



# SAFE HOUSE



## Production Notes



# PRODUCTION NOTES

Press Release.....	Page 3
Foreword by Michael Crompton.....	Page 4
Director's Statement by Marc Evans.....	Page 5
Christopher Eccleston is Robert.....	Page 6
Marsha Thomason is Katy .....	Page 9
Paterson Joseph is DCI Mark Maxwell.....	Page 12
Jason Merrells is David Blackwell.....	Page 15
Nicola Stephenson is Ali Blackwell .....	Page 18
Episode synopses .....	Page 21
Cast list .....	Page 23
Production credits .....	Page 24



## ATMOSPHERIC THRILLER SAFE HOUSE PRODUCED BY ELEVENTH HOUR FILMS

Acclaimed British actor Christopher Eccleston ('The Leftovers', 'Thor: The Dark World') stars alongside Marsha Thomason ('White Collar') and Paterson Joseph ('The Leftovers', 'Law & Order: UK') in a new four-part drama series **Safe House** from Eleventh Hour Films. **Safe House** is a tense thriller set in the beautiful wilderness of the Lake District.

The cast also includes Jason Merrells ('Emmerdale', 'Waterloo Road'), Nicola Stephenson ('All At Sea', 'Holby City'), and Peter Ferdinando ('Starred Up', 'Hyena').

The 4-part drama tells the story of a married couple: Robert (Christopher Eccleston) a former detective and Katy (Marsha Thomason) a teacher who are asked by close friend and detective Mark (Paterson Joseph), to turn their remote guest house into a police safe house.

Their first 'guests' at the safe house, are a family in fear of their lives after they are violently attacked by someone who claims to know them. For Robert protecting the family resurrects fears and anxieties bound up in a terrifying night eighteen months ago – where he was protecting a star witness who was about to testify against her gangland husband. He was shot, and she was killed. As a consequence of running the safe house, Robert re-questions this incident and uncovers a web of lies.

**Safe House** is a distinctive character-driven drama created and written by Michael Crompton ('Code of A Killer', 'Kidnap & Ransom'), and directed by award-winning Marc Evans ('Hinterland', 'Collision') and produced by Andrew Benson ('Strike Back', 'Mad Dogs'). Executive Producers for Eleventh Hour Films are Jill Green and Paula Cuddy.

**Safe House** is potentially a returnable series for ITV and Eleventh Hour Films and was commissioned by ITV's Director of Drama, Steve November and Controller of Drama, Victoria Fea. The production has been overseen for ITV by Head of ITV Drama Series, Jane Hudson.

Steve November said: "We're delighted to commission **Safe House** from Jill Green and Eleventh Hour Films. It's a compelling four-part drama from Michael Crompton with great characters and genuine twists which keep you guessing right to the end."

Jill Green ('Foyle's War', 'Collision', 'The American') said: "This brilliant idea for a psychological thriller has attracted a strong cast – and will keep viewers gripped."



## FOREWORD BY WRITER AND CREATOR, MICHAEL CROMPTON

**There is a house hidden away in a beautiful and remote part of the Lake District. It is a guest house. But it's not. That's such a great cover story.**

All of us have at least one secret we hope will never become known. It's what people hide and don't want us to know that's always the most fascinating – and compelling drama is stacked with secrets and revelations. And so it is with **Safe House**. All the characters are dealing with secrets of one kind or another.

I wanted the couple (Robert and Katy) running the safe house as well as the first guests (the Blackwell family) to be people the viewers could relate to. This might be me or you in there.

Initially no-one knows why the Blackwell family have been targeted and whilst the police, directed by DCI Mark Maxwell, hunt the man at large, our hero Robert conducts an investigation into the family members under his protection at the safe house. But it's not only the family who have secrets and truths to deal with so do our couple Robert & Katy, which as a result of running the safe house begin to surface...

### **'Living With Secrets'**

By definition a safe house and anyone staying there must be kept a secret. Friends of Robert and Katy's who 'drop-by' inadvertently become a threat. The guests have to be very careful – No using their phones or laptops or casually going onto Facebook to update their status. They have to disappear – but how do you do that in these days of social media, instant communication and being constantly accessible?

One of the things I learned from our police advisor was that people in hiding are often given a 'script' to learn. What's their name? Why are they here? Where have they come from? All of this completely intrigued me. They need to appear to be normal – on holiday perhaps – but this involves subterfuge and lying. What happens if or when they make a mistake? When your life may depend on it – the stakes are of course high and in our show, the Blackwell family is under constant pressure and threat.

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**Safe House** was inspired by a casual anecdote – Across the UK there are safe houses managed by private individuals and used by different agencies such as the police, the prison service, intelligence and security services, the armed forces, multi-national businesses. I hadn't seen a safe house in a drama run by 'normal people' and was gripped the idea of using this precinct in a fresh way to create a tense and thrilling crime drama that wasn't straight police procedure. I made myself a golden rule to never go inside a police station, 'No Cop Shops'.

