

sky original

THE iRIS AFFAIR

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CREATOR'S STATEMENT

NEIL CROSS

The Iris Affair began with the simplest impulse you can imagine. I wanted to make the kind of TV show I was really, really in the mood to watch.

That meant a fast-moving, sophisticated thriller under brilliant blue skies – something designed to be exciting, intelligent, witty and glamorous in a modern old-fashioned way. It meant clever and likeable people with off-centre moral compasses embroiled in twisty-turny, high-stakes intrigue that's pitched somewhere between lethal hostility and reckless flirtation. So there's a lot of Alfred Hitchcock in there – things like *North by Northwest* and *To Catch a Thief*. There's quite a bit of Patricia Highsmith too, particularly her later Ripley novels. And you can throw in some romantic mysteries like *Charade*, and definitely some of those Technicolor adventure shows of the 1970s: *Department S*, or *The Persuaders*.

But here's the real secret to my job. It doesn't really matter what you set out to do... because stories come alive in the telling. So it wasn't long before Iris Nixon and Cameron Beck started saying and doing things I hadn't expected, in ways I hadn't anticipated. And as they came to life, so did the world around them: Joy Baxter proved herself more undaunted, and more resourceful than the young woman I'd first envisaged; Jensen Lind became more elementally terrifying, and more heartbreaking; Alfie Bird turned out sweeter, kinder and braver; Hugo Pym even more deranged; and the taciturn Meski just as impassive, yet somehow also secretly hilarious.

So that's where our story comes from. It began as a simple impulse that came alive, grew legs and began to gather about itself a traveling circus – a huge team of brilliant people doing brilliant things.

It was a labour of love for all of us. We hope you like it.



EPISODIC SYNOPSSES

EPISODE 1

When we meet IRIS NIXON – a genius codebreaker – she is living in Sardinia, hiding behind a complex series of disguises, on the run, with a bounty on her head. She is buying time to decipher a coded diary, linked to events from two years ago when she was hired by charming entrepreneur CAMERON BECK to work on a mysterious piece of technology, nicknamed “Charlie Big Potatoes”. But when she learns her location has been exposed and corrupt cops are on her tail, she is faced with taking extreme steps to ensure her safety.

EPISODE 2

In a desperate bid to escape the island, Iris blackmails her lover, TEO, to botch the police investigation and help her flee. But when put under pressure by KRAUSS and BAPTISTE, Teo is given no choice but to betray her location, forcing Iris to make a death-defying escape, and to turn to her young pupil JOY BAXTER as the only one who can help her retrieve the mysterious diary that she refuses to give up to her former employer, Cameron. .

EPISODE 3

Joy is taken captive by Baptiste, while Iris pleads with Teo to help secure her escape, and contacts conspiracy Youtuber ALFIE to meet her in Rome and help her with the next phase of her plan. But with Teo being directed by Krauss, both Joy and Iris are delivered into the hands of Cameron for an explosive showdown. Not all of them will walk out alive. In the past timeline, we see the devastating consequences of Iris unlocking supercomputer “Charlie Big Potatoes” that caused her to flee with the diary of the man who built it – JENSEN LIND.

EPISODE 4

Pursued by Teo’s colleague, Sardinian cop NICO CASTERMAN, Iris escapes the island with nothing to her name. But she is galvanised by an extraordinary revelation that kickstarts the next stage of her plan when she lands in Rome, where she enlists Alfie to help her retrieve the precious diary. As Cameron imprisons Joy in his mountain lair, Caliburn, the number of adversaries Iris must worry about increases when corrupt cop boss BRUNI and a network of opportunist drug dealers realise Iris has arrived in their city with a growing bounty on her head.





EPISODE 5

Nico has apprehended Alfie, who is now in possession of Jensen's diary. Iris is in hot pursuit – but unbeknownst to her, Bruni and his forces are closing in on her. As Joy is thrown face to face with Jensen and realises there are mysterious depths to this situation, time begins to run out for Cameron when HUGO PYM arrives, the sinister representative of 'The Money' bankrolling his project. Iris realises she has seconds to spare before Bruni arrives, and is forced to try win Nico around to her cause.

EPISODE 6

With the clock ticking, and Pym ruthlessly doing all he can to try and accelerate his aims, Iris negotiates an audacious 'spy swap' to try and trade Joy for the diary. But with Alfie and Nico on her side, she has other ideas to turn the situation to her advantage. However, Joy's unexpected bond with Cameron leaves her with a complex dilemma as she makes a decision about who has her best interests at heart, with enormous consequences.

EPISODE 7

Devastated by Joy's betrayal, Iris believes she has lost the battle and urges Alfie to go public with the situation. But when she, Nico and Alfie are cornered by Bruni and his strike team she is galvanised to take one last stand to make it out alive. Cameron believes he has secured his and Joy's safety, but when he lands at Caliburn with the diary, he and Joy are taken prisoner as Pym shows his true ruthlessness in pursuing his company's aims and eliminating all obstacles to "Charlie Big Potatoes" being reactivated.

EPISODE 8

Iris arrives at Caliburn determined to get answers or to die trying. Her return fuels Joy's anger at being betrayed. As Iris finally learns what Jensen saw in "Charlie Big Potatoes" and is forced to try and outmanoeuvre Pym – it becomes clear that "Charlie Big Potatoes" is the one who is trying to manipulate everyone inside Caliburn to ensure its own survival. It orchestrates a final showdown with Joy, desperate for vengeance on Iris, Cameron and Jensen, forced to confront the consequences of their creation, and Iris, forced to prove whether she truly does care about those around her.



CHARACTER

BIOS

IRIS NIXON

Niamh Algar

Iris is a puzzle addict and genius, a hyper intelligent drifter with a string of low-paid jobs behind her, satisfied with living a solitary existence. Her rationalist amorality may at times verge on nihilism, but underneath it all, Iris has a keen (if idiosyncratic) sense of right and wrong. She's recruited by Cameron Beck to solve an impossible puzzle, decoding scientist Jensen Lind's diary and reactivate the powerful computer they call "Charlie Big Potatoes". But what seemed like a dream job for her became a nightmare when she became convinced the device was dangerous, and fled, taking Jensen's encrypted diary with her that may contain the truth about the device's true powers... if she can crack it open. Finding a home at her rustic shack hidden in a fairytale forest, on the edge of the crystal-clear waters of Sardinia, Iris adopts multiple aliases, including "Miss Brook", tutor to Joy Baxter, and "Monica", lover to the local cop Teo. But, with a bounty on her head, Iris is soon being hunted from every direction, and if she wants to make it out alive, she must do the thing she finds most difficult – putting her trust in others.



A man with grey hair and black-rimmed glasses, wearing a white button-down shirt and light blue trousers, sits in a dark wicker armchair. He is holding and reading a book with a dark cover. To his left is a large, leafy green tree and some bushes. To his right is a table covered with a green cloth, featuring a small potted plant and some folded items. In the background, a large, ornate Gothic cathedral with a prominent circular rose window and multiple spires is visible under a clear blue sky. The scene is set in a sunlit courtyard or plaza.

