

Based on the Best-selling Novel

A **Stan.** ORIGINAL SERIES

SCRUBLANDS



NOVEMBER 16

For more information, contact stan.publicity@stan.com.au

STAN PRESENTS
IN ASSOCIATION WITH NINE NETWORK AUSTRALIA IN ASSOCIATION WITH VICSCREEN
AND ABACUS MEDIA RIGHTS AN EASY TIGER PRODUCTION

A **Stan.** ORIGINAL SERIES
SCRUBLANDS

DIRECTOR
GREG MCLEAN

WRITERS
FELICITY PACKARD, KELSEY MUNRO AND JOCK SERONG

PRODUCERS
IAN COLLIE AND ROB GIBSON FOR EASY TIGER
DAVID REDMAN AND FELICITY PACKARD

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS
MICHAEL HEALY AND ANDY RYAN FOR 9NETWORK
CAILAH SCOBIE AND AMANDA DUTHIE FOR STAN

CAST
LUKE ARNOLD AS MARTIN SCARSDEN
BELLA HEATHCOTE AS MANDY BOND

WITH
JAY RYAN AS BYRON SWIFT

BASED ON THE NOVEL BY
CHRIS HAMMER



SYNOPSSES

ONE LINER

One year after a charismatic and dedicated priest opens fire on his congregation, journalist Martin Scarsden arrives in Riversend to cover the anniversary and uncover the truth.

ONE PARAGRAPH

In an isolated and struggling country town, a charismatic and dedicated priest (Jay Ryan) calmly opens fire on his congregation, killing five parishioners. One year later investigative journalist Martin Scarsden (Luke Arnold) arrives in Riversend to write what should be a simple feature story on the anniversary of the tragedy. But when Martin's instincts kick in and he digs beneath the surface, the previously accepted narrative begins to fall apart, and he finds himself in a life and death race to uncover the truth.



EPISODE 1

ONE LINER

One year after a horrific mass shooting, an investigative journalist arrives in a remote country town to write an anniversary piece, but soon realises there is much more to the story than meets the eye.

ONE PARAGRAPH

One year after the beloved Father Byron Swift opened fire on his parishioners, investigative journalist Martin Scarsden arrives in the desolate town of Riversend to write an article on how the town is coping. Martin resents this puff piece, but his flagging career desperately needs a decent by-line. He finds a community deeply scarred and hostile to journalists but divided over the memory of the late Byron Swift. Many insist the priest was a paedophile,

while others maintain he was a good man. Local bookstore owner Mandy Bond in particular rejects the 'paedophile goes crazy' version of events, and challenges Martin to dig deeper. Instincts piqued; Martin deducts this was no random shooting: Swift targeted his victims. Smelling a real story, and finding a glimmer of hope in himself, Martin determines to stay and find out the truth of why Byron Swift opened fire that day.

ONE PAGE

In the sleepy town of Riversend parishioners gather outside St James Catholic Church, waiting for the popular Father BYRON SWIFT (Jay Ryan) – a charismatic man who has done so much for the town. Byron steps into the summer heat, met by smiles, which turn to screams of horror as he raises a high-powered hunting rifle to his shoulder and opens fire.

A year later, investigative journalist MARTIN SCARSDEN (Luke Arnold) arrives in Riversend to write a puff piece on how the town is coping after the tragedy. Martin resents being delegated to the desolate town but after suffering a personal trauma as the result of pushing too hard on a story six months prior, his flagging career needs a decent by-line.

Martin finds the people of Riversend deeply scarred and hostile towards journalists, with local bookstore owner MANDY BOND (Bella Heathcote), CONSTABLE ROBBIE HAUS-JONES (Adam Zwar),

and widow of one of the massacre victims, FRAN LANDERS (Victoria Thaine), giving him short shrift. But each have a past with Byron Swift they have kept hidden.

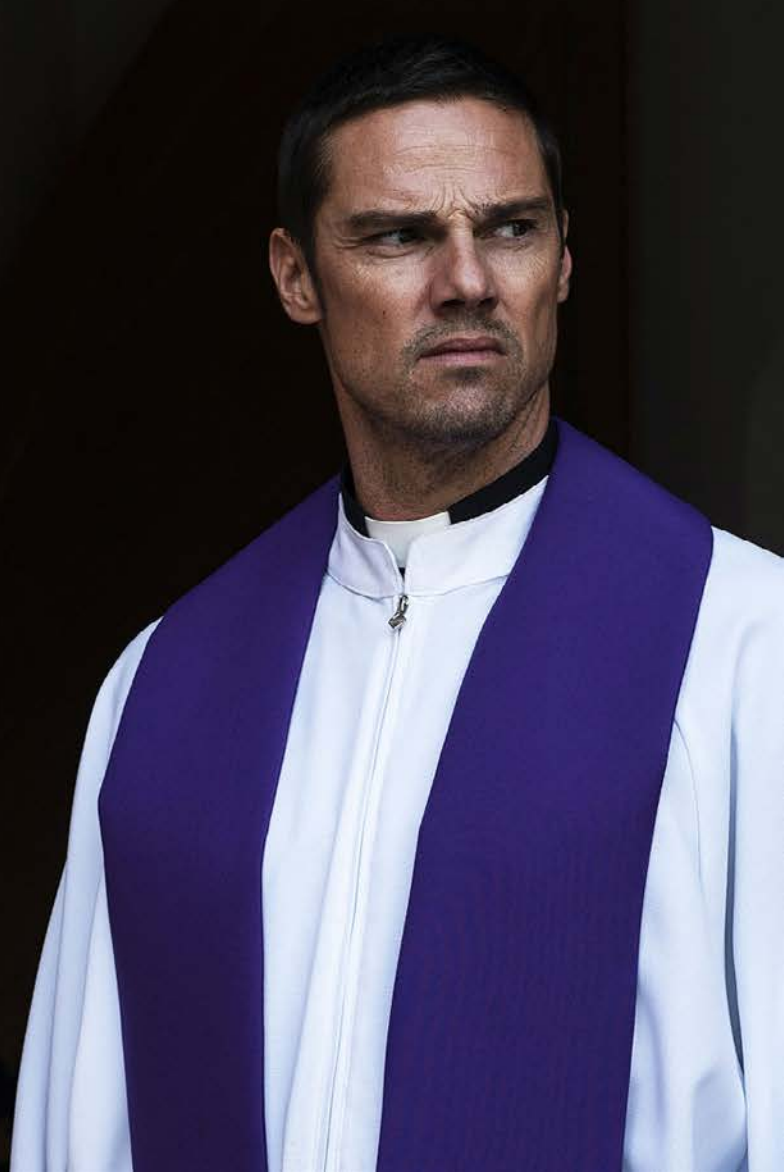
Martin is struck by the divisions in the town over the memory of the priest. Many, like HARLEY REAGAN (Robert Taylor) insist Swift was a paedophile, while others maintain he was a good man. Mandy in particular rejects the 'paedophile gone crazy' version of events, challenging Martin to do a real investigation into what made Father Swift kill.