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## DIRECTOR MARC EVANS ON THE ATTRACTION OF SAFE HOUSE

Television allows you to paint on a different canvas and right now, with its American and European influences, it is a very exciting place to be. So a four parter set in the Lakes, with ambition and a considerable amount of freedom, seemed like a golden opportunity. To then be able to attract Chris Eccleston to play Robert was the ultimate bonus.

What attracted me to the story and characters was the writer Michael Crompton's interest in what makes families tick, how "blended families" work and the meaning and responsibility of parenthood. Of course the piece is first and foremost a thriller but at its heart I felt there was a fable about parenthood. In particular the relationship between Robert, the childless protector and Joe, the youngest member of the Blackwell family – a surrogate son in need of protection was interesting to me and as an older father of two was something that struck a chord. Plus there was the challenge of two intertwining narratives. Technically this is always a tricky thing to get right (and **Safe House** was no exception!) but it is also an opportunity for more adventurous directing and less linear story-telling.

I seem to have made a lot of films that are based around houses and landscape. In **Safe House** I wanted the house to feel both safe and dangerous at various times, for the viewer to be aware of its physical presence; the shape of a door, the texture of a wall or the view through a window. As for the landscape – our backdrop was the magnificent Lake District in all its majesty – I wanted those fells and lakes to seem far from "safe" to this little exiled suburban family. There are no picket fences or privet hedges here, the back of the house merges with the endlessly changing mountains, the front garden dissolves into the lake.

I wanted Chris's character Robert to have a physical and mental relationship with the lake, it's the place he swims to get physically strong, but it is also the place in which, during his solitary swims, he can think about the past. The lake has hidden depths so to speak.

You can soon run out of angles filming in a house, however big it may seem at the outset. For all their limitations, I prefer responding to real locations rather a studio space and when Cristina Casali (the production designer) and I first visited the house it had more than just the right scale and proportions for filming on its side. It had a very special atmosphere, something that is hard to quantify...it got under our skin. These initial, instinctive responses to a place are important because once you start shooting the house becomes a film studio, over-run by crew and equipment, and it is important to try and capture and re-kindle on film what its personality is as a place, what attracted you to it in the first place.

The director of photography Jan Jonaeus's framing and use of natural light were integral to the whole piece and we both loved being out in the British weather trying to capture the mood and atmosphere it can bring (give us rain anytime over a bland white sky). It's no coincidence that the Lake District was the landscape of choice for those dark, romantic poets and the hardest of present day ramblers. It's a place that can defeat you (and almost did at several times during the shoot) but I am proud that we have brought this seldom filmed corner of Britain onto our TV screens



### **CHRISTOPHER ECCLESTON IS ROBERT**

**Christopher plays Robert, a former police detective who has embarked on a new life in the Lakes after being seriously injured in the line of duty, looking after a witness who was due to testify against her gangland husband, when Robert was ambushed and she was killed.**

**Having left the police force following this incident, Robert now runs an isolated Lake District guest house – Tarrock House – with his wife Katy (Marsha Thomason) but is still restless and suffers nightmares about his experience.**

“I think if I was as severely traumatised as this character I would definitely use nature and physical exercise. I’m a runner and physical exercise is a big part of my own mental health.”

“So I would do what Robert does if I had suffered that kind of trauma. I would re-locate and work through it with physical exercise of some sort. I had a real connection with him and his compulsion to swim.”

“I had to wild swim in Coniston Water once or twice and I was in Derwent Water three times...and it was very cold.”

“I was in a wet suit. Everybody who swims in there swims in a wet suit unless it’s the height of summer. I was probably in the water for maybe half an hour, 45 minutes, for each sequence.”

“The swimming scenes were not the greatest thing to contemplate the night before. But to actually do them was wonderful. Exhilarating. So when they put me in the box I can say, ‘Well, I did that.’”

**Robert’s birthday party reunites him with his former boss and best mate DCI Mark Maxwell (Paterson Joseph).**

“They go back a long time and treated each other with absolute trust. There was a brotherhood between Robert and Mark,” explains Chris.

“Robert was a very serious career policeman with no time in his life for anything other than his job. There was no wife or children. He was very driven. Then about six months before he was shot he met Katy, who basically changed his view of the world. Then after he was shot she immediately became a carer for a deeply traumatised man.

“Being shot and so close to death, also witnessing the death of another human being who is under your care – not only is there personal humiliation, it’s the brush with mortality that you either learn from or go under.”

“As a protection officer you’re handling very fragile, vulnerable and scared people. And it takes a particular kind of talent to do that.”

