

Low budget true story becomes TV smash hit

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Whodunit?: *Baby Reindeer*, starring comedian Richard Gadd (above) follows struggling comic Donny Dunn.

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But is it wrong to be an armchair detective? *Baby Reindeer* has inspired TV fans to unmask the real-life inspiration for stalker Martha. Some worry that this might hurt the vulnerable.

What's happening?

Baby Reindeer is the show television bosses dream of. It was made cheaply, but after it was released on Netflix, it became a huge hit.

In one week, it had 2.6 million viewers. The next week that increased to 13.3 million, then to 22 million after three.

Find out more

Baby Reindeer is based on writer Richard Gadd's life as a struggling comedian who was harassed by a stalker, called Martha in the show.

Some of the appeal comes from what Gadd has hidden. Fans have become armchair detectives, trying to find out the name of the real-life person behind Martha.

Every now and then we become thrilled by a juicy real-life mystery. True crime podcasts and shows have millions of listeners each year.

Some worry whether this is good for us. *Baby Reindeer* has led to a hunt for a real Martha. One suspect has reported facing death threats. Our mystery mania runs the risk of hurting people.

It even can disrupt real detective work. After a British woman, Nicola Bulley, accidentally drowned last year, dozens of social media users stepped in. Many claimed it was a murder. The police had to work around conspiracy theories.

Is it wrong to be an armchair detective?

Some say

Yes! We should leave detective work to the police. Looking for the real-life Martha will only end up hurting more people.

Others think

No! The police often do not have the time or staff to work on every case. Lots of cases have been solved by amateurs who have made a lucky find.

Some people say

"Evil being the root of mystery, pain is the root of knowledge."

Simone Weil (1909 – 1943), French philosopher and mystic

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Six steps to discovery

1. Connect

How do you feel about this story? - Are you interested in unsolved mysteries?

2. Wonder

What questions do you have? - For example: When did detective stories first become popular?

What do you think?

3. Investigate

What are the facts? - Pick out one thing we know for certain about this story and one thing we cannot say for sure.

4. Construct

What is your point of view? - Is it wrong for people to try to search for Martha?

5. Express

What do others believe? - In pairs, choose an unsolved mystery from history. What do you think is the likeliest explanation?

6. Reflect

What might happen next? - Come up with an idea for a TV show about your life.

Glossary

Netflix - A television and film streaming service. People pay each month to watch programmes on Netflix.

Harassed - Being given unwanted attention.

Stalker - When somebody repeatedly contacts or surveils another person, often against their wishes.

Conspiracy theories - Theories that explain world events by blaming shady groups of powerful people operating in secret. Some conspiracy theories have a basis in fact, but many more of them are completely invented. What is more, they often play on dangerous prejudices such as antisemitism. It's worth being especially cautious and critical when you come across accounts that ascribe enormous agency to small and secretive groups.