Despite his attraction to Mandy, Martin's not up for her conspiracy theories and heads out of town. But on the road, teens JAMIE LANDERS (Zane Ciarma) and ALLEN NEWKIRK (Stacy Clausen) – both of whom lost fathers in the massacre – play 'chicken' with Martin, with tragic results.

Impressed by Martin's calm under pressure and grateful for his saving of Jamie's life, Constable Robbie reveals that after shooting the five men, Byron forced Robbie to kill him in suicide by cop. Martin returns to the church and

maps the shooting, realising Swift in fact targeted his five seemingly ordinary victims – CRAIG LANDERS (Martin Copping), ALF NEWKIRK (Fletcher Humphreys), GERRY TORLINI (Adam Morgan), HUGH GROSVENOR (Ben de Pagter) and TOM NEWKIRK (Scott Major).

Smelling a real story, and finding a glimmer of hope in himself, Martin determines to stay and find out the truth of why Byron Swift opened fire that day.



EPISODE 2

ONE LINER

Martin's investigation leads to a series of revelations that draw him deeper into the scrublands and the secrets of Riversend.

ONE PARAGRAPH

Martin's investigation leads him to the scrublands- sparse, stunted Eucalypt country and refuge for outcasts - and the nearby colonial homestead Springfields, where he speaks with landowner Harley Reagan. Harley is defensive and accuses Martin of exploiting trauma. A flat tyre on the way back to town leads Martin to a shocking discovery - two skeletons, with bullet wounds to the head. Martin suspects they're two young travellers who went missing shortly before the church massacre and that Byron Swift was responsible. Despite Mandy's insistence Byron couldn't have killed them, Martin's newly assigned partner,

BETH RAMACHANDRAN (Sarah Roberts), publishes a story implying as much. The article provokes a series of discoveries: after the church massacre, an official investigation on Swift was stonewalled, Swift poured inexplicably large sums of money into the community claiming it was from 'donations', and Mandy and Byron were involved: she is his alibi for the travellers' murders. On a visit to Mandy's house, Martin discovers another secret- Byron's hidden go-bag containing clothes, money, a gun, a British passport and a photo of Byron in army fatigues.

ONE PAGE

Martin's investigation leads him to the scrublands - sparse, stunted Mulga country; a refuge for society's outcasts, including pregnant SHAZ MCINTYRE (Ella Ferris) and her partner JASE (Liam McCarthy).

At the colonial homestead Springfields, Martin speaks to Mandy's estranged father, Harley Reagan,

and raises that Father Swift's dying words were of him. Harley has no explanation and no time for Martin, whom he accuses of exploiting trauma to revitalise his career.

After getting a flat tyre on his way back to town, Martin makes a shocking discovery - two skeletons with hunting rifle bullet wounds to the head. Martin thinks the bodies are those of a young couple who went missing just before the church massacre and that Byron Swift could be responsible. When he sees Byron speaking to the couple in the background of a TikTok, Martin thinks he's on the right track. Despite Mandy's insistence that the priest

couldn't have killed them, Martin's newly assigned partner, Beth publishes a story implying as much.

Meanwhile, SR. SERGEANT MONICA PICCINI (Freya Stafford) reveals to Martin her belief that Byron was being protected as her investigation into the church massacre was hindered by her superiors. Martin also discovers that Byron poured tens of thousands of dollars into Riversend, passing it off as 'donations.'

Angry with Martin for linking Byron to the dead couple, Mandy reveals that she is the priest's alibi. She and Byron were romantically involved and together in Melbourne at the time of the couple's disappearance. Martin deduces that Mandy's baby, Liam, is Byron's son and that's why Mandy wants Byron cleared of child abuse. Martin then discovers a bag of Byron's hidden at Mandy's containing clothes, money, a gun, a British passport, and a photo of Byron in army fatigues.



EPISODE 3

ONE LINER

The pieces of the puzzle are starting to come together but Martin's excitement is short lived when his search for the truth marks him as a target, and he very nearly pays the ultimate price.

ONE PARAGRAPH

Martin's still trying to connect the hidden go-bag, the army photo and Byron's inexplicable source of money to the massacre. He's also beginning to wonder who exactly Bureau of Meteorology researcher JANE GIBSON (Eliza Matengu) really is. When Martin and Beth's story drops with a tabloid headline focused on Mandy and Byron's clandestine affair, Harley Reagan steps in to offer Mandy support, and father and daughter begin to reconcile. Meanwhile, Martin's attempts to speak to a Defence contact reveal a link between Byron Swift and

a marijuana crop in the scrublands. Ashamed, Constable Robbie confirms it's where Byron got his money for the town. Martin and Robbie go to the crop, only to find it's been razed, revealing the murdered couple's van. Martin returns to tell Mandy about his discoveries but for her, it's breaking point – she can't defend Byron anymore. Nevertheless, Martin is encouraged when his Defence contact arranges a meeting, but his excitement is short-lived when he's suddenly shot at.

ONE PAGE

Martin is still trying to connect the hidden go-bag, the army photo and Byron's inexplicable source of money to the massacre. Meanwhile, Beth has written a story citing Mandy's alibi of Byron for the scrubland murders, outing Byron and Mandy's relationship, but not Liam's parentage. Martin is also beginning to wonder who the new arrival in town, Jane Gibson really is, suspecting a Bureau of Meteorology employee is unlikely.

At Allen Newkirk's wake, Martin and Beth's story about Mandy's clandestine affair drops. Frustrated and frightened by the sudden media spotlight, Mandy assaults a journalist. Harley steps in to help her, starting the reconciliation between father and daughter.

In the hope of uncovering Byron's apparent military past, Martin calls a Defence contact but is abruptly cut off. Realising that his phone may be tapped, Martin negotiates a SIM card trade with a local kid who, along with her joint-smoking buddies, sets him to connecting the weed to

Allen Newkirk, Byron's influence over Riversend and the bodies in the scrublands.

When he confronts Constable Robbie with his theory, Robbie confesses that he had discovered Byron tending a commercial marijuana crop hidden in the scrublands. That is where Byron's mystery money was coming from, and he convinced Robbie to turn a blind eye. Martin and Robbie go to the crop, but it's been destroyed, leading them to discover the murdered couple's van.

With Robbie confessing his cover-up to Sergeant Piccini, Martin tells Mandy of their recent discoveries. She hits breaking point, unable to defend Byron any longer. Martin is encouraged when he receives a call on his new SIM card from Defence contact, LILLY COULSON (Louisa Mignone), arranging an in-person meeting the next morning. His excitement is short-lived as he's shot at in front of the motel that night.



EPISODE 4

ONE LINER

All the answers as to who Byron Swift really was and why he chose to kill five people are revealed as Martin comes face to face with the true mastermind.