“I think Robert has had some form of breakdown and then some form of spiritual re-birth. He’s essentially two different people. It’s opened him up, made him aware of his own mortality. He’s become much more reflective, perhaps more sensitive. He’s joined the human race. Which is perhaps why he’s re-located close to nature.”

“So he’s now an urban policeman running a guest house. Obviously it’s too extreme a change to work for a driven man like that, to suddenly be making teas and coffees. It’s always going to blow up in his face. And, most importantly, he knows that he still doesn’t know the whole story of what happened to him that fateful night.”

Mark offers Robert the chance to get involved in police work again by using Tarrock House as a safe house.

“Robert leaps at the offer, ill-advisedly in a sense. But we often do things like that and they lead us to what we need. Then through a lot of pain and struggle he finds out some fairly uncomfortable truths.”

Chris continues: “Paterson is one of the finest actors of my generation. He’s a real actor’s actor. I’ve come close to working with him on a couple of occasions. Once in ‘Doctor Who’ and once in the American series ‘The Leftovers’. Finally in **Safe House** we got eyeball to eyeball and got on famously. A great experience.”

“Marsha is a really strong actress in the role of the Katy, Robert’s wife. She’s the rock for Robert. It’s very much two very strong individuals.”

**Both the Lake District and Tarrock House are characters in their own rights.**

“The Lake District was a fantastic location. Our director Marc Evans led us into the most extremes of the Lakes and it was great. Because there’s nothing that makes me happier than being out of reach of email and mobiles.”

“The weather was very kind to us, most of the time. The first 10 days it rained but apart from that we had extraordinary good luck with the weather over an eight week shoot. It’s a challenging environment to film in but that’s what you hope ends up on the screen.”

“The house is a central character. We do have the sense the ‘safe house’ is ironic. Because it’s not safe. It’s haunted by Robert. A troubled but very decent man. But as we approach the truth you will see the house brighten and become safer.

“The main attraction of **Safe House** for me was the director Marc Evans, who is about the most visually literate director I’ve ever worked with. I worked with him in 1992 on ‘Friday On My Mind’ and he is a fine director of actors.”

“I’ve previous experience with him shooting in the valleys of Wales so I knew what to expect in terms of the demands he’d make on the cast and crew. He is a brilliant visual storyteller. I feel we’ve created a great visual language for the drama and told it with imagery as much as we possibly could.”

**Robert becomes something of a father figure to Joe Blackwell (Max True), the youngest son of the Blackwell family who take shelter in the safe house.**

“Max was a real gift to the production. Completely unphased by working with all these intense lunatics like myself. He just turned up, stole every scene and went home. He enjoyed doing it and was very good.”

“Robert has an instinctive understanding but he’s no hero. He crosses the line and forgets his responsibility in the pursuit of evidence. Once the policeman in him kicks in and there’s a scent of the truth, all bets are off.”

Salford-born Christopher was just a boy himself when he had his first encounter with the Lake District.

“We used to go on holiday to a caravan site in Arnside and went treading in the estuary between there and Grange-Over-Sands. When the tidal bore was out we would walk on the channels, find flat fish, put them in your little string bag and go home and cook them.”

“There’s something very magical and scary about the tidal bore when it comes in. You’ve got to move. And the scale of the Lakes and fells is breathtaking, along with the beauty. Plus the micro-climate and changeability of the weather.”

“Anywhere in nature I feel much safer. Much clearer about everything. I was brought up in a council estate, so maybe it’s natural to yearn for the countryside.”

“The lack of light pollution in the Lake District is unbelievable. The sights we saw. The clarity. Just wonderful. And great beer as well,” he laughs.

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### MARSHA THOMASON IS KATY

**Safe House** provided a homecoming for Marsha Thomason.

The Manchester-born actress is now based in Los Angeles after starring roles in American TV shows 'Las Vegas', 'Lost' and 'White Collar'. But the former 'Playing The Field', 'Burn It' and 'Where The Heart Is' star seized the chance to return to British television.

"I've been on 'White Collar' for the last six years and that show was coming to an end last summer. So I had a conversation with my English agent. It's been a long time since I've been able to come back home and work."

"**Safe House** was the first script that came through and the opportunity to work with Chris Eccleston and the director Marc Evans was a no-brainer. It was very fortuitous."

"Initially I had the first two scripts to read and when I got to the end of the second one I was fuming that if I didn't get the job I wouldn't know what happened as, of course, I don't live in the UK now and might not get to see the series."

"I just remember thinking, 'Ah, what is going to happen?' So it was lucky that I got the job."

Adds Marsha: "It's a great story because it has both the thriller element with the family under threat and then this other element with Katy, Robert (Christopher Eccleston) and Mark (Paterson Joseph). I think the audience will be gripped."

