

State Of Play

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State Of Play

A major new conspiracy thriller by Paul Abbott



David Morrissey and John Simm star in *State Of Play*, a gripping conspiracy thriller set against the background of Whitehall and Fleet Street.

Stephen Collins (Morrissey) is a high-flying, ambitious member of parliament and Chairman of the Government's Energy Select Committee. Cal McCaffrey (Simm) is a well-respected investigative journalist and Stephen's ex-campaign manager. When Stephen's young research assistant, Sonia, falls to her death on the London Underground, it's not long before revelations of their affair hit the headlines.

Meanwhile a suspected teenage drug dealer named Kelvin Stagg is found shot dead. The discovery that Kelvin and Sonia shared a two-minute phone call on the morning of their deaths draws Cal into an investigation that's always one step ahead of the police. But friendships are tested and lives are put on the line as an intricate web of lies unfolds.

When Paul Abbott, who has created many hit series including *Clocking Off*, *Linda Green*, *Touching Evil* and *Reckless*, decided to write *State Of Play*, it was his love of the conspiracy thriller genre which inspired him. "It's the kind of television I like watching, and conspiracy thrillers seem to have gone by the wayside in the last few years," he says. "By creating the link between a rising star of the government and

a young journalist, it looks at the way we're all fed information, the way it's laundered for mass consumption, and how that translates once it makes the front page. I fell in love with the idea of watching a tiny piece of journalistic information trigger an investigation that gradually unearths a scandal."

Abbott says he wanted to base the story on a newspaper investigation because it is a world that hasn't been seen very much on British television. "It's a world that intrigues me because journalists have a different mentality from the police. The police naturally look for evidence, while a journalist naturally looks for a story. And it's in a journalist's commercial interest to keep the information away from the police. But while they have very different perspectives, both journalist and detective rely on each other to fertilise their information."

Producer Hilary Bevan Jones, who has worked with Abbott on dramas as varied as *Cracker*, *Butterfly Collectors* and *The Secret World Of Michael Fry*, believes the appeal of *State Of Play* lies in its many twists and turns. "You think you're on the right track, then something else comes along to make you think again, it's constantly changing. You can never predict what is coming next, but you can have a lot of fun guessing," she says.

“I also wanted to look at the world of politics, and people’s growing disenchantment with modern government’s reliance on spin,” continues Abbott. “There is a lack of honesty which just seems to have spiralled out of control. The fact that the two victims – Sonia Baker and Kelvin Stagg – shared a phone call on the morning they died consequently mushrooms into a huge political and public story. Then the race is on between the police investigation and the newspaper investigation and there’s emotional fall-out for everyone involved as the drama unfolds.”

Abbott believes that media, big business and government should watch their own corners. “If government gets too familiar with business, then business steers the country in a way that happens in America. Look at the links between the people in George Bush’s administration and Exxon. The British media seem currently far more robust at taking the government to task than their US counterparts,” he says.

Abbott, Bevan Jones and director David Yates spent time at *The Times* and *The Guardian* and were struck by the energy in the newsrooms they visited. “We wanted to capture the exuberance, the rising tensions and the sheer adrenalin that we observed,” says Bevan Jones, “as well as the humour that comes from working in a highly stressful environment.”

Yates, whose Bafta Award-winning production of *The Way We Live Now* was one of the highlights of BBC One last year, was hooked by the scale and complexity of the story. “Paul skilfully interweaves the myriad worlds of press, politics and police, but his sense of the bigger picture never buries the emotional lives of his characters. He is a master storyteller and the thrill of the ride doesn’t displace the fact that, at the end of it, the themes of *State Of Play* are still pretty resonant.”

David Morrissey follows up his acclaimed performances in *Out Of Control* and *This Little Life*. His previous credits include *Murder*, Tony Marchant’s *Holding On* and *Captain Correlli’s Mandolin*. John Simm is best-known for his leading roles in *The Lakes*, *Human Traffic* and *Crime And Punishment*. *State Of Play* also stars Polly Walker, (recently seen on screen playing Mary Archer in

Jeffrey Archer – The Truth) as Anne Collins, Stephen’s wife and the object of Cal’s increasing affection; Kelly Macdonald (who has appeared in the hit films *Gosford Park* and *Trainspotting*) as Della, Cal’s outspoken young colleague; and Bill Nighy (recently on screen in *Auf Wiedersehen, Pet* and *The Lost Prince* and shortly to be seen in BBC Films’ *I Capture The Castle*) as newspaper editor Cameron.

