out to the world, where applicable. He also downplays the model of *Miss Scarlet*, adding that the company “hasn’t really reinvented the wheel.” It is rather just “the model of independent film-making – and we are just applying that to TV”.

For New, Phillips and the rest of the cast and crew, the model seems to be working. Further sales to broadcasters are in the works but Tulk-Hart says the company has largely “held back” over recent months, almost re-appraising the work of the past year or so. “We know we have something very special and when you get that you hold on to it and go about it in a more measured manner. To have this as the first big show in our new co-production space... it’s great, you don’t expect it.” At present, the gamble seems to be paying off. **TBI**



Peaky Blinders actress Kate Phillips is detective Eliza Scarlet

Caterina
MURINO

Thierry
GODARD

Mathilde
SEIGNER

Stanley
WEBER

Jenifer
BARTOLI

Grégory
FITOUSSI

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When writers revolt

Creative talent might be in demand but recognition and recompense remains an issue for writers from LA to Berlin. Richard Middleton catches up with developments at the Oslo Showrunners Summit in Norway



Talented writers are in demand around the world but you might not have guessed it from the way they have been treated in Germany over recent years.

The issue came to a head last year when screenwriters and the TV industry as a whole came together to show their outrage at the German

Television Awards, known as the Einladung des Deutschen Fernsehpreises (DFP).

Screenwriter Kristin Derfler's two-part drama *Brüder*, commissioned by national broadcaster ARD, had been a hit and secured a nomination at the DFP. But although she wrote the script for the show, she was not invited to the ceremony by the awards organisers.

"It was literally that they wanted to have more celebrities and fewer people who accept the awards – it was deemed that the writers were people who were not needed," says Tillman Roth, who has been behind shows such as *Five 2 Twelve* and has several series in the works with German outfits.

For Derfler and her colleagues, the situation simply underlined the longstanding lack of recognition given to writers across the German TV drama business. And such was the furore, they set up Kontrakt '18, which has since transformed how the local scripted business is operating.

Derfler teamed up with a trio of acclaimed writers including Anette Hess, who worked on shows such as *Ku'damm 56*, and Volker Zahn and Orkun Ertener to create the framework contract, which they said they would abide by to secure recognition for their work.

"In a modern world, we have to tell more complex and modern stories. It's a matter of survival for everyone – not just screenwriters."

Tillman Roth
Screenwriter



Kontrakt '18 manifesto

Point 1:

The author is responsible for the script until the final version, unless otherwise agreed in writing.

Point 2:

The author has a say in the selection of the director. The decision will be made by mutual agreement.

Point 3:

The author is invited to table reads with the actors.

Point 4:

The author is granted the right to see and comment on the dailies as they come in and on the rough cut at the earliest opportunity. The author is invited to internal screenings or rough cut presentations with the network.

Point 5:

The author is mentioned by name in all communication materials about the project (press releases, programme notes, posters, etc.) and invited to all project-related public events.

Point 6:

The signatories undertake to accept orders for script revisions to another author's project (rewriting, polishing, etc) only if they have previously agreed the author who is leaving the project.

Kontrakt '18 has been signed by around 250 of the country's top writers

From there, the idea snowballed and today, 18 months later, Kontrakt '18 has been signed by around 250 of the country's top writers. The declaration is intended to introduce contractual and behavioural standards that local writers argue have become a matter of course in other countries. And those signing the contract have promised not to enter into contractual negotiations unless the six-point manifesto is abided by.

For Roth and other German screenwriters, the action is revolutionising the country's TV drama business. "This has shaken up the whole industry," he says. "If you ask a Danish or American or English writer, they would say of course there is a common understanding but in Germany it isn't understood that as a writer you should get invited to table reads, for example.

"If you want to visit the set you should be able to or if you want to give feedback you should – and you shouldn't be able to be just kicked out for no reason on shows. These are all things we have fought for."

It is also reflective of an industry in flux. German dramas have started travelling over recent years, with series such as *Dark* on Netflix and the *Deutschland* franchise on Amazon taking the country's scripted product global, but Roth says the business still has some way to go.

Writers rooms, for example, are regularly discussed but rarely implemented, he says. "What helps is the big production companies are providing development

"At its best, a writers room becomes like a band where the sound is greater than the sum of its parts"

Howard Gordon
Homeland co-creator



Dark (top) and *Brüder*



money much more now than maybe a year or two ago, so writers can meet for a week and flesh out ideas.

"That isn't a writers room as such – it is a writers session – but these influences are trickling into Germany," he continues, adding that writers such as Joerg and Anna Winger, who were behind *Deutschland* 83, 86 and 89, have introduced the US practice. The latter is also a signatory to Kontrakt '18.

But Roth adds that the German business remains years behind the US, where shows have numerous scribes working on ideas together, normally led by a showrunner. The role has morphed into various guises, a point alluded to by Caryn Mandabach, CEO of *Nurse Jackie* prodco Caryn Mandabach Productions. For *Homeland* and *24* showrunner Howard Gordon, who was speaking alongside Mandabach in Oslo, it should be like "being a band leader".

"You put everything together and hopefully bring in the right percussionist at the right time. At its best, a writers room becomes like a band where the sound is bigger and better, greater than the sum of its parts."

That's not to say it always works, Gordon admits, before adding that the nature of the industry is also influencing the way shows are being written Stateside. "The way we write TV is affected by how we watch it, or whatever we call that now," he says. "We all consume and binge. Even the idea of bingeing is a disgusting term. Who wants to eat a meal and binge it?"

"You want to have a table set for you, be hungry, have an appetite and anticipate it. You want to pick from the menu, then when it's over, you want to digest it and look forward to the next meal – not just see what's next and shovel it in. That's not a small thing."

He also admits that the "land grab" for talent suggests US studios and streamers will increasingly produce for their own vertically integrated outlets, something that is affecting writers affiliated to certain projects or companies. And like their German counterparts, US writers are also in the midst of attempting to re-assert themselves in the ongoing battle involving the Writers Guild Of America, which is looking to do away with agency packaging deals, something the US Association of Talent Agencies is loath to do.

Over in Germany, those behind Kontrakt '18 have already met with local agents, agreeing to forge closer ties. But for Roth, there is an urgency to modernise – both in recognising screenwriters but also introducing concepts such as the writers room – simply in order to keep up with the rapidly changing scripted ecosystem.

"We definitely aspire to using writers rooms because the media world is changing so radically that we can't tell the stories as we did back in the day, when we had to choose from three terrestrial broadcasters. There is no other way but to change." **TBI**

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Austen untold

Andrew Davies, the prolific writer behind countless adaptations of beloved classics, tells Tim Dams about filling in gaps and taking controlled liberties with Jane Austen's unfinished novel *Sanditon*

Andrew Davies is widely acknowledged as the go-to man for adaptations of classic novels, with credits ranging from *Pride And Prejudice* through to *War And Peace*, *Middlemarch* and *Les Misérables*.

Yet 83-year-old Davies had his work cut out for *Sanditon*, Jane Austen's unfinished final novel. Austen completed only 11 chapters before her death in 1817 – just enough story for half of the first episode of Davies' eight-part ITV adaptation.