ONE PARAGRAPH

Martin is more determined than ever to figure out who Byron Swift really was. Accessing police files with a suspended Robbie, Martin confirms the five massacre victims were not only connected but involved in the murder of the missing couple. Martin's Defence contact reveals a classified secret that connects all the dots - Byron Swift was once Julian Flynt, an SAS soldier accused of a war crime and scapegoated by Defence. He went MIA and changed his identity, but the paedophile accusation alerted them to his whereabouts, and he was backed into a corner. Meanwhile, an ashamed Jamie reveals Craig coerced him to falsely accuse Byron of child abuse

ONE PAGE

After coming into close range to a bullet, Martin is more determined than ever to figure out who Byron Swift really was and put together the pieces of the crop, paedophile allegations, the scrublands murders and the church massacre. He convinces a suspended Robbie to access police files that confirm his suspicions the five victims were connected. Panel beater Hugh Grosvenor even opened his shop on New Year's Day to fix Craig's damaged ute. Damage that matches that on the murder victims' van discovered in the burnt out weed crop.

Martin races to meet Defence contact Lilly, who reveals classified information that Swift was once Julian Flynt, an SAS soldier accused of a war crime and used as a scapegoat by Command and Defence. He went MIA for five years before the paedophile accusation triggered Defence and the Federal Police to Byron's name change and whereabouts. Lilly had called Byron, warning him the police were after him, leading to his decision to run with Mandy and the go-bag. But then the massacre and his death conveniently left 'paedo priest goes crazy' as the accepted narrative.

Meanwhile, Fran discovers Jamie had been coerced by Craig to make the accusations of child abuse against Byron to scare him away from Riversend. Martin is unconvinced, with the scheme not fitting Craig's usual demeanour. It is

to scare him away from Riversend. But to Martin, the scheme feels too Machiavellian for Craig, and recalling Byron's dying words, he realises Harley Reagan was the mastermind. Racing into the scrublands, he soon finds himself, Shaz and Jase trapped by gun-wielding Harley. In an ensuing fight, Harley is shot, and a fire breaks out at the homestead. Martin saves Harley just in time for Mandy to arrive and see her father revealed for who he really is. Later, Martin finishes his come-back investigative article and with the record straight, secrets exposed, and questions answered, Martin drives away from Riversend.

then that Byron's dying words make sense: "talk to Harley Reagan."

Racing into the scrublands, Martin is flagged down by Shaz who not only reveals that it was Jase who shot at Martin under Harley's orders but confirms Martin's suspicion Harley was behind the weed crop and is the mastermind behind Byron's downfall. Shaz reveals to Martin that Harley has moved from growing cannabis to cooking meth at his homestead. Unaware to Martin, a distraught Mandy decides to take up Harley on his offer of support and heads out to see him.

Arriving at Springfields, Shaz and Martin are met with Jase cooking meth for a gun-wielding Harley. Confronted by his actions, Harley is ready to attack. In an ensuing fight, Harley is shot, and the meth lab goes up in flames, spreading quickly to the Springfields homestead. After saving Shaz and Jase from an explosion, Martin goes back into the burning shed to retrieve Harley, just in time for Mandy to arrive and see her father for who he really is.

Later, Martin finishes his comeback investigative article connecting the dots of the mysteries. But he leaves out one detail, Byron being Liam's father. Mandy is grateful to Martin for omitting her secret but decides to stay in Riversend despite their connection. With his investigation complete and loose ends tied up, Martin drives away.



THE MAKING OF SCRUBLANDS

ABOUT THE SERIES

Based on Chris Hammer's bestselling novel by the same name, *Scrublands* follows a country town grappling with the aftermath of a horrible crime, still trying to come to terms with it a year on.

Director GREG MCLEAN came onto the project after being pitched the idea by producers ROB GIBSON and IAN COLLIE. The trio had previously worked together, so McLean was immediately drawn to the idea.

"I read the novel and thought 'this is a great piece of Australian crime writing,'" he commented. "I love stories told with landscapes, so I was immediately sucked into the novel and fell in love with trying to work out how to create the world of this story."

Scrublands opens with a shocking event that serves as the basis for the story. A local priest opens fire on his parishioners on Sunday morning after church, committing a mass murder. This event is then seen through multiple points of view over the series as the characters grapple with the truth and the lies that were told about it.

"It's a shocking crime that rivets the town and destroys it in a way," says McLean. "That's what the story is about. It's about a town grappling with this horrible crime and trying to understand the motivation, what it meant."

"Our understanding, as the audience, of this one particular crime is completely transformed throughout the series. So, what we first thought was a random, horrific act of violence by some crazed priest turns out to be entirely different," he continues.

Writer and producer FELICITY PACKARD notes, "It's a story about an aspect to Australia audiences don't often see. It's a rural story about the town and what it's like to live in a place like Riversend which is struggling to hold on to population, to identity and to hope."

Operating on a dual timeline, the series follows a journalist, Martin Scarsden, portrayed by LUKE ARNOLD (*Black Sails*, *Treasure Island*), as he uncovers the truths about what really happened that fateful morning.

BELLA HEATHCOTE (The Stan Original Film *Relic*, *Pieces of Her*), who plays bookstore owner Mandy Bond, says she was attracted to the unique premise of the show, where the audience sees the crime occurring and know exactly what happened, but are unaware of the motivations of the crime. "You know who did it, and then you find out through the four episodes why," she comments.



BRINGING THE CHARACTERS TO LIFE

"There is a saying that 80 percent of directing is casting. I'd say it's about 95 percent and, in this sense, it's about 100 percent because the actors brought so much to their characters," McLean comments.

"So much of casting is about finding an actor and a person who has enough elements of the character they're playing so they kind of blend at some point," he continues. "So, I was very pleased that we ended up with this amazing trio who brought this cross-time romance drama together."

Producer Rob Gibson comments that *Scrublands* is "a really strong, character-based piece with the dynamics between Martin, Byron and Mandy" so it was vital to get their casting correct. "I feel so lucky that we ended up with this cast, and not just Luke, Bella and Jay, the entire cast is so fantastic. It's an ensemble piece, you really need one weak link to make that fall over and we just had extremely strong actors in each of the roles."

Bella Heathcote was excited at the opportunity to work with director Greg McLean. After receiving the scripts from him, she was immediately hooked to the story of *Scrublands*.

Heathcote opted not to read the original source material, instead doing her own research into her character by reading the novel 'A Year of Dangerous Living', which is referenced as Mandy's late mother's favourite book. Due to the differences in the novel and the series, she didn't want any conflict for her character choices.

"One of the things I loved about Mandy was that within four episodes you see her before the big tragedy and before her mum died. You see her before these two huge traumas in her life and you see her after sort of grappling with all this loss and being a single mother a year later," says Heathcote.

JAY RYAN (*IT: Chapter 2, Top of the Lake*) was cast opposite Heathcote as the enigmatic priest Byron Swift. "What a delight," says Heathcote. "The way he can marry or jump between light and dark within moments. Without giving too much away, we have some heated scenes and there's just an ease around him that was extraordinary.