State Of Play is an Endor production in association with the BBC. The producer is Hilary Bevan Jones, the director is David Yates, and executive producers are Gareth Neame, Laura Mackie and Paul Abbott.

Viewers of *State Of Play* will be able to join in the intrigue by guessing what happens next in a BBCi website game and competition which will run in conjunction with the series. Throughout the series, web-users will be invited to log on to www.bbc.co.uk/stateofplay and choose between different scenarios and decide which is the most likely outcome in subsequent episodes.

Episodes two to five of *State Of Play* première on BBC Four, immediately after the previous episodes are shown on BBC One.

www.bbc.co.uk/stateofplay

State Of Play

Cast

Stephen Collins David Morrissey
 Cal McCaffrey John Simm
 Della Kelly Macdonald
 Anne Collins Polly Walker
 Cameron Bill Nighy
 Dan Foster James McAvoy
 Pete Benedict Wong
 Helen Amelia Bullmore
 Syd Tom Burke
 Liz Rebekah Staton
 Adam Greene Christopher Simpson
 Yvonne Geraldine James
 Dominic Foy Marc Warren
 DCI Bell Philip Glenister
 Chewy Sean Gilder
 DI Brown Rory McCann
 Detective Chief Constable Janson Nick Brimble
 Greer Deborah Findlay
 Andrew Wilson Michael Feast
 George Fergus James Launson
 Louis Collins Charlie Ryan
 Karen Collins Rebecca Ryan
 Olicia Stagg Maureen Hibbert
 Sonny Stagg Johann Myers

Production credits

Writer and Executive Producer Paul Abbott
 Producer Hilary Bevan Jones
 Director David Yates
 Executive Producers for BBC Gareth Neame
 Laura Mackie
 Production Designer Donal Woods
 Director of Photography Chris Seager
 Costume Designer Claire Anderson
 Make-Up Designer Anne 'Nosh' Oldham
 Editor Mark Day
 Composer Nick Hooper
 Script Editor Susie Conklin
 Line Producer Paul Frit

John Simm plays Cal McCaffrey



“*State Of Play* is all about human relationships and, on top of that, it’s a huge thriller,” says John Simm. “Cal finds himself investigating his distraught friend, Stephen Collins, and soon becomes embroiled with Stephen’s wife, Anne, whose marriage has finally fallen apart over revelations of her husband’s affair with Sonia.”

Simm has a history of playing dark, troubled souls, culminating in the darkest and most troubled of them all – Raskolnikov in last year’s *Crime And Punishment* on BBC Two. But his latest roles in both *State Of Play* and his upcoming film, *Miranda*, where he stars alongside Christina Ricci, are a departure from all that.

The decision to play someone “a bit more grown up” was a conscious one. “I usually play brooding, weight-of-the world weirdos,” he chuckles, “but

Cal’s not one of those. He’s a bit more normal. He’s not a perfect person – he hasn’t settled down and he’s a bit crumpled – but he’s an investigative journalist, a professional, and very high up in his job so in that respect it is very different.

“He does try to help Stephen, but there is always that thing at the back of his mind that the story is everything. The more he unravels it, the more exciting it gets and he’s like a bloodhound. He’ll break rules to get what he wants. His friendship with Stephen sometimes puts him at odds with the rest of the investigative team. But it’s an advantage because sometimes he wouldn’t have got half the information he has unless he had been friends with him.

“The whole relationship with Anne is a messy love thing which he doesn’t really mean to happen. But she and Stephen had already split up so it’s not his fault. She needs a shoulder to cry on and he’s vulnerable. I don’t think he’s ever been very good with women,” he explains.

