

RIVER

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INTRODUCTION

Stellan Skarsgård (The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo) stars as John River, a brilliant police officer whose genius and fault-line is the fragility of his mind.

Nicola Walker (Last Tango In Halifax) and Adeel Akhtar (Utopia) line up alongside Skarsgård, as Detective Sergeant Jackie 'Stevie' Stevenson, River's colleague and confidant, and Detective Sergeant Ira King. Lesley Manville (An Adventure In Space And Time) is their superior, Chief Inspector Chrissie Read, with Eddie Marsan (Ray Donovan) also joining the cast as a notorious killer who plagues River.

John River: a Detective who lives among the dead and dying victims and killers from the murder cases he's trying to solve.

John River: a man whose vulnerabilities and eccentricities are brought to the fore as he grieves the loss of his dearest friend and colleague, DS Jackie Stevenson.

The stages of his grief mark River's growing bonds with those he has excluded from his heart and his mind, and when a murder suspect jumps to his death whilst being pursued by River, the pressure and scrutiny that surrounds him escalates fast.

As the investigation into Stevie's murder begins to reveal her deepest secrets, River has to question everything he thought he knew about his one true friend. Their relationship might have survived her death but can it survive the truth of who she really was in life?

Abi Morgan says: "Actors are agents of change. They carry the vision of an entire creative team. A show like River needs broad shoulders and I can't think of anyone better than Stellan Skarsgård to take on this challenge and lead this brilliant cast."

Jane Featherstone, Executive Producer says: "I can't tell you how chuffed we are at Kudos to have been able to assemble such a magnificent group of actors led by the extraordinary Stellan Skarsgård, all attracted by the quality of Abi's script."

River was commissioned by Charlotte Moore, Controller of BBC One, and Ben Stephenson, Controller of BBC Drama Commissioning. The executive producers are Jane Featherstone, Manda Levin and Abi Morgan for Kudos and Lucy Richer for the BBC. Chris Carey (Run, Ambassador, Dirk Gently) will produce and Richard Laxton (Burton And Taylor, Him And Her) will direct. The 6x60-minute series is made by Kudos (Humans, The Hour, Broadchurch) for BBC One.

River will air from Tuesday 13th October at 9pm on BBC ONE.

RIVER – WHO’S WHO

John River - A Detective who lives among the dead and dying victims and killers from the murder cases he’s trying to solve.

Through time spent with these imagined lost souls, River is able to piece together the truth behind the crimes he investigates. The figures that drift in and out of River’s consciousness are ‘manifests’.

They are vividly imagined by him through the great empathy and understanding he has for the damaged, the deranged and the disenfranchised.

He has a way of keying into people’s inner lives and tends to rely more on his instincts about the words and behaviours of the people he studies, than on procedural evidence. His own lonely and peripatetic upbringing has frozen him in a kind of isolation from the living, Stevie being the notable exception.

Jackie 'Stevie' Stevenson

Stevie’s more than just a colleague to River; she is his closest confidante and his only real friend, the woman who best understood River’s unique perspective and who helped him navigate the complexities of a world he finds so difficult.

She is also a manifest. Funny, fierce and loyal, her self-deprecating wit and wisdom belied an inner soul as conflicted and shattered as River’s own; she just hid it better.

Utterly committed to her profession, she has escaped the confines of a claustrophobic and crime-ridden family to make her own way in the world, at great personal cost. She knew how to lighten and enliven those moments when the day-in-day-out reality of policing a brutal and complicated city became too much- which made the task more bearable both for herself... and River, too.

As River delves deeper into the events surrounding Stevie’s brutal and apparently senseless murder, the Stevie he thought he knew better than anyone bears less and less resemblance to her truest self.

Ira King

Ira is a young Detective Constable who’s assigned to working with River on Erin’s case; an attempt at replacing Stevie.

He’s an offbeat and sensitive individual who, despite being initially surprised by the peculiar challenges of working alongside River, actually finds himself well-suited to dealing with this unique and often disconcerting companion and colleague.

He respects and admires River as a detective, but has to work incredibly hard to begin to gain River’s

trust. Despite being adaptable and understanding, he's a sharp investigator and not un-ambitious. He's a proud husband and father to a newborn son.

As River gets deeper into the investigation into Stevie's death, Ira's insight and commitment becomes invaluable, but his determination to finally earn River's respect will also take Ira to risky places.

Cream

A real life killer from the nineteenth century, Thomas Neill Cream represents the bleakest aspects of the human condition – both in the minds of the killers that River investigates and in River himself.

He's a constant reminder that the veneer of civilization is thin, and that we all have the potential for great darkness within us. He's also a manifestation of the pull towards death, suicide and oblivion.

Christopher Riley

A small-time drug dealer who panics and falls to his death whilst being pursued by River.

Though there was good reason for River to suspect and chase Riley, his death occasions great guilt. When it would be easier for River to collude with his higher ups and use damning circumstantial evidence to nail Stevie's murder on Riley, River instead keeps pushing for the truth.

Erin Fielding

A recently deceased teenager, and the last case Stevie and River were working on together before Stevie was shot. Erin is another manifest in River's mind.