He's just lovely and really good at his job."

"Jay is someone I've been a fan of for a while and was dying to get a chance to work with, so it was great that he came on to create Byron for us," says McLean. "Byron is a really challenging character because he's essentially like a Rubik's cube, you're never quite sure what angle you're coming from with him."

Producer DAVID REDMAN adds, "Jay as Byron portrays all the different elements and sides of the character in a way that we're really excited about."

Despite initially being interested in the role of Martin, Ryan says he was drawn to Byron while reading the book and the scripts, noting what an interesting and dynamic character he is.

"When Byron first comes to Riversend, he comes in with a sense that the town is cracking and it's not cohesive so, he's coming in to try and do his part and bring it back together," he notes. "He has great intentions and a good heart, I believe, but it's stained from his past, and that stain begins to bleed quite rapidly to the point where he can't stop the bleeding anymore."

On casting the protagonist, Martin Scarsden, McLean says, "We needed a really likeable, very intelligent, warm but kind of wounded character and Luke Arnold was able to bring all of those things because he's such a gregarious and wonderful person, and also happens to be super smart and is also an author."

Like Heathcote, Arnold was drawn to the project after reading the scripts and the novel. "*Scrublands* is such a great Aussie noir and from the moment I read the scripts and was reading the book alongside the scripts, I was interested as it obviously opens with such a dynamic first scene and I really wanted to know more about Swift and why he did what he did."

"The beauty of having the book there is that a lot of the research and preparation is already there in Chris Hammer's great world, so the whole book is full of pieces of Martin that I could pick and choose what to use," he says.



FROM NOVEL TO SCRIPT TO SCREEN

For producer Rob Gibson, it was clear early on that Chris Hammer's novel would look incredible on screen.

"It was just such an arresting opening few pages of the book, it was so obvious to us that this could make an incredible and visually striking piece of television," he comments.

When translating a script from a novel, particularly a novel as long as *Scrublands*, one of the main challenges is condensing the storyline and characters to be able to fit into a suitable timeline for screen.

McLean comments that while in a book, "you can spend three chapters talking about a character's backstory or motivations, for TV you have to have, generally speaking, a very strong narrative drive to engage the audience constantly."

Jay Ryan, who plays Byron Swift, says, "In the novel, the world is quite vast and big and there's many characters and a lot of them are just red herrings. They're there to misguide you. So, I think the writers have done a great job of pairing down the strongest elements of the story."

Luke Arnold noted the differences between the scripts and novel, "Being four episodes, the series is a bit of a tighter, more action-packed version so, it was a little confusing at first because the show is a bit of a different beast."

"It really made me appreciate how great this adaptation is and the things that the writers have chosen to include, the things they've chosen to highlight and the things that have unfortunately have to be left by the wayside," he continues.

He says that despite the changes, book lovers will still get to experience the main storyline of the novel as well as a few new tidbits. "If you've read the book and love the book, not only are you going to enjoy those scenes and those characters being brought to the screen but also it does go in its own direction, there are still some surprises."

Production designer JO FORD comments on the unique premise of *Scrublands* telling the story of the crime in reverse, with the audience seeing Byron coming out of the church and shooting his partitioners in the first scene. She comments how this grabs the attention of the audience as they "try to work out what the heck it all means because the audience is essentially seeing the last scene first."

Writer FELICITY PACKARD says that during the writing and shooting of the series, she would add in 'easter egg' moments alluding to the ending of the series, giving the audience pieces of the puzzle to try and put together to solve the crime as they watch.

"We return to the opening scene in different ways, the lead-up to it, the moments before. We fill in what seemed like completely innocent conversations in one scene to then see them later from different perspectives and realise what looked like an innocent exchange was not."

Ryan says, "I loved that Martin is the investigative journalist who comes in and instead of following the town or the murderer, you have someone who uncovers the mystery with the audience as you're watching it. Thriller and mystery really ignite the mind as the watcher, so I think it's unique how we have our protagonist being on the side of the audience."

The fictional town of Riversend had been brought to its knees long before the horrific event that opens the series. An isolated and struggling country town; it was vital to the crew that they painted an authentic picture of a town close to ruin on screen.

The visualisation of the series began with director Greg McLean and director of photography MARDEN DEAN, who had previously worked together on the Stan Original Series *The Gloaming*. McLean says the two put together a lookbook of reference images from Australian and American photographers, creating a visual library to convey the photography they would aspire to create.

With the series unfolding across two different timelines, one in the present and one in the past, it was important to visually differentiate these changing times on screen.

"We said what if the past was differently coloured, differently textured, always handheld and always much more intimately photographed," says McLean. "And the present day should be a bit more removed from that because the storyteller is in a God-like sense telling the story. So, we go from a very cold storytelling in the present day to being very emotionally connected to what happened in the past because we're telling a memory of someone."

Luke Arnold comments that having McLean at the helm of the show worked perfectly to capture the dark undertones of the story. "There are definitely some sequences in it that made it very clear that the guy who created Wolf Creek is the guy behind the lens," he muses.

"This is sometimes a very intimate, intense, character driven story that can be quite subtle and quite delicate in how it works through some of the plot, and then in moments it really rises to a bit of action with thriller elements. In Greg, we've got the perfect guy there to make sure that really pops and is really exciting."

THE REAL TOWNS BEHIND RIVERSEND

The cast and crew agree that shooting in regional Victoria was one of the highlights of this project. With a number of different towns in the area combining to create Riversend, they were able to capture an authentic look at the rural town described in Chris Hammer's novel.

While the novel is originally set in the NSW Riverina in a decade-long drought, producer David Redman says they were able to better capture the desolation of Riversend in regional Victoria due to the recent flooding in much of NSW.

The towns of Castlemaine and Maldon, about an hour and a half north-west of Melbourne, saw the majority of the action. The opening massacre sequence was shot in the local Catholic church in Maldon, with Ford noting the mammoth size of the church as a metaphor for the story, because Riversend is a town that people have forgotten about or moved on from. What once may have been a full, thriving church and subsequent town is now empty and desolate.

She also noted the architecture in these towns was a huge drawcard leading them to shooting the series there. "Luckily, the National Trust and local council have kept it antique and stopped the development so it's great for film crews to walk into," she says. These "million dollar looks" of the historical buildings create the perfect backdrop for the forgotten town of Riversend.

Packard says that by utilising these existing towns, they were also able to create correct eyelines while shooting. "What Maldon gave us was an incredible main street. Once we thought it through, it gave us so many key locations with the correct eyelines. So, we have a little café, which has direct

eyeline to the one shop in town, and then the police station is nearby, just up the road, and just across from there is the petrol station."

For some scenes, including the opening sequence, over 25 extras from the local area joined the cast to create the crowd and atmosphere needed. "The extras have been great. They're really prepared to put in the hours, and they all take direction really well. They've been wonderful," Packard notes.