Simm was looking forward to working with David Morrissey as he had admired his work for a long time, particularly in Tony Marchant’s *Holding On*. But the connection goes way back: “He did something called *One Summer* years ago which I remember very well from being a kid. It stuck in my head and it was one of the things that made me want to go to drama school,” Simm says. However, Morrissey wasn’t overly flattered when Simm told him of his early admiration. “He just said, ‘thanks, that makes me feel really old,’” he laughs.

Simm spent time in the offices of both *The Times* and *The Guardian* in preparation for the role. “There’s a lot of things that journalists find out that they can’t tell you or they can’t print. But the interesting thing for me was the how the place came alive as the deadline approached, the buzz of the office became really prominent and everyone’s body language changed.”

Simm very briefly toyed with the idea of becoming a journalist himself before he left school, taking part

in an organised trip around a local paper and he admits that the idea of being an investigative journalist holds some appeal for him: “You have a licence to do undercover detective work which could be very interesting.”

However, it is unlikely that Simm would be able to squeeze another career into his busy life as actor, musician and new father.

He is due to begin work shortly in Dublin on *The Six Revenges Of Gregory Lynn*, a film which he describes as “a cross between *Natural Born Killers* and *Billy Liar*”. He plays a librarian who kills off his old teachers one by one and will star alongside Brenda Blethyn, Michael Gambon and Joely Richardson. In *Miranda*, due to be released shortly in the States, he plays another librarian. Simm says the film is lighter than his usual roles and his character is eccentric, romantic, shy and quite funny looking – “he has a mad quiff and dresses like Frank Sinatra.” He starts a passionate affair with a mysterious woman who walks into his library and, when she suddenly disappears, he travels down to London to search for her only to discover that she has three identities – dancer, dominatrix and con-woman.

However, the roles for which Simm is still recognised in the street are usually his earliest – Danny in *The Lakes* and then Jip in the raver film *Human Traffic*. In fact, the latter provoked such a response he soon found himself under siege whenever he went clubbing, surrounded by ravers on the dance floor “all gurning away”. Although he concedes that it is part of the job, he hates the idea of celebrity culture. “It infuriates me and makes me angry. I couldn’t watch the Oscars in the middle of the war – actors slapping themselves on the back is just crass. I think the worst thing an actor can be is a celebrity because you lose all the mystery. It makes it harder for anyone to believe in you as the character.”

He finds it difficult to pick a favourite role but, when pushed, says he thinks *Crime And Punishment* was the best thing he’s ever done. “It was so meaty, dark and heavy – kind of similar to *Hamlet* without playing *Hamlet*.” Which is a surprise as you might expect his favourite to be his performance as Joy Division guitarist and New Order frontman Bernard Sumner in *24 Hour Party People*, a role which combined his two great loves – acting and

music – and one which Simm describes as “the best fun job I’ve ever had”.

He has recently played on Ian McCulloch’s new album, *Slideling*, which is to be released shortly, and says he might get up and do a few songs with him when he tours. If he does, it won’t be the first time he’s shared a stage with McCulloch as his band, Magic Alex, have supported Echo And The Bunnymen on tour. He says there are plans for Magic Alex to release an EP this year but swiftly qualifies it with “but we keep saying that, we’re all really busy”. He has no regrets about concentrating his professional energies on acting: “We’ve surpassed everything I thought we would do anyway, so anything else is just a bonus.”

These days, he insists that he is much more of a family man, happy to spend time at home with his girlfriend, actress Kate McGowan, and their 19-month-old son, Ryan. He describes Ryan as “the meaning of life” and is consequently not looking forward to a two-week trip to promote *Miranda* in the States. “I’ve never left him for that long before – it’ll break my heart when I get on the plane,” he says. “Being a father, your priorities suddenly change, you’re not number one any more, which is quite a weird thing – if the proverbial truck was hurtling towards me, I’d rather die than him. I’d cut my own throat if he wanted blood.” But Simm, an avid Manchester United fan, says it could all change if Ryan doesn’t do the right thing when it comes to supporting a football team. “I won’t feel like that if he grows up an Arsenal fan,” he jokes. “If he’s an Arsenal fan he can find somewhere else to live, it’s all out the window then!”