"Katy is someone who has tried to put her past behind her. She doesn't talk about it but we sense there's something there. She's a loving wife to Robert and very supportive."

"They hadn't been together that long when Robert was shot in the line of his police work. So they moved to a new life running a guest house in the Lake District because he needed a change."

"Reality very quickly set in when this terrible thing happened to him and she's had to change gears. It's all about taking care of him. Katy is a very selfless person."

Marsha, who first went to America to play Eddie Murphy's wife in Disney's 'The Haunted Mansion', was able to return to her roots for Katy.

"Katy is from Manchester so that was lovely. I don't play Mancunian very often anymore."

As a lifelong Manchester City fan, Marsha also had no problems co-starring with Manchester United supporter Christopher. "I'm married to a Red, so it was OK," she laughs.

### **The Lake District provides a stunning backdrop to the drama.**

"I visited the Lakes as a kid and as an adult too. For a number of years friends and I have booked a cottage for a week over New Year and just holed up in the Lake District snow. I've done that loads of times all over the Lakes."

"Filming for **Safe House** was the longest I've ever been there. It was challenging and very different to going on a week's break. It's also a place where there's very limited internet and your mobile phone doesn't work. That was hard for somebody like me who's a bit of a 'techie'. I like my mod cons. But it all added to the sense of isolation."

"The rain in the Lakes made for a different kind of shoot. We would show up in the morning and whatever we'd planned to film we weren't necessarily going to do. You had to roll with the punches: 'We're not going to do that scene now because the sun is shining over there so the light is perfect for a scene we'd planned to do in a week's time. So we're going to do that now.'"

"It was very seat of your pants. 'Hold on. We're going for a ride.' But it was actually very creative because we were all on our toes and having to think all the time. It made for camaraderie because we were all in it together. For everyone it was one of the most challenging shoots we'd ever had. So we formed a bond going through that together."

"I would work with the director Marc Evans again in a heartbeat because he's fantastic. And I really enjoyed working with Chris so much. He's such a fine actor, as everybody knows, but also so much fun. We had a great time and laughed a lot. And Paterson is just a gent."

### **Katy and Robert's guest house becomes a haven for a family in trouble.**

"The house is a character in itself and the views are gorgeous all around. It was wonderful to see the change in colours from greens to browns from when we arrived at the beginning of October to when we left at the start of December. I've never experienced that before, never having been there for that amount of time."

### **How does the view compare with the one from Marsha's home in California?**

"My view in Los Angeles is pretty beautiful too. In fact in some ways the Lakes reminded me of LA, in that you're surrounded by mountains. You go into the valley and it's mountains all around you. Obviously LA's a big city but I did think of it quite a lot when I looked at those mountains. Although we don't have the stars in the sky in LA shining as brightly as in the Lakes." Marsha jokes "Just the ones on set."

### **Running a safe house isn't easy for Katy.**

"At one point Katy says, 'This is a lot harder than I thought it was going to be.' It's a huge thing. These people have been ripped out of their lives because something crazy is going on and they bring all of that drama into your lives and you have to take care of them. I don't think I could do it."

"I really like the way Katy is drawn to Louisa (Harriet Cains), the teenage daughter of the family. Katy is ready to be a mother and so she is able to use all of those feelings with this family."

"Becoming a mum myself definitely helped with Katy's desire to be a parent. I know when that switch flicks it's kind of everything. So I was really able to empathise with her in that way."

### **Marsha's "homecoming" including filming at Manchester's Piccadilly railway station.**

"Filming at Piccadilly train station was crazy. There were so many people. Every time I go back to Manchester it's changed so much. I see family there at least once a year and they come and visit me. It's always lovely to return to Manchester because that's where I'm from and I like being there."

### **There's also another place where Marsha feels most content and at peace.**

"I have to be honest with you, it's my own home. I travel a lot for work and there's nothing like being in your own bed, sitting in your own living room, eating at your own dining table. Just being surrounded by your own things."

"I live a bit of a circus life, travelling a lot, so there really is no place like home."

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### **PATERSON JOSEPH IS DCI MARK MAXWELL**

Destiny drew Paterson Joseph to the Lake District.

“It’s no big secret that I used to bunk off school in London quite a lot,” he confides.

“I wouldn’t do anything particularly naughty or even adventurous. I’d go to Willesden Green Library. I didn’t have time to read the books so I would nick them. I did give these books back, by the way, later.”

“But I remember nicking this book on the flora and fauna of the Lake District when I was about 14. Just because the cover looked like some alien land to me, there in Willesden.”

“I’d never seen rolling hills like that or those seemingly exotic plants, trees and animals. I don’t think I’d even seen a sheep at that point, except on telly.”