"Part of the reason I do so many adaptations is that actually making up the plot is not one of my strong points as a writer," admits Davies. "I was just

wondering, would I be able to think up enough?"

This is an issue because in her 11 chapters, Austen did little more than set the scene for her book – merely introducing her characters and its setting. At its heart is entrepreneur Tom Parker, who is planning to develop a fishing village, Sanditon, into a fashionable seaside resort; young Charlotte Heywood, who embarks on a journey from the only home she has known to Sanditon; Tom's handsome and forthright brother Sidney Parker; the miserly Lady Denham, on whose fortune the Sanditon project relies; a cast of relatives hoping to inherit Lady Denham's money; and a wealthy mixed race heiress from the West Indies.

Sanditon has grabbed headlines in the UK for some racy scenes

Davies was brought the project by Red Planet, the production company best known for long-running hit *Lost In Paradise*. Around the bicentenary of Austen's death, Red Planet was brainstorming how it might create a new Austen project for television.

"We saw this book," recalls joint MD Belinda Campbell. "If you are going to take on Jane Austen, there is only one person you can approach who is confident enough to take on her work and continue it."

Davies says he was "blown away" at the opportunity: "I was aware of *Sanditon*, but I had never really considered it before. I just saw such fresh things about it: the setting at the seaside and the fact that those Parker brothers were not like Austen's usual gentleman heroes."

The Parker brothers, he notes, have put all their efforts into being businessmen rather than country gentlemen on their estates. They borrow huge sums of money to try to turn Sanditon into a fashionable resort, going out of their way to attract celebrities and influencers of the day to help spread the word.

"It all felt rather modern and exciting," says Davies. "Plus there is Austen's first black character, Miss Lamb, the heiress from the West Indies."

Campbell says there are other differences about *Sanditon*, too. Unlike Austen's previous books, it was written after the Napoleonic War, which had ended in 1815 with the battle of Waterloo. "This is a slightly different time," says Campbell. "Britain has won the war, there is a confidence in the air, you have the new industrial age, the gentry are waning in importance, and there is this idea of entrepreneurialism and that the aristocracy are not necessarily the only game in town anymore."

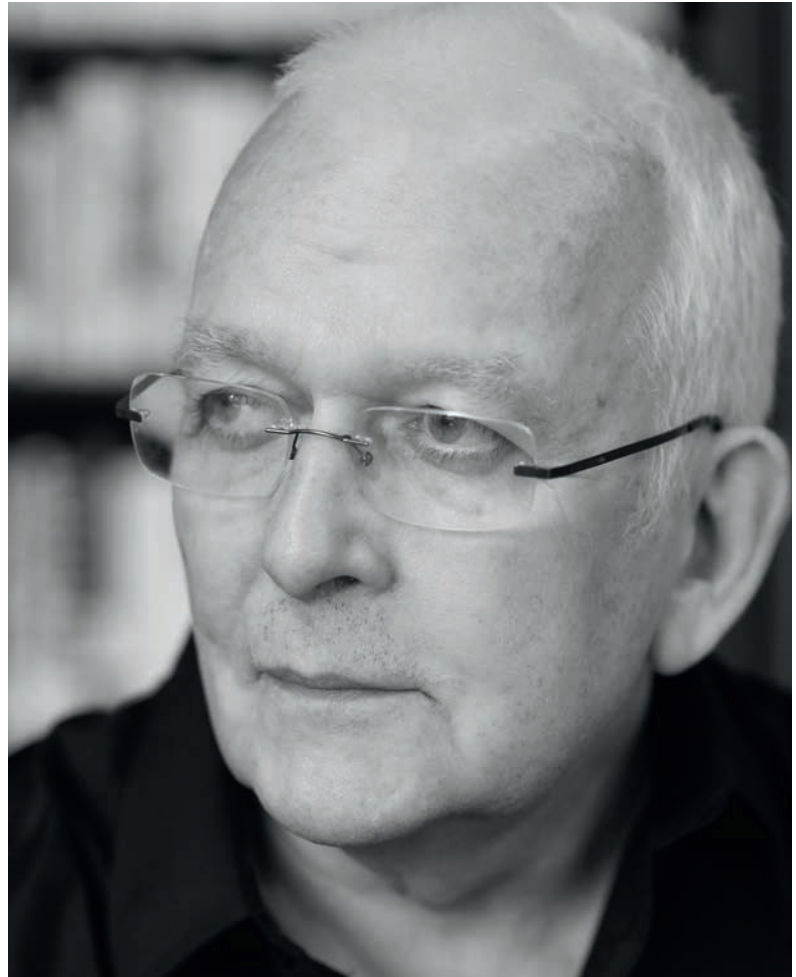
To build out Austen's original story, Davies worked with Campbell and the Red Planet development team to create an outline for the eight-part series.

"Luckily, I didn't have to do it on my own," recalls Davies. "They are very bright. We just had a lot of fun thinking about what could happen. We'd sit around a table, or we'd go to the pub and have lunch. It was a continuing series of conversations."

Campbell also speaks highly of the development process, saying Davies is "incredibly collaborative and absolutely knows what he wants something to be". Davies wrote the first three as well as the final episode, while three were written by Justin Young and one by Andrea Gibb.

As Austen only had time to introduce her characters, Campbell says it was key to develop the relationships between them so that it "feels real and authentic very, very quickly".

However, the plan was never to write something



"Part of the reason I do so many adaptations is that actually making up the plot is not one of my strong points as a writer."

Andrew Davies

entirely in the style of Austen. Even though Campbell says the adaptation is guided by her themes, tropes and values, "we attempted to do something a bit different with this, so it doesn't feel like a re-run of her greatest hits, but brought something new and surprising as well".

Reviewers have, it seems, tended to agree that there is something different about this adaptation of *Sanditon*.

Sexed up? Not quite

"A sexed-up take on Jane Austen's unfinished novel" was the headline in *The Financial Times*, while *Radio Times* published a story titled "Jane Austen fans shocked by *Sanditon* sex scene".

Episode one does indeed contain a surprise clinch in the woods between two characters – Sir Edward Denham and Clara Brereton – witnessed by Charlotte, while some of the lead male characters take a naked dip in the sea.

Davies, who is famous for including the scene of

Colin Firth emerging with a wet shirt from the lake in BBC One's *Pride And Prejudice*, explains these additions by saying he never wanted to write a slavish imitation of Austen.

He points out that he has been "filling in the gaps" of Austen's novels ever since he started adapting them, noting that she would only write about what she knew, and would never write a scene, for example, where a man is on his own or two men are together.

Davies also explains that the period towards the end of her life was "one of the most licentious periods in remembered history."

"It was an extraordinarily free and bold time. We get hints of that in her novels. She never writes scenes of a seduction or a sexual encounter, but there are lots of girls getting seduced off stage in Austen's books if you read them carefully."

Campbell adds that the scene is not just included for sensation or titillation, but for authentic and genuine reasons. "They do have a clandestine meeting in the book. Obviously Andrew took that a bit further, but the reason for doing so is that in the book it is very clear that Edward's intention is to seduce and ruin her."