CAMERON BECK

Tom Hollander

The antagonist, but not the villain. Cameron's no genius: what he does is find geniuses. An idealist driven by a desire to understand the mysteries of the universe, Cameron hires Jensen to create the world-changing computer "Charlie Big Potatoes". Having taken out a loan from dangerous investors, and with the activation password for "Charlie Big Potatoes" now hidden behind unbreakable code, Cameron's life is on the line if he doesn't retrieve the diary and get "Charlie Big Potatoes" working again.



JOY BAXTER

Meréana Tomlinson

A wayward teen whose need for attention from her guardians presents itself as rebellion. When Joy discovers her tutor, “Miss Brook”, is really Iris Nixon, her zest for adventure leads her to become embroiled in Cameron and Iris’s game of cat and mouse – and in the process, Joy must decide who has her best interests at heart and who is using her for their own gain.



ALFIE BIRD

Sacha Dhawan

Alfie Bird, a former clickbait journalist with high aspirations, runs a YouTube channel called ‘Two Seconds to Midnight’ for the ‘FIND IRIS NIXON’ enthusiasts. Some might call him an Iris expert, others, an Iris obsessive – but he believes he is a true journalist. He teases his audience with what they crave the most – answers to their questions: who and where is Iris Nixon? But, with the only sightings of Iris across the globe unconfirmed, bogus phone calls from impersonators to contend with, and no concrete evidence, Alfie is unable to solve the mystery. Until, he receives an urgent phone call from Iris to meet him in Rome, transforming his online world of shadowy conspiracies into a team-up with an Iris he can believe in.



NICO CASTERMAN

Maya Sansa

Nico Casterman, our hardworking cop who plays by the rules. Nico first meets Iris Nixon posing under the pseudonym Harriet Brook – so when Nico and her colleague Teo are brought on board to investigate a murder, she’s surprised to recognise the prime suspect as ‘Harriet’, and is led to realise she is just one of Iris’ personas. . As we move through the series, in joining the chase, Nico takes paths we least expect and converts to a version of herself she never thought she’d become.



JENSEN LIND

Kristofer Hivju

Jensen is a man driven by a curiosity, a desire to look ever deeper into the fundamental nature of the universe. Though, at first, he sees beauty in his creation, he later descends into a violent rage, not wanting “Charlie Big Potatoes” to be reactivated. For Jensen, the computer is something far greater, far more dangerous than he anticipated, for reasons he refuses to share, to the point that he is locked in a mysterious unresponsive state when we first meet him. However, with so many around him desperate for the machine to be activated, Jensen is coaxed into sharing his beliefs about what activating “Charlie Big Potatoes” means for the world.



COLONEL MESKI

Angela Bruce

Colonel Meski is a military woman with a fearsome skillset. She’s Cameron’s head of security and fixer. Not afraid to challenge Cameron, and her opinion is highly valued by him. Where Cameron goes, Meski follows, and when he travels to Sardinia to find Iris, and then to Rome, she gets him there. Loyal to her core, she’s willing to risk her own safety to save him.



HUGO PYM

Harry Lloyd

Hugo Pym is the acting Head of the Intragroup Committee – a representative of “The Money”, the investors of Cameron Beck’s project “Charlie Big Potatoes”. With a desire to impress an ambition to be the permanent Head of the Intragroup Committee, and a vicious streak, Pym needs “Charlie Big Potatoes” to provide a cure for a condition suffered by his boss’s granddaughter. However, when the data he needs is intentionally withheld, we learn of his favourite game – playing with life and death.

A woman with short blonde hair is sitting cross-legged on a wooden deck, leaning against a vertical wooden post. She is wearing a light-colored button-down shirt and dark pants, and is focused on typing on a laptop. To her left is a dark glass bottle, and in front of her is a glass of red wine. The deck is made of light-colored wooden planks. In the background, there is a calm body of water and distant, hazy mountains under a clear sky. The scene is bathed in warm, golden light, suggesting late afternoon or early morning. The text 'KEY LOCATIONS' is overlaid in large, white, sans-serif capital letters across the lower half of the image, with two light-colored diagonal bars intersecting it.

KEY LOCATIONS

KEY LOCATIONS

Villa Polissena (Rome)

Used as: Baxter Mansion - Exteriors

Key scenes: Nico brings Joy home, Iris as 'Miss Harriet Brook'.

Biblioteca Angelica and Piazza Mattei (Rome)

Used as: Library

Key scenes: Alfie asks for the Second Book of Aristotle's Poetics – inside it is hollow and contains Jensen's diary. Outside the library – Iris greets Alfie.

Bunker Soratte (Sant'Oreste, Lazio)

Used as: Caliburn Interiors – Laboratories and corridors, security room, the lounge, airlock, security room, tunnel

Piazza di Santa Croce (Florence)

Used as: Itself

Key Scenes: When Cameron's and Iris first meet after she solves the puzzle

Campo Imperatore (L'Aquila, Abruzzo)

Used as: Caliburn Exteriors. Isolated Roads, Helicopter Landing Pad, Caliburn Gates

Monte Ciocchi (Rome)

Used as: Viewpoint

Key scene: Meski is at a spectacular viewpoint overlooking Rome – she unleashes a drone.

Acquedotto Claudio (Rome)

Used for: Rural bus stop sequence

Acquapiper (Rome)

Used for: Abandoned Aqua Park sequence

Key Scenes: Alfie interviews Joy for Two Seconds to Midnight. Joy steals Iris' backpack

Azienda Agricola – Procoio (Rome)

Used for: Ghost Village

Key Scenes: Iris tries to run for it – Bruni's strike team attacks.

Corviale (Rome)

Used as: Freddo's base / Urban Housing Project

Ex Cantine Sociali (Rome)

Used as: Abandoned Farm sequence

Spiaggia di Calamosca (Cagliari - Sardinia) 4.32

Used as: Tourist Beach (mainland)

Key scene: Iris steals a tourist's beach bag to get hold of a phone

Via Canelles (Cagliari - Sardinia)

Used as: Apartment 7 – one of Iris' hideouts

Capo Caccia (Alghero - Sardinia)

Used as: Winding clifftop / Sardinian country roads

Baia delle Ninfe, Pineta Mugoni (Alghero – Sardinia)

Used for: Location of Iris' cottage (custom built)

La Frana (Sardinia)

Used for: Somewhere spectacular / Cameron's helicopter flies in

Cinecitta Studios: Set Builds for:

- Caliburn interiors – Jensen's suite, Joy's Room, Cameron's Room, "Charlie Big Potatoes", Atrium, Control Room
- Alfie's flat
- Apartment 7 – interiors
- Stairwells

Other Key Landmarks featured in the production: Fontana Dell' Acqua Paola, Circo Massimo



INTERVIEWS

NEIL CROSS

WRITER/CREATOR

Where did the idea for the series come from?

I was flicking through the channels, and my DVD collection, looking for this precise show I was in the mood to watch. I couldn't find it. So I wrote it.

Aside from the plot, what is the show really about?

