

# 2020 AACTA AWARDS

TELEFEATURE OR MINI SERIES  
HANDBOOK



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## The Commons

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**Production Company: Playmaker Media**

**Broadcaster: Stan**

### Candidate Summary

Best Telefeature or Mini Series Candidates

Shelley Birse

Diane Haddon

David Maher

David Taylor

Lead Actor

David Lyons - *Lloyd*

Ryan Corr - *Shay Levine*

Lead Actress

Joanne Froggatt - *Eadie Boulay*

Supporting Actor

Rupert Penry-Jones - *Dom Boulay*

Dominic Ona-Ariki - *Israel Latu*

Damon Herriman - *Ben Childers*

Supporting Actress

Simone McAullay - *Francesca Boulay*

### Program Summary

Average Episode Duration: 46 minutes

#### Series Synopsis:

THE COMMONS is a character-driven thriller set in a near future, playing out at the intersection of climate change and biotechnology. The series puts a very human face on what's coming down the road and the heroism that lies inside us all when our backs are against the wall.

Taking us into a not-so-distant future, into a world one step forward technologically and two steps backward ecologically is Eadie (Joanne Froggatt). Brain Doctor. Desperate Wannabe Mum Eadie will take us on a ride through the weather channel gone wild and the terrifying brave new world of science where she will come face to face with the dark heart of intellectual property theft, the multi-billion-dollar world of disaster capitalism and the swampland that is the new eugenics. It will only be the long awaited conception, and the prospect of a tribe to protect, which will bring Eadie to a third way – to the point where we realise it's only reconnecting to our humanity which is going to save us. When we withdraw and start looking out for me and what's mine, we are lost, but when we opt in to the commons, there's a chance we just might make it.

#### Target Demo:

This premium, eight part drama series is designed to appeal to the 18 - 54 demographic of discerning Australian viewers (gender neutral) as well as international viewers who have come to expect a high level of quality in their at-home viewing. A secondary audience is skewed female with our female protagonist.

#### Popularity and Engagement:

The critical response to *The Commons* was outstanding — with critics hailing the Stan Original Series as a deftly crafted drama from AACTA Award-winning writer Shelley Birse, with standout performances from its all-star ensemble cast led by Joanne Froggatt, Rupert Penry-Jones, David Lyons and Ryan Corr. The social sentiment around *The Commons* was overall very strong, with viewers calling it ‘eerily real’ and an accurate depiction of a near future world. The contemporary/futuristic storyline and the protagonist’s personal strife resonated above all other show themes. Being filmed in well-known Sydney locations also struck a chord with audiences.

**Originality and Innovation:**

Set in a near future, playing out at the intersection of climate change and biotechnology the series challenges audiences to think about where our world may be headed.

Artful direction combined with VFX, this bleak tomorrow looks just nice enough on the surface to be plausibly liveable.

*The Commons* establishes the new status quo before the twists and conspiracies emerge. Unlike a lot of recent Australian fantasy and science-fiction, the series throws enough ideas out there to keep the setting and storylines constantly evolving, a grim future constantly showing off new facets to the viewer.

**Notes:**

# The Gloaming

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**Production Company: 2 Jons and Sweet Potato Films**

**Broadcaster: Stan**

## Candidate Summary

Best Telefeature or Mini Series Candidates

Victoria Madden

John Molloy

Fiona McConaghy

Lead Actor

Ewen Leslie - *Alex O'Connell*

Lead Actress

Emma Booth - *Molly McGee*

Supporting Actor

Martin Henderson - *Gareth McAvaney*

Aaron Pedersen - *Lewis Grimshaw*

Matt Testro - *Freddy Hopkins*

Anthony Phelan - *William Fian*

Supporting Actress

Rena Owen - *Grace Cochran*

Annie Finsterer - *Eileen McGinty*

Markella Kavenagh - *Daisy Hart*

Josephine Blazier - *Lily Broomhall*

## Program Summary

Average Episode Duration: 50 minutes

### Series Synopsis:

Time passes but grief lingers...THE GLOAMING isn't a Whodunit but a Whydunit. The killer is known from the outset, but as the investigation unfolds something else is slowly exposed. Something darker, sinister and more insidious; a crime stretching back decades; the ghosts of past traumas reaching into the present, and a terrifying occult religious order whose origins stem from transported Scottish convicts.