Luke Arnold comments the locals in Maldon and Castlemaine were incredibly considerate to the film crew, especially when they had to shut down shops and streets for filming. "Everyone was so lovely and very welcoming. They were so understanding and accommodating to our needs."

When planning their shooting schedule, director Greg McLean says they planned around the positioning of the sun to create optimal lighting for the actors and their surrounding landscapes.

"We were scheduling around the light because so much of this is a landscape-based show. It's about the town and the atmosphere and creating the atmospherics. So, we tried to schedule the show so that we would arrive at a place, and we would know where the sun will be at that time."

"We planned it meticulously," he continues. "And incredibly, it happened. Everything we planned in terms of that schedule worked out which never, ever happens. So, what people will see in the show is incredibly beautiful landscapes and beautiful sequences that were shot in probably an hour because the sun was racing down."



THEMES

Beyond the main logline of the film, the underlying themes of the film speak to the different lived experiences of the characters. McLean sees one of the main themes of *Scrublands* to be grief and how people deal with grief in families, communities and in society.

"The town is trapped in the horrific event at the start of the show and their grief because of it and Martin is stuck in his own personal grief from his past. While trying to work through that, he helps the town come to terms with the events of the past," he notes. "In broader thematic terms, it really is about dealing with trauma and how grief can lock you into a negative holding pattern in life."

Heathcote says she has been drawn to projects that deal with the theme of grief after losing her mother and brother years ago: "Watching people pull themselves together after loss and the shells we develop, the armour that we develop, and just watching people cope with what life throws at them and I just thought it was really great to see in the scripts."

"Also just watching people get on with it," she continues. "They're not just completely mired down in their grief. We see all of it, grief, love, loss, deception, because so much of the process of grieving is just finding out all these things, the truths that we believed about people that turn out to not be true at all."

One of the themes especially relevant to Jay Ryan's character, Byron Swift, is the impact of masculinity. Ryan notes that his character has been subject to various institutions in his life that have been surrounded by

men. From being in the army, to a priesthood and now a traditional country town, he notes Byron has "learnt his way to dominate a situation is through an almost alpha-like quality."

"Byron is dealing with some very strong-headed men in this community of Riversend, as there are in a lot of Australian rural towns, there's lots of dominant type characters. So, he almost becomes the monster himself, to deal with the monster at hand," he continues.

Ryan goes on to comment that the "abuse of power and themes of toxic masculinity" are also an effect of war, a theme he sees in his character, and the impact of when "war comes back home with the people who took part in the war."

For Luke Arnold, one of the themes that comes to the forefront is the power of the truth. "I think it's about the potential healing power of the truth, and how until the truth comes out, people can get trapped in a state shaped by the experiences they've gone through, their trauma, their sense of self, their identity. And that's true for both the place of Riversend as a whole, as well as each of the individuals that live there."

"I think for Martin, he's going from a place where a story for him was just part of his career and what he did well. It was about readership and journalism, and he has to learn how the truth can work for people on a more personal level; a flashy, exciting, adventurous way of fighting truth and power and making a name for himself," he continues.



WHAT TO EXPECT

Producer Rob Gibson says he hopes audiences will get really absorbed into the world of *Scrublands* and pulled in from the first moment.

Luke Arnold says, “from the opening scene, *Scrublands* is a really original show. It’s unlike anything you’ve seen and has so many twists and turns.”

“It’s got that great classic Aussie noir vibe in the isolated country town, but then there are so many other elements giving it a bit of a different flavour and a different energy to anything we’ve ever seen before. I don’t know how anyone is going to watch that opening sequence and not want to know what’s going on. There’s no way I’d be able to switch it off after that.”

This notion is mirrored by writer Felicity Packard who comments, “I hope what audiences find in *Scrublands* is

a really compelling mystery, with interesting, complex and real characters.”

Producer David Redman says the “opening scene is going to be one of the most impactful for any series, Australian or otherwise. I don’t think there will be many people changing channels after the first scene. It’ll definitely get people’s attention and it sets up the world, the characters and the underlying mystery that people will keep watching for.”

Bella Heathcote says she wanted to tell the story of *Scrublands* because she hoped audiences would relate to the characters and be drawn into the mystery. “I was really engaged with the script, but I also find myself drawn to stories where one of the central themes is grief. I wanted to know what happened next after reading the scripts and I know that other people will too.”