Bridie Stevenson

Matriarch of the Stevenson family, Stevie's mother constantly crosses paths with River and Ira as the secrets in Stevie's personal history are unpicked. Bridie is Irish and Catholic, but has lived in the East End for most of her life.

She's formidable, pragmatic and resourceful but can turn her charm on and off in an instant. Her fractured, dysfunctional brood are a symptom of her dark and brooding heart.

Losing Stevie to the police force was a blow to Bridie, but more wounding still was the shocking family betrayal that followed.

Chrissie Read

Chrissie is a brilliant leader and investigator, stretched very thin. As a mother of four unruly teens, and a DCI managing a large team within Greater London police, she knows how to handle difficult people and get the best out of them. But trying to be everything to everybody is taking its toll on her nerves and her marriage.

She's got a keen sense of humour and knows River well enough to see through him when he tries to placate her. She needs the brilliant River in her team but is also worried about his state of mind – both as his boss, and as his friend.

Nobody will be left untouched or unchanged by the quest to find out why Stevie was killed – not least Chrissie, whose life is built on more fragile foundations than she thought.

Rosa Fallows

Rosa has worked as a psychiatrist and therapist for many years, primarily in the police force. She's skilled at understanding the sometimes repressed and conflicted police officers that she works among, and she's also seen the other side of the coin through working with the criminals they pursue.

She tries not to be personally affected by cases but can't help being drawn to the charmingly complicated, and tenderly intelligent darkness in River.

Marcus McDonald

Marcus runs Chrissie's team and is primarily concerned with maintaining the good reputation of his own division. If he could, he would get rid of River, a detective who he sees both as a liability and as competition and places Chrissie under increasing pressure to solve such a high-profile murder case involving one of their own, and to get a result as quickly and cleanly as possible. But Marcus has his own vulnerabilities and it is around River that they begin to show...

EPISODES ONE TO THREE SYNOPSES

EPISODE ONE

John River is a respected police officer haunted by the murder victims whose secrets he must uncover. Struggling to come to terms with the recent loss of a close colleague, River chases a potential suspect across London, with tragic consequences. In his fragile mental state, he comes under increasing pressure both from the press and within the police force as calls for his dismissal grow. Meanwhile the mother of a murdered teenager is growing increasingly desperate - the boyfriend has confessed but no body has been found, and she blames River for failing to make good on his promise to find her daughter.

EPISODE TWO

Still wracked with grief over the death of his friend and partner Jackie 'Stevie' Stevenson, River and his colleagues must attend her wake. There he is surprised to come across her brother Jimmy - recently released after serving sixteen years for a brutal murder, in which Stevie's own evidence was key. River reaches breaking point as he begins to suspect that the man he chased to his death, was innocent. The victim's pregnant and unstable girlfriend is on the warpath, and pursues River, only to find in him an unexpected ally in a confusing world.

EPISODE THREE

With his career resting on the outcome of Rosa's psychiatric report, River must keep his unofficial investigations into Stevie's death off the radar. This sends tensions high with his new partner, DS Ira King, who is desperate to impress in his new role as River's partner. Chrissie steers River back towards his own cases, most pressingly a suspicious workplace accident that has left a man fighting for his life. But River's mind is elsewhere as the discovery that Stevie had a second phone forces River to reassess how well he really knew his colleague and friend. Unlocking her voicemails throws suspicion on someone close to Stevie; somebody with real motive and a history of violence.

ABI MORGAN – WRITER

How has this experience been for you?

It's really been an extraordinary experience writing this one, mainly because it's written from one character's point of view. I've come to the end of an intense journey.

How did you come to address the subject of living with voices in your head?

I know from myself, I talk out loud. I've got children and they say to me 'mummy, you talk to yourself all the time'. I realized how much I do have other people in my head and what a comfort they are to me. It's not just about those who experience voices through mental health, it's the voices we carry from our past, our future or experiences, that we manifest and I hope that's something that an audience will identify with.

What is River about?

River is about a London based police officer who battles with his own mental health issues and when he loses his partner both personally and professionally it triggers a massive psychotic event which runs parallel to his quest to find the murderer. It's really about a man who struggles in all forms of intimacy and relates better to those no longer living, to those voices in his head, than to those real relationships around him.

He's a really good police officer and I think part of the reason is that his connectedness with his own mental fragility allows him to connect with the fragility of those abused, corrupted, disenfranchised, and the people around him that he comes into contact with in his work.

He's insightful and I think for a man who does talk out loud, it's what's being spoken under the line that has been important to River; what's not being said. In a way the manifests are manifestation of his inner conflict, they are all aspects of himself really.

River is also about living in a city where very few people are actually from London. London does two things for me; it makes me feel connected and it also makes me feel very isolated and quite lonely at times, and that's someone with two children in their family. I always think about that title London Kills Me, and how London is the best of the world and it's the worst of the world, so I wanted to write a character who was navigating their way through that.

Can you explain what a manifest is?