David Morrissey plays Stephen Collins



David Morrissey found his latest role as politician Stephen Collins particularly tricky to play. “Stephen is genuine and honest, but because he is a politician and these are not qualities which we believe are common amongst our own politicians, your natural instinct is not to believe in him,” he says. “At best, people are apathetic about politicians and, at worst, they’re completely cynical.”

For his own part, Morrissey falls somewhere between the two. “It’s how I feel about some politicians, but not all of them. I believe in the political machine and that, for all its flaws, the democracy we have is the best way to run the country.”

Stephen Collins is an up-and-coming light of the Labour party. As the Chairman of a Select Energy Committee on oil he’s being groomed for high office. He’s very ambitious, very capable, and things are going swimmingly for him until one day, his researcher falls under a train and all at once his life starts to fall apart.

He turns to Cal for help. Cal was once his campaign manager and they were very close but pressure of work has meant they’ve drifted apart. “He enlists Cal’s help as a damage limitation exercise, but also because he really does need his friends, but things get very complicated, not least because Cal starts an affair with his wife,” says Morrissey.

“In *State Of Play* the main focus is finding out who’s spinning who and who’s telling the truth. As the story goes on, it dawns on both Stephen and Cal that there are bigger things at work than they thought.”

As research for the role, Morrissey spent some time shadowing Peter Mandelson and two other MPs, but his time in Parliament didn’t make him want to be a politician himself. “It’s a ruthless profession, they were all quite open about the fact that if you want to rise in the party you have to be careful who you affiliate yourself with. There’s a line in *State Of Play* when an MP says, ‘the enemy isn’t sitting opposite you but all around you,’ and it’s true. As a politician, you’re not allowed to show vulnerability and I’d find that very difficult.

“You do think they live a slightly glamorous life, particularly someone like Mandelson, but actually it’s really hard work. It’s a huge workload, especially if your constituency is outside of London and you have to do a lot of travelling. That’s part of the reason why Stephen’s marriage falls apart – it’s a fact that for a relationship to be successful you have to spend time with someone!”

Morrissey found the whole experience of filming *State Of Play* a bit schizophrenic as he used a six-week break during shooting to fly to Luxembourg and film *Girl With The Pearl Earring* with Colin Firth. Based on Tracy Chevalier’s novel about Vermeer, Morrissey plays Vermeer’s friend and confidante, Van Leeuwenhoek. “One minute I was in the modern day and the next I was in doublet and hose, with a big moustache, beard and long wig – that was very weird and it was difficult to go back to *State Of Play* after that.”



Morrissey has a reputation for playing meaty roles. His most recent appearance was as the traumatised father of a baby born three months prematurely, whose relationship with his wife collapses under the strain, in *This Little Life*. Prior to that, he made an acclaimed appearance opposite Tamzin Outhwaite in the award-winning *Out Of Control*. In Dominic Savage's BBC One film, he played an officer in a young offenders' institution, unable to prevent one of the inmates from taking his own life. He has also played troubled characters in *Holding On, Murder* and *The Suicide Club*... the list is seemingly endless.

However, he has had forays into the lighter side of things in *Linda Green* and *Born Romantic*, a film about salsa and love, in which he played opposite Jane Horrocks. "I tend to play people who are going through trauma. I'm happy to be seen as a serious actor but I wouldn't mind a bit more frivolity. Still, I'd rather be playing them in my work rather than living them in my real life and doing comedy all the time," he says with a wry grin.

In real life, Morrissey is a father of two whose partner, Esther Freud, was behind his recent departure into the world of directing. "She got fed up with me complaining about not having enough creative responsibility and told me to do something about it or stop moaning." The result is his own production company, Tubedale Films, and he has already made a few successful shorts as well as *Sweet Revenge* for BBC One. He's keen to do more directing but his next project, an adaptation of Freud's *The Wild*, is stalled at the moment, a combination of too much acting work on Morrissey's part and the recent demise of the film's backers, Film Four. Nevertheless, it remains "very much on the front burner".

