

Arctic Circle cycle for writer of The Rig

The Edinburgh creator of TV hit The Rig has said he travelled from his home in Portobello to “the Arctic” every day by bike while making the supernatural thriller.

David Macpherson, 37, wrote the show, starring Martin Compston, Iain Glen and Emily Hampshire at his home in Portobello.

Series two, currently at number one in the Amazon Prime UK Top 10, is set in the Arctic Circle.

But while filmmakers considered shooting in Iceland and Svalbard – a snowy archipelago halfway between Norway and the North Pole – the icy landscapes and underwater scenes were all created in FirstStage Studios in Leith Docks.

Macpherson said: “We looked at other places, we did a great trip to Svalbard near the North Pole and to Iceland as well to look at locations.

“That was great to get a feel for that environment and really understand it but in the end we decided that it was going to be better for the show overall to do the whole thing in the studio in Scotland.

“The seasons are very changeable in the Arctic so your filming window really has to line up and ours didn’t so we were happy to come back. The Arctic and under the water, you can do all that in the studio.

“I could cycle to the Arctic and home again, which was nice. I leave a very small footprint, but that’s great because it grounds it as well. I could go back to my own home at night and my normal life, while all this craziness was going on.”

The first series was released in over 200 territories around the world in 2023, and was set entirely on the Kinloch Bravo, a fictional North Sea oil rig cut off from the outside world by a mysterious fog.

Macpherson said it was a conscious decision to contain the first series on the rig, with the crew trapped in a single location amid rising tensions.



David Macpherson with the cast at the premiere of the Amazon Prime Video Series RIG2 in Edinburgh. Picture: Jamie Simpson / Prime Video

Following its destruction in a giant tsunami, the survivors have now been transported to the Stac, a secret new offshore facility in the Arctic Circle.

Macpherson said: “My big aim with series two was to make it

much bigger. In series one we never leave the oil rig itself, we're always contained within that environment.

"Breaking out of that was always my aim, and to make this a global show that really feels like you're travelling with these characters.

"We're up in the Arctic Circle so we've got that snow and ice environment but we also go under the sea so we're down on the seabed and there's action down there. We've got a new oil rig as well, which has its own secrets and surprises.

"Bringing those new worlds all together has been really fun and I like to think we've achieved it well... We built an ice sheet 100 metres long and the art department were out there carving bits of ice and making fake snow and dressing it all up.

"We have a bit of a car chase, an action sequence where we were driving a car over the ice and that's all done in the studio as well.

"The great thing about TV people is they are very 'can do'. If you present them with a crazy challenge like building a big ice sheet in the middle of a studio, making it into a storm, and things like that, they will find a way to do it.

"We had this company come in who create all different kinds of snow. They have like a catalogue of snow and you can pick the kind you want.

"Then it's about actors and costume, getting the feel of that place and making sure the actors can embody that cold environment."

He added: "A lot of the time we were filming in the summer so it wasn't exactly freezing, but that's what great actors can bring to it as well. Luckily there are a lot of Scots in the cast and they're used to being cold."

Macpherson praised a “brilliant cast”, including Compston, Glen and Hampshire, together with Mark Addy, Owen Teale, Alice Krige and a host of Scots including Stuart McQuarrie, Molly Vevers, Ross Anderson, Phil McKee, while Still Game’s Sanjeev Kohli appears as a medic.

He said: “There are no divas on our show, it’s all people working together to do the best thing possible..

“There’s nothing you could ask Martin (Compston) to do that he wouldn’t have a go at – if there is I haven’t found it. He’s very up for stretching himself.”

Macpherson said The Rig’s global success demonstrated that big shows could be made entirely in Scotland, while having facilities like FirstStage Studios made careers in film and television more accessible to young people.

He said: “I went to visit my old school recently and for kids and people thinking about getting into the industry I think it makes it real when it’s that close by – it’s not a magical thing that far away people do in Hollywood and you can never go there.

“Productions like this are being made now a lot in Scotland. You can physically go and see them, real people who have all these jobs that hopefully our younger generations will want to go into as well and keep that going.”

He added: “One of the really heartening things was that some of our crew from series one were trainees, then on series two they had been promoted to more senior positions.

“In the business of film and TV that’s the key thing to make it a sustainable industry. We need to keep these talented people working here and give them opportunities to advance. Our show being a part of that is great.”

Macpherson said he was already planning future storylines,

adding: "I'm particularly proud of this series. If it takes off as well as it did last time then hopefully we'll be able to come back because it's a show that I love to make and our cast and crew seem to love it as well.

"I've got plenty more ideas to keep going."

* The Rig series two is available to watch exclusively on Prime Video.





Martin Compton