A manifest is a physical manifestation of a literal or emotional voice in the head. It can be a literal voice, it can be the voice of someone you know, the physical manifestation of their presence i.e. Stevie, or it can be the voice of a real character from history like Thomas Cream. Thomas Cream is an interesting one because he's a literal character, but also in one of the episodes River says 'Who are you?' and Cream says 'I am you. I am despair. I am death' so they also become physical-emotional-verbal manifestations of the deepest darkest parts of River's thoughts.

In a way, the character of Riley becomes a kind of manifestation of River's guilt and impotency, and Erin's character becomes a manifestation of his lost childhood and loss of innocence; he comes to realise that the world is not what he thought it was and Stevie's not who he thought she was.

When he is facing the facts about her and his impotency about that, River manifests these into very physical forms. That's what a manifest is for me; it's not a real thing. I don't believe in ghosts: they aren't real for me, but I do feel people can manifest an emotional and often physical manifestation that can feel very real and very present. I think a lot of the audience will see them as ghosts - which is fine. You can't control how an audience responds to something, it's up to them. It's their right to explore it in whatever way they want.

How do you feel about the casting of Stellan as River?

I was a huge fan of Stellan since *Breaking the Waves*. He has tremendous warmth and stillness and so when we started to talk about who could play River in the early days, Stellan was absolutely at the forefront. I just didn't think he would even look at it because, to me, he's a film star. By some miracle Jane Featherstone flew the script to him and he responded very quickly, and after a lovely boozy dinner with him in Stockholm, he just signed up to it.

Stellan being Swedish is interesting because originally I didn't write this for a Swedish actor, yet that became an important part of the storytelling; his back story, the remoteness of the man and this idea of him being displaced emotionally and literally. It was really helpful, quite powerful and added something to that performance.

He has huge integrity, humility and subtlety which is who River really is. That part has grown and grown because of him and he astonishes me with his stamina. You went on set at the end of a really long week where he hadn't had any break and he was always ready to go. And he's always ready for a sit down and a glass of wine and a chat, and this is a man who has 8 children. He balances life. He works hard and he plays hard. He's very inspiring and motivating to write for, and he brings out the best of every actor he works with; he raises everybody's game.

Who is Stevie?

Stevie, has grown into a very successful, very good police officer but who had uncovered something that had threatened her professional life and personal life. She is everything that River is not. She's outgoing, undisciplined, very communicative, good fun. She's an extrovert in ways and yet, like River, she does have an emotional secret and emotional fragility. They connect because they are opposites, and River realizes how much Stevie meant to him.

She not only kept him professionally on track, but she kept him emotionally on track, and the loss of her is the thing that makes him have to stand on his own two feet for the first time. He has to accept that he's been abandoned before on a profound level and he has to deal with that.

Stevie plugged that hole in River's life and she is somebody that, through the course of the drama, you'll hopefully feel the loss of in the way that River and people around her do. She is one of those characters who doesn't feel that emotionally open but you realise they are the ones who hold together a community of people, which is what Stevie does through her relationship with River and her relationship with younger brother, Frankie.

How does Stevie deal with being in between that disconnected family?

Stevie is from the East End of London and she can't run away from her past like the others can; actually each character has their own grappling with their past in the way Stevie does with her present.

I've been fascinated by the relationship between two opposites; the idea that police officers hang out in the same pubs and bars as criminals and actually there's a mutual respect there. It makes sense to create a character that's been brought up in a world that she later rejects.

She rejects it because it's not how she wants to live her life, and she chooses professionalism in many ways, which is in opposition to where her parents and her brother have come from, but also she understands that world and can never shake it.

Ira and Rosa are imposed on River but he does create a connection with them. How does that happen?

Ira King is brilliantly played by Adeel Akhtar and he is a young sidekick replacement for Stevie, in some ways he's closer to River on the surface. He's quite odd, quite well-mannered. He's seemingly disconnected but through the course of the series he becomes quite a life-line for River, because he's got everything that River hasn't. He's got a wife, he's got a new baby, and he knows how to fit in; he's got a desire to fit in. He's a good cop and River grows to respect him. What you learn about Ira is that he's very un-judgemental; he accepts everybody's foibles and he really comes to understand River and appreciate him.

He challenges River but at the same time, to be River's associate, he respects him. In a way it's something that grew out of Adeel's performance for me, wondering and seeing how much I can develop him.

Rosa represents the classic therapist role and initially listens, provokes and encourages River to talk about his feelings. She's imposed literally because part of the structure of his job is that to continue, he must get counselling and see a therapist, but actually she represents hope in the future in the same way that Ira does; that there may be a world and a life outside Stevie, and that River in his fragile state can recover, heal, and survive this incredible loss. Not just the loss of Stevie, but also River's deep sense of loss of his partner. He's displaced in a country where his relationship with Stevie normalized and regularized things and made that feel like home. In a way, for both of those people, they both become River's new home.

Tell us about the development process of River.

I had a long standing relationship with Kudos, Jane Featherstone and Manda Levin - who were brilliant execs - as I'd just come from doing a multi-character ensemble piece in The Hour. I wanted to try a new challenge and a cop show is a new challenge for me, but really River is a relationship drama masquerading as a cop show. Note to self: cop shows are the hardest to do and I may never do one again, because the ones I admire I could never achieve and when it was truly terrible, I was falling into the clichés I really didn't like, so it's a hard ask.