He says that being a director has given him a different perspective on being an actor. "Basically you know what's your business and what isn't. Before, as an actor, I thought everything was my business, I'd go mad about where the catering truck was parked, but now I know I'm just here to do my job."

Kelly Macdonald plays Della



Kelly Macdonald first shot to fame in *Trainspotting* and, since then, has had numerous roles, most notably as Mary, the maid, in Robert Altman's *Gosford Park*. But, like John Simm, she found herself playing someone with "a proper job" for the first time as Cal McCaffrey's sidekick, Della, in *State Of Play*.

"She takes her work very seriously and is very career-minded – she's 24 hours on the job and you imagine her personal life probably suffers quite badly," she says of journalist Della. "Della is part of the investigative team looking into the death of Stephen's researcher, Sonia, and is the one who first unearths the connection between her and murdered teenager Kelvin Stagg."

But for all her professionalism and hard-nosed investigative skills she has a few vulnerabilities which she tries to keep well hidden. "She's like a Cadbury's Cream Egg – she's got a hard shell and a soft centre. There are certain things that happen to

her where she feels her life is threatened and you can see her get upset, but she doesn't like to show it to people. She soon recovers and starts being the aggressive force that she was before.

"Della thinks that Cal is too personally involved to be able to do his job properly. He makes certain decisions that she doesn't agree with but, because he's a couple of rungs above her, there's not much she can do about it, except tell him what she thinks, and so they have a few spats. But at the end of the day they are mates and respect each other – they've both got the same aims work wise."

Della also has some useful connections of her own and has a reciprocal arrangement with the police, trading snippets of information on cases. But when the stakes are raised on the investigation, she finds herself dealing with the equally hard-nosed Detective Inspector Bell (played by Philip Glenister) who is determined that the journalists shouldn't be one step ahead of them. "There's a lot of friction between Della and DCI Bell," says Macdonald. "They annoy each other all the time, and they keep getting in each other's way, but they end up helping each other out in order to make progress on the case."

Asked whether she thinks it's the media or the politicians who hold the most power, she pauses to consider. "I think one can't really work without the other, it's an interesting thing. We are told what the Government wants us to know, and there are things going on behind the scenes so you can't take things that you read at face value."

Brought up on a Glasgow council estate, Macdonald famously got her big break when a friend persuaded her to attend an open audition for *Trainspotting*, while she was working in a pub and thinking about applying for drama school. She says that without the film, it would have taken her a bit longer, but she would always have become an actress, although her lack of formal training worried her at first: "It wasn't like I was being treated any differently but, in my head, I thought because I hadn't been to drama school I didn't deserve to be there." Now she's glad that she didn't go to drama school: "The more people I talk to the more I



Kelly Macdonald

realise that it's not a problem. I hope I've been learning as I go along, which is much more entertaining for other people," she laughs.

Gosford Park certainly saw her holding her own with some of the biggest names of stage and screen as Mary, the maid through who witnesses much of the action as it unfolds. "Every day there was somebody new and more famous than the next. I was in a nice place in the film because I could openly watch the other actors at work – my character was watching what everybody else was doing," she says of her time alongside Michael Gambon, Maggie Smith, Helen Mirren, Emily Watson, Richard E Grant and Alan Bates.

With Robert Altman at the helm and that kind of cast it was bound to get noticed but Macdonald insists "it was a bit of a surprise to everybody that a lot of people went to see it, and then went back to see it again, which is a really nice thing, even if it was because they couldn't understand the plot and went back to verify it!"

In the last year, she has filmed two more features due to be released in 2003. She appears alongside Johnny Depp, Kate Winslet, Julie Christie and Dustin Hoffmann as Peter Pan in *Neverland*, a film about JM Barrie and how he first came up with one of the most famous stories of all time. And she stars with Colin Farrell in *Intermission*. "It's about a bunch of idiots really trying to sort their lives out, and I'm one of them!" *Intermission* was filmed in Dublin, and Macdonald says that the experience was very similar to working on *Trainspotting*.