Honestly, in one sense I'm not sure it's "about" anything, really, not in the grand scheme of things. I just wanted to write a fast-moving, sophisticated and exciting thriller with a European setting, a lot of blue sky, the odd sports car and some great clothes. I wanted it to be witty and glamorous in a modern-old-fashioned way, which meant drawing on a lot of things I love. There's a lot of Alfred Hitchcock in there, for instance - North by Northwest, or To Catch a Thief. And I love the kind of lush, long-ago adventure series produced by Lew Grade; The Saint, say, or The Persuaders! Shows where the world was a bit heightened, a bit dangerous, yet full of jaunty sports cars and unapologetically glamorous.

Other elements of the story are tremendously indebted to the greatest British television writer who ever lived; Nigel Kneale. Most famously in Quatermass, Kneale explored the kind of ideas you might call cosmic horror – the bloodcurdling notion that humanity is utterly insignificant in the face of vast, ancient forces that lie beyond our comprehension.

How much is it founded in current concerns and how much in ancient themes? Should it feel topical or timely?

It's definitely contemporary – but it's not designed to feel topical, like one of those shows that's been "ripped from the headlines". Even if I'd wanted it be that, the present now moves much too fast for something as slow-to-produce as a TV drama to keep pace with it. In some ways it's the opposite. Elements of the Iris Affair belong to the same tradition as Prometheus, or Frankenstein, or Oppenheimer – narratives rooted in our fear of the unknown, and our paradoxical compulsion to pursue knowledge that might destroy us. These themes are as old as the hills... which hopefully makes them timeless rather than timely.

How did you research it?

I don't do much dedicated research. For one thing, I'm much too disorganised. For another, I've learned that research is sometimes a form of procrastination brilliantly masquerading as diligence. I just tend to throw in things I'm interested in. This is partly on the basis that if I find something interesting, other people might too. I do tend to check my facts once I've written them into a story, though, and revise them when necessary. Which is quite often: I get things wrong all the time. And I still have immense trouble summarising how a book code works.

"Elements of the Iris Affair belong to the same tradition as Prometheus, or Frankenstein, or Oppenheimer — narratives rooted in our fear of the unknown, and our paradoxical compulsion to pursue knowledge that might destroy us."

How much of what we see and hear is based in fact and how much sci-fi, extrapolation, surmise or conjecture?

I borrowed certain ideas from the theoretical physicists Roger Penrose and Paul Davies that are, strictly speaking, conjecture. But the kind of conjecture that makes me want to sleep with the lights on.

How scared should we be?

Honestly, I don't know. But I do know that fear is the enemy of freedom, and in many ways the enemy of a life well lived. Being scared never got anyone anywhere, or assisted in the process of rational decision making. If we care, we should definitely be attentive; and if there's something we could do, then we should do it. But if we don't care, and the outcome is out of our control, we might as well make a Martini, be with people we love, and put on some Bossa Nova. →

"I feel that, if Iris had just applied to become part of an Only Connect team, her life might've turned out very differently."

Where is it set and why is it set there?

Caliburn, Sardinia, Rome... The show is filmed in Italy. This is because Italy is one of the most beautiful places in the world, and I'd spent a wildly disproportionate part of my professional life filming in London, in February, at 3am.

How did you conceive of Iris – did the idea of a character come before her story?

The character came first. In the early days I described her as "Bad" Will Hunting. Imagine a more solitary and itinerant version of Matt Damon's character; one who never put down roots, never fell in love with Minnie Driver, never got to university, and is also Niamh Algar. Before meeting Cameron, Iris was pretty content living a solitary, somewhat liminal existence: not quite on the margins of society, but not far from it either. Drifting from place to place, and low-paid job to low-paid job.

She's addicted to quizzes because I spend a lot of time watching Only Connect, and feel a certain

affinity with the occasionally somewhat awkward people who take part in it. I feel that, if Iris had just applied to become part of an Only Connect team, her life might've turned out very differently.

As it is, her rationalist amorality may at times verge on nihilism, but underneath she's got a keen (if idiosyncratic) sense of right and wrong. Accordingly – from a certain perspective and with a squint of the eye – you might think of her as a modern, amoral Ronin. Not that she'd ever admit it.

And Cameron?

Cameron certainly starts out as an antagonist, but he's never really a bad guy. In many ways he represents the very best of us; he's an optimist; a believer in the limitless potential of the human race.

In youthful, private moments he might've once pictured himself as becoming a bit like Tony Stark. However, while Cameron is brilliant, he's no genius. What he does is find geniuses, and fund them. Not because he wants to exploit their intellectual property, but because he's excited by big ideas... and because he finds their company exhilarating.

His goal in life, as he puts it, is to help brilliant people do brilliant things. But when we meet him in this story, all that optimism has curdled into the sunk cost-fallacy. In pursuit of high ideals, he's made some poor choices. And now he owes very bad, very powerful people a great deal of money.

Like all great enemies, Cameron and Iris are perversely fond of each other. Each admires the other for their

brilliance, their audacity, their singlemindedness. It's the kind of enmity that's almost friendship. It's Fischer vs. Spassky. Ali vs. Frasier. Hepburn vs. Tracy.

What do Niamh Algar and Tom Hollander bring to their respective roles?

Niamh and Tom work in completely different ways, but one of the great pleasures of working with really, really good actors is that they know when, and how, to surprise you with your own material – thus making you feel like a better writer.

What type of show is this – what tone were you looking to achieve? Deadly serious; funny, Bleak, Life-affirming?

I'm not sure I've actually got it in me to be life-affirming. I could probably shoot for deadly serious, but the membrane between "deadly serious" and "self-important" is terrifyingly fragile.

I just want the audience to be entertained. Which means I want them to be intrigued, and excited, and thrilled, and sometimes scared. I want them to spend time in places they'd love to be, with people they'd enjoy spending time with... each of whom seems intent on destroying the other.

Interesting that you made the goal of the really bad guys – The Money – something good (saving the girl with Fatal Familial Insomnia). Why?

Essentially because nobody thinks they're the bad guy. And I was intrigued by the idea that all this villainy is rooted in something as small, and as human as wanting to save the life of a child. ■

TIMOTHY BRICKNELL

SERIES EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

What were the main challenges presented by Neil Cross's scripts for *The Iris Affair*?

When I first come to a project, I am always drawn by the writing and the characters. My first read is never a critical read of, oh my god, that would be really difficult to do, where do we film this? Blah, blah, blah, I just read it. And Neil is a really special writer. He can make things seem accessible and fun and exciting and then every now and then blindsides you with a really powerful philosophical conversation about our place in the universe. So I love the combination of those two things.

What is this show about?

It's about a woman on the run. But also- every now and then- it unpretentiously reminds us of our insignificance in the universe with a good dose of cosmic dread. You know, the bigger idea, that is gradually revealed and never dwelled on too much in the show, is that this incredible piece of technology they've created in a bunker in Slovenia is actually going to serve as a beacon for a dead civilization out beyond the Boötes Void. But basically, it's a clutch of very strange and unique characters chasing each other around Italy. Which is fun.

I love that nothing is black and white. No goodies and baddies. Someone may feel like they're good in one scene, but then they do something really awful

in another. So you're always vacillating between who you find most empathetic and who you feel is righteous or not. A bit like *Breaking Bad* did.

How did you cast *The Iris Affair*?