It also came out of a love of the film Truly Madly Deeply when I first started. That film so brilliantly realised the relationship between Alan Rickman and Juliet Stevenson's characters and what it was like to live with ghosts. I like the idea of a character where one moment it feels very real and then it's not there.

It felt like an opportunity to take a character that you'll hopefully fall in love with and see is competent at his job, but also see him battling with his own mental health issues. River came out of a maelstrom of these different ideas really, and most good dramas start with one central image. For me it was two policemen walking down a road laughing together and at some point during the conversation, you realize that one of them is dead. That's the central image at the start of episode 1 so that was the starting point for me.

Tell us about Thomas Cream (Eddie Marsan) and his significance?

I knew that we needed some kind of physical antagonist through the piece and I wanted a manifest that would really hold River's darkest feelings, would stir him and motivate him and really hold his despair. I researched the psychology of serial killers, psychopaths and sociopaths and I stumbled across Thomas Cream.

Cream, the Lambeth Poisoner, was a Canadian doctor who killed a number of people in America, and came over to the UK and poisoned several women. It just seemed a brilliant story and a brilliant way of colliding a suppressed straight-laced police officer with a dark psychotic 19th century killer. It's something that if it does go onto a second series, I'd probably explore more.

Eddie Marsan is just my favourite actor of all time. I love everything he's been in, so it's a dream come true to work with him. He's terrific in it and he's someone I'd like to write more and more for; mainly because he quotes continually a load of gobbledegook, made up of all the weird quotations of 18th and 19th century poets I could find.

What do you hope viewers get from the series?

I hope it's entertaining. I hope it's a group of characters you care about and I hope it makes one feel more connected to the world. I love the intimacy of TV. I love the fact that you don't necessarily have the pressure of an audience or anyone around watching it, just you and it.

STELLAN SKARSGÅRD plays John River

What's the story of River?

If it was a normal TV series it would be rather easy to tell you about it but it's not and that's why I'm in it. You could say it's a crime story on the surface, but it's really more about a person's breakdown or his psychological status. This police officer I'm playing, he has a mental disorder. We've heard a lot about people that hear voices, but he actually sees those people as well that he's talking to, and very often it is victims of crime that pop up and have conversations with him. They're not like ghosts, they're his own creations.

Who is River and where do we join him in the story?

When you meet River in the first episode, he's in a car together with his colleague Stevie outside a fast food drive-through joint. That's where it starts, but his colleague who was probably closest to him, has been murdered three weeks earlier and we learn he is working on the case of solving her murder, as well as all other cases that pop up during his journey. Very often the victims of murder cases show up and have discussions with him, and try to help him solve the crime; 'manifests' as we call them.

As an audience, we see those victims, or 'manifests', as real living people in a room, but of course it's not the victim that is helping him solve the crime because the victim is dead. We're not talking about ghosts here, he produces these dialogues himself: they are an internal discussion almost like his own kind of checklist as he investigates their lives and the moments leading to their death. The audience see these characters and get used to them being around, and should be happy (or scared in some instances) to see them when they show up even if you know they're dead. It's always interesting when they do: it sort of jars reality, but in an intriguing way.

What's the effect of the manifests on River's life and relationships?

Well he's a police officer, and he's supposed to have a record that shows no psychological problems whatsoever and he's of course hiding this, but it's hard when he suddenly starts talking to somebody who isn't there. Some of those situations become quite comical and some are tragic. His behaviour is of course bizarre sometimes to the people around him, but the audience can see who he's talking to so the audience are hopefully on his side.

Would you say the presence of those manifests is an extreme representation of a common experience?

It's a tool in this drama of course, but some people hear voices and can't get rid of them. Most people have inner dialogues; before you go into a meeting, you might even make the dialogue of that meeting before you enter the door just to rehearse yourself.

The manifests are a way to play the internal life of a person which is not necessarily what it looks like on the surface but what it feels like inside.

Can you relate to River and to that aspect of his character?

I can relate to anybody and I can relate to River too, but it's not like "Oh yeah I've seen a lot of manifests myself" It's nothing like that. I relate to him; when he's angry I can relate to his anger and when he's sad I can relate to his sadness, when he's jealous I can relate to his jealousy, as we all do.

Are the manifests serving a purpose that's helping or assisting River?

They serve a purpose for River. First of all he's a very lonely man and they are his friends, like children have imaginary friends, but in his case it's pathological. They serve the purpose that an inner dialogue can serve for you of course, but they also terrorize him because some of them represent the darkest sides of him.

Have you enjoyed working with Abi's writing and bringing that to life?

I took the job for her writing because it doesn't look like anything else. Her writing is not linear. It's more filled with odd impulses. It throws you from one thought to another thought in a less organized way, and to me that resembles life much more than a lot of the writing you get which is extremely structured and polished and is by the book of 'How to Write a Screenplay'. I find I'm looking for what I can do with the words because the poetry is there in her writing. Her dialogue often takes the character and repositions them so often in a short dialogue that it becomes very interesting. Very different, but very interesting for the actors to work with.

