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## Nesbitt and Neeson set for Ulster drama

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- [Leigh Holmwood](#)

[guardian.co.uk](http://guardian.co.uk), Thursday May 8 2008

## About this article

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This article was first published on [guardian.co.uk](http://guardian.co.uk) on Thursday May 08 2008. It was last updated at 08:34 on May 08 2008.



Liam Neeson and James Nesbitt: have both appeared in dramas about the Troubles

BBC2 has commissioned a major drama about the Troubles in Northern Ireland that will feature James Nesbitt, with Liam Neeson also being lined up for a starring role.

The one-off piece, to be called *Five Minutes of Heaven*, will be set in Belfast and tell a dramatised version of the real life story of 17-year-old Alistair Little, a member of the Protestant Ulster Volunteer Force.

Little was convicted in 1975 and spent 12 years in prison for the murder of 19-year-old Catholic Jim Griffin in Lurgan.

The murder was witnessed by the victim's 11-year-old brother, Joe, and the film will look at the impact of his sibling's death on him and his family.

Hollywood star Neeson is expected to confirm soon that he will play Little as a grown man, while *Murphy's Law* actor Nesbitt will portray Joe Griffin in adulthood.

Both actors were born in Northern Ireland and have previously appeared in films about the province's troubled history.

Neeson starred in the 1996 movie *Michael Collins*, about the early 20th century IRA leader and founder of the Irish Free State, while Nesbitt took a lead role in the 2002 ITV film *Bloody Sunday*.

The new drama will be directed by German Oliver Hirschbiegel, whose movie *Downfall*, about Hitler's last days, was nominated for a best foreign film Oscar.

*Five Minutes of Heaven* is being written by Guy Hibbert, who penned the 2004 Channel 4 television film about the Real IRA bomb that killed 29 people in Omagh.

Hibbert said: "The impact of the drama is stronger still, as the story is about two real people who stand up and say it the way it is.

"It was important to get their full permission and co-operation. I have created this drama in their image, using their words and reactions.

"Working separately with both Alistair and Joe on the fictional areas provided a unique way of telling this story and revealed there were no easy answers."

Patrick Spence, the head of BBC Drama Northern Ireland, which commissioned the film from independent producer Big Fish Films in association with Ruby Films, said: "Northern Ireland is a society emerging from conflict. We wanted to develop and produce a single film, which, in a responsible way, marks part of that transition.

"We have done this by recording powerful personal testimonies of the two individuals whose lives have been determined by the Troubles."

The film's producer, Stephen Wright, added: "This film is not about finding a resolution or a happy ending. What we are attempting to achieve, in a balanced way, is to create a place where both men can tell their individual stories."

Filming is due to begin on the drama at the end of the month in Belfast, for broadcast on BBC2 later in the year.

*Five Minutes of Heaven*, which also received finance from Northern Ireland Screen, will be produced by Eoin O'Callaghan for Big Fish Films and Wright for the BBC.

It will be executive produced by Spence and Paul Trijbits, whose credits include *Bloody Sunday*, *The Wind that Shakes the Barley* and *Touching the Void*; and Cameron McCracken for Pathe, which will also distribute the film outside the UK and Ireland.

*Five Minutes of Heaven* was commissioned by Jane Tranter, the BBC controller of fiction, and Roly Keating, the BBC2 controller.

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