Casting Iris herself seemed like it would be an impossible task, but Niamh [Algar] sent in a self-tape that was so good that actually it was very easy for everybody. She has something behind her eyes that finds life and the universe slightly absurd and funny. She's not playing the comedy at all, but there's always that sense of, you know, nothing really matters. That feeling comes very naturally to her and it's really important for Iris as a character. Niamh is also incredibly fit, she's a really good boxer and she's got wit and intelligence about her as well. She is perfect.

And how about Tom Hollander as Cameron Beck?

Neil's writing and this character are absolutely in Tom's wheelhouse in terms of big ideas delivered articulately in the moment, whilst maintaining a believable character journey. I think initially Neil probably thought that Cameron was going to be the villain. But then you end up rather liking him. That's the sympathy that Tom can bring, along with ferocious intelligence and wit. And even Iris really quite likes him. There's an amazing scene at the end when he is shocked that Iris actually touches him for

"Neil is a really special writer, I think. He can make things seem accessible and fun and exciting and then every now and then blindsides you with a really powerful philosophical conversation about our place in the universe."

the first time, with love. It's just a hand to a cheek, but it means a lot. These two characters admire each other's intelligence and outlook on their place in the universe, even though they're coming at opposite sides of the same problem. Cameron is an evangelist for everything that "Charlie Big Potatoes" could do. Iris is very suspicious of it and sort of mortally curious as to what Jensen discovered it might be able to do once it was turned on. That's the big frustration between them.





How much of what we see in *The Iris Affair* is based in fact and how much is science fiction or conjecture?

Neil is incredibly interested in technology and the bigger philosophical questions that science fiction traditionally asks. But it's definitely not a sci-fi show and nor is it a show about artificial intelligence, really. It's a Frankenstein story, really – as humans we've created something that will eventually consume us and wipe us out. That's what he's interested in. The questions he asks about technology are obviously everywhere in the world and dealt with in

different ways by different stories. But what I love about this is that it's never po-faced about it. It's not too earnest. It acknowledges that these questions exist, but it doesn't sit for hours and cry into a puddle about them.

This is a series that is literally always on the move, story and location-wise. Where was it shot? The series is filmed in Sardinia, which remains in the story until the beginning of episode four, when Iris escapes the island. After that we moved to Rome, and there's quite a lot of different natural looks in and

around Rome itself. You're very quickly up into the hills or out to the coast and there are various ruins and underground nuclear bunkers and farmhouses in the middle of nowhere – we've definitely made good use of everything there is in and around Rome.

Coming to Italy has worked well- there's such a professional film culture of craftspeople and technicians and designers that I just knew that we would be well looked after. Plus, I speak Italian, so that was obviously a big plus for me! It's been great throughout.

TERRY MCDONOUGH AND SARAH O'GORMAN

DIRECTORS

What was your initial response to Neil Cross's scripts?

Sarah O'Gorman: Neil's scripts were an absolute gift to a director. A thrilling plot with smart, playful characters, sophisticated themes and ideas, all set in beautiful sun-drenched Italy. Dealing with complicated, dark concepts, Neil's writing has humour throughout which was a joy to bring to life.

Terry McDonough: I remember thinking the idea of this supercomputer we call "Charlie Big Potatoes", which is the spine of it, was absolutely fascinating. It's almost like it's not science fiction anymore because these supercomputers are way ahead of what we're aware of at the moment. It's all going on out there. Whether or not one can develop its own brain or not, I don't know. But that was the first thing I asked and Neil said, 'Yeah, it won't be long.'

What did you think you could bring as director? What did you want it to look like?

TMcD: Because "Charlie Big Potatoes" isn't tangible in effect – he's kind of living in this glass case – what I thought would be good was to give a voyeuristic element to it, a third party kind of point of view in many scenes. Use a wider lens, give it a Hitchcockian kind of vibe, just to give a stronger sense of portent for the audience. Even in a scene that seems quite harmless, where it's just people chatting about

whatever, I wanted the audience to feel that there's something going on. There's somebody watching, there's something brewing all the time. I mean this is a thriller, so that's for me one of the best techniques.

SOG: I wanted to make sure this action-packed show was as exciting and compelling on the screen as it was on the page. To focus on the complexity and humanity of our characters, the excitement of the exquisite plotting and action – think fast cars, shoot outs, helicopters – and the sheer beauty of our stunning locations and sets. And to link all of this to the big moral question at the heart of it.

How important is location and that this is a show on the move?

SOG: We went to some incredible locations for the show. Sardinia, Florence, the heart of Rome, the wonderful countryside surrounding it and the breath-taking lakes and mountains of Abruzzo. These locations, steeped in history and culture, were inspiring and reflective of the themes of the show and were integral elements of the story.

TMcD: What was great was being able to contrast between the light in Sardinia and Rome and the subterranean world of "Charlie Big Potatoes" with all its grey tones and the concrete and the brutalist element of it and no daylight. We filmed in this old

nuclear bunker up in the hills and it was like being underground in a German prisoner of war camp.

What were the main challenges of the shoot?

TMcD: Not putting on eighteen stone eating Tiramisu! I mean it was such a well-crewed, lovely production so there really weren't that many challenges we couldn't overcome. In Italy they've all studied film so they're genuinely interested in what you're doing. They're not worried about when they get to go home. It's not just a job, it's a vocation for them and you can really feel that vibe and it enhances the whole production.

SOG: Every shoot has its challenges, and we were filming in Rome over the summer... let's just say the thermals stayed firmly in the suitcase and the factor 50 never left my side!

How did you work with Niamh and Tom on their characters?

SOG: Niamh and Tom were a joy to work with, as were the rest of the cast. Thoughtful, clever, team players – full of ideas and fun.

TMcD: They're both very, very open to suggestions but what was great was that they also both had their take on what they wanted the character to be. We discussed that in detail and in rehearsals before →

"It is playful and high octane, intimate and expansive, thought provoking and thrilling. It was as exciting and as fun to make as it was to read."

we started filming. So we all had a pretty good idea about where the destination would be.

Aside from the bare bones of the plot, what is the show about?

SOG: The Iris Affair is a chase thriller. Genius Iris unwittingly unlocks a dangerously powerful, world-changing piece of technology, then steals the code to it and vanishes. Philanthropist Cameron Beck wants it back. The chase begins.

What type of show is this – what tone were you looking to achieve?

TMcD: The whole thing has a bit of flippancy about it. It's quite light on its feet. That's important. From my point of view with performances, you know, with the comedy, we had to let the moments do the work for themselves – don't try and play it as comedy. Because that way it contrasts nicely with the incoming scene or the outgoing scene.

SOG: The show is unique. It will make you feel all of the feelings, pretty much all of the time! It is playful and high octane, intimate and expansive, thought provoking and thrilling. It was as exciting and as fun to make as it was to read. ■





NIAMH ALGAR

IRIS NIXON

Who is Iris?