As we enter the story, Molly McGee is involved in a cat and mouse game with the powerful Gareth McAvaney, a man whom Molly believes got away with murder. This pursuit drives her to turn vigilante and step outside the law. As both a cop and single mother of a fourteen-year-old girl, Molly's preoccupation with Gareth inevitably embroils her personal life in the complex and dangerous choices she makes.

And all the while Molly is haunted by the past...twenty-three years ago, she and Alex O'Connell were teenage lovers on the verge of adulthood. Theirs was a tempestuous relationship, with Alex the calm negotiator and Molly the volatile wild child. Despite their age, most thought they'd end up marrying, as is the way in small towns. But on a fateful day, Molly's unpredictable mood prompted Alex to make a decision that would change both their lives forever.

One day in 1999, Alex took another girl, Jenny McGinty, on a road trip. Jenny wanted to research her family's convict history. She hinted at a dark and troubling secret in the family and had something to show Alex in her childhood home. Jenny had a crush on Alex, and he knew it, but Alex's offer to drive

her was little more than a petty way to provoke jealousy in Molly. The decision cost Jenny her life when she was killed in a seemingly random shooting - from which Alex was inexplicably spared. Alex left the island after the tragic events and he and Molly never spoke again. Yet the pair led oddly parallel lives with both of them becoming police officers. With a defiant facade, Molly put Alex and the past behind her. But now, more than two decades later, their paths will cross again when Alex is seconded to Hobart to help in the investigation of the strange and brutal murder of Dorothy Moxley. It is a killing with sinister religious overtones, yet it's not the murder that shocks them most, it is the tattered old school ID card found with the victims body - an ID card belonging to Jenny McGinty.

**Target Demo:**

Target demographic for The Gloaming was 25+ It was conceived to appeal to audiences with a love for premium international drama series, particularly in the "Nordic Noir" tradition of crime television - such as \*The Killing\* and \*The Bridge\* - as well as the show's predecessor, Tasmanian Noir series \*The Kettering Incident\*

**Popularity and Engagement:**

The Gloaming premiered as the summer tent pole for Stan on January 1 2020. While Stan does not provide figures, it has confirmed that The Gloaming was a breakout success for the platform.

**Originality and Innovation:**

The Gloaming brings premium Australian drama to the international stage, showcasing the unique voice of Victoria Madden, Australia's foremost female showrunner. The series continues Victoria's practice, beginning with The Kettering Incident, of splicing the crime and gothic/horror genres to create an innovative way of telling Australian stories.

**Notes:**

## Hungry Ghosts

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**Production Company:** Matchbox Pictures

**Broadcaster:** SBS

### Candidate Summary

Best Telefeature or Mini Series Candidates

Stephen Corvini

Timothy Hobart

Debbie Lee

Sue Masters

Lead Actor

Bryan Brown - *Neil Stockton*

Ferdinand Hoang - *Anh Nguyen*

Ryan Corr - *Dr Ben Williams*

Gareth Yuen - *Paul Nguyen*

Lead Actress

Catherine Vãn-Davies - *May Le*

Jillian Nguyen - *Sophie Tran*

Gabrielle Chan - *Lien Nguyen*

Susie Porter - *Catherine Taylor*

Supporting Actor

Vico Thai - *Quang*

Hoa Xuande - *Khoa*

Gary Sweet - *Hugh*

Hazem Shammass - *Zaer*

Supporting Actress

Clare Bowen - *Liz Stockton*

Justine Clarke - *Clare Nguyen*

Linda Hsia Chin - *Phuong Le*

Suzy Wrong - *Roxy*

### Program Summary

**Average Episode Duration:** 51 minutes

#### Series Synopsis:

The past isn't done with us yet. When a tomb in Vietnam is accidentally opened on the eve of the Hungry Ghost Festival, a vengeful spirit is unleashed, bringing the dead with him. As these spirits wreak havoc across the Vietnamese Australian community in Melbourne, reclaiming lost loves and exacting revenge, May Le, a young woman who has never taken responsibility for who she is, must finally accept her destiny and help bring balance to a community still traumatised by war.