“The reality has fulfilled all of my expectations and more and where I think every urban child should go for at least a week. To see what England is really like and the beauty of the place. It’s gorgeous.”

Paterson plays DCI Mark Maxwell, who worked with former police colleague Robert (Christopher Eccleston) before he was shot and left the force.

“Mark is an inner city detective and his mate Robert was shot in the line of duty protecting a witness who was killed. They have a long working relationship and friendship. They are proper mates, not just colleagues.”

“After the shooting Robert decided to leave the police and has bought a guest house in the Lake District with his teacher wife Katy (Marsha Thomason), who also has a connection with Mark.”

“Katy calls Mark to help because Robert is obsessing about his last case. So Mark goes up to the Lake District and suggests they use the guest house as a safe house.”

“For Mark it’s killing two birds with one stone. He wants to know what’s happening with Robert and Katy and likes to be involved in their lives. And the safe house will also help Robert to stop obsessing about the woman who was shot under his protection.”

Adds Paterson: **“Safe House** was presented to me as something I might want to do and then they spoke about Chris Eccleston being attached to it. I’ve always been a big fan of Chris’s so I was half sold on it anyway before I even picked up a script. And the scripts were good. Our director Marc Evans is very insightful and knows what he is doing. It turned out to be creatively quite the most stimulating job I think I’ve ever done.”

**The cast were kept in the dark about exactly how the story would end until just before they came to film the concluding episode.**

“That can bring good things. You can start to over think when you know too much about the story or the character. But when you’re doing it moment by moment it’s clearly more spontaneous because you don’t know what’s coming next.”

**Paterson visualised the Lake District safe house while reading the scripts.**

“In my head I thought of something quite new and modern. And then when I went there I could see it wasn’t. The house feels more sinister and moody, which really lends a creepiness to the whole plot.”

“It is remote. Once you’re there you can’t see anything else. You can’t see the road, you can’t see any houses. So it does properly feel like you’re isolated.”

**Mark lives in a Salford apartment but finds himself driving backwards and forwards to the Lake District.**

“Part of the story is about the incongruity of the urban policeman dealing with crime in a country setting. Mark is a very urban black man in the middle of the fells. It’s actually quite arresting, even for me looking at it.”

“One minute you are freezing, wanting to hide from the wind in the middle of nowhere. Cloud, rain, wind, every kind of weather. Then you switch to filming in this little flat with air conditioning, big screen TV and slick bathroom. It’s definitely a series of contrasts.”

“I did a lot of driving in the first week of filming. I basically drove a car up and down the fells, avoiding sheep, because they just wander on to the road. You come around a bend and they’re just there.”

“For one scene they were filming me winding my way through a valley. I’ve put my foot down because I know they’ve cleared the road ahead. So I know nothing is going to be there, unless a sheep happens to wander across the road.”

“I’m speeding along and I did not see this hump in the road. I took off and I had, for the first time ever in my life, no wheels on the ground. Nothing. Just the air. Probably going about 45mph so it wasn’t tremendously fast but it’s narrow. One side is the lake and the other side is a bit of mountain. And the car, brilliantly, just landed like a cat and steamed around the corner.”

“So I got back to the film unit shaking and everybody was applauding and whooping like I’d done it on purpose. I was terrified. But it looks great on screen. A tiny figure in the distance going over that hump. Amazing.”

**Paterson pondered over the plight of the family in Safe House whose lives are turned upside down.**

“It was so moving. You think it might be a great adventure but the fact is, they never know when they’re going back to their lives. It’s a very powerful story.”

**A family in hiding out of necessity have to learn how to lie about their real identities. Are actors good at keeping secrets?**

“I think we can be quite good at that. Although some of us are terrible liars. Lying and acting are not as similar as people think. There’s a transaction you make with yourself as an actor where you come to a character and decide that character is you. So for the duration of whatever time you’re doing it you are that person.”

“But that isn’t a lie. That’s really a craft. You put yourself in somebody else’s shoes. Empathise to the point at which you can be them. Lying is about covering, subterfuge, fooling and obfuscating. And acting is the opposite, really. It’s about revealing. You’re unpicking another human being.”

**Aside from his own home, where does Paterson feel the safest or most content?**

“The Southern Alps. I go there quite often. It’s the place in the world where I feel most like I know who I am and what I’m doing here because of the obvious perspective you get.”

“It’s beautiful in the winter. Just hearing snow falling and nothing else.”

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### **JASON MERRELLS IS DAVID BLACKWELL**

**A game of crazy golf on the seafront at Blackpool is the start of a nightmare for a family on a night out.**

**Father David Blackwell ends up being brutally attacked by a man abducting his young son.**

“It was intense,” recalls Jason Merrells, who plays David. “Being near Blackpool Pleasure Beach, lots of people were looking on and we had to do the scene many times for each different camera set up.”