As for the skinny dipping, Davies says that sea bathing was very popular at that time. Women would have to swim wearing elaborate costumes, whereas men could take a dip completely "starkers" at the other end of the beach.

"If you are going to take on Jane Austen, there is only one person you can approach who is confident enough to take on her work and continue."

Belinda Campbell
Red Planet



"Also, we'd got a fine cast of blokes acting in this, so I thought we should take advantage of this for the benefit of the female viewers, and for those male viewers..." he jokes, tailing off the sentence by adding, "I shouldn't really be saying all this."

Asked what she thinks about the press focus on the raciness of this adaptation, which in reality is much less than is made out in the media, Campbell says: "You've got to live by the mantra that there is no such thing as bad publicity...But I don't want people to think that this is just a sexed-up Austen, because it is in very short supply really."

For Davies, *Sanditon* "combines a love story, a business story and all those things that people love about costume dramas – the costumes themselves, the lovely buildings and the scenery".

Indeed, there are many classic elements to this adaptation, from the lavish balls and beautiful production design, right through to the fact that, like all Austen books, it really is a Cinderella story at heart – the tale of a young girl growing into adulthood and finding love.

For all his prolific output, Davies says it takes him roughly four weeks to write an episode of drama – and explains that he keeps a regular schedule to keep on top of the work.

"I'm better in the morning than in the afternoon. I keep office hours, or try to. I like to get started by nine in the morning, and find I'm tailing off by four in the afternoon." He thinks it is a habit that started 70 years ago when he was at school.

He began working on *Sanditon* just as he was finishing off his BBC One adaptation of Victor Hugo's classic novel *Les Misérables*.

Since then, he's finished an adaption of Vikram Seth's India-set epic *A Suitable Boy*, which has just started filming. It's a big story, but one that has a Jane Austen-like tale at its centre, notes Davies, about a young girl at university whose mother is determined to see her married as soon as possible.

And now Davies is working on a similarly epic project – an adaptation of John Updike's four *Rabbit* novels for producer Lookout Point, whom he worked with on *Les Misérables*. The plan, he says, is to create a 12-part series, or three parts to each *Rabbit* novel. No broadcaster is yet attached. Davies says that, "touch wood", there is a brilliant American female director who is "very interested", although no contract has yet been signed.

He's also hopeful that ITV will commission a second season of *Sanditon*, allowing him to develop the story further. "It's all very exciting. I'm not sure how I'm going to juggle my time between the two of them. But that is a very nice problem to have." **TBI**



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Sally Forever

British writer-director Sally Wainwright, creator of *Happy Valley* and *Gentleman Jack*, is one of the few creative talents who can pursue whatever projects she likes. But as she tells Manori Ravindran, you can't afford to be too complacent in this industry

Sally Wainwright, one of the UK's pre-eminent writers, will be thinking long and hard before sliding into a pair of golden handcuffs proffered by the streaming giants.

The writer behind the likes of BBC One's *Happy Valley* and *Last Tango In Halifax*, ITV's *Scott and Bailey*, and most recently, BBC One's *Gentleman Jack*,

is used to being in control, working at her own pace and, frankly, for whomever she likes. A lucrative deal that requires her to work exclusively for one partner is looked upon with some uneasiness.

You can understand why. The BBC Studios-distributed crime thriller *Happy Valley* is consistently cited by myriad TV execs as proof that domestic,

“It’s possible I’m too possessive and close to the material, but there is much detail that gets missed by other people. It may say more about me than it does about them, but it’s difficult. I personally find it difficult to hand my work to other people.”

Sally Wainwright



gritty drama can travel to broadcasters and platforms around the world, while her latest venture, the Suranne Jones-fronted *Gentleman Jack* marked her first co-production with HBO.

Is a dalliance with a player such as Netflix, which has enlisted Shonda Rhimes and Ryan Murphy in headline-grabbing deals for absurd money, on the cards? She’s open to it – Netflix, after all, picked up *Happy Valley* for international and will likely be on board the planned third season she is writing after the second season of *Gentleman Jack* – but with caveats.

“It depends what they would be expecting in return,” Wainwright tells TBI.

“I’ve worked in a traditionally British way in that I write all my own episodes and I direct as many as I can. The US model is different in that once you become a showrunner, you tend to hand your episodes to other people to write and you oversee them, and there just isn’t as much time for you to be involved in writing or directing.”

TBI understands that Wainwright may be locked into a deal with a major distributor, though she won’t be drawn. It’s clear that the pact allows her the flexibility and involvement she needs – one that wouldn’t necessarily come to pass with an SVOD.

Indeed, Wainwright isn’t as clued up about the digital disruption of the British broadcasting landscape as one might expect.

For example, speaking to TBI at the Série Series drama festival in Fontainebleau in July, she didn’t realise that Sky’s former head of drama Anne Mensah had made the move to Netflix earlier this year, though she remained relatively unperturbed by the development.

Might it make the platform more accessible to her in a sense? “I guess it would,” she shrugs.

What has her particularly enthusiastic, though, is HBO’s involvement in *Gentleman Jack* – a historical drama she based on the partially coded diaries of 19th-century British landowner and businesswoman Anne Lister, who was open about her relationships with women.

Wainwright breathlessly describes the Lookout Point-produced drama, which marked the first proper collaboration with a US partner for any of her projects, as “really faultless”, praising HBO execs Francesca Orsi and Kathleen McCaffrey and describing the cable channel’s approach as “supportive without being too intrusive”. The same goes for the BBC, she adds quickly.

“What’s exciting about HBO is that you feel you’re in very good company because they’re very prestigious, and you know when they give you notes that you have to listen to them, but you know they won’t give you notes that are unnecessary.”

The “healthy” budget, too, has enabled Wainwright to flex her directing muscles – a skill she speaks passionately about honing since first directing episodes of *Happy Valley* and then her one-off BBC drama on the Brönte sisters, *To Walk Invisible*.

“What’s wonderful for me is that *Gentleman Jack* looks cinematic,” she says, noting that she directed four of its eight episodes.

Wainwright is determined to do more in the director’s seat. Now she’s started, she finds it “even harder” to hand those particular reins to someone else.

She admits, however, that “it would be hard to direct a nine-part series or more,” adding that *Gentleman Jack* was a two-and-a-half-year process at the end of which she was “absolutely shattered” and drained “physically and mentally”.

Women behind the lens

The experience was testing, too, for other reasons. Wainwright was proactive in trying to get more women alongside her behind the camera on *Gentleman Jack*, but the reality of such an endeavour was, she discovered, not straightforward.

“The conversation around female directors is changing, but I’m not sure the reality is changing that much,” she says. “It was hard [to get female directors]

Gentleman Jack is the first US creative collaboration for any of her projects

Happy Valley will return for a third season produced by Lookout Point



“What’s exciting about HBO is that you feel you’re in very good company because they’re very prestigious, and you know when they give you notes that you have to listen to them, but you know they won’t give you notes that are unnecessary.”

involved because, instantly, the pool you can choose from is much smaller.

“I did interview some men, but I made that conscious choice I was going to employ women, and it wasn’t as positive an experience as I thought it would be.”

Pressed on what aspects, exactly, were challenging for Wainwright, she is the first to admit with a wry smile that she is “a perfectionist and obsessive”.