Iris is a total outlier — Neil Cross described her as having ‘a brain the size of a planet,’ and that really fits. She’s brilliant, a fugitive, can hack any system, and actually relaxes by solving insanely difficult puzzles. In some ways, she functions almost like a computer, copying, storing, and processing only what she considers important, precise, and logical. She’s obsessive, manipulative, and unpredictable — spotting people’s weaknesses and using them to get what she needs. Dangerous, unique, and entirely her own — not motivated by romance or defined by trauma, but shaped by her intelligence and curiosity. Meeting her as she’s recruited by Cameron Beck [Tom Hollander] is just the beginning of discovering who she really is.”

Who is...

Cameron is this tech billionaire who’s basically built what could be the world’s most powerful computer. Iris is brought in to work it — but it’s locked behind codes created by its inventor, Jensen Lind, who’s now catatonic after what seems like a breakdown. He won’t give up the codes, so she’s handed his diary to figure it out.

Iris has this irresistible compulsion to solve problems. It’s like a need — a part of her that won’t let her rest

until she cracks it. Problem-solving isn’t just what she does, it’s who she is.

And then there’s Cameron. He and Iris have this brilliantly unique dynamic. He starts as her boss, but quickly becomes her worst enemy, turning their world into an explosive, high-stakes game of hide and seek — full of tension, danger, and unpredictability.

What do we know of her backstory?

Iris’s backstory is deliberately mysterious — we, as the audience, meet her exactly as she is in the moment: on the run, sharp, and perfectly in control. But the way she moves, reinvents herself, and stays ahead of danger hints that this has been her life from a very young age. She’s constantly had to adapt, survive, and rely only on herself. In fact, she’s a code-switcher, someone who changes the way she presents herself depending on the situation — an analogy Neil Cross really liked when I first met him. If you were to describe her, she’s like Will from Good Will Hunting, Jason Bourne, and Tom Ripley rolled into one — brilliant, resourceful, and unflinchingly independent. She has no family she mentions, doesn’t allow herself to get close to anyone, and sees human connection as secondary. That is, until Cameron comes along. He’s the first person she genuinely enjoys spending time with, and the first to challenge the walls she’s built around herself.



"Dangerous, unique, and entirely her own — not motivated by romance or defined by trauma, but shaped by her intelligence and curiosity."

Is she at all empathetic to the audience?

I think she's empathetic, but in her own way. At the start, she doesn't respond emotionally like you'd expect, and that's deliberate — when she does start to show feeling, it's her reconnecting with emotion on her own terms. She channels hurt into solving problems, and her compulsion to fix things leaves little room for friendships or romance. She's original in so many ways, and that challenges the audience's perception of her. But ultimately, people can empathize with her drive, her intelligence, and the way she navigates the world entirely on her own terms.

What then is her relationship with Cameron?

Iris's relationship with Cameron is fascinating because it's completely new for her. He starts as her

boss, but quickly becomes so much more — the first person she genuinely enjoys spending time with. Cameron challenges her in ways no one else does, and for the first time, she allows herself to connect on a human level. Their dynamic is unpredictable, tense, and sometimes explosive — it's a mix of trust, rivalry, and a game of wits. He brings out sides of her that no one else can, and that makes their relationship thrilling and essential to the story.

And her relationship with Joy?

Iris sees something of herself in Joy — a younger version of someone who's grown up without real care or love. Joy is essentially a token child in a wealthy household that doesn't really notice her, and Iris has always felt like she didn't belong in any system or structure. When she reinvents herself as Joy's tutor, she becomes the first person who's completely honest with her — even if it's not what a teen might want to hear. Iris talks to her almost like a super-intelligent older sister, guiding her, challenging her, and cutting through the nonsense. When Cameron kidnaps Joy to get to Iris, it becomes a real test for her. It's high stakes, but it also highlights how much she cares for Joy in her own way, and how protective and resourceful she can be when someone finally matters to her.

Iris is supposed to understand the theoretical science. How did you get your head round it?

Getting my head around Iris's theoretical science was a challenge because she thinks in such a precise, highly analytical way. She has a multitude of 'monologues' running at once — the problem she's solving and Iris herself solving it in real time. On my first week in Italy, I saw the drawings of "Charlie Big

Potatoes". Lara, our production designer, and Neil had mapped out how a computer could take over a facility — what it could shut down, manipulate — and created this incredible Bond-style set. Seeing it in reality made it click. The writing is brilliant, and I had to fully trust Neil's vision. It's all grounded in research, entirely plausible, and completely interconnected, which made it easy to invest in Iris's world — honestly, it could probably function somewhere in the world right now.

What is the essential plot of *The Iris Affair*?

The Iris Affair is a sun-drenched, high stakes game of Cat & Mouse. The show follows Iris, a brilliant fugitive, as she's pulled into a world of high-tech danger, forcing her to outthink enemies, solve impossible problems, and confront the rare connections she allows herself

And what has it been like to play a character who is so many characters in one?

I've loved playing Iris — she's so many characters in one, constantly shifting and reinventing herself, and making all those 'sub-Iris' personas feel real was a huge challenge. Then there's the adrenaline side: gunfights, jumping off boats, leaping from buildings, blowing up things — and racing a Ferrari at high speed through the mountains in Italy was the absolute highlight. On top of all that, working with Tom Hollander has been one of the absolute highlights of this project — a true master of his craft. Playing Iris has been exhilarating, terrifying, and completely thrilling all at once — and that's exactly what it feels like to be her. ■

TOM HOLLANDER

CAMERON BECK

Who is Cameron?

Cameron Beck is an enthusiast. The story of *The Iris Affair* is a sort of struggle for the soul of a computer. Iris [Niamh Algar] believes the computer to be a force for ill. Cameron, who raised the money for the computer to be built, believes it to be a force for good. The plot is her trying to kill it and him trying to keep it alive by getting back the activation sequence that she has stolen.

Within that, there's more: does Cameron hate Iris or does he actually love her? And there's this debate going on throughout it about what's the moral status of this enormously powerful thing which is capable, as Cameron says, of solving climate change, curing cancer and solving poverty. Or, as Iris says, of being used for weaponry, stealing secrets and the creation of false information.

So it's a very contemporary debate turned into a sort of Wacky Races, structured thriller in which you would say that I'm Dick Dastardly and she's Lady Penelope. Except that I'm not Dick Dastardly because Neil Cross, who's a very, very lovely collaborator, was happy to let me be a bit more sympathetic than that. You start to feel for Cameron's point of view, and then there's another villain created. So then there's someone else bearing down on Cameron, and he's the proper villain.

What drives Cameron?

Well there's the fight for the soul of the computer but what's really motivating Cameron is he's in fear for his own life. He's a rich man that's over-borrowed, so effectively he actually doesn't have anything, even though he has a helicopter. Dark forces called 'The Money' own everything now, and he's going to be killed if Iris doesn't bring the activation sequence back and if he can't get the computer going again.

So he's not 'the bad guy,' in all of this?

He's not a bad guy. He wants good outcomes. He believes in "Charlie Big Potatoes" [the quantum computer] good outcomes – as I said, he thinks "Charlie Big Potatoes" is capable of curing climate change. Cameron had a revelatory experience when he was young where he saw God. What motivated him to want to create this quantum computer is that fundamentally it's a creative entity – it's a super being that you can worship. Not suggesting that there's a religion in this or anything, but that at some level Cameron believes in "Charlie Big Potatoes" in the way that people believe in gods. It literally is a higher power. It can think faster, it's more capable, it can do anything. It makes Chat GPT look like a like a geriatric with a Zimmer frame.