“The actor I was fighting and I were both really going for it, trying to make it as real as possible. It was hard work but all good. We were all very pleased with the end result.”

Former ‘Cutting It’, ‘Waterloo Road’ and ‘Emmerdale’ star Jason adds: “I thought it was a great script as soon as I read it. Both the story and characters rang true. Filmed in a beautiful location in the middle of nowhere.”

“David is a prison officer married to Ali (Nicola Stephenson). It’s a second marriage for both of them. He has a teenage daughter and an older son at university, both from his first marriage. While Ali has a young son called Joe, who is snatched by the man.”

“It’s a good depiction of a blended family. They’re pretty good at it most of the time but this attack comes out of nowhere and they end up in a safe house. It’s quite a journey for them and they all learn something about each other.”

**The police remove the family from their old life in the city and put them in the Lake District safe house run by Robert (Christopher Eccleston) and Katy (Marsha Thomason).**

“It’s quite a shock for the family to suddenly be taken away from their old life and everyone they know. The protection isn’t to do with guns or barbed wire. It’s all about no-one knowing they are there and banking on that. The house we used in the Lakes was a little spooky and very atmospheric to film in.”

**Jason was already a fan of the Lake District.**

"I've been up there quite a bit. Especially from working on 'Emmerdale' in Leeds, so I would go across there a lot. It's a lovely part of the world. I've spent a good many holidays there and I've walked up Scafell Pike with my eldest daughter when she was 15."

"We did that ascent in the same way that David and Robert go up in **Safe House**. Only it was much better weather when my daughter and I did it. We were battling with the weather the whole way through filming. But it is wonderful up there."

"One day we were up at the Honister Pass and they said, 'We can't film anymore so we're going to call it.' It was horizontal sleeting rain with wind and mist. You couldn't see anything."

"And then suddenly the sky cleared and the director of photography said, 'No, no, it's alright. I can see the view now. Let's go.' So we shot those scenes really quickly, just to catch the weather."

"The Lake District is a character in itself in the drama. I've never been on a show where the schedule was torn up every day in quite the way it was on **Safe House**, because the bosses wanted the absolute best. It's really nice when you've got that support behind you."

"So if the clouds were coming across and it wasn't quite the right shade of colour, then we wouldn't do it that day. We'd do something else and come back to it when the light was right. Like a movie."

"Everything was really specific and particular and set up on its own merit. You don't get that a lot in TV drama. It was them saying, 'You go for it and take the time that you need to do it.'"

"We also had time to mix with the locals. We did a couple of pub quizzes and some steak nights. The beer up there is just great. I'm a bit of a fan of real ale."

David finds himself in an unusual position with former detective Robert taking on a protective role over the Blackwell family.

"He feels awful about it. Hobbled and emasculated. There can also be a natural tension, I found, between prison officers and police officers. Some prison officers feel the police have the glamour and they have to deal with the dregs for the rest of the time and get a lot of criticism."

"So the relationship between David and Robert begins from a point of antagonism and then Robert is calling the shots, telling David what he can and cannot do. While young Joe (Max True) is bonding with Robert in the way that kids do."

"David finds that all incredibly difficult. Most men would feel like David in that situation."

"Max True, who plays Joe is a lovely kid, full of energy. He bounces around like Tigger but is just a natural when it comes to filming a scene. Which is great. I've got a lot of praise for him."

"I've known Nicola Stephenson for years and worked with her before. We did a BBC1 Afternoon Play together. We've also got a lot of mutual friends, including Angela Griffin who I worked with on 'Cutting It'."

"I'd met Marsha Thomason before but had never worked with her. She was wonderful. I worked with Christopher Eccleston on 'Clocking Off' and I'm a huge fan of his work. It was great to work with him again. While Paterson Joseph, who I'd never worked with, was just a joy. I've always thought he's a brilliant actor and it was lovely to work with him."

"I also can't speak too highly of our director Marc Evans. I really feel Safe House is the best it could be, thanks to him and the whole crew."

While Jason has enjoyed a long line of different roles, he still gets recognised in the street as businessman Declan Macey in 'Emmerdale'.

"It was quite bizarre filming scenes for **Safe House** on Blackpool Pier and people are calling out, 'Declan!' It's just one of those things."

"Soap recognition is different to other kinds of recognition when you're in people's homes so many times a week. It takes a while to fade."

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### NICOLA STEPHENSON IS ALI BLACKWELL

**Nicola Stephenson plays Ali Blackwell, the mother of a family under threat who are forced to seek shelter in a safe house.**

“My dad was a policeman and he worked in witness protection towards the end of his career, including working with families going into witness protection. So I know a little bit about how difficult it is.”

“Obviously he could never talk to us about it while he was doing the job. It was only after he retired that he said what an awful thing it is for families to go through.”

