



**“The Sea Captain’s Tale is about Asians in Britain, but it’s a noir, a tale of sex and money and simmering violence, with a full-blown femme fatale lurking at its dark heart.”**

John McKay, director of *The Sea Captain’s Tale*

## interview

# Avie Luthra is the writer of *The Sea Captain’s Tale*

**“I wanted to make a film noir,” says Avie Luthra, “and of all the tales that I read, *The Sea Captain’s Tale* seemed to lend itself to that style most easily. It’s about an outsider coming into a closed community, getting involved with the conniving wife, and getting caught in a web of intrigue and manipulation. It’s got all the classic elements that I was looking for.”**

Luthra admits that he’s departed slightly from Chaucer’s original story. “In my version I have Pushpinder, the outsider, falling in love with Meena, the wife, and that creates a great deal more conflict. Chaucer gave me the situation but didn’t provide enough for a film with a strong narrative drive. Daun John in Chaucer’s version is just a baddie, basically; he cheats the wife and the husband and disappears. Pushpinder is a lot more sympathetic and his character develops further.”

Luthra’s inspiration came from classic noir films such as *Double Indemnity*, *The Postman Always Rings Twice* and *Murder, My Sweet*, as well as from later works like the Coen brothers’ *Blood Simple* and *The Man Who Wasn’t There*. “I also love the novels that inspired those films, particularly the books of James M Cain. His novels, like *Mildred Pierce*, are about families and the complex ties of

kinship and community that they create. That, for me, is the root of all good drama.”

Luthra echoed that sense of community by setting his adaptation of *The Sea Captain’s Tale* among British Asian businessmen. “It’s a world that has its own rules, that sees itself as separate from the rest of society. Every community, whether it’s Asian, Italian-American, Jewish or white liberal, has a certain insularity.

“There’s a brotherhood within the community, a set of rules that you have to obey if you’re going to survive. Jetender, the businessman in my story, understands that very well: he says that you have to stay within the rules of the community if you want it to accept you. Pushpinder, of course, breaks the rules and that’s why he’s driven out in the end. The specific cultural context isn’t that important in itself. It

doesn’t really matter that these people are Asian, it just matters that they’re rich and separate from the rest of the world. I based it in the Asian community because that’s what I know and I was drawing on people and events that I know. But it’s not influenced by previous depictions of the Asian community in film or television. The influence is film noir, the ethnicity of the characters is really incidental.”

Avie Luthra trained as a doctor and until 1999 was working as a psychiatrist at London’s Maudsley Hospital. In 2000 he went to the National Film School, and has subsequently won awards from Red Productions/Channel 4 and the Dennis Potter Awards. His full-length drama *The Village*, also starring Nitin Ganatra, will be shown on BBC Two later this year.