Macdonald moved to London five years ago when she was 22. "I didn't think I'd last very long but I thought I'd give it a go and I really like it." She now shares a home with Travis bassist Dougie Payne, to whom she has recently become engaged. The pair met in Glasgow at an art exhibition. For such a starry couple they manage to avoid the paparazzi quite well – a situation that Macdonald is more than happy with.

Bill Nighy plays Cameron Foster



Bill Nighy has had a busy time lately. Since his most recent TV appearances as Grainger in *Auf Wiedersehen*, Pet and as King George V's brilliantly adept private secretary Stamfordham in *The Lost Prince* earlier this year, he has found time to film three movies and was running between film lots in Shepperton, finishing off scenes in Richard Curtis's upcoming *Love Actually* as shooting started on *State Of Play*.

Nighy plays Cameron Foster, the wise-cracking editor of *The Herald*. "He's a decent man in a hard game and he absolutely believes in the benign power of newspapers. He seems to have survived the experience of having worked in Fleet Street in an admirable way. He's honest and he does think that if you bring information into the world it is with a view to making things better," explains Nighy. "He sails a little close to the wind, especially when it comes to legal matters, but nothing irresponsible or sinister."

As the investigation twists and turns, he and his team of reporters find themselves trying to stay

one step ahead of the police investigation. This doesn't make him popular with DCI Bell. "He relishes the cut and thrust of it all and gets a huge bang out of his job," says Nighy. "He has a particularly strong relationship with Cal – Cal reminds him of his younger self. He puts a lot of trust in Cal and I guess there must be a couple of moments when he speculates about it. But for the most part I don't think he doubts Cal's motives or his integrity, although he thinks there are times when he's serving too close to the line."

Nighy is familiar with the world of journalism, "I played seven journalists when I was a young man – it became a running joke when I was in my thirties – but never an editor. I'm going up in the world," he laughs.

He reveals he once wanted to be a journalist himself, applying for a job at the *Croydon Advertiser*. "I wanted to be a journalist principally because Ernest Hemmingway had been a journalist, and he was my hero. I was very keen and really saw myself in a good hat and decent trench coat. I had the completely romantic version of what a journalist was like. During the days, I'd meet and fall in love with beautiful women and in the evenings I imagined that I'd write a novel. If I'd have bothered to pay attention during school, it could all have happened!"

"I left school under a cloud – in other words they asked me if I would consider not coming back again," says Nighy. "I was taken to the youth employment centre by my mother and the bloke said, 'What do you want to do?' and I said, rather lamely and meekly, 'I want to be an author'. My mother pressed her foot on mine very hard and violently under the table, but he was very kind and politely looked through the pages of his books to see what he could get. He said that he didn't have any jobs for authors but he did know of a job working as a messenger boy on the *Field Magazine*, which was a hunting, shooting and fishing magazine. I did that for a while. In fact, halfway through my time there, the proprietor said that if I learned short-hand he would put me in the sub-editor's

office, so it could have worked out and I could well have gone on to become a journalist.”

Instead he went into acting. “I had done a bit of acting at school. I was tall and therefore got to play boys, thank God. I was at a boy’s school, so if you were slight you got to play the girls, which was a kind of hell. I had a reasonable memory so I used to get the big parts,” he says modestly. “I was completely naïve about acting and didn’t seriously consider it. I did write to a couple of theatres and they said that I could go and work with them but it would have to be for free. But that was no good because I didn’t have any money. And there was nobody in my family who had ever been involved with acting, so I didn’t know anybody.

“Eventually I had a girlfriend who suggested that I might go to drama school. But I never really thought I’d be an actor – it was just a glamorous opportunity for further education. I could be a student, which was quite posh. My life was scheduled to start quite soon – I was always one of those people whose life was going to start tomorrow. And then I left drama school and got a job – and I continued to get jobs. And then you wake up a few years later and say, ‘I guess I’m an actor’.”

When *State Of Play* arrived through his letterbox, Nighy says he sat down on the sofa and read the scripts straight through. “I didn’t get up once – it doesn’t just have one twist, but several. It’s a real achievement to keep you guessing like that. I think the conspiracy thriller is an incredibly popular genre and one that people miss on television. It has something very powerful to say, there are sinister workings here.”