“He did all kinds of different jobs within the police force – in CID, uniform, undercover – and he said, without a shadow of a doubt, witness protection was the toughest and most harrowing.”

“Because he’d take people completely away from everybody and everything they knew and it is horrendous for them. So I had some insight into it.”

“Once we got to the house we used for filming in the Lake District it was really easy to get that feeling of isolation and fear. It was quite a spooky, eerie house. Along with the rain, gloomy skies and short autumn and winter days it was very atmospheric.”

“Also being away from my own family while filming **Safe House**. Being in a place where the phone and internet connections were really poor. That feeling of being yanked away from the comfiness, cosiness and loving arms of your family was really good for me to get into the part.”

Adds Nicola: “I really wanted to be a part of this drama and was thrilled when they offered me the part. It is a real rollercoaster ride in all the twists and turns that come along and an exciting script. A good old fashioned thriller.

“But what also appealed to me was the very human element within that. All the characters are flawed. They’ve all got secrets. You see them at the start, a seemingly happy, perfect blended family. Then it’s smashed apart.”

“It was a labour of love for everyone involved – the writer, producer, director, cast and crew. We were all tucked away in the Lake District and it became a collaboration between us all. A really exciting project to work on.”

**Ali is married to David (Jason Merrells) in what is a second marriage for them both. She is mother to young Joe (Max True) and step-mother to Louisa (Harriet Cains) and Sam (James Burrows).**

**The Blackwell family end up needing protection after a family trip to play crazy golf at the seaside ends in the attempted abduction of Joe.**

"It looks like an idyllic family at the start. You've got the sulky teenager dragging her feet along, but they're all laughing and having a great time. Then the rug is pulled out from under their feet. They seem to be a family like any other and you just go, 'That could happen to us.'"

"Ali works in probation and is a very capable woman. She is someone who looks after everybody and does that to the best of her capabilities. But she's totally out of her comfort zone in the safe house."

"We filmed the seaside scenes on a very cold and windy pier in Blackpool on November 5th – Bonfire Night. I went to Blackpool all the time as a kid and I'd forgotten how brilliant it is. I really want to take my kids there now."

**Oldham-raised Nicola was less familiar with the Lake District.**

"I had never been before. We weren't a particularly adventurous, outdoor pursuit kind of family. So we never went to the Lakes. This was my very first visit and it is very beautiful. I even got to take a boat to work on some days when we were filming on an island in the middle of a lake."

"The weather was what you'd expect in the Lake District in November. I quite like the rain because I grew up in Manchester. So it doesn't bother me. The weather just made it easier for us all to be really insular and get right into it. I found the whole atmosphere of the place really helpful."

**Nicola also loved working with her co-stars, young and old.**

"Max is not too much older than my daughter. So they're quite similar. Max is really energetic. He's moving all the time, running around. My daughter is just the same. But when the camera is turned he was so still and contained with it all going on in his eyes. I think he's going to be a little star."

"I knew Marsha Thomason, who plays Katy, socially because she did a job called 'Burn It' with my best friend Lisa Faulkner. I've also met Chris Eccleston, who plays Robert, socially because we've done a lot with Red Productions. So we've read together for projects before or done auditions together. And I worked with Paterson Joseph, who plays Mark, on 'Casualty'."

**Secrets and lies are revealed in Safe House.**

"My husband says I'm absolutely rubbish at lying. He says, 'I can't believe that someone who lies for a living is so hopeless at lying.' But I don't like telling lies. Even little white lies. If you want to play a good liar as an actor then you play the truth. The worst thing in the world to watch is someone doing 'pretending to be lying'."

"I don't analyse acting too much because I think if we did that then we wouldn't do it. Because it's tortuous, really. Most actors are really sensitive people, by the very nature of the work, who want to be liked. And yet we do a job that puts us in a position where we're constantly rejected," laughs Nicola.

“You live for that moment when you get a job. You’ve been accepted. Somebody wants you to play this part. Then you go through the torture of having to leave your family and go to the other end of the country and be away from them while you do it. But it’s a challenge and a thrill when you get it right.

“I watch my daughters playing and they are acting out little stories, little dramas, all the time. They’ll go, ‘You be the mummy, I’ll be the baby,’ or whatever it is. It’s something that’s in all of us from a young age. It’s how we learn, how we express ourselves, how we make sense of the world.”

“So I guess being an actor is a continuation of that fun you have as a kid. And when you can recreate a dramatic situation and you think you’ve got it right, it’s a massive buzz.”

“It’s true of any art form. If you paint a picture and you’ve made it exactly as you wanted it to be, that’s a massive thrill. And the flow you experience while you’re doing it is the joy of life.”