In Vietnamese Culture, the day of someone's death is infinitely more important than the day of their birth. It is a sacred date to be celebrated each year. But the dead who are not given a proper burial or veneration become ghosts - forever wandering the earth, lost and hungry. In the Vietnam War and the years following; in the jungles and villages, in the cities and the South China Sea, nearly two million souls were lost without trace or burial - destined to become hungry ghosts that haunt the survivors to this day.

Hungry Ghosts is a character driven ghost story with heart, warmth, humour and scares. The series interweaves the stories of two Vietnamese Australian families and one Anglo; all still haunted in one way or another by the traumatic events of the Vietnam War and the exodus that followed. Through our characters and the experiences of the Vietnamese Australian community, Hungry Ghosts explores the concept of the inherent trauma we pass down from one generation to the next.

**Target Demo:**

Hungry Ghosts has a demographic target of 23 to 49 year olds with a slight female skew.

**Popularity and Engagement:**

There's anticipation for the show, but no evidence of audience engagement yet given it hasn't aired.

**Originality and Innovation:**

Hungry Ghosts is a genre-bending, supernatural thriller that uniquely explores the principles of inherent trauma through the medium of hauntings within the Australian-Vietnamese community. Told across four intergenerational and intertwining storylines, the character-driven series looks at the pain carried by the survivors of the Vietnamese war and its terrible aftermath. Especially how the children of survivors struggle to fully understand the horror their parents went through, yet still suffer the inheritance of that very trauma. Told with real heart and compassion, the series remains grounded in the tropes of an entertaining and at times, terrifying, ghost story.

**Notes:**

## Operation Buffalo

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**Production Company:** Porchlight Films

**Broadcaster:** ABC

### Candidate Summary

Best Telefeature or Mini Series Candidates

Vincent Sheehan

Tanya Phegan

Peter Duncan

Lead Actor

Ewen Leslie - *Leo Carmichael*

Lead Actress

Jessica De Gouw - *Eva Lloyd George*

Supporting Actor

James Cromwell - *Cranky*

Tony Martin - *Dick Wilcox*

Julian Garner - *Syngeon*

Angus McLaren - *Dalgleish*

Supporting Actress

Adrienne Pickering - *Corrine*

Bojana Novakovic - *Molly*

Frances Djulibing - *Ruby*

### Program Summary

Average Episode Duration: 57 minutes

#### Series Synopsis:

At Maralinga in 1956, atom bombs were not the only things being tested. At the height of the Cold War, the human capacity for loyalty and betrayal were constantly pitted against each other. But not just in terms of espionage. Friend against friend. Lover against lover. Government against its people. If only trust could bloom in an infinite desert. But these are not trusting times.

#### Target Demo:

Gender natural, 30-50+

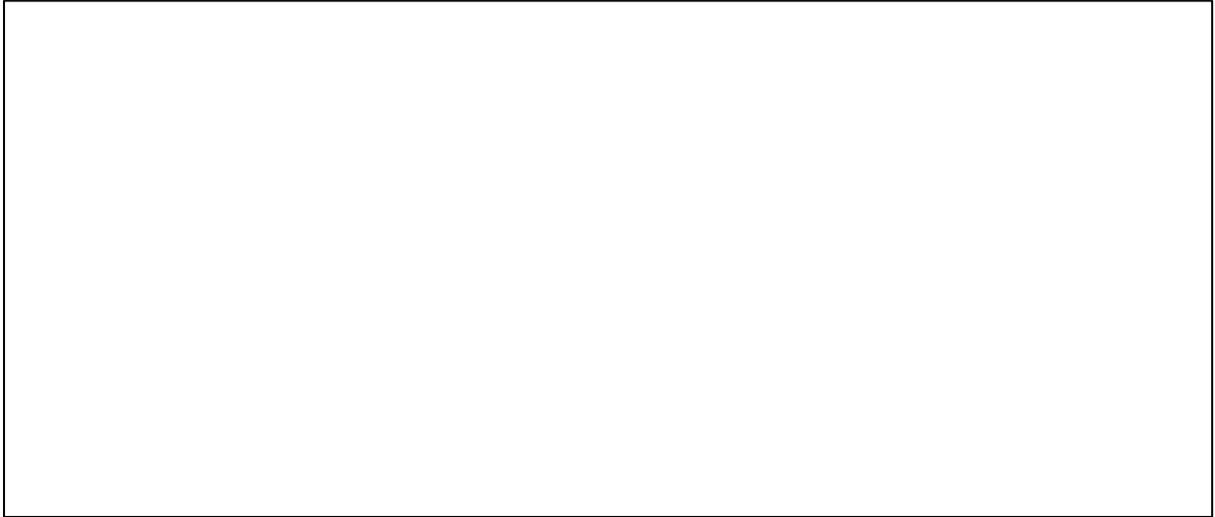
#### Popularity and Engagement:

