

EPISODES 1 & 2

“Chan eil dùil ri beul uaigh.”

Episode 1

Bha là air tòiseachadh le spaid na làmh, agus sìth na anam. ‘S ann a bha è nise air chrith, agus uaigh fosgailte air a bheulaibh. Cò lèis è?

In the mystical glow of the Northern Lights’ shifting shadows, Iain Martin sits entranced in the abandoned family blackhouse. It’s not the lights that have hypnotised him. Beneath him, in the pulses of light, something has shocked him. We don’t see yet what it is.

We go back to Lewis in 2014. Three village lads, close pals. Iain, Neilie and Rob. Iain, with his ambitions set far from their home. Neilie, a get-up-to-that-bar kind of guy. Rob, always capable of the unexpected. We see the bonds of friendship when they use Iain’s father’s boat for fishing trips, of drinking and an unseemly episode of hi-jinks in which they disrupt a Druid ceremony.

On the periphery is Donna, an island-immersed girl. There is a connection between her and Iain, but she makes it clear that a life away from the island is not for her.

A change comes over Rob. He begins to need more than beer and whisky for his highs and makes new connections in town. Through these new contacts he pitches the idea to his friends that there is money to be made running drugs on the boat to and from the mainland. Iain is dismissive of the idea of smuggling. Neilie is more ambivalent. Rob isn’t put off.

On a night of drama, Neilie bursts into Iain’s house, soaking wet, and tells him Rob has set out on the boat. He never returns. The boat is recovered, but Rob never is. The tragedy rocks the island. Iain’s questions about the incident open a faultline with Neilie. It is exacerbated when Neilie comes into money, ostensibly from a bachelor uncle in the US. Finally, Iain resolves to finally leave the island and his troubles behind.

We see scenes of Iain in the life he moved to, as an aid volunteer in a war zone. We see an explosion in a jeep caused by an IED – tumult and death. We see a session with a trauma counsellor.

Now Iain is back living with his mother in her home. Duty has called him to care for her as she fades into the fog of dementia. Sometimes, when confused, she holds a framed photo of her brother, Calum, who long ago emigrated to the United States and lost contact. Iain thinks she is mistaking him for her late husband and his father. His return is also a search for peace. To distract his mind from what he has witnessed, he is embarking on a quest to reconstruct the old family blackhouse further in the village. A metaphorical rebuilding of his life.

There is opposition to his plans. His mother urges him to leave the past alone. Neilie is fiercely sceptical. And the Druid worshippers who took over the old house as a base when they were worshipping at the nearby ancient and mystical ring of stone. They challenge Iain’s right to the abandoned property.

Finally, Iain has broken ground on his project. And now we see what has so distracted him. Beneath him is a skeleton.

Episode 2

Dè a chunnaic na ballachan seo? Dè cràthadh intinn?

Iain calls the police the next morning, but when they accompany him to the site, he finds the skeleton has disappeared and the earth replaced.

Where has it gone? Was it ever even there?

Iain doubts himself. The conflicting demands of his former and present life are pressing down on him. Can he be sure of his own mind?

In the midst of this he has to be a son to his mother, taking her to the hospital for a consultation on her deteriorating condition. He gently prods her on his discovery, but it seems to confuse her.

Iain resumes his project to distract himself from all that is crowding in on his thoughts. He finds one, remaining, isolated bone.

Cautious about further involving the police, he takes the bone to the archaeological dig further down the coast at an Iron Age site. He establishes a connection with a German researcher, Karina, who agrees to examine it, but does not believe it to be ancient.

As he dwells on who might have interfered, we see the tensions between the teenage friends over the loss of Rob, over their rivalry for Donna. After Iain left the island she had settled for a life with Neilie and his island ways.

In an attempt to dismiss his doubts or to force a confession from Neilie, Iain brings him to the house and confronts him. Did he know mabout the skeleton? Did he move it? What happened that fateful night? Neilie is evasive. He insists that if Iain wants to know about strange happenings, he should speak to the Druids.

In his confusion, Iain does confront the Druids. Still resentful of his expulsion of them, they leave him with more questions than answers. The next day they are gone.

EPISODES 3 & 4

Episode 3

...ach bha an cruth-tìre mar a bha riamh, a' chuan a' sluaisreadh a' bhàigh, na h-eòin a' sgiamhail agus fhàileadh saluinn is mòine san adhar.

Donna invites Iain to dinner with her and Neilie. She needs them to reconcile.

That day, Karina the archaeologist appears. Her initial analysis suggests the bone to be anything up to fifty years old. She advises him that this is likely a criminal cold case.