“I feel extremely lucky and privileged to be able to do it. Because not everybody gets the opportunity. Unbelievably grateful every single job I do – and a job I love so much.”

**Is there a place in the world where Nicola feels safest or most at peace?**

“The little two-seater sofa in my kitchen. It’s right by the kitchen window and looks out on our tiny little town garden. That’s where I used to sit and feed the babies, when they were babies. And that’s where they now sit and play on the iPad or whatever while I’m cooking the tea.”

“That’s my little corner of the world that is happiness. That little sofa.”

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## **EPISODE SYNOPSES**

### **EPISODE 1**

Former police officer Robert and his wife Katy left city life behind them after Robert was injured, whilst trying to protect a witness in his care. The witness, Susan Reynolds was fatally shot. Robert has been struggling with the guilt he feels over the death of Susan.—

In a bid to put the past behind them, Robert and Katy now run a guest house, hidden away in the idyllic Lake District. A surprise visitor turns up, DCI Mark Maxwell, an ex-colleague and old friend. He suggests that the guest house is perfectly positioned to operate as a safe house, Robert is tempted but will Katy agree?

Later, DCI Maxwell finds himself dealing with a family left reeling from an unexplained assault. The father, David, has been hospitalised and an innocent passer-by is in a critical condition. DCI Maxwell needs to work out why this family was targeted and track down the assailant.

Mark calls Robert to see if he and Katy will take David, Ali, Louisa and Joe Blackwell and keep them safe. They agree. Deep down Robert wants to protect this family to prove that he can still do the job – and make sure that this time nothing goes wrong.

Settled into the guest house the Blackwell family adjust to life in a safe house. The man hunting the family is being investigated by Mark who turns to Robert for help and from within the safe house Robert undertakes his own investigation into the family.

The only member of the family not in the safe house and unaccounted for is the eldest son, Sam. He is away at university, but worryingly no-one has seen or heard from him in weeks.

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### **EPISODE 2**

The Blackwell family must pretend to be ordinary holiday makers, staying at the guest house. They are given a 'script' on which they are tested by Robert and Katy – it's vital each of them knows their cover story.

Sam Blackwell's car is found smashed and abandoned and there's growing concern for his safety. The police have a possible connection between Sam and known criminal Michael Collersdale (identified as the man targeting the family). Robert explores this current theory, determined to get to the truth.

The family is tested when unexpectedly Katy's friend visits. Meanwhile Michael Collersdale confronts someone connected to the family and the daughter Louisa confides in Katy, triggering a situation which endangers the family.

At the safe house Robert's questioning of the family continues as David, the father, is under scrutiny. Can he explain the large amounts of cash arriving and leaving his bank account? He has a secret that he is desperate to keep from his Ali, his wife.

Katy is feeling the pressure of keeping the family safe and concealing the real reason for their stay. The youngest member of the family, Joe, gravitates to Robert and wants to know more about the night Robert was shot. Joe's innocent questioning leads to Robert remembering new details from the night Susan Reynolds died.

Louisa and Joe are taken for a sailing trip on the lake. When the boat disappears from sight Robert is thrown into a panic. Later Robert can't sleep and heads off into the night. Katy is worried and calls Mark who knows exactly where Robert has gone. Mark finds Robert and questions him over the true nature of his relationship with Susan Reynolds.

Meanwhile, in the city Michael Collersdale roams free.

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## CAST LIST

Robert .....	Christopher Eccleston
Katy .....	Marsha Thomason
DCI Mark Maxwell .....	Paterson Joseph
David Blackwell .....	Jason Merrells
Ali Blackwell .....	Nicola Stephenson
Sam Blackwell .....	James Burrows
Louisa Blackwell .....	Harriet Cains
Joe Blackwell .....	Max True
Ben Hodges .....	Nicholas Moss
Megan Hodges .....	Sarah Smart
DS Becky Gallacher .....	Christine Tremarco
Michael Collersdale .....	Peter Ferdinando
Susan Reynolds .....	Kelly Harrison
Gemma Underwood .....	Eleanor Samson
Dom Twyler .....	Macaulay Harewood
Eddie Reynolds .....	David Schofield

## PRODUCTION CREDITS

Writer and Creator .....Michael Crompton  
Executive Producers..... Jill Green & Paula Cuddy  
Producer .....Andrew Benson  
Director .....Marc Evans  
Line Producer.....Susan Dunn  
Production Executive.....Nicole Finnan  
Casting Director .....Gary Davy  
Make-Up & Hair Designer.....Lin Davie  
Costume Designer.....Alexandra Caulfield  
Location Manager ..... Joseph Cairns  
Sound Recordist ..... John Hughes  
Production Designer.....Cristina Casali  
Editor.....Jason Krasucki  
Composer.....Daniel Giorgetti  
Director of Photography.....Jan Jonaeus