Why did this part interest you?

What I am definitely interested in these days is playing characters that are relatable. I don't want to →



"But it's interesting to play characters who are relatable. To whom the audience can. I am definitely interested in the grey of things, as that seems to reflect my experience of the world and the life that I've had."

play villains particularly at the moment. I mean, I shouldn't make a statement like that in a press pack. It's a silly thing to say. But it's interesting to play characters who are relatable. To whom the audience can. I am definitely interested in the grey of things, as that seems to reflect my experience of the world and the life that I've had. I feel with Neil in that respect there was a meeting of minds.

How much are we in the realm of fantasy and how much reality here?

Well Neil [Cross] is a nerd and has researched all this stuff deeply, but I know that it's all theoretically possible. A very quick Google search will reveal physicists and academics talking about quantum computers and nanoparticles and topographical computing systems... which is why I found the script extremely difficult to learn! Niamh and I are playing people who are much cleverer than we are, and every so often the wheels come off when we can't say the lines! Because we don't — we can't — we just don't know what we're talking about. I would go, 'Shit. I'm just going to be so busted...' We just ended up laughing at each other.

What is the crux of Cameron and Iris's relationship?

The crux is I've employed her initially. A lot of the story happens before the series starts. Jensen [Lind, Kristofer Hivju], the genius scientist who built "Charlie Big Potatoes", Jensen's gone catatonic. The computer's gone to sleep. I need to get the computer to start again. I need someone clever enough to decode Jensen's encrypted activation sequence, which he has in his diary, but which no one understands except Jensen. So I need a brilliant code breaker.

In order to find someone I set an online trail, an online competition. Because it's so difficult, anyone that can solve it online will be sufficiently clever to solve the activation sequence, much in the way that they found Bletchley Park people in the Second World War.

And so that produces this woman, Iris. She is quite a character. She seems to be in some way rather detached from the world and is not interested in material things but she's absolutely brilliant at solving puzzles. I will say that I think Cameron is a bit in love with her. Whether she's in love with him is hard to say because her emotions are not really available to her. Until it's too late.

And how does Cameron relate to Joy (and vice versa)?

I mean, she's a bit lost, Joy. She's an orphan, so she's a seeker of love and safety in this very unsafe world. She believes in Cameron as this avuncular figure, and through Joy we see Cameron expressing his vulnerability and his sadness at his own life. So it's an interesting relationship. There's a very

funny generational difference that's shown through Cameron not knowing any of the music she's into and her being shruggy about stuff that he loves. She's a teenager, so it's a father, uncle, niece, daughter sort of vibe. But she's very clever, and so she's challenging him the whole time and as she discovers that the world has been misruled by adults. That is also a very contemporary theme: the younger generation despising the rest of us and seeing no leadership or anything worth aspiring to. So she's an interesting character, and another example of how this is a show where there are several different protagonists in a way by the end. Joy's journey is quite as interesting as mine or Iris's.

How would you characterise The Iris Affair?

It's quite wacky, but it's very bold and it's very high concept. And it's very exciting and it's very glamorous and it's very hooky in the way that a thriller needs to be. You know, at the end of each episode you're thinking, 'Oh my god, what's going to happen next?' There are lots of reversals and clever plot twists and fast cars but there's also all of the moral grey areas.

I will say this: Neil [Cross], is incredibly good at grey. There's a wonderful speech in it that I have about Neil Armstrong, that the suit that Neil Armstrong wore could only be made because of a Nazi scientist who subjected people to pressure tests and freezing temperature tests that killed them. So no worst, no best-ness. That duality is going all the way through it. Neil was a big fan of Rev and Neil himself almost was ordained at some point. So he as a person is fascinated by the duality of what it is to be a human being — of how the dark and the light are always intertwined. ■

MERÉANA TOMLINSON

JOY BAXTER

How would you describe your character Joy?

Joy has very clearly come from a turbulent background. Her parents are both dead and she's been raised since the age of about nine or ten by her guardians who were like her parents' best friends – and she doesn't seem to get on with them too well. Joy's incredibly smart and she can pick things up and put things down very easily. She is tutored by Harriet Brooke, who then turns out to be Iris Nixon [Niamh Algar] herself. And Harriet and Joy have this sort of relationship that Joy hasn't had before, where she's treated like an actual person. It means Joy becomes very loyal to her and I think that thread of loyalty runs throughout the show – but Joy's loyalties, and her character, change.

What happens when Cameron [Tom Hollander] appears in her life?

I think that Cameron has an understanding of Joy that Miss Brooke didn't have either. As much as Miss Brooke and Joy get on and share these amazing ideas together, I think that Cameron is more alike with her in terms of her emotional wellbeing and her emotional state. She latches on to him at the start for survival and then that turns into actual companionship. That's what it is – Miss Brooke is her teacher and Cameron is her companion. Because a lot of her relationships with adults or older people thus far have been them speaking down to her or chiding her.

With both Iris and then even more so with Cameron, she feels that she's on an even keel with them and that they respect her more.

The other thing is that you don't see Joy interact with any people her age in the show. There's nobody else on the show that's anywhere near her age; she's seventeen. I think that gap between how you are treated based on your intellect as opposed to based on your age is really interesting, in the way that's depicted in the series.

Do Cameron and Joy end up as friends or is there more of a father-daughter thing going on?

I don't think it's so much father-daughter. Maybe Cameron does. I think he does sort of feel responsible for her and fear for her safety in a way that a father would. But I think for Joy, it's more like an older cousin or a big brother kind of thing. She's probably not sure, but she does know that he doesn't speak down to her, and she definitely likes that.

What did you like about Neil Cross's writing?

Neil is fantastic at writing to sound like a 17 year old girl, to be honest. Sometimes I will just say something, and he's like, 'That's funny. Yeah, I'm gonna use that at some point.' I have a quote book in my Notes app. It's just funny things that people have said and I'm like, 'That's going in the quote book.' I said to Neil,



'Read my quote book,' and he just sat there giggling at it for five minutes. He was like, 'I like this one. I definitely think he's going to take away some of it.'

Any gems you can share?

Um I told him I was having a catharsis at one point. I came and sat down and he was like, 'You good?' I said, 'Neil, I'm having a catharsis.' And he said, 'Oh my God, I really I wish I could put that in. I can see Cameron's face, see the face Tom will pull when he hears that.'

Is your catharsis in the script?

You'll have to wait and see!

SACHA DHAWAN

ALFIE BIRD

Who is Alfie?

Alfie is probably one of the most unique characters that I've ever played. I absolutely adore him. He's a former clickbait journalist who, sadly, exists on the margins of society with a diet consisting of cuppa soups and pot noodles. But he has a huge heart. He genuinely cares about people's welfare and I think he represents the underrepresented, a bit like Iris. He has huge aspirations to make a better life for himself, which is why he's poured his heart into his own YouTube channel, which is called Two Seconds to Midnight.

