

The Moment of Truth

Writer **Tony Marchant** unveils his latest project – a good looking, high speed, high-stakes ethical thriller that reflects the cultural climate of our times. Would you have what it takes to blow the whistle?

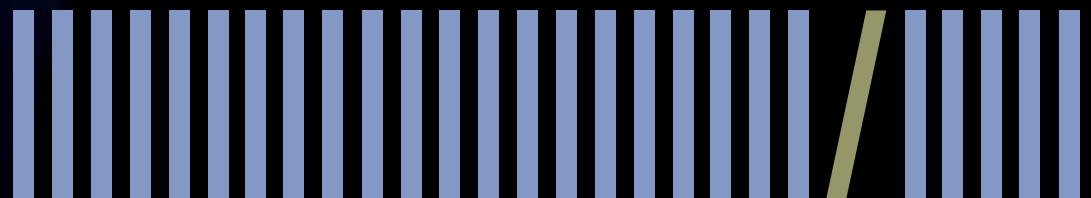
About two years ago, Gareth Neame, having left the BBC to join Carnival, approached me with an idea for a series. We were both aware of prominent, headline grabbing whistleblowers such as David Kelley (WMD and the Iraq conflict). Now Gareth had come across an organization called Public Concern at Work (PCAW), set up to advise and support people who wanted to expose wrong doing or corruption in their firm, school or government department – anywhere that their conscience had been troubled enough to want to expose bad practice.

The man who runs this organisation talked us through various sce-

narios – from major whistleblowers like Sherron Watkins at Enron, to an assistant in a local pharmacist whose boss was scamming the NHS. It was exactly the same premise: having the courage to come out and expose the truth regardless of the consequences.

Gareth and I knew we had the makings of a truly original drama series but that it wouldn't be good enough for our characters to be office bound, on the end of a phone. They needed to be proactive in busting cases, either in league with a willing whistleblower or confronting and persuading those reluctant or simply scared. In Gareth's words, "Our →

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→ protagonists have to abseil into buildings and not merely work in one!"

The next challenge was to figure out how our organization or partnership could come into being. I hit on the idea of a pair of thirty-something personal injury lawyers who take on cases of negligence. Ben (Richard Coyle) and Alisha (Indira Varma) are a couple, both going places in their chosen career. But Ben is increasingly troubled by the fact that getting compensation for his stricken clients is not the same thing as obtaining justice.

One day Ben and Alisha witness a half naked man being bundled into a car. When they report it they find their lives turned upside down as the machinery of the intelligence service comes crashing down on them and they become 'enemies of the state'. Do they walk away from the injustice they've witnessed or try and get to the bottom of what they've seen and tell the world? Their jobs, their reputations and their lives are at stake. Fortunately, they make the right choice, and their new business partnership is born.

Richard Coyle (*The Best Man, Coupling*) brings a natural zest and energy to the role of Ben while Indira Varma (*Rome, Torchwood*) perfectly portrays Alisha's feisty independence, her forensic intelligence and her vulnerability. As well as being a formidable investigative partnership, Ben and Alisha make a sexy and passionate couple.

When we first meet Alisha and Ben, their relationship is in jeopardy. But being locked in their joint adventure professionally means they must also be locked together personally. In most

TV investigative partnerships of opposite sexes, there is unresolved sexual tension. In *The Whistleblowers*, that tension is not about whether they will get together, but whether they can stay together. Ben and Alisha are contrasting personalities – he's impetuous, reckless and opinionated; she's calm, logical and incisive. Ben's a shotgun. Alisha is a rapier sword. They both get results.

The series explores the moral and emotional conflicts of a whistleblower: speaking out may lose them their jobs, their families or their lives. But not speaking out also has its price – the ruin of families and danger to other innocent people. Each episode is a conspiracy thriller where the stakes couldn't be higher, compounding the responsibility of the whistleblower and heightening the need for our partnership not to get it wrong.

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inspired by films like *The Insider* and *All the President's Men* – brilliant evocations of the heart of darkness in a political and corporate culture.

One of the production challenges was trying to find the right locations to film. Anonymous spaces, underground rendezvous, no man's lands – anywhere that could give a sense of edgy paranoia and menace. There's a fantastic scene in *The Insider*, set in a deserted golf practice range, late at night. It was both eerie and threatening, but at the same time a normally functioning environment.

The Whistleblowers is not just contemporary in the sense of taking us into different, topical worlds each week – threats of a pandemic, faith schools, the implications for immigration of a world on the move, the drinks industry, environmental hazards – it also reflects the cultural climate of our times.

We live in a confessional age, with bloggers assailing the internet with the details of their lives, kiss and tell tabloid stories and graphic memoirs of childhood topping the bestseller lists. Information has never been more abundant, nor inconvenient truths more fiercely protected.

The biggest story in the world at the moment – the war in Iraq – is a case of the truth emerging out of a well orchestrated campaign of falsity.

It's worth remembering that there are some people in the world who have the courage and conviction to tell all, for the sake of the greater good and at whatever personal cost. *The Whistleblowers* is about those kinds of people. And they make dynamic television drama. **SE**

A Carnival Films co-production with BBC America for ITV