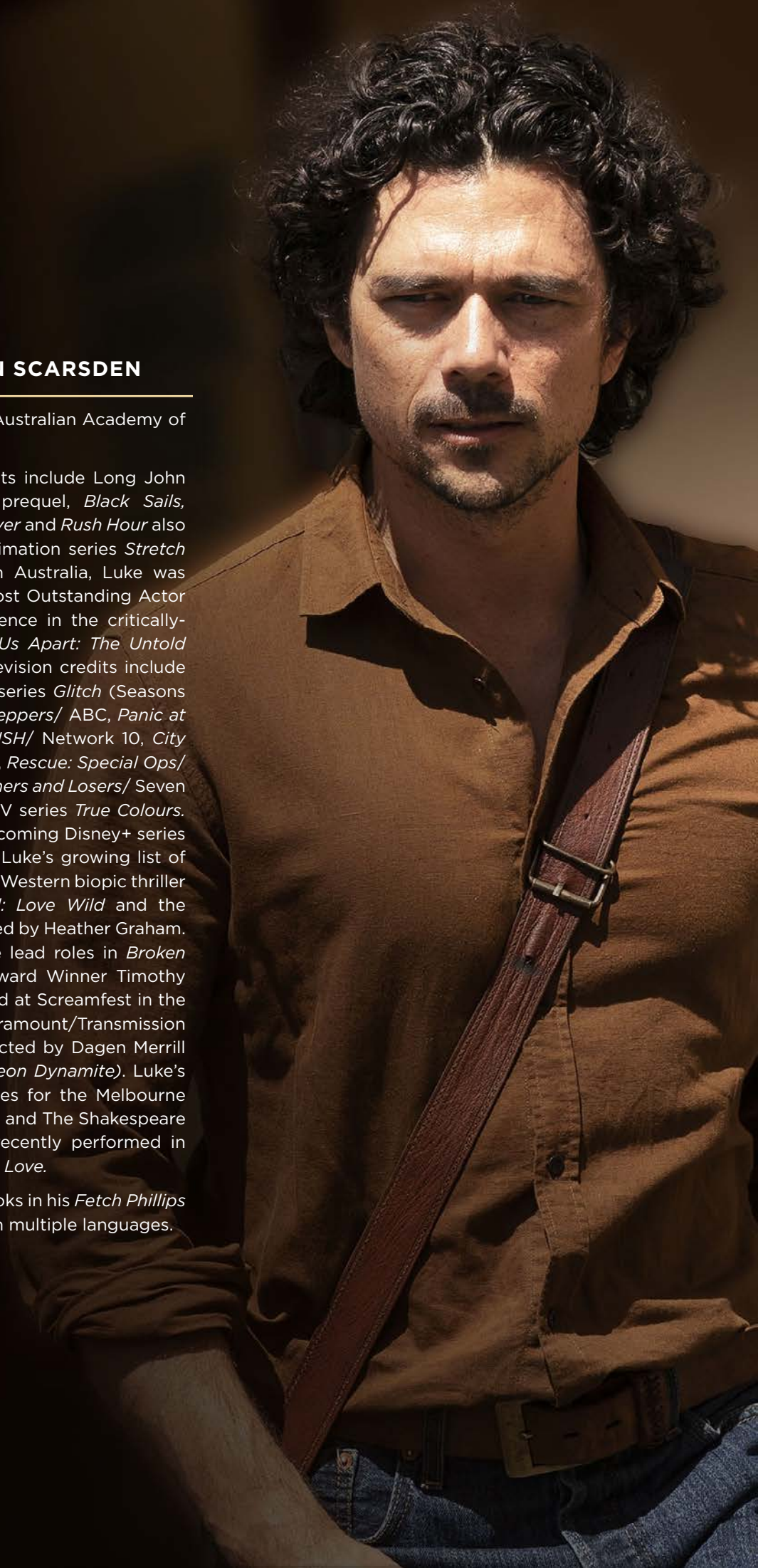
CAST

LUKE ARNOLD AS MARTIN SCARSDEN

Luke is a graduate of the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA).

Luke's international television credits include Long John Silver in Starz's *Treasure Island* prequel, *Black Sails*, *Salvation* for Amazon / CBS, *MacGyver* and *Rush Hour* also for CBS and the Hasbro/Netflix animation series *Stretch Armstrong & The Flex Fighters*. In Australia, Luke was awarded the TV Week Logie for Most Outstanding Actor for his portrayal of Michael Hutchence in the critically-acclaimed mini-series, *Never Tear Us Apart: The Untold Story of INXS*. Other Australian television credits include Netflix / ABC's AACTA nominated series *Glitch* (Seasons 2 & 3), *The End*/ See-Saw Films, *Preppers*/ ABC, *Panic at Rock Island*/ Goalpost Pictures, *RUSH*/ Network 10, *City Homicide*/ Seven Network Australia, *Rescue: Special Ops*/ Nine Network, *Lowdown*/ ABC, *Winners and Losers*/ Seven Network Australia and the SBS/NITV series *True Colours*. He will soon be appearing in the upcoming Disney+ series *Nautilus* as Captain William Millais. Luke's growing list of international film credits include the Western biopic thriller *Deadman Standing*, *Mary Pickford: Love Wild* and the romantic comedy *Half Magic*, directed by Heather Graham. Luke's other screen credits include lead roles in *Broken Hill*; starring opposite Academy Award Winner Timothy Hutton, *The Tunnel*; which premiered at Screamfest in the US with worldwide release by Paramount/Transmission Films, and *Murder in the Dark*; directed by Dagen Merrill and written by Chris Wyatt (*Napoleon Dynamite*). Luke's theatre credits include performances for the Melbourne Theatre Company, *La Mama* Theatre and The Shakespeare Globe Centre Australia. He most recently performed in MTC's production of *Shakespeare in Love*.

Luke is also an author, with three books in his *Fetch Phillips* series published around the world in multiple languages.



BELLA HEATHCOTE AS MANDY BOND

Hailing from Melbourne, Australia, actress Bella Heathcote recently completed production on the independent feature, *Roof*, starring opposite Asif Ali. The survival drama marks the directorial debut of Salvatore Sciortino from an original script by Josh Tate. *Roof* tells the story of two co-workers who accidentally get locked on the roof of a skyscraper during the hottest holiday weekend in years. Lacking any water and unable to communicate with the outside world, they attempt increasingly dangerous ways to escape as their health rapidly deteriorates in the heat. At the same time, an unexpected friendship blooms as they mutually realize just how badly they have wrecked their lives.

In the last few months of 2022 Bella starred in the feature film *The Moogai* and will soon be appearing in the Stan Original Series *C*A*U*G*H*T* alongside Sean Penn.

Bella starred alongside Toni Collette in the Netflix original series *Pieces of Her*, based on the bestselling novel of the same name. Set in a sleepy Georgia town where a random act of violence sets off an unexpected chain of events for 30-year-old Andy Oliver (Heathcote) and her mother (Collette). Desperate for answers, Andy embarks on a dangerous journey across America, drawing her towards the dark, hidden heart of her family.

Heathcote also starred with Emily Mortimer in the Stan Original Film *Relic*, which received rave reviews at its premiere at Sundance 2020 and for which Bella was nominated for Best Supporting Actress at the Australian Academy of Cinema and Television Arts (AACTA) Awards. Prior to that, Bella starred in CBS All Access drama series *Strange Angel* with Jack Reynor and Rupert Friend as well as a major role on Amazon's acclaimed original drama series *The Man in The High Castle*.

Heathcote's past film credits include *Fifty Shades Darker*, alongside Jamie Dornan, Dakota Johnson and Kim Basinger; *Professor Marston & The Wonder Women*, with Luke Evans and Rebecca Hall; *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, with Lily James, Sam Riley, Lena Heady and Jack Huston; the Nicolas Winding Refn directed horror thriller *The Neon Demon*, alongside Elle Fanning, Keanu Reeves, Christina Hendricks and Jena Malone; *The Rewrite* alongside Hugh Grant and Marissa Tomei; David Chase's feature film *Not Fade Away*, and Tim Burton's *Dark Shadows*, as the romantic lead opposite Johnny Depp. She made her feature film debut in the 2008 film *Acolytes*.



JAY RYAN AS BYRON SWIFT

Jay has recently starred in independent feature film *Muru*, alongside Cliff Curtis in their native New Zealand and in Roseanne Liang's mini-series *The Creamerie* on SBS, which has just wrapped on its second series. On the big screen, Jay was last seen in a leading role in *It: Chapter Two* alongside Jessica Chastain and James McAvoy and in *The Furnace*, which premiered at Venice International Film Festival. Last year he appeared on Australian screens as the lead role in Foxtel limited series *Fighting Season*, for which he was nominated for a Most Outstanding Actor Logie. And on US screens in three seasons of hit drama *Mary Kills People*.

Previously, Jay appeared in Jane Campion's Emmy-nominated mini-series *Top Of The Lake*, co-directed by Garth Davis, and prior to that he starred on the popular CW series *Beauty And The Beast* as Vincent Keller (The Beast). Other television credits include recurring characters in Network Ten's *Offspring* and the Fox series *Terra Nova*, executive produced by Steven Spielberg, as well as regular roles in the Nine Network's mini-series *Sea Patrol*, Network Ten's *Neighbours* and the acclaimed New Zealand series *Go Girls*.