That channel specifically targets the Find Iris Nixon enthusiasts. And with this channel, you see Alfie miraculously transform from being incredibly meek and mild to this sharp witted, charismatic purveyor of hidden secrets. I'd say that Alfie's not even sure if Iris is real or part of some bigger conspiracy, but his YouTube channel certainly gives him a space where people will sit up and take notice, and they'll listen to what he has to say.

Is attention all he's after, or is he fascinated by the story itself?

I think it's a combination of both. He's absolutely obsessed with Iris. But thanks to her he's now got thousands of subscribers as well. People will often ridicule Alfie a little bit because of how he comes

across. But out of everyone, Alfie's the one person that Iris makes direct contact with. She ends up whisking him away from his mundane existence and alters the course of his life forever.

What did you make of the scripts?

I'm a huge fan of Neil Cross. I hadn't worked with him until now, but I was already familiar with much of his work, including the exceptional Luther. When I read the scripts, I thought they were brilliant, real page-turners. Neil has a remarkable talent for creating television that's not only gripping and entertaining but also deeply in tune with what's happening in the world today.

Did your research take you down any rabbit holes?

I think, with the rise of conspiracy theories, the timing couldn't be more perfect, the world feels ripe for this kind of story. We're all looking for answers, and I've definitely found myself going down the rabbit hole of conspiracy theories!

With Alfie, I explored certain online channels, the way people present themselves on them, and who's really behind that content. I took elements from that. But for me, the fun was in discovering how Alfie transforms when he's performing on his YouTube channel.



You meet Alfie first through that channel, it's all a performance. Then, later, there's that phone call with Iris, and you see the real Alfie in his flat in Croydon. He's wandering around in his underpants, completely different from the polished persona. I really wanted to capture that contrast. That's where the real fun lies.

Do you see him as a pathetic character or as a hero?

I definitely see him as a hero. He represents the underrepresented, and he genuinely wants to do good in the world, it's not just about selfish motives. That's why he's a journalist: he wants to shed light on the untold stories that people need to hear. He's driven by a desire to make a real difference, much like Iris in her own way. She's not just on the run for the sake of it, she's holding onto answers that could change the world forever.

MAYA SANSA

NICO CASTERMAN

Who are you playing in *The Iris Affair*?

Nico Casterman is the chief inspector of police on Sardinia. I think she's in a moment in her career where she's dealing with smaller types of crime, and she's quite relaxed about everything - as much as a policewoman can be relaxed – and then Iris happens.

How does she come into contact with Iris [Niamh Algar] and Joy [Meréana Tomlinson] in the first instance?

Nico is on her way home having finished her shift. On a cliff in Sardinia, she sees Joy staring into the void all by herself and she worries, realizing that the girl has no intention of stepping back and that she is holding some pills in her hands. She takes her back home to her family, and she meets her tutor – who is Harriet Brooke aka Iris. They have a brief exchange, but things get complicated very quickly and soon she realizes that this tutor is somebody else entirely. But then she becomes something of an outlaw – trying to find her and arrest her. And it's at that point that I realise that there's so much more behind Iris' story.

Does Nico get involved in the super-computing part of the show?

Haha, not really. But I did. Once I read it [the script] I couldn't help myself – I had to dive into the sci-fi, the fictional world, try and understand the science

of quantum computing . Little by little you read articles, you watch interviews, and all of a sudden it all comes together.

What did you like about the part and show when you saw the script?

Well I have to say I was – and I am – a big fan of the TV show *Luther* so when I saw that this was written by Neil Cross I was very excited. And then I did all my drama training in England so I'm very keen on British TV drama, actors and writing. So it was exciting just to be in an English project on Sky.

More than all that though I love how in Neil's writing he's able to find lightness and humour even in the darkest moments. I think the way Neil deals with the storytelling of violence is very sophisticated and respectful of the audience. There is always something going on underneath. It's complex, there's stuff to think about, even though the thriller on top of it all is absolutely gripping.



KRISTOFER HIVJU

JENSEN LIND

Who do you play in *The Iris Affair*?

Jensen Lind is a Norwegian scientist. He has been looked at as quite controversial, but respected. He is a bit crazy, a man thinking out of the box. He lost his daughter and then he lost his wife and that took him into a dark place. Then he's approached by Cameron [Tom Hollander] and they set out on this project of proving God's existence. They create a miracle in quantum physics – for me it is the closest you get to magic, scientific magic. Until something makes Jensen try to destroy 10-15 years of working in this compound making the biggest revolutionary device in history. He decides to destroy it and destroy everything in his way, to stop anyone or anybody from waking it up. So that's the mystery of the show – why?

He is also, we see, an artist...

He is a very gifted painter. And I think he does it to get out of the mathematical world and as a kind of self-therapy. I don't think he could have solved anything without his art. It was an interesting thing for the series to show his pictures – he's not showing trying to copy Rembrandt or anybody, he's just trying to express something. He paints his fear of what can happen.

Are any of Lind's paintings that we see your own?

I did paint one of them! I insisted on a scene where I was painting. So it was not scripted, but we did it

anyway. In my early twenties I only hung out with figurative painters, and Odd Urdum – you have to check him out, one of the greatest painters in history – he was like my mentor. I actually built a lot of Jensen on him because he is a genius. He writes music and scripts and novels and is like multi-everything. I love that they added that [the painting] in because Jensen is a genius too.

In your view has Lind gone mad?

In one sense he is extremely unmad. He's not mad at all, he's just trying to save humanity. If you create something that powerful then you're responsible, and that's the big struggle, and that can make you mad. He is aware that he has created a monster. That's why he feels like a monster. So he's very troubled. In a good way mad, perhaps. A too-intelligent kind of mad.

Have you tried to understand the physics and philosophy behind *The Iris Affair*?

My Chat GPT has overheated! We have had long, long discussions. And every time I have to ask it, 'Okay, now can you try to explain this to a 15 year old? And now a ten year old.' So that it simplifies it. It's been one of the most interesting paths I've been down because I have had to go into Hindu cosmology and quantum physics and all this stuff just to get a grip on it and to understand my lines. I also picked Neil Cross's [writer] genius brain to get him to help me. So yeah, a lot of →



research. But it's been very interesting – it's opened my mind a bit, actually.

How so?

You know how when you learn to drive the teacher says you have to look at what's close but also far away, the close view and the longview? What this has given to me is you have the small picture – your life, your emotions, your thoughts, the people you surround yourself with – and then you have life in the longer term. More people, society, then pull back and suddenly we're so small, not even ants, we're just bacteria living our small lives and humping around. When you get that perspective – not just one universe but many – suddenly I feel like life is a bit easier. We're not important. I mean every era has a major fear. In the old days, in the eighties it was the Russians and now it's technology. This TV show puts all that in perspective. It is a thriller, and a really good one, but it's also quite intellectually advanced.

How have you found working with Tom Hollander and Niamh Algar?

Tom's role as Cameron – it feels like it's written only for him and there's only one person in the whole world could do it. The same goes for Niamh. It's funny – in the makeup trailer we had pictures of all her disguises, all the characters she's playing, all the forms, all the costumes, all the states, and it's like it looks like it could have been a passport of everything she's done in her life. It's all the characters ever played, but it is in one piece. I should add that Meréana [Tomlinson, Joy] is from the gods. She is so natural. and so brave and so tough and so vulnerable. She has it all. So I must say I think the cast here is just perfect. ■



"It's been one of the most interesting paths I've been down because I have had to go into Hindu cosmology and quantum physics and all this stuff just to get a grip on it and to understand my lines."