How does River differ from so many other cop shows out there?

I don't know exactly how this show will differ from other shows but I think we're all doing our best to be sure it does. First of all, the satisfaction of the show is not to find out who did it, the satisfaction of the show lies in the beautifully written characters and what's happening between them and their relationships. Hopefully it will have a tone of its own, and a tone of its own that works. We're taking some risks in the way we do it and that makes it very interesting. Without risk, it's not worthwhile is it? It's a pretty highly strung and tense show because the psychological stakes are high, and the personal stakes for a lot of the people are also high. It's a mixture of the danger of illegal actions and psychological vulnerability.

How do you execute acting with the manifests?

How we practically do it is we usually shoot the scene first with the actor who plays the manifest and then we shoot the same scene exactly the same way but without anybody there. It looks fantastic, because you walk around, you gesture and talk to somebody that isn't there and it's quite interesting visually. To me, I'm the kind of actor who doesn't want to act towards a mark beside the camera; I want the real actor to be there, and I feed so much off the other actors. So it's very unnatural to me to do it, but since we always do the scene with the actor first I have a very clear memory and then we do it with the real actor saying the lines, so I still get a response and it becomes more like playing a game of ping pong.

For the viewer, what would you hope they get from watching River?

I hope of course that they would be entertained, not necessarily in the sense that it's the average kind of entertainment; I want them to be entertained but in a different way and maybe find some fascination in things that they don't usually see. It's very much a series about humans and human behaviour; extremely lovely, warm and compassionate without being overly sentimental...

It's all made with a lot of love for life, even if on some levels that can be depressing or sad, on other levels it's like life; comical and dramatic and funny.

NICOLA WALKER plays Jackie 'Stevie' Stevenson

Can you briefly describe the story of River?

It doesn't fit into a neat breakdown. On the surface it looks like a murder story, a police show, but obviously it's so much more than that. What you move into is an observation of a man's journey through extreme grief, which is sweetened by the fact that the person that he loves and lost is still there with him.

What kind of roles do the manifests play in the show?

I'm not sure Stevie would put her hand up to being a manifest. I can do that; I can say she is but I don't think Stevie would join that club. She would dislike being put in the same group with a lot of other people. She's a rather all-consuming jealous manifest really.

She doesn't know she's a manifest, or certainly not something you look at. Of course, if I look at it from outside; they all serve different purposes, or are conjured by River for different reasons, but Stevie is a constant because River can't rest. He can't be still until he's found out who murdered her. Other manifests come and go but Stevie's is there constantly.

What do you think the practical challenges are for River in dealing with living with manifests?

How that affects his job, and are there positive aspects to that? How does he overcome these challenges? I think there's a really blurry line for Stevie. It makes him the man he is; this ability or affliction he has. Who's to say that's not a better way to be living than other people?

When she was alive, Stevie recognised that it was useful to him. What's wrong with him navigating the world with these other people in his life? In a way I think she sees him being more successful if he could embrace it, if he could learn to live with them. She's certainly never made an issue of it when she was alive, and she doesn't make much of an issue of it once she joins that sort of manifested world.

It's never written in that she's aware of the other manifests really, apart from Thomas Cream. Manifests do appear together sometimes with River when he's in a particular state, but I can't really think of it like that. Within Stevie's personality, there's one moment where Stevie becomes aware that Cream is stalking River and is trying to warn him that Cream is coming for him, which is the strongest moment where you get a sense that River allows the manifests to be aware of each other. I found that really exciting to shoot because it was on the underground, and the first time Stevie spots Cream before River. It was the first time we did it and it was quite a frightening, shocking moment where she's trying to protect him.

Do you think that the story tells us anything about mental health in society?

I don't think it's ever mentioned directly in the show, certainly not by my character, that River has a mental health issue. I don't think Stevie thinks he has a mental health issue; he is who he is, and she only sees great advantages to the way he navigates the world. To be honest I think Stevie recognises

she has her own issues because of what's happened to her in her past, and you couldn't label those either.

She says very directly to River at one point 'You will find the order in your chaos. Through this different way that you associate with the world and with other people, use it and you'll find your way through.' I think Stevie's definitely very open to the idea that a mental health issue doesn't have to be labelled or named. She's not frightened of it which I think is really interesting, and hopefully reflects something wider that might be going on within the show that we don't address directly.

We watch him living with it, literally with it walking alongside him and that's why he's so fascinating to watch. I think if you reduce it, you start labelling it. Stevie feels that if you labelled him and said what you felt his issues were, that reduces the potential of those issues for good, as complicated as they are.

What do you think River's manifest of Stevie thinks about Rosa and River's relationship?

During this series, River becomes professionally, and to a degree, personally and emotionally involved with Rosa. When we were shooting some of that stuff, very early on, I was laughing because if it was purely Stevie, I think she might have quite a lot to say about that in terms of being rather jealous, but in a really sweet way it shows how much River loves her I think. That's not how he imagines her reacting.