“It’s possible I’m too possessive and close to the material, but there is much detail that gets missed by other people. It may say more about me than it does about them, but it’s difficult. I personally find it difficult to hand my work to other people. I’ve always wanted to direct my own work.”

Here, Wainwright references *Line Of Duty* writer and showrunner Jed Mercurio, who had invited her to France for an on-stage interview during *Série Series*.

“Jed says he’s very calm when he hands [his work] over and people don’t do what he wants. I’m not – I get very angry and upset. That’s not good for anybody.”

However, she is adamant that this won’t put her off from working with other female directors. Wainwright is also keen to get more female directors of photography involved in her projects, citing a plan to do more with the British collective of female cinematographers *Illuminatrix*.

Going forward, Wainwright has another season of *Last Tango In Halifax* in the works and a third helping of *Happy Valley* planned, albeit with Lookout Point rather than her long-time production partners Red – a departure that comes as a result of a falling-out with Red boss and Studiocanal UK CEO Nicola Shindler.

She is also keen to pitch yet another project about a risk-taking female protagonist – British pilot Amy

Johnson, the first aviator to fly solo from England to Australia in 1930. Initially imagined as a film, Wainwright is now considering a multi-part series.

She is clear, though, that despite the global resonance of her work and the freedom to write and direct most anything she desires, she continues to doggedly follow her instincts, and take little for granted in this business.

“My guide is my instincts,” she says earnestly. “On the whole, they’ve been fine. I know specifically when it has gone wrong and it’s when I listened to other people instead of my own instincts.”

There is a pressure, still, over when a programme does as well as *Happy Valley*, which helped to launch the careers of actors such as James Norton and Sarah Lancashire and won numerous BAFTA Awards.

“There is a worry that you then do another series and everyone goes, ‘Well that wasn’t as good.’ You see shows all the time that are written by good people and it just didn’t work. And I’ve had shows that didn’t work.

“You never get complacent,” she admits. “You always think the next one will always be the one that flops.” **TBI**

FILMOGRAPHY

Emmerdale (1991)
Coronation Street (1996-1998)
Jane Hall (2006)
The Amazing Mrs. Pritchard (2006)
Scott & Bailey (2011-2016)
Happy Valley (2014-2016)
Gentleman Jack (2019)
Last Tango In Halifax (2012-2020)

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Expanded thinking

Globo has sunk \$50m into a sprawling new studio complex to produce more drama and expand its global reach, but don't expect streamer collaborations any time soon, writes Richard Middleton

Globo's huge studios in Rio de Janeiro are, on the surface, just as you might expect them to be: palm trees sway in the warm breeze, golf carts ferry execs and talent to shoots, and all manner of costumes and cameras are being readied for filming.

Delve deeper, though, and the Brazilian media giant's studio complex – complete with a new R\$200m (\$50m) expansion launched this summer - reflects how fundamental changes are impacting the Latin American TV business.

The three new studios, known collectively as MG4, total 4,500 square meters and each can fit a jumbo jet

Senior Globo execs formally opened the expanded studio in August

inside. They are also part of Globo's strategy to expand its drama output and improve the quality of its series against rising competition from streamers such as Netflix.

Each studio has been kitted out with the latest equipment with an express interest in ensuring its scripted product, namely telenovelas, can be produced as efficiently and quickly as possible. That will, in turn, free up studio space elsewhere on the lot, enabling around 70 scripted series to be created each year, delivering a more varied diet of drama to the company's viewers.

Globo Network CEO Carlos Schroder says the

expanded slate, facilitated by the new studio, is a response to a rapidly changing TV landscape in Latin America and the surging popularity of largely US-based entrants that have become popular with local audiences.

Despite the competition, Schroder is bullish about the Brazilian broadcaster's prospects. "This world is really opening up and it allows us to experiment," he says, adding that the expanded complex will produce series for its free-to-air networks, as well as its Globosat pay offering and its SVOD service GloboPlay.

The latter has become a key part of Globo's strategy to not just compete with streamers and the likes of YouTube, but to learn more about their own viewers and tailor their offerings accordingly. It has also signalled the growing importance of OTT by launching a raft of new shows that have premiered on the service, which is ad-funded or available for \$5 a month commercial free.

"We want to understand the different social tribes we have. It is a huge challenge, but we are investing more in content and will spend R\$4.2bn (\$1.1bn) this year alone," he says.

"We are providing more flexible packages, too, so people can watch what they want when they want to. We cannot think only about one platform anymore: able, free-to-air, GloboPlay – it is all together."

Grupo Globo CEO Jorge Nóbrega adds that the company "knows 30m" of its viewers but says that it wants to gain insights into each and every one of the roughly 100m Brazilians who consume Globo content each day. "In this world, you know who is logged in, who the subscribers are, what they watched and for how long. And why they did not subscribe."

Scripted product provides one way of delivering those viewers and those insights, perhaps partly explaining why Silvio de Abreu, drama director of Globo, describes the new studio complex as "the most important milestone in the company's history". It represents, he says, "a new era in content production, expanding Globo's capabilities and giving a fresh breath to drama, with a new model of producing telenovelas".

And with streamers looking to make further inroads into Latin American countries, particularly into major markets such as Brazil, Globo has been attempting to adapt to a fast-changing landscape.

"In the last few years, we've wanted to restructure our production processes, content management, talent management, creation and distribution, in order to prepare for the market challenges," continues De Abreu. "And we believe the inauguration of the studios gives us even more possibilities in an area we have already dominated for a while: the creation and production of quality content as our main premise."



Globo's new studio complex totals 4,500 square metres

But the launch of Globo Studios is not simply a domestic play to produce more telenovelas for a country that is rapidly moving into streaming content. Rather, it reflects the company's ambition to stretch its tentacles further around the world and to make the most of surging demand for scripted product.

Nóbrega says he wants to target countries such as China, Turkey and India with his productions, while Raphael Corrêa Netto, executive director of international businesses of Globo, adds that the company is also looking to expand its relationships outside of Brazil.

That means building on long-standing ties with the likes of US Hispanic network Telemundo but also forging new partnerships in English-language scripted series, such as its deal with Sony Pictures Television that is already in the works.

"We are moving forward on our first production of a series in English, the first one from a total of three series," he explains. "This is an important step towards the position we are building, as an international production player of high-end drama and short formats."

The first show, *O Anjo De Hamburgo*, is set in 1940s Germany and explores the story of Aracy de Carvalho, an employee of the Brazilian consulate in Hamburg and her romance with writer João Guimarães Rosa. The story delves into De Carvalho's work helping Jews escape to Brazil, with the series' creator Mario Teixeira writing alongside British scribe Rachel Anthony.

"For the second production with Sony, we are producing *Rio Connection*, which will tell the real story of a group of European mobsters that chose Rio de Janeiro, in Brazil, as the most important and strategic point for heroin trafficking to the United States in the 1970s," he explains.

Corrêa Netto also highlights drama series *Aruanas* as an example of Globo’s expanded partnerships. Co-produced with Maria Farinha Filmes, the show was launched in Brazil as an original GloboPlay production and was later distributed via Aruanas.TV to 150 countries, backed by organisations such as Greenpeace and Global Witness.

