

“Tiberius”

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Abstract

The first part of the thesis is a script for a pilot television series with the following logline:

A supernatural detective drama set in the North of England when the life of a promising young medical student suddenly collides with an eccentric and mysterious detective specialising in the paranormal; as the student is drawn into a tale of hauntings and magical extremism she'll have to decide which world she truly belongs in, the rational world of science and medicine or the esoteric world of the occult which threatens to consume her.

A series bible, detailing the rest of the series, will follow.

Finally, a reflective essay will give my thoughts on some aspects and themes from the development of *Tiberius*.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis, comprised of a script, series bible, and essay, is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for a degree or other qualification at this University or elsewhere. All sources are acknowledged as references.

- Luca Campana

TIBERIUS

"Seeing Double"

by

Luca Campana

MA Submission

Television Pilot

EXT. BRADFORD STREETS - NIGHT

Puddles on the road reflect shuttered betting shops and broken doorways. A car speeds past, ripping through the mirrored world. An old textile plant stands derelict, windows smashed in and graffiti covering the walls.

INT. ABANDONED MILL - NIGHT

Moonlight shines in past the shards of glass lining the windows. Someone moves in the shadows. There's a sound, a blade being unsheathed. There's breathing, steady and calm, as though someone's asleep. More breathing becomes clear, much more ragged and muffled, as if coming through a mask.

Then suddenly, a flash. A glint of steel and a muffled cry. A gasmask appears from the darkness. The sound of ripping flesh. A splatter of blood paints the nearby wall and then drips onto the floor. The steady breathing continues, hitches, then stops. The ragged breathing continues. Then the muffled voice lets out another cry, full of rage.

INT. AFSHAN'S DORM - NIGHT

With a shaky gasp, AFSHAN, 26, rises from bed, gulping for air. She's a young, British-Pakistani woman with messy hair. She reaches for an alarm clock next to her: 