I think he gives her the benefit of a much more graceful reaction to it. It's really painful for Stevie to see him being intimate and talking with someone else. I was the only person he spoke to. I think River's aware that it's difficult for Stevie to watch him then, initially in a professional capacity, talking intimately to another person, let alone another woman, and then when that seems to be becoming a more complicated relationship between them. I think River's also aware that that's hard for her as well, but more importantly, he's aware of how almost impossible that is for him, in his emotional state.

Do you think River remembers Stevie in a rose-tinted way?

We talked about that, whether in grief sometimes you convey more kindness or more saintliness on that dead person than they perhaps had in real life. That's just what we do, don't we? I do think he's quite honest though. I think he knew her so well and he allows her to show some bits of jealousy, bits of anger, flushes of aggression, excess. Sometimes her sheer enthusiasm is pretty annoying. I think it's a sign of how well they knew each other that he's not frightened to let flashes of things that are unappealing come through, that's how well he knew her, but it seems to me that he's generally very loving and kind in his version of her.

What do you think of Abi's writing and how has that been through the series for you?

When the scripts came through and prior to the meetings for the job, I kept thinking "How do I keep hold of the way I felt when I hit page twelve?" It's precisely page twelve, but in the way Abi writes she completely, brilliantly lured me in to this very close relationship between this female policewoman and policeman and I thought I knew exactly where I was. I thought I understood where this story was going to go and then she sort of fells you with one line. It feels like being this complete subverting of your preconceptions. Because you think you know where you are.

You think it's a police show and yet it's not a police show at all. It's not about procedure. It's a big grief stricken, emotional journey for this man who does the job he does. I think Abi's writing is so immediate that it just takes you. It turns very sharp corners so you never get ahead of her writing. I'd be playing catch up all the time when I was reading the scripts, trying to understand where we're going.

How has the team constructed this drama, what's it been like to be a part of that?

I think the thing about starting on a job like this is that of course everyone's been on it for a long time with massive amounts of prep, and in a way you felt like you're playing catch up; Richard Laxton, the director, Abi and everyone on that side of it have been thinking about it and working on it for a long time before you get to step on set. Richard especially had a very clear idea of the feel of it and the way we would deal with this relationship. He didn't want it to be tricky or odd; he just wanted it be very, very real and true between these two people. That's a huge relief because then you can do that, you can achieve that for him because everyone else is dealing with that other stuff and I have to turn up and play a scene out with Stellan.

What would you hope to people take away from watching River?

Oh my gosh. I would hope that a viewer comes away from the show with the same feelings as I did reading the scripts initially. As a piece, it's incredibly mournful at times because it's about grief, getting things wrong, not saying things when you should say things, leaving it too late. There is an awful, awful lot of regret for my character and Stellan's character, but there is something incredibly joyful about it as well; that's the journey it goes on. It seems rather complete to me with this man having to carry on. There's no neat end, but there is something joyful and full of hope and I want people to take away from it that feeling that I had in the first read. I felt incredibly moved by it but left with a sense of great hope. The bottom of it is these two people that worked together, loved each other, and knew each other incredibly well and never really told each other. They completely missed it. Abi has us returning to it, to the fall-out of how you live with losing someone who you really loved but never told them.

ADEEL AKHTAR plays Ira King

Can you tell us a bit about the story of River.

It's about a policeman, John River, whose partner Stevie has just recently been murdered, and the story is the fallout from that. River is trying to figure out who killed her and why, but the obstacle in achieving that is the fact that he has these manifests which means that he creates people who aren't actually there; they are echoes of victims from cases he is investigating.

Summarize who Ira is and where we join him in the series.

River's partner has died, so Ira is hired from Croydon Police station. He's got 8 years' experience - the majority of stuff has been technical, so he's largely been stuck behind the computer. In a way, he's there to replace Stevie, but River of course, only accepts he has to work with him very begrudgingly because he and Stevie had a real connection, fondness and love for each other, so first of all you see Ira negotiating that relationship.

Between River and River's loss of Stevie, they reach this complicity and understanding of each other, whether it be a sort of silent acknowledgement, that each of them are trying to do the best that they can do in their jobs. I think also maybe a little bit of fondness there too.

Does Ira have techniques for dealing with River?

I don't think he has any techniques. Ira is one of the people who sees River's psychosis up close. He takes on board what River is going through as well, and through his attempt to understand what's happening to River, they create a strong bond together.

River teaches him that in order to be the best policeman he can be; he can't leave a part of himself at the door. River immerses himself fully within a case to the point where he conjures these manifests, which he's doing to the detriment of his own mind. Ira sees that and understands that in order to be the best policeman he can be, he has to adopt that a little bit and really dive in. To not over-think it and just go 'Right I've got to be here, 100 percent fully committed to what's going on.'

Have there been any particular moments that changed Ira's relationship with River?

Ira and River's relationship shifts incrementally. The change from mistrust to trust, is, I feel, an accumulative thing, a slow build throughout the series.

What is your understanding of River's manifests?

River's manifests are, from my understanding, things inside his own brain that he hasn't come to terms with yet. Whereas ordinary people might have emotional closure for something and we can process it in a way where we just have a bad day, or may need to chat to somebody about it, with River's mental state, he creates these people within his own mind as if he was just sitting beside them.