The evening is one of revelations. Iain challenges Neilie again on the night of Rob's loss. He'd been in on it, hadn't he? Knowing when Rob was sailing, the sudden influx of money. Iain insists he'll be calling the police again the next day. Neilie mocks him as a police botherer. As the tension rises, the evening ends uncomfortably. Neilie storms out and heads to the pub. In their time alone Donna confides to Iain that Neilie is also deeply troubled and drinking too much.

Iain comforts Donna when she becomes upset. There is a critical moment between them, interrupted by Neilie's return. There is a tense stand-off in which Donna says she's had enough. This can't go on. All three have too much else to deal with in their lives. There must be a truce. Seemingly understanding, Neilie tells Iain that Donna is right. They need to reunite. He suggests going back out on a boat fishing, re-living their youth. The police can wait.

The trip starts positively. They share yarns and it's like old times. Then the storm hits. The waves drive them close to rocks. Neilie makes a sudden manoeuvre with the boat and Iain is thrown overboard. His life jacket keeps him afloat and he manages to clamber onto the rocks. He sees Neilie powering away and is faced with a death-defying clamber up the cliff.

Episode 4

"Tha mì a' diochuimhneachadh. Agus chan fhada gus an tèid mo dhiochuimhneachadh sa, cuideachd."

Iain manages to clamber up the rocks and walk across the moor home. They share yarns and it's like old times. Then the storm hits. The waves drive them close to rocks. Neilie makes a sudden manoeuvre with the boat and Iain is thrown overboard. His life jacket keeps him afloat and he manages to clamber onto the rocks. He sees Neilie powering away and is faced with a death-defying clamber up the cliff.

Iain manages to get home. Neilie and Donna are at his mother's house having alerted the coastguard. A raging Iain accuses Neilie of leaving him to die. And he makes the damning allegation that Neilie had murdered Rob and hid his body in the house.

Iain calls the police again and returns to the old house to wait for them. Neilie follows him. He says it was too rough for him to get off the boat with no one handling it. And he admits he removed the skeleton. "They were old and your mind has troubles enough."

The police car arrives, but from it emerges Iain's mother. She had been walking down to the blackhouse when the police passed her.

"Fhuair sibh lorg air," (You've found him), Mary says sadly.

She tells the full story, lucidly. Her older brother Calum, long believed to have emigrated to the United States and lost touch, had never left the island. He had suffered a violent breakdown after his experiences as a soldier in Northern Ireland. In a scuffle in which he overpowered their father, Mary had panicked and hit him on the head with an iron pot. Calum had fallen and cracked his head. Their father insisted Mary's life could not be ruined, so they buried him where he would never be discovered.

Iain is reconciled with Neilie and Donna. Donna gets Iain to accept the truth of Neilie's story that he had been tempted by the drugs smuggling, but pulled out in the last moment and swam back ashore. Rob must have drowned and his body had never been recovered.

In the final scene, Iain and his mother look onto the sun setting over the Atlantic. "Tha mì a' diochuimhneachadh." "I'm forgetting things, son," she says. "Agus chan fhada gus nach bithidh cuimhn' ormsa, a bharrachd." "And in time I'll be forgotten. The past is just that. You can only live for the present." As they speak, a rush of wind blows in of the ocean and sweeps past them as if they were never there.

CHARACTERS | THEMES

CHARACTERS

Iain Martin – early-mid 30s. Islander. Gaelic speaker. Suffering effects of PTSD from voluntary service. Returns home to rebuild the old family home as recuperation therapy.

Neilie – early-mid 30s. Gaelic speaker. A man who has never had any ambition to leave the life he loves. Wholehearted, get-up-to-that-bar kind of man. Physical. Crofter/fisherman/jack-of-all-trades.

Donna – early-mid 30s. Island girl. Gaelic speaker.

Mary Martin – 70s. Gaelic speaker. Gentle, God-fearing. Slipping into dementia.

Rob - late-teens. Gaelic speaker. Seen in flashback. Easily led.

Karina – 30s. Archaeologist. German. Gaelic learner. Not archetypal academic. Captivating. Iain connects with her.

THEMES

Set on the Isle of Lewis, 'Heartland' is a compelling mystery told through a principal character who is struggling in the aftermath of his experiences in a conflict zone. He has returned home in the hope of finding peace. But there is no peace. Home has changed from what he knew. He finds a diminished mother he has neglected and exposes long-suppressed tensions with old friends. When he stumbles across a mystery it causes him to doubt himself and his mind and it challenges all that he thought to be true. The mystery is the driving force of the story with the audience guided towards tantalising answers which are cast into doubt again, leaving them needing to know more. At its heart the production lies within the Gaelic language and the Gaelic culture.

John MacKay and Patsi Mackenzie will work as co-writers throughout the process, ensuring that the narrative is generated wholly in Gaelic.