Operation Buffalo, when airing on the ABC, was consistently the most watched non-news non-reality program on Sunday nights. It had good social media traction, with lots of tweets and interactions during its run.

#### Originality and Innovation:

Operation Buffalo shines the spotlight on a dark part of Australian history. In order to try to capture the essence of such a historical betrayal - a human drama about a fading empire, two governments, atom bombs, soldiers, doctors, spies, diplomats and nurses - a human drama about a dispossessed and ignored first people, we had to create a fictional yet essentially truthful history. Because much of what happened at Maralinga, despite our research, remains unnervingly opaque.

**Notes:**



# The Secrets She Keeps

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**Production Company: Lingo Pictures**

## Candidate Summary

Best Telefeature or Mini Series Candidates

Helen Bowden

Jason Stephens

Paul Watters

Lead Actor

Michael Dorman - *Jack Shaughnessy*

Ryan Corr - *Simon Beecher*

Lead Actress

Laura Carmichael - *Agatha Fyfle*

Jessica De Gouw - *Meghan Shaughnessy*

Supporting Actor

Michael Sheasby - *Hayden Cole*

Hazem Shammam - *Cyrus Haven*

Supporting Actress

Cariba Heine - *Grace*

Emily Havea - *Detective Lisa-Jayne Soussa*

## Program Summary

Average Episode Duration: 44 minutes

### Series Synopsis:

Two women have a chance encounter in a supermarket in an affluent Sydney suburb. They are the same age, both heavily pregnant and due at the same time. Meghan is a glamorous online 'influencer' on the rise with an ambitious television sports reporter husband Jack. Agatha works in the supermarket as a shelf stacker.

Although they live near each other, the two women's lives could not be more different ... Agatha is a loner, barely subsisting above the poverty line. She's ecstatic to be pregnant, pinning all her hopes and dreams on this much longed-for 'miracle baby'. Yet the father of her child, Hayden, a sailor on active duty, remains oblivious to her condition.

Meghan is a sophisticated mother-of-two who uses her website to reframe her imperfect life into a glossier, more aspirational existence. Despite posting enthusiastically about her pregnancy to her avid followers, including Agatha, behind closed doors this third baby is putting pressure on a strained marriage.

Both women have secrets. And both will risk everything to conceal the truth. But their worlds are about to collide in one shocking act that cannot be undone.

### Target Demo:

The Secrets She Keeps is aimed at those aged 18-49, skewing female, as it's a female-driven narrative and the dual protagonists are both female.

### Popularity and Engagement:

TSSK rated extremely well in Australia and overseas. On Network10 it dominated its timeslot and numbers increased throughout the series (well over \$1m have watched Ep 6).

It is also one of Australia's most successful drama exports - currently over \$2.2 million in international sales, with several deals still in negotiation. On BBC1 it was the best Monday-night drama launch of 2020, with 3.1m viewers - beating Normal People at 2.2m.

The audience enthusiasm for the show was also reflected through the engagement on social media. For example, it was a #1 trending topic on Twitter in both Australia and the UK.

**Originality and Innovation:**

The Secrets She Keeps is an explosive and gripping thriller. But what separates it from others in this genre is that it is incredibly character driven. Our two leads are complex women that don't fit neatly into the protagonist or antagonist baskets. Agatha is not wholly 'bad' – she is a woman who has been deeply affected by the trauma and coldness of her upbringing. Meghan is not wholly 'good' either – for despite appearances she's fighting to cover up a significant transgression. The moral ambiguity is part of what has hooked audiences all over the world.