Is Ira an interesting character to play?

Yeah, I found him a bit challenging in that my personal approach to the situation that he finds himself in, would be to run away or say 'I can't deal with it' or look for help - but it feels like he would meet a challenge and he's ready to help the fella out the best he can, without much

assistance, and to the point where he's physically and emotionally damaged. There is a part where he's tearing his hair out and gets a bit angry with River for his inability to contain these voices that he has. I think before that point, for me Adeel, I would have asked for some help - I think most of us would but Ira feels he can go it alone, which is commendable I think.

Is there a time where Ira feels like he needs to call River out on these issues?

There's a scene where Ira calls River out on the fact that he speaks to these manifests in public. I think there are a few scenes where Ira is with River and he starts going off into one these non-sequitur tangents, but Ira is trying to get on top of a case or trying to collect facts and stuff like that, so those sort of non-sequiturs for him, at that point, seem to be very unhelpful. Towards the end of the series, he sees they're necessary, that you need to let your mind go wherever it needs to go; embrace the pain of being human in order to be the best person you can be, in any job you're doing. I don't know if that's true of everything, but certainly in the context of River, of being a good policeman and dealing with human beings.

In terms of the scene where River and Ira fall out, how does River take that?

Any relationship or partnership, unless you can get angry legitimately and have that anger received in some way, then it just makes the partnership better doesn't it? But it's a strange kind of relationship between the two, it's obviously a working relationship, but they're also being emotionally open with each other as well which I think might make their bond stronger.

Do you think the issues raised in the story can be applied to everyday life?

I think they can. I remember talking to the producer about it, and we were discussing how we'd describe it to people. On one level you can call it a cop drama, and on another level, it's an exploration into people's mental states; an insight into people's sanity or insanity. Chomsky's got this linguistics theory that made him famous. It's about how our ability to communicate with people with language is a bit of an anomaly in our human evolution.' Chomsky's saying it's not *why* do people talk to themselves, it's *why don't* people? Why don't we all talk to ourselves? So I think it does apply to life in that sense, because we all find ourselves in the quietness of our rooms or houses, and before you know it, we catch ourselves having a full-on chat to ourselves. If there was a camera here then I would be seen as mental, but actually it's in the privacy of your own home, so I think individuals just have that volume turned up a little bit, and then we call it whatever we call it - psychosis, sanity, delusional, paranoia or whatever.

Do you think it gives the series certain extra responsibilities in to how address those issues?

That's a big old question, isn't it? It's like saying what responsibility does TV have setting a moral agenda. I don't feel very well qualified to start a conversation on that, but I don't know, maybe it could prove to have an insight into people's mental states that we'd never want to look at.

River's is learning to live with his manifests. Do you think that that is the right journey for River to try and come to terms with them?

So in regards to River legitimizing the manifests, I suppose everybody around him, except himself, doesn't tell him off for it - they sort of encourage it. That is a necessary step in him being able to feel that he is actually a functioning human being. Maybe that is one approach of dealing with the problem that he has, I suppose we do that all the time, like when kids are scared of something, and one approach is to legitimize the fear is by actually saying 'Alright let's look at this problem that you have.' Maybe acceptance is the first stage to solving your problems?

Do you think that the series reflects how society has moved forward in how we view people who have got issues with mental health?

I know from experiences with people who might be a little bit depressed in some ways that there is a fear to say that it is clinical. There's this idea that you are limited or weak in some way. As you ask that question, I'm thinking of someone like Stephen Fry who came out about having serious depression, and I know from the back of that it gave people the opportunity to look at that side of themselves. I'm not sure there's enough out there, but if you can shine a light on it which is what I think River is doing, then I can only see it as only being a good thing. I suppose doing this sort of drama or having this sort of drama on TV really sheds light on people's mental illnesses.

What was it like working with Stellan?

The obvious stuff that somebody would say about an actor is he's amazing and it's a privilege, but all of that aside, he's a brilliant actor who with a lot of grace has just taken us along with his journey, and it's such a privilege in so many ways. Just being opposite him is an amazing experience because everything seems to be taken care of straight away. I just need to let the words come out and everything follows along. In reality I'm more like River and he's more like Ira, not that I talk to myself on set or anything, but he's a person who makes fart jokes and is silly, which is a really necessary antidote to make this stuff happen which is very intense.

Working with the cast as a whole and with the crew and producers, how has that team come together and what are the days like?

TV can be quite a challenging thing because you are up against it time wise, and you need to make sure you get all the scenes. Generally every director has managed to do that, but I'm always surprised about how prepared I think I am and how unprepared I actually am when I get on set and everything. I'm always learning. Manda, Naomi and I have known each other for a while, and they've been around a couple of times which is just a really welcoming sight. So from top to bottom you've got a face to put to everything so that's nice, and working with Kudos, as I've done stuff with them before. It's nice to have that sort of familiarity.

What would you like audiences to take away from watching River?