“That started a brand new distribution model for the company. And now, we are launching the series on the market,” adds Corrêa Netto.

International demands are also driving Globo’s production away from pure telenovelas and towards the creation of shorter scripted series, something that the expanded studio complex will also help to deliver. Drama chief De Abreu says the company has invested more in the production of shorter format shows “aligned with growth in the consumption of this format worldwide”.

Underlining this shift, he adds, is the fact that such series are the only types of programming being taken by Globo’s sales staff to MIPCOM this month for global buyers headed to Cannes.

“Aiming at producing and improving drama, we opened the Writer’s Room five years ago, where

“We want to understand the difference social tribes we have. It’s a huge challenge.”

Carlos Schroder
Globo



Aruanas is on Globo’s MIPCOM slate

our 250 hired screenwriters can meet, discuss new ideas, elaborate on new projects and develop new and original series,” he adds. “This effort represents a wider range of options for the audience, so they can – according to their profiles – assess what we are producing and make their choices considering Globo’s greater production capabilities.”

Contrasting this drive to engage more viewers domestically and securing more partnerships internationally is Globo’s decision to avoid the deep pockets of streamers such as Netflix.

The launch of the new production complex takes Globo Studio – the biggest complex in Latin America – to a total production capacity of 12,500 square meters, with more than 3,000 hours of drama and entertainment shows set to be filmed on the lot over the coming 12 months.

But Nóbrega has no intention of allowing streamers into their ecosystem at present or even selling any of the resulting shows to global streamers. “We won’t do what was done in the US, allowing our content to be sold to Netflix and Amazon,” he says. “That was how Netflix was born. Our shows will always be on our platform.” **TBI**



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Writer's Room Franck Philippon

Bringing the Alliance to screen

“The presence of four partners – The Alliance’s France TV and ZDF, and Canada’s Bell and Superchannel – with each potentially attracted by one ingredient over another didn’t make the task easy. But it forced us to have a clear vision of the DNA of our show.”

Franck Philippon is the creator and writer of *Mirage* (6 x 60 minutes), one of the first projects to emerge from Europe’s Alliance of public broadcasters. It is being distributed internationally by Cineflix Rights.

M*irage* is the story of the destiny of an ordinary woman, Claire, who is thrust into the dangerous world of espionage and has to take control of her fate. Our first writing challenge was to combine the plot of a spy thriller with the emotional ingredients of a family drama. Finding the balance between these ingredients – an ordinary family, the geo-strategic stakes of espionage and the riveting suspense of a thriller – was crucial to guarantee the series works as a stand-out example of the genre.

At the same time, we needed to ensure audiences everywhere relate to our female lead — so that every viewer is prepared to follow Claire all along her extraordinary adventure in a location that is just as extraordinary: Abu Dhabi.

It’s precisely because of this need that writing for a broad audience watching on multiple networks is such an exciting challenge. Espionage is far from our daily concerns, and rooted in sometimes complex issues such as ideology and geo-political strategy. With *Mirage*, our ambition is to dive into this world through the eyes of an ordinary woman, ready to live a dangerous adventure for emotional reasons that everyone can easily understand, and with whom audiences have a strong and immediate empathy.

Spy series are often carried by characters already involved in the world of espionage. In *Mirage*, on the contrary, Claire doesn’t know anything about this world. For her, diving into this grey world is a leap of faith. And since she’s driven by basic human motivations, any viewer can understand her decisions.

Story-wise, the presence of two networks during the development phase (France TV and ZDF) created a challenge for us to build an immediate connection between Claire and the viewer in order to throw them both into these two mysterious arenas: the world of espionage and Abu Dhabi.

Claire’s character needed to overcome her French

identity. Basically, she could be any Western expat who lands in a modern El Dorado to start over and soon finds herself thrown into a larger-than-life thrilling adventure. As a result, the series speaks to viewers all over the globe, since Claire’s trajectory is that of an ordinary woman determined to go beyond her own past ‘mirages’. And who can claim they have no ghosts in their closet?

We won’t lie: the presence of four partners – France TV and ZDF for the Alliance, and Bell and Superchannel for Canada – with each potentially attracted by one ingredient rather than another, didn’t make the task easy. But it forced us to have a clear vision of the DNA of our show. Having written a pilot before bringing the broadcasters on board was key.

If there were differences of opinion on the mix of ingredients and in the storytelling, it was my role as showrunner to understand the constraints and wishes of each partner in order to address their notes within the natural perimeter of the show — satisfying all partners without betraying its DNA.

It’s a role I would describe as more a respectful stubbornness rather than subservient diplomacy. But this obsessive fidelity to an original point of view requires constantly convincing everyone, draft after draft. And, ultimately having several partners benefitted the show because it forced the creators (Bénédicte Charles, Olivier Pouponneau and myself) to fine-tune our point of view.

Ultimately, throughout this long journey into the heart of the espionage world, our goal is to tell the coming-of-age trajectory of a woman determined to go through her own mirages in order to gain her freedom. A woman not only torn between two men, but also between her self-fulfilment and her family.

And the original part of her destiny is that her path of emancipation starts with her rebirth as a secret agent – a promise of many seasons to come for *Mirage*. **TBI**

A man with a beard and a woman with long brown hair are embracing in a city at sunset. The man is in the foreground, looking towards the camera, and the woman is behind him, resting her head on his shoulder. The background shows a city skyline with a prominent skyscraper under a warm, orange sky.

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Script to Screen: The Capture

On the set of BBC One's surveillance conspiracy thriller, Kaltrina Bylykbashi gets the lowdown on the series that has UK viewers in suspense this autumn

This spring, TBI found itself at the “mothership” – a bunker with a wall full of cascading CCTV footage taken from across London that looks like the lair of a new top-secret data-collection organisation. Of course, this isn't a real secret location, but a studio in West London, where BBC's surveillance conspiracy thriller *The Capture* from Heyday Television – NBCUniversal International Studios' joint venture with producer David Heyman – is being shot.

Just days away from wrapping, it is clear that this is going to be an ambitious project. Hollywood megastars Ron Perlman (*Hellboy*) and Famke Janssen (*X-Men*) are filming a very serious, very confidential

conversation, while writer-director Ben Chanan watches on. Meanwhile, Heyday executive producer Rosie Alison walks us through how the project came to be, all while trying not to reveal too much about the upcoming plot.

“We had always been interested in those 1970s American conspiracy thrillers – something that's a specific incident, but which can spiral out in a meaningful way,” says Alison.

“So, in came a spec and I couldn't believe that Ben had come up with a really brilliantly worked-out, brilliantly-led conspiracy thriller. I just rang the agent and said, ‘Please, I need to meet Ben at once.’”

The script from Chanan – who makes his debut

The Capture's mothership features 120 screens



as auteur – focuses on British soldier Shaun Emery (Callum Turner) who was formerly convicted of a murder in Afghanistan before having his sentence overturned. After he regains freedom and returns to normal life with his six-year-old daughter, damning CCTV footage from a new incident in London surfaces and Emery is forced to fight for his freedom once more.

It quickly becomes apparent, however, that the truth about Emery is merely a matter of perspective. The show uses the soldier's story to repeatedly test the audience on whether what they see via CCTV footage is real and whether security services around the world – from MI5 to the CIA – are working for us or against us.

The action-packed 6 x 60-minute series has been written and directed in its entirety by Chanan, the director behind shows including *Cyberbully* and the second season of BBC and Starz drama *The Missing*. Heyman, Heyday's Tom Winchester, NBCU's Tom Coan and BBC One's Ben Irving join Alison as executive producers, while Derek Ritchie, who previously produced hit BBC detective show *Luther*, was also drafted in to produce on the show.

Writer-director Ben Chanan's doc experience covering UK surveillance proved useful

Act 1 – A post-truth thriller

Chanan's insight into the security industry began with his work as director on the BAFTA-winning documentary *The Plot To Bring Down Britain's Planes* (2012), which followed a UK surveillance operation that focused on a group of British men from East London who had plans to blow up multiple airlines with explosives masked as soft drinks.

While the plot for *The Capture* is not directly inspired by these events, Chanan's deep-rooted knowledge of surveillance is what drove him to conjure up a conspiracy thriller that would touch on some of what he had learnt from the world of counterterrorism. It turns out he had his finger on the pulse.

"When Rosie and I first started working together, I used to have this office with a giant whiteboard for the core ideas we needed. A surveillance thriller was always one of those titles on the board," says Coan, as he joins TBI's conversation with Alison.

"We explored lots of opportunities and lots of books and none felt quite right for some reason – it had to have the magic of an individual and their specific take



and connection to it. And then *The Capture* came into our lives and I've never seen Rosie work so quickly to get in on a project.”

The execs admit that they had to beat some stiff competition to get Chanan on board, but with Heyday's credentials as a film company – the prodco is behind the *Harry Potter* franchise as well as this year's Quentin Tarantino film *Once Upon A Time In Hollywood* – and its propensity to work with writer-directors, they were able to sign him up.

Things moved quickly from there. The team worked with Chanan to develop the script for six months before pitching it to the BBC, which immediately commissioned the show via drama controller Piers Wenger. A short turnaround, according to the execs.

“There's a real appetite and hunger to find something that's contemporary, political – with a small ‘p’ – and a ‘state of the nation’ thriller,” says Alison. “The BBC were really thrilled to get something like that, because it can be hard to find.”

Act 2 – Bringing the abstract to life

Once *The Capture* received the greenlight, the execs had their next challenge: bringing the many moving parts in Chanan's script together on screen.

Presenting an authentic picture of the City of London, CCTV footage and the structure of the surveillance services was key for the team to ensure that it resonated with audiences. As a result, multiple measures were taken to bring all of these elements to life.

One such measure included Turner, along with Holliday Grainger – who plays DI Rachel Carey – receiving professional training in each of their character's professions to get a deeper understanding of their roles. Grainger took on counter-terrorism classes, while Turner trained in the army.

A focus was also placed on the CCTV footage that would be shown in the series. Coan says they wanted

BBC drama controller Piers Wenger immediately commissioned the drama following the pitch



to bring it to life in a way “that didn't look dull” and that would invoke personal paranoia among viewers. To do so, the team brought in *Luther*'s Ritchie and multidisciplinary artist Mark Doman, who had previously worked on BBC One's *Spooks*, to create the footage both for the mothership – which features 120 screens – and key scenes in which we see the lead characters play out on screen.

“We created this world of surveillance to surround the drama,” says Doman. “We filmed London day and night for six months. We just built up these stories, these different textures and layers of life that come from being the most surveilled country in the world. We wanted to portray the idea that there's surveillance everywhere.”

The team admits, however, that overall they were simply enablers to Chanan's vision.

“Ben has the whole of *The Capture* in his head in a way that none of us could know and he presented it in a script form that got us all interested,” says Coan. “The Heyday process is about really considered storytelling. No massive movements from the script, but making sure everything sits well together.”

Act 3 – New blood and new views

At its core, Coan says *The Capture* centres on “a detective and soldier who have a cat and mouse game that drives them to a singular truth”. High stakes have been placed on the heads of Grainger and Turner, who the execs have positioned at the forefront of the series to draw in the masses.

The duo are no strangers to success: Grainger recently appeared in the film *Animals* and BBC One's *Strike*, while Turner just wrapped up a role in the latest *Fantastic Beasts* film – but Alison insists that their work in *The Capture* will be defining for the both of them.

“I think this is Holliday and Callum's show,” says Winchester. “One hopes that they will appeal to a younger audience because I think they have such wide appeal – especially with bringing in the world of *Harry Potter* – and they will bring the highly sought-after young audience the BBC is always after.”

Meanwhile, catering to an international audience, Perlman and Janssen have also been flown in as a CIA agent and the head of US intel, thanks to some string-pulling by Coan.

“It's a story about our relationship with the US,” says Winchester. “And, luckily, that happens to be at a time when TV itself is incredibly global.”

Overall, the team's aspirations for the title are no secret. *Line of Duty* – BBC One's best-watched show of 2019 – is just one of their reference points throughout the conversation, along with Harrison Ford hit *The Fugitive*. **TBI**

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 Top Pick

Scripted Hot Picks

Breakout dramas are headed to Cannes, ranging from contemporary thrillers such as *Devils* and *Black Bitch* to gritty fare turning history on its head, such as *The Trial of Christine Keeler* and *The Terror: Infamy*

The Trial Of Christine Keeler

While most Brits may know the Profumo Affair as the political scandal that rocked Harold Macmillan's government in the early 1960s, few have ever been privy to the perspective of 19-year-old Christine Keeler, whose brief sexual relationship with then Secretary of State John Profumo is credited to have been the epicentre of that government's eventual undoing.

The story, which re-entered headlines in 2017 upon Keeler's death, is ripe for telling in the current climate – one that looks more favourably on her point of view, according to writer Amanda Coe (*Apple Tree Yard*, *Black Narcissus*), who carried out exhaustive research into Keeler's life around the time of the scandal.

"The [material] that is undiscovered has to do with her perspective, which is what would it feel like to be a teenage girl who comes from a very limited and damaged background and is suddenly the most famous woman in the country?" says Coe.

"In a sense, the tabloids created the story and that is something that's in the mix of the drama – how she was encouraged to perform a certain version of events she got trapped in and that other people became collateral damage to."

The Trial Of Christine Keeler is the first project to emerge from Keshet International's \$55m drama fund for English-language drama, launched last year. The drama stars newcomer Sophie Cookson as Keeler, while Ben Miles is Profumo and James Norton plays Stephen Ward, who was in the orbit of the affair as part of the inner circle.

Producer Rebecca Ferguson adds that the team was suggested male directors, but she was determined to secure a female director. "I wanted [Andrea Harkin] from the get-go," she explains.

"It's not that men can't direct women, but there is a definite distinction between the male and female gaze. Andrea has brought an intimacy and poetry to this."

The project is to air on BBC One in the new year. **TBI**

The Trial Of Christine Keeler

Distributors: Keshet International/Endeavor Content

Producers: Ecosse Films, Great Meadow Productions

Broadcaster: BBC One (UK)

Logline: An explosive new perspective into the headline-grabbing Profumo Affair of the 1960s



The Terror: Infamy

T *rue Blood's* Alexander Woo and Max Borenstein, who has been behind *Kong: Skull Island* and *Godzilla*, co-created this “haunting and suspenseful” drama that combines supernatural twists with a story about the internment of Japanese Americans and the aftermath of Hiroshima.

Woo is attached as showrunner and exec producer, alongside Borenstein, on the anthology series, which follows the first instalment of *The Terror*, which provided a fictionalised account of Captain Sir John Franklin's lost expedition to the Arctic in 1845–1848.

The action this time takes place during World War II and centers on a series of bizarre deaths that haunt a Japanese American community. The plot moves on to follow a young man's journey to understand and

combat the malevolent entity responsible, chronicling the life of Chester Nakayama, along with his friends and family, as they face persecution from the American government while they battle the evil spirit that threatens their future.

Like the first season, elements of the show have been inspired by true events, in this case telling the story of Japanese American internment more than 70 years ago. From 1942 to 1945, more than 145,000 Japanese Americans and Japanese Canadians were forced from their homes and into internment camps by their respective governments, because of where they or their ancestors were born.

“Their story is one of perseverance in the face of injustice,” AMC says, adding that the series is “asking what it truly means to be an American”.

Derek Mio takes the lead role of Chester Nakayama, while Kiki Sukezane (*Lost in Space*) Cristina Rodlo (*Miss Bala*) and Shingo Usami (*Unbroken*) also star. Producer, author and activist George Takei (*Star Trek*) also features and serves as a consultant on the series, which has an executive producer roster that includes Ridley Scott, David W. Zucker, Alexandra Milchan, Guymon Casady and Jordan Sheehan. **TBI**

The Terror: Infamy

Distributor: AMC Studios

Producers: Scott Free, Emaj Productions, Entertainment 360

Broadcaster: AMC (US)

Logline: A series of bizarre deaths haunt a Japanese American community, as a young man tries to combat the malevolent entity responsible

22 July

Norwegian public broadcaster NRK's drama *22 July* examines the aftermath of the 2011 tragedies in Oslo that saw far-right terrorist Anders Breivik detonate a van bomb in the Norwegian capital and carry out a shooting rampage at a summer camp on the island of Utøya.

The long-gestating project has spurred “significant interest” because of the nature of the drama and sensitive subject matter, according to Dave Clarke, EVP of content at DRG. However, the tragedy is handled with the greatest care and respect, he assures.

The project follows a couple of films over the last year that have tackled the tragedy, including Paul Greengrass's Netflix film, also titled *22 July*, as well as Norwegian director Eric Poppe's *Utøya: July 22*.

However, while those titles are “more about the actual event and deconstructing the attack,” explains Clarke, “NRK was extremely conscious of not wanting to do that”.

“They wanted to tackle [the attacks'] impact on people, so you see them through the eyes of the journalist, policeman and some other characters who were in and around Oslo at the time but weren't necessarily directly involved,” he says.

“It's about dealing with that impact, the grief, the shock and how they coped. The perpetrator is never seen in the drama. This is not about even acknowledging Breivik in any way or enhancing that reputation.”

Recent programmes such as Sky and HBO's Emmy-winning limited series *Chernobyl* have raised the bar for historical drama, and *22 July* hopes to do the same, says Clarke, who agrees that there has been a ‘*Chernobyl* effect’ of sorts “in terms of people's openness to engaging with a subject matter that is extremely challenging” but made with high production values.

Clarke says the business is talking to a range of buyers, but “the emotional and creative place” the drama is coming from suggests a better fit for public service broadcasters. **TBI**

22 July

Distributor: DRG

Directors: Sara Johnsen, Pål Sletaune

Broadcaster: NRK (Norway)

Logline: A tense contemporary historical piece exploring the impact of the 2011 Norway attacks



Black Bitch

Rachel Griffiths is perhaps best known internationally for starring in the likes of ABC's *Brothers & Sisters*, HBO's *Six Feet Under* and even the film *Muriel's Wedding*, but in *Black Bitch*, the actor takes on a creative role, realising a story that has sat with her since the 1990s.

Fresh from its debut at the Toronto International Film Festival last month, *Black Bitch* tells the story of a local Indigenous politician (Deborah Mailman) who is convinced to join the senate by the Australian Prime Minister (Griffiths), who has ulterior motives of her own.

Griffiths, who is Australian, tells TBI that the story was inspired by local politics from the period that resonated with her. She knew a potential show would tackle “sexism and racism inherent within a parliamentary system, the barriers to women representing their constituents, the cost of service and the boys club in most operating democracies”.

But presenting the project, initially as a film, was tough. “I used to pitch it and people would just go blank, look at me and say, ‘Well that’s not going to happen,’” she says.

Years later, Griffiths realised she couldn't make the show on her own “because it was ultimately walking in an Indigenous Australian's shoes”. She pitched the 6 x 60-minute project to Blackfella Films founder Darren Dale who was looking to do a political show.

“He got it up incredibly quickly and drove it forward,” she explains, adding that Keshet had really significant skin in the game early on”, which ultimately allowed ABC to take a risk as well.

In regards to the title, Griffiths recognises it can be divisive and says ABC has changed it to *Total Control* for the local market. An alternative title is also available globally.

But, she adds, a punchy title can be a useful benchmark. “It keeps you reaching for something. You need to live up to the name.” **TBI**

Black Bitch

Distributors: Keshet International/Endeavor Content

Producer: Blackfella Films

Broadcaster: ABC (Australia)

Logline: An indigenous politician is pulled into the Prime Minister's web of lies



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Devils

Based on the novel *I diavoli* by Guido Maria Brera, 10-part thriller *Devils* is set largely in London and follows the high-stakes world of global finance during the 2011 debt crisis in Europe.

The drama centres on a hot-shot trader (Alessandro Borghi) whose meteoric rise at a global investment bank, aided by his mentor (*Grey's Anatomy's* Patrick Dempsey), is derailed by a personal crisis that plays out against a more nefarious, international backdrop. Think *Billions* meets *Wall Street*.

Nils Hartmann, director of original production for Sky Italia, says that while the drama was shot in English, it is “truly a European show” and remains true to its Italian roots with a mixed cast and crew.

Devils

Distributor: NBCUniversal Global Distribution

Producers: Sky Italia, Lux Vide

Broadcaster: Sky Italia

Logline: A thriller set in the world of high finance follows the European debt crisis through the prism of two traders in London

“The main director [Nick Hurren] is English but the second director is Italian,” says Hartmann. “I love the idea of *Devils* crossing bridges at a moment when politics are trying to create boundaries.”

The project will also be dubbed in Italian for the broadcaster, as per other global-facing drama offerings, such as *The Young Pope*.

The series was shepherded by Sky Studios' Jane Millichip and her team at Sky Vision – what Hartmann calls a “proper co-production” – before it was handed over to NBCUniversal Global Distribution, following Comcast's takeover of Sky earlier this year.

In addition to showcasing the drama at May's LA Screenings, the distribution powerhouse has made *Devils* a key priority for MIPCOM.

The shuttering of Sky Vision has not had any impact on the trajectory of the show's sales, says Hartmann, who adds that the drama will likely get picked up by Sky UK and is currently courting US buyers as well.

“We're going to see how far this can travel,” he says enthusiastically. Discussions are also currently underway around a second season of the drama. **TBI**

Masantonio

This one looks like a must for fans of contemporary Italian crime dramas, coming as it does from the same production company that has been behind series including *Gomorra* and *Suburra* over recent years.

Produced for Mediaset in Italy by Cattleya, *Masantonio* delves into the world of missing person's investigations. The 10 x 50-minute series is described as an "intriguing procedural crime drama that digs deep into the heart of missing persons investigations – uncovering the human story within".

Written by Gianluca Leoncini and Valerio Cilio, the show is based in Genoa and revolves around the statistic that around 25,000 people in Italy go missing each year without trace. The response in Genoa is to establish an office, hidden in an old museum, with a roster of staff who are tasked with finding these people.

Alessandro Preziosi stars in the title role as Elio Masantonio, a "lone wolf" with a complex personality who, on the surface, appears to be the worst possible candidate to lead the newly established office. However, the producers add, "Masantonio has an extraordinary ability to get inside the lives – and heads – of the disappeared."

Masantonio

Distributor: ITV Studios Global Entertainment

Producer: Cattleya

Broadcaster: Mediaset (Italy)

Logline: Procedural crime drama with a new take on missing persons investigations

The procedural, which is directed by Fabio Mollo and Enrico Rosati, follows both the stories of the disappeared and the show's title lead as he finds his feet in the new organisation. Despite appearing to be ill-suited to the task, his superiors quickly see his potential, which comes to the fore when he is partnered with Sandro Riva, played by Davide Iacopini.

Described as "a profoundly honest, open and patient cop," he is Masantonio's opposite and ensures the show incorporates both procedural arcs referencing the "intricate, puzzling cases" of the missing people as well as a wider study into the two detectives' lives and their complex relationship.

Bebo Storti, Claudia Pandolfi, Daniela Camera and Virginia Campolucci also star in the Italian-language show from Cattleya, whose slate also includes *ZeroZeroZero* and the forthcoming Latin-language series *Romulus*. **TBI**



Deadwater Fell

Good Omens star David Tennant and *The Good Fight*'s Cush Jumbo lead the cast for Channel 4's *Deadwater Fell* (working title), a moody Scotland-shot drama about a murder that shakes a small town to its core.

The Kudos-produced psychological thriller (4 x 60 minutes) centres on an entire family that is murdered by someone they know, ultimately leading to a veil of suspicion descending on their closest friends and family.

While she describes the show as “gripping” and “quite dark”, Endemol Shine International boss Cathy Payne says that, ultimately, *Deadwater Fell* is “really a thinking piece” that explores the cause and aftermath of a tragedy.

In addition to a compelling conceit, what is attracting buyers is the cast, explains Payne.

“They’re a really strong cast in what some people might think is a domestic UK show. Being able to attract a cast at that level really brings in that interest,” she says.

The project has not been dependent on pre-sales and has thus had “the luxury of waiting” and taking

it out to buyers a little later, says Payne. So far, there has been interest from traditional broadcasters as well as regional SVODs such as C More out of Sweden.

The project will deliver just ahead of Christmas, and is set to TX early next year on Channel 4. *Deadwater Fell* is written by *Humans* and *Grantchester* scribe Daisy Coulam.

Coulam said when the project was first unveiled that she “wanted to look at the notion of evil”.

“We’re very quick to call something evil – to dismiss it out of hand as something inhuman or monstrous, but it is humans who commit these acts,” she said. “*Deadwater Fell* is an unflinching look at a community we might live in, families we might know and what happens when tragedy befalls them.” **TBI**

Deadwater Fell

Distributor: Endemol Shine International

Producer: Kudos

Broadcaster: Channel 4 (UK)

Logline: A psychological thriller about a small town rocked by the murder of a family



The Kollektive

This political thriller is from Amsterdam-based producer Submarine and has been inspired by the company's feature documentary *Bellingcat – Truth In A Post-Truth World*, which explores citizen-driven investigative journalism.

The eight-part drama is being written by *Gomorra* alumni Leonardo Fasoli and Maddalena Ravagli, with the story focusing on a citizen journalism group known as The Kollektive that is committed to uncovering the truth at all costs and investigating the misdeeds of governments and multinational corporations.

The show picks up the story of the group as they seek answers after one of their members dies in mysterious circumstances in Cairo. His young friends and colleagues look into the death but then find themselves trapped in a plot that threatens to destroy global democracy. The series takes viewers around the world, revealing “disturbing connections” between politics, fake news factories and crime from Malta to Saint Petersburg.

“We are constantly inspired by contemporary stories that have relevance for our world today,” says Femke Wolting, co-founder and MD of Submarine. “That is why we were drawn to this project as it enables us to create an entertaining contemporary spy thriller based on the amazing work of groups like Bellingcat.

“And it is fantastic to be joined by storytellers of Leonardo and Maddalena’s calibre to take the fascinating work of modern-day citizen investigative journalism into a fictional realm.”

The show joins an expanding slate for Submarine, which has offices in Los Angeles and is also behind projects including original scripted animation series *Undone* for Amazon Prime Video, true crime series *The Singh Case*, and animated feature *Coppelia*.

For Fasoli and Ravagli, the opportunity to explore issues such as ‘fake news’ was a key reason why they signed on.

“We love investigating what is happening in the world around us and tackling difficult questions through our work,” the duo explain. “We feel that the battle for truth against fake news exploited in order to direct the public opinion is the battle for freedom in our time. It is a fight for the millennial generation.”

TBI

The Kollektive

Distributor: TBC

Producer: Submarine

Broadcaster: TBC

Logline: Takes viewers inside the world of 21st-century citizen investigative journalism

The Hunt: Monteperdido



Spanish scripted series have gained traction around the world over recent years and this drama looks likely to continue that trend. Directed by Salvador García Ruiz and Álvaro Ron, it tells the story of two families who struggle to get their lives back on track after the disappearance of two girls. Five years later, one of the 11-year-olds re-emerges, reopening old wounds and suspicions as to who was involved.

The show is set in the Pyrenees and has Agustín

Martínez and Antonio Mercero attached among writers, with Megan Montaner, Francis Lorenzo and Alain Hernández starring.

RTVE tells TBI the show will attract an international audience because of its “universal story”, which “reflects ordinary life, family relations and how an unexpected drama affects all of them”.

The series has become a primetime ratings hit for the Spanish broadcaster and secured an award at the Vitoria FesTVal, as well as being nominated in the best fiction category for Prix Europe.

The show, which also makes the most of the stunning scenery of the Pyrenees, is set to be extended, with RTVE confirming that a second season is in the works. It will be known as *The Hunt: Tramuntana* and will be set on the Spanish island of Mallorca. **TBI**

The Hunt: Monteperdido

Distributor: RTVE Commercial

Producers: DLO Producciones, RTVE

Broadcaster: RTVE (Spain)

Logline: A disturbing psychological thriller revolving around two families

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