**Notes:**

## Stateless

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Production Company: Matchbox Pictures & Dirty Films

### Candidate Summary

Best Telefeature or Mini Series Candidates

Cate Blanchett

Elise McCredie

Tony Ayres

Sheila Jayadev

Paul Ranford

Liz Watts

Andrew Upton

### Lead Actor

Jai Courtney - *Cam Standford*

Fayssal Bazzi - *Ameer*

### Lead Actress

Asher Keddie - *Clare Kowitz*

Yvonne Strahovski - *Sofie Werner*

### Supporting Actor

Darren Gilshenan - *Brian Ashworth*

Phoenix Raei - *Javad Shahrokh*

Dominic West - *Gordon Masters*

Claude Jabbour - *Farid*

### Supporting Actress

Marta Dusseldorp - *Margot*

Cate Blanchett - *Pat Masters*

Helana Sawires - *Rosna*

Soraya Heidari - *Mina*

### Program Summary

Average Episode Duration: 55 minutes

#### Series Synopsis:

Sofie Werner is a charming and free-spirited flight attendant. Home for the holiday season, Sofie escapes an oppressive family Christmas to attend a party hosted by a self-improvement group called GOPA. There she is captivated by enigmatic leader Gordon Masters and his wife Pat Masters. Seduced by the idea of creating a new identity for herself, Sofie throws herself into Gordon's expensive therapy sessions. Slowly, her life begins to unravel.

After she quits her job, Sofie's mental health declines rapidly, her sister Margot admits her to hospital. When we next meet Sofie, she's at Barton Immigration Detention Centre, claiming she's "Eva Hoffman". How did she get here?

Cam Sandford is struggling to provide for his wife Angie and their young family. When his best friend Sully shows off the fruits of his job at Barton, Cam is tempted to sign up as a guard, despite the disapproval of his sister Janice, a refugee advocate. Cam decides to pursue employment at the Detention Centre, but soon finds himself at odds with the other guards who are vastly undertrained treating the detainees like criminals. He wrestles with his conscience, but ultimately, the pressure becomes too much to bear, sending Cam to the brink of a violent breakdown.

Ameer, a bright, optimistic Afghan man, is fleeing persecution with his wife and two daughters. No longer able to live safely in their home country and desperate to find sanctuary in another, they arrive in Indonesia to seek passage to Australia. After being tricked out of their savings, with his daughter dangerously ill, Ameer goes to dangerous lengths to ensure his family seek asylum. We next see Ameer arriving on the shores of Christmas Island where he is processed and transferred to Barton Detention Centre. There, he is reunited with his oldest daughter Mina and discovers that his wife and youngest daughter both drowned at sea on their way to Australia. Overwhelmed by grief, Ameer must now prove his refugee status to the immigration authorities whilst not revealing what really happened in Indonesia.

Lastly, an ambitious bureaucrat Clare Kowitz from the Department of Immigration, arrives at Barton as the new General Manager. She has been instructed to quell growing media scrutiny following a protest by two Tamil detainees. After a tour of the facility with KORVO security manager Brian Ashworth, Clare realises the extent of the challenges ahead – Barton is vastly under-resourced and her experience in policy has in no way prepared her for the reality of life in a desert Detention Centre.

When a photograph of a beaten detainee is leaked to the press, the department's increased pressure to stop the leak becomes too much to tolerate. Claire's moral centre begins to crumble. That is until, she sees an opportunity to save a young girl, Mina and the discovery of Eva Hoffman's true identity.

These four central characters are trapped behind the same barbed wire in the searing desert heat. As past traumas rear their heads, realities begin to splinter for our four protagonists.

**Target Demo:**

15-95

**Popularity and Engagement:**

Stateless was one of ABC's most anticipated show of 2020. It averaged 632k total viewers, which was an increase on ABC's primetime. It garnered very good word of mouth and sparked a lot of social media conversation. Stateless currently ranks as the #2 (of 6) Australian scripted tiles on the channel since the beginning of 2019.

**Originality and Innovation:**

Stateless is a timely series exploring Australian immigration history from multiple perspectives. Bold storytelling, powerhouse performances and an original and heart breaking script brought to life with stunning cinematography and production design.

**Notes:**