Jay's other feature credits include *Lou* opposite John Hurt. He also appeared in the short film *Franswa Sharl*, which was awarded the Crystal Bear for Best Short Film at the Berlin International Film Festival and Best Australian Short Film at the Melbourne International Film Festival.

Jay has appeared in numerous theatre productions including an international tour with John Cleese in *Seven Ways To Skin An Ocelot*. He also starred in *The Packer*, a one-man show at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival that went on to tour New Zealand, Australia and Los Angeles. *The Packer* was nominated for Best International Contribution to Los Angeles Theatre at the 2011 Hollywood Fringe Festival.



CREW

GREG MCLEAN – DIRECTOR

Greg McLean is a highly accomplished Australian writer, director, and producer with a broad range of experience in fine art, theatre, and opera. He gained recognition in the film industry for his 2005 Stan Original Film, *Wolf Creek*, which premiered at the Sundance and Cannes Film Festivals and achieved cult status.

Following the success of *Wolf Creek*, Greg went on to write, direct, and produce a variety of films, including *Rogue*, *Wolf Creek 2*, and *The Belko Experiment*. He also directed the survival thriller *Jungle*, based on true events and starring Daniel Radcliffe.

Greg has also made a name for himself in the world of TV, directing successful series such as the Stan Originals *Wolf Creek*, *The Gloaming*, *Bloom*, as well as ABC's *Jack Irish*, and NBC's *La Brea*. Most recently, he directed episodes of *The Twelve*, which starred Sam Neil.

In addition to his impressive body of work, Greg has announced his latest venture, HUGE FILM, a partnership with director Patrick Hughes to produce big-budget genre and action films in Australia. With his exceptional talent for storytelling and his impressive track record, he has established himself as a significant figure in the Australian film industry.

IAN COLLIE – PRODUCER

Ian Collie is one of Australia's most experienced producers and the founder of Easy Tiger. His credits include the Foxtel drama *The Twelve*, Binge/CBS Studios comedy *Colin From Accounts*, the iconic ABC comedy *Rake* (five seasons with ABC TV), and Nine's *Doctor Doctor* (aka *The Heart Guy*, five seasons). He has produced two series and three telemovies of the crime drama *Jack Irish*, and the telemovie *The Broken Shore*, all based on the award-winning novels of Peter Temple. Ian is also the producer of SBS dramas *Sunshine* and *The Principal* and ABC TV telefeature *Hell Has Harbour Views*. He was nominated for a PGA Award for his work producing the Disney feature film *Saving Mr Banks* starring Emma Thompson and Tom Hanks.

Ian is the producer of the factual series *Lindy Chamberlain: True Story* and the forthcoming *The Hunt for The Family Court Killer* both for Network Ten.

ROB GIBSON – PRODUCER

Rob Gibson is CEO/Producer at Easy Tiger Productions, with producing credits including hit Foxtel courtroom drama *The Twelve*, the Binge and CBS Studios international comedy sensation *Colin From Accounts*, *Jack Irish*, *Doctor Doctor* and *Lindy Chamberlain: The True Story*. Prior to joining Easy Tiger, Rob was the Head of Originals at Stan, where he was responsible for Stan's defining successes and award-winning, critically acclaimed originals *No Activity*, *Wolf Creek*, *Bloom*, *The Other Guy*, *Romper*

Stomper among others. Rob previously worked as a film and television producer both in the US and Australia, and was formerly a media and entertainment lawyer, working for Allens Linklaters, Foxtel, Festival Records and Fairfax Media.

DAVID REDMAN – PRODUCER

David Redman has been producing films for over 25 years and his credits include the Paramount distributed *Charlie & Boots*, *Salute* and *Till Human Voices Wake Us* and the highest grossing Australian movie of its year, *Strange Bedfellows*.

In 2016 he produced *Spin Out*, distributed worldwide by Sony Pictures and in 2018 he expanded his experience into high end Television by line producing the Stan Original Series *Bloom*. He is currently producing *Scrublands* for Stan/Nine & Easy Tiger. His previous production, *Measure for Measure* starring Hugo Weaving, premiered at the 2019 Melbourne International Film Festival and was selected for Busan International Film Festival.

He previously worked in the UK on productions including *Before The Rain*, a UK, French, Macedonian Co-Production which won the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival and was nominated for an Academy Award and *The Young Poisoner's Handbook*, a UK, German Co-Production awarded the Critics' Prize at Edinburgh Film Festival.

FELICITY PACKARD – LEAD WRITER AND PRODUCER

Felicity is a freelance screenwriter and producer.

Lead writer and producer of *Scrublands*, Felicity was co-creator and writer of the 2018 Netflix political/spy miniseries *Pine Gap*, which she also produced. She is one of the creator-writers of the commercially and critically successful Nine Network *Underbelly* true-crime drama franchise: *Underbelly*; *Underbelly: A Tale of Two Cities*; *Underbelly: The Golden Mile*; *Underbelly: Razor*; *Underbelly: Badness*, and *Underbelly: Squizzy*, associate producing the last four. She was lead writer and producer on the ABC's award-winning *ANZAC Girls*, and adapted, wrote and associate produced season one of the Stan Original Series *Wolf Creek*.

Felicity has won multiple awards for her screenwriting, including the Queensland Premier's Literary Award (screenwriting) for episode 7 of *Underbelly*, *Wise Monkeys*. She has won five Australian Writers' Guild Awards for *Underbelly*, *Underbelly: A Tale of Two Cities*, *Underbelly: Badness* and *ANZAC Girls* as well as being nominated on several other occasions.

Over a career spanning almost three decades, Felicity has written over a hundred hours of television drama including for *Ms Fisher's Modern Murder Mysteries*, *Janet King*, *MDA*, *GP*, *Sea Patrol*, *Blue Heelers* and *Home & Away*.

JO FORD – PRODUCTION DESIGNER

Jo Ford's career as a Production Designer has spanned several decades. The creative complexity of heading a collaborative design team whose job it is to bring to life 3-dimensional worlds that can then be inhabited by the director and actors, to tell a story for audiences to enjoy, is endlessly challenging and inspiring for Jo.

After graduating from the Swinburne Institute of Technology Film School (VCA Melbourne), Jo's career has been spent designing stylistically varied feature films and television series, as well as countless TV commercials.

Feature films include *We Of The Never Never* and New Zealand's *The Quiet Earth*, through to *Last Ride*, *Animal Kingdom*, *The Rover*, *Cut Snake*, *Holding The Man*, *War Machine*, *Cargo* and *Judy And Punch*.

Television miniseries and tele features include *My Brother Jack*, *Road From Coorain*, *After The Deluge*, *Kidnapped*, *Tripping Over*, *Time Of Our Lives*, *Gallipoli*, *Cleverman*, *7 Types Of Ambiguity*, *Romper Stomper*, *Picnic At Hanging Rock*, *Upright*, *Fires*, *Love Me*, *Bay Of Fires*, and *Scrublands*.