When I chatted to Chris the producer, we were discussing how it's not just a cop drama in the traditional sense, this is an exploration of a person's sanity and it raises questions as to what is insanity and what is insane... I think we need to be honest with ourselves, and it's important for the people who do talk to themselves a little bit too much to know that there isn't such a thing as 'too much'. There's nothing really that bad about it. You've got your volume turned up a bit which is alright I suppose isn't it? It's not a bad thing.

LESLEY MANVILLE plays Chrissie Read

How did you come to take this role and what drew you to it?

I was attracted to the whole project really. I met Richard Laxton, the director of the first two episodes, who was also responsible for setting it up and setting the tone right, so I talked to him in general about it. I really did have a sort of connection with him, and we seemed to be talking the same language. When you embark on a project as long as this, you need to make sure you feel safe artistically, because those things are very important.

I also of course, met with Abi Morgan: she is incredibly interesting because she likes to write with actors in mind - she writes quite fast and she likes thinking 'I'm writing this part and it's Lesley playing Chrissie.' I've worked with Stellan before who is absolutely lovely, and also because I've not really done anything like this. I don't do a lot of television. I have to think the script is good... I think that it's true to say that River is more a series about human relationships, human relations and people's psyche rather than a detective series.

I think with all dramas that have a specific backdrop, like crime or hospitals, you have to make the characters interesting, because you can't just talk about policing or surgery for an hour. It's got to be invested by interesting people, human relationships and the human condition and all of that stuff that's interesting to watch.

Tell us a bit about your character Chrissie is and where she is in the story.

Chrissie Read is the Chief Inspector, so she's River's boss. There are other characters that are more senior but she runs the floor; it's her ship, and she's got an interesting relationship with River. They are close.

She has to be his boss, and at times she has to pull rank and be the boss, but there are so many times where you see them just functioning as two people who are working on the same job, and they've got an intimacy; a closeness, a shorthand. As we move further into the series, we're going to get more into her private life.

She's married and got 4 children, so she's the classic woman with a very high profile job trying to juggle her husband and a career, and I think you're going to see the complications within that relationship, not just on a domestic level but on a professional level as well.

Who is John River?

John River is a Detective Inspector who is a complex guy; he doesn't deal with things in a straight forward A to B fashion. He's a man who the phrase 'he thinks outside of the box' was probably coined for. He sees things with lateral vision and that's why to Chrissie he is such a good detective, because where I would imagine 95% of detectives, if they are good, they see things in a linear way, but he doesn't. River sees things in the most bizarre way, and gets to things by a route that other people wouldn't take. Although the series is starting out with the death of his partner and all the

difficulties of that, it's more about him and how he constructs his life. He's a fascinating character in the hands of Stellan Skarsgård. Wonderful!

What's different about River as a series?

The series has a great slant to it; a certain darkness and unusualness I find very appealing, very interesting and quite European and I'm not just saying that because Stellan is playing River. I think the tone of it is very European whether you had a Swede playing River or not. It's slightly off centre and off kilter which is very Abi. You look at the stuff she's written and it's not straight down the line; she writes fascinating characters and that's exciting for us as actors and audiences alike.

CAST LIST

| | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Stellan Skarsgård | John River |
| Nicola Walker | Jackie "Stevie" Stevenson |
| Lesley Manville | Chrissie Read |
| Adeel Akhtar | Ira King |
| Georgina Rich | Rosa Fallows |
| Sorcha Cusack | Bridie Stevenson |
| Josef Altin | Christopher Riley |
| Pippa Bennett – Warner | Tia Edwards |
| Owen Teale | Marcus McDonald |
| Eddie Marsan | Thomas Cream |
| Michael Maloney | Tom Read |
| Jim Norton | Michael Benningan |
| Steve Nicholson | Jimmy Stevenson |
| Turlough Convery | Frankie Stevenson |
| Shannon Tarbet | Erin Fielding |
| Fady Elsayed | Aten Olama |
| Cathy Murphy | Marlena Fielding |
| Franz Drameh | Bruno Marconi |

| | |
|---------------------------|-----------------|
| Julian Lewis Jones | Jordy Merton |
| Amerila Lowdell | Pauline Merton |
| Alex Utgoff | Sasha Mischenko |

PRODUCTION LIST

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|-------------------------|--|
| Written by | ABI MORGAN |
| Executive Producers | JANE FEATHERSTONE, ABI MORGAN, MANDA LEVIN |
| Series Producer | CHRIS CAREY |
| Associate Producer | NAOMI DE PEAR |
| Line Producer | MAGALI GIBERT |
| Directors | RICHARD LAXTON, TIM FYWELL, JESSICA HOBBS |
| Director of Photography | HUBERT TACZANOWSKI |
| Location Manager | PATRICK STUART |
| Production Designer | PAUL CROSS |
| Hair & Make Up Designer | ANGIE MUDGE |
| Costume Designer | EMMA FRYER |
| Composer | HARRY ESCOTT |
| Music Supervisor | DANNY LAYTON |
| Sound Recordist | BILLY QUINN |
| Script Editor | LOUISA FITZGERALD |
| Editors | ADAM BOSMAN, MARY FINLAY. FIONA COLBECK |
| Casting Director | LUCINDA SYSON |