Of his other recent projects he says, modestly, “It’s been a very good year – something that actors dream about.”

In *Love Actually*, written and directed by Richard Curtis, he plays a middle-aged, drug-riddled one-time rock god in a star-studded cast including Hugh Grant, Liam Neeson, Emma Thompson, Colin Firth, Martine McCutcheon, Laura Linney, Billy Bob Thornton, Alan Rickman and Michael Parkinson.

He also played a vampire in a werewolf movie called *Underworld* with Kate Beckinsale and Michael

Sheen, which gave him his first experience of prosthetics. “I had six-hour make-ups, which was a bit of a shock, and it took two hours to take off – they chip it off like wallpaper. When I was wearing the full garb, people treated me very cautiously. They didn’t want to come anywhere near me and they certainly didn’t want to eat their lunch with me.”

However, one of his favourite roles was in BBC Films’ *I Capture The Castle*, starring Romola Garai and Tara Fitzgerald. “I play a genius who is surrounded by beautiful women who fuss over him the whole time – that was a really tough gig,” he jokes.

And his hectic schedule doesn’t look set to stop as he will shortly begin filming *Sean Of The Dead*, a zombie movie written by and starring Simon Pegg.

Polly Walker plays Anne Collins



Polly Walker, who plays Stephen Collins's wife Anne, has most recently been seen on screen playing a very different kind of politician's wife – the 'fragrant' Mary Archer in Guy Jenkin's *Jeffrey Archer – The Truth* last autumn on BBC One.

However, it's doubtful that Mary Archer would have anything in common with Anne Collins who is, as Walker points out, "not your typical politician's wife. She's quite opinionated, she has her own career and she's fiercely independent. Her priorities are her children. Her marriage isn't in the best possible condition because Stephen puts his work first and they see very little of each other. So really she's like a single parent, bringing the kids up."

Despite her recent roles, Walker couldn't see herself as the loving partner of an MP. "I can't imagine a politician would want to be with me," she laughs. "I don't imagine I have the right attributes, sacrificing

everything for your husband's career, putting him totally number one. I don't think I could do that. And neither could Anne really. I think that's why the marriage disintegrated, I don't think she was ready to disappear as a person."

When Anne discovers Stephen's affair, she feels deeply betrayed and resents the way the Westminster spin doctors try to manipulate her in order to keep Stephen's career on track. "She wants the facts and then she can act accordingly. She doesn't want to be lied to. She's a bright woman and doesn't want to be patronised. She plays along because the children would be the ones to really suffer from the bad publicity."

The subsequent affair with Cal is unexpected. "She's in a very vulnerable place and she's feeling rejected. Her husband has been having an affair with a younger woman, and her self esteem is pretty low. Cal seems to be very keen on her and it makes her feel good. It's as simple as that."

Walker says that her role was all about the emotional fall-out of the revelations caused by Sonia's death and she didn't get drawn into the conspiracy side of things. "It's like lots of different stories and I was only working with a few people so it was a weird experience for me, almost like doing a completely different series," she says.

Walker is a big fan of conspiracy thrillers. "I think everybody likes guessing 'whodunit'. It's nice to actually be mentally involved as well and try to work things out." And in real life she admits to being "completely sceptical about what I read and what I'm told by governments".

Walker's first major TV appearance was the lead in *Lorna Doone* and she was soon making waves in Hollywood with her portrayal of a ruthless terrorist opposite Harrison Ford in *Patriot Games*. Roles in period films such as *Enchanted April*; *Restoration*, where she played the mistress of the decadent King Charles II; and the decidedly more demure Jane Fairfax in the 1996 film *Emma* followed. Her most recent big screen appearance is the Sylvester Stallone vehicle *Eye See You*.



Polly Walker

Born and brought up in Warrington, Walker attended ballet boarding school but dismisses reports that she was destined to be a dancer until an injury put her on the path to acting. "I was always going to act," she says. "Ballet was something that I just seemed to fall into because I couldn't start acting at seven."