DEBI MAZAR

CELIA BAXTER

Who is Celia?

Celia is a woman in her 50s, probably from the Upper East Side of New York City. She now lives in London with her husband, Julian Baxter [Peter Sullivan] who, we believe, is quite wealthy. Both of them like to travel. They travel the world.

What is their connection to Iris and to this story?

They have a place in Sardinia, and they really like their freedom. They like to do their thing and decorate. And they chose not to have children. Julian's best friend and his wife got into a tragic accident and died. Julian promised to be the godfather and take care of their daughter in the event that anything happened. So we have now inherited our daughter Joy [Meréana Tomlinson] or we're her guardians.

Joy is a wayward teenager — like every teenager, she's a bit distracted, disruptive, finding herself. She's beautiful, she's smart, but she's always getting herself into something. My character Celia... she just can't handle it. She doesn't have a maternal quality to her. She doesn't even have pets. For Julian, it's a bit different because it was his best friend's daughter. It was a commitment that he made. And so in our relationship, it's quite difficult because he's always coddling her and putting up with her stuff whereas although I'm always trying to take care of her she really

doesn't love me. Or she probably does, you know, deep down somewhere. But she doesn't show it, because I'm not maternal and because she's not my daughter.

Celia and Julian have gone through a lot. We've given a lot of sacrifice. We've relocated Joy. We've sent her to different schools and different caretakers, different teachers, different ways to inspire her. Iris [Niamh Algar] is just her latest tutor on Sardinia. And Joy's just really resentful and she's not grateful whatsoever. So it's just a constant struggle, and it's actually beginning to affect our marriage.

What was your impression when you first read Neil's scripts?

So when I first read Neil's script I didn't really know Luther, so I watched an episode or two and I loved it. I was sent three episodes of this, I was on a plane to some place far, I read all three and, I was just sucked in — the writing is brilliant. I was engaged the entire time.

Plus, it takes place in Italy, where I actually live so I liked the location. I liked the descriptions of the characters. What I loved most is that the character of Iris is such a con artist. She kind of took me back to that movie from the early 90s called Run Lola Run. It's always on the move, the hero is also a villain who is really smart and even though she's a horrible person you love her and you can't help but root for her.



HARRY LLOYD

HUGO PYM

Who is Hugo Pym?

Hugo Pym is the face of The Money, ultimately – the shady organization that has bankrolled [quantum computer] “Charlie Big Potatoes”. He turns up about halfway through the series in episode four and is another layer of menace and threats that Iris [Niamh Algar] has to navigate. He is this guy who actually is somewhat psychotic and somewhat deranged, but has to be very calm on the surface. With the directors our Pym note was anytime he's really nasty, play it super nice. And any time he seems to be quite nice, play him super nasty. Constantly contradict what seems to be the outward impression of the scene. That just makes him this annoying person. You can't really place him anywhere. He's just this strange thorn in the side of the plot. And he's weird, and he's kind of funny. And he's got this horrible haircut that makes him look like a lizard. So I really enjoyed him, basically.

Who are ‘The Money’?

They are this ‘Intra Group Committee.’ I am someone who has recently been made head of it. I have one dude above me who is some general CEO chairman and who has this personal problem with his granddaughter. In a way, it's important that it's a company that exists beyond national boundaries, beyond any tax implications. It's the secret world

where billionaires kind of hang out. It's money beyond imagination and I'm sure that when we're not bankrolling existential quantum computers, we are selling arms. We are starting wars to finish wars. We are the strings that pull governments around. It's that kind of level of cash, I think.

And how have The Money become involved with Cameron Beck?

The story is that Cameron [Tom Hollander] basically hit a financial dead end at some point with “Charlie Big Potatoes” and it was all about to fall apart. And then Pym comes in, and someone like the Intragroup Committee are the kind of people who can get you two billion pounds in a week. Put you in touch with big money quite quickly and not ask too many questions. So I feel they weren't the people who initially set up “Charlie Big Potatoes”. and had some big goal, but my boss suddenly saw this opportunity: ‘Okay, we can bankroll this crazy inventor who's doing something interesting, and actually, in return, we can save this problem that we have, which is this incurable condition of the grand-daughter of my boss, ultimately.’ I see an opportunity to kill two birds with one stone, I suppose. That's when I/Pym suddenly come in. So I'm not really on Cameron's side. I don't really have any respect for him. I'm just using him to get what I need. And I think that is Pym's downfall, ultimately. →



What does Pym want? What's his motivation?

What's his goal? I think what what's interesting is you see it in episode eight, actually, when he and Iris finally get head-to-head, and she absolutely asks that same question. She smells it out. She says, 'What happened to the previous head of the Intra Group?' Which actually is a really smart question, and it kind of exposes Pym. He is the new head and his job is to not lose his job. In order for him to stay in this incredible position, he's got to save the life of this little girl by whatever means necessary. I'll kill whoever I need to. And the only way that this child, who cannot be saved by any normal methods, can be saved, is if a computer smarter than God can cure something that's incurable – fast. So it's an impossible challenge, but I feel that Pym lives in the world of every now and again impossible things happen. So for him, his motivation actually is very clear: it's just save the girl.

Did you spend time looking into quantum computing — what Charlie Big Potatoes is and whether it/he might work?

Pym is someone who's not really interested in the existential aspects of "Charlie Big Potatoes". I personally am very interested, and I had loads of conversations about it. In fact my main research, which was great, once I got out to Italy to film, was just bugging Neil Cross [writer]. I used to have dinner with him loads because we were in the same hotel and I would just talk all about "Charlie Big Potatoes" and the physics and the philosophy and even stuff that didn't really concern me in the plot, just because I was really into it. I wanted to make this story work on a thriller level but also on a philosophical level, because I think it touches on something really interesting. It would be easy if it just was an eight

episode chase, which in a way it kind of is, but actually it goes a lot deeper than that and it asks some fascinating questions – not just about technology, but about morality and about society and about choices and all the good stuff you want in a TV drama. So my research in to all that was just grilling Neil.

In your view do those philosophical and physical underpinnings all make sense? Does the thinking behind The Iris Affair hang together?

Yes - it's not 'Lost'! With a show like this you can open a lot of doors, and actually not disappoint the viewers a little bit at the end. That's almost expected with a show as ambitious as this. But I can promise that Neil doesn't disappoint. Neil is not that kind of person. That would annoy the crap out of him. He very much wants it to hold together, and it should, and it does. And it's not what you expect.

In the first ten minutes you've got the main character saying, 'Infinity minus one is infinity.' Which is, you know, quite a big concept to get your head around in terms of applying that to humanity. But that is kind of the scale that we're dealing with, and that's something that only a writer like Neil can wade through and still come out... I'm not going to say unscathed, but it definitely holds together, yes. I think that's very important to him. It's not to every writer of a thriller. But it's very important to someone like Neil Cross. ■

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