Jo and her ArtDepartment teams have also been nominated for various AACTA awards, which include *My Brother Jack*, *Road From Coorain* (Winner), *Animal Kingdom*, *Cut Snake*, *The Rover*, *Seven Types Of Ambiguity*, *Cargo*, *Picnic At Hanging Rock* (Winner), *Judy And Punch*, *Fires*, and *Love Me*.

MARDEN DEAN – DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Marden Dean is an award-winning cinematographer working across acclaimed television drama and feature films.

Marden's recent credits include the third season of *Jack Irish* (dir. Greg McLean/ Easy Tiger, 2021); the Stan Original Series *The Gloaming* (dir. Michael Rymer/ 2jons, 2020), as well as the feature film, *Breath* (dir. Simon Baker/ See Pictures, 2018) for which Marden won a Gold ACS VIC/TAS Award for Cinematography in a Feature Film and earned an AACTA nomination for Best Cinematography in a Feature Film. His other credits include the Stan Original Series *The Other Guy* starring Matt Okine (dir. Kacie Anning/ Aqaurius Films, 2017), the feature film *Boys in the Trees* (dir. Nicholas Verso/ Mushroom Pictures, 2016) and the short film *Problem Play* (dir. Matthew Moore, 2015) for Goalpost Pictures.

Marden shot the feature film *Fell* (dir. Kasimir Burgess/ Footprint Films, 2014) for Footprint Films and Felix Media, for which he earned an AACTA Award nomination for Best Cinematography, as well as the feature film *The Infinite Man* (dir. Hugh Sullivan 2014) for Hedone Productions. The film premiered at SXSW Film Festival in 2014 and was described by time.com as one of the 'ten films that made SXSW spectacular'.

Marden completed a Masters in Cinematography at the Australian Film, Television and Radio School and has gone on to enjoy collaborations which have taken him across Australia and around the Globe.

In 2021, Marden was the set-up DOP on the hugely popular Netflix series *Clickbait* for Heyday Production and Matchbox Pictures – Marden received an AACTA Award nomination for Best Cinematography in a Television Drama for his work on episode 6, with the series also picking up a nomination for Best Drama Series. Marden was also the set-up DOP

on the landmark ABC anthology series, *The Fires* (dir. Michael Rymer), for TAP and Spirit Pictures – the series was nominated for Best Miniseries or Telefeature at this year's AACTA Awards.

Most recently, he shot the television series *Scrublands* (dir. Greg McLean) for Easy Tiger and Stan.

ANNA KARPINSKI – HAIR AND MAKEUP DESIGNER

Anna Karpinski has worked as a Makeup Artist in Film and Television for over 35 years, and as a Hair and Make Up Designer for over 20 years.

Anna was head of department on the feature films *Miss Fisher & the Crypt of Tears*, *Woody Woodpecker 2* and the television series *Miss Fisher's Murder Mysteries*, *Spreadsheet*, *Surviving Summer S1*, *Five Bedrooms S1 & S2*, *Jack Irish S1 & S3*, *Get Cracking*, *Mr and Mrs Murder*, *The Wrong Girl S1 & S2*, *True Story S1 & S2*, and *Rockwiz*. She also worked on the feature films *Ali's Wedding*, *Where the Wild Things Are*, and the HBO television series *The Pacific*.

JEANIE CAMERON – COSTUME DESIGNER

With a career that has spanned four decades, costume designer Jeanie Cameron has worked on many of Australia's most beloved and successful films, television series and commercials, which has led her to work in many parts of the world.

Starting off for Crawford Productions in the early 1980s working on shows such as *The Sullivans*, *Cop Shop*, *Flying Doctors*, *Carsons Law* and was involved with seminal television mini-series like *Nancy Wake*, *Sword of Honour* and *ANZACS*.

In the 90s, Jeanie was costume designer for TV productions such as *Law of the Land*, *Gillies*, *Kangaroo Palace*, *1960s*, *Round the Twist*, *The Genie from Down Under*, *Acropolis Now*, *Dog Women*, *Crash Zone*, *Boys from the Bush*, before moving into film work, both Australian and international. She worked on *The Sound of One Hand Clapping*, *Charlotte's Web*, *While Designing*, *Father*, *Till Human Voices Wake Us*, *Beyond My Reach*, *Ruthvan*, *Mull*, *Slate*, *Wyn and Me*, *Cool Change*, *Heaven Tonight* and *The Interview*.

In the 2000's, Jeanie's costume work has seen her expertly depict the style of dress from many historical periods from 1890's *Utopia Girls*, 1915 *Monash and the ANZACs Legend*, 1920's *Phryny Fisher*, through the 1930's and 40's *The Eye of the Storm*, 1950's *The Dressmaker*, the 1960's *Slate*, *Wyn and Me* and *Dangerous Remedies*, and the 1980's *Hawke*. These experiences have allowed Jeanie to hone her skills in the art of character dressing and also provide period costumes to numerous productions from her extensive costume collection. She also achieves contemporary costuming for character driven films such as *John Doe*, *Strange Bedfellows*, *Charlie & Boots*, *Healing* and the mini-series *Jack Irish*.

Over the last decade, Jeanie has been involved in several award-winning films and television series including Fred Schepisi's *The Eye of the Storm*, Rob Sitch's *The Hollowmen*, and the Stephen King adaptation of *Nightmares and Dreamscapes*, Sue Maslin's *The Dressmaker*, Tim Winton's *Breath*, Daina Reid's *Sunshine* and Easy Tiger's *Jack Irish*.

Over the last few years, Jeanie has designed *The Very Excellent Mr Dundee*, *Halifax*, *Jack Irish Series 3*, *Scrublands*, co-designed *Fisk* and buyer for *Barons*, *1970's* and *Run Rabbit Run*.



Stan is Australia's leading local streaming service and unrivalled home of original productions.

Stan's original production slate includes hit thriller series **BLACK SNOW** starring Travis Fimmel; **TEN POUND POMS** starring Michelle Keegan and Faye Marsay; the Stan Original Dating series **LOVE TRIANGLE**, a modern take on the struggle for love; **BUMP**, a modern parenthood drama starring Claudia Karvan; **REVEALED**, a slate of Stan Original investigatory documentaries created in collaboration with award-winning journalists, filmmakers and philanthropists; **RUPAUL'S DRAG RACE DOWN UNDER**, hosted by RuPaul, Michelle Visage and Rhys Nicholson; **WOLF LIKE ME**, a genre-bending drama series starring Isla Fisher and Josh Gad; and countless other acclaimed original series and films.

Stan's studio partnerships include NBCUniversal, Starz, Lionsgate, AMC, Paramount, Sony, Warner Bros, Disney, all3media, BBC, MGM and more. Through these partnerships, Stan offers Australians unlimited access to thousands of hours of premium entertainment – with an outstanding lineup of exclusive premieres and blockbuster movies.

For more information, visit **stan.com.au**.

For more information, contact
stan.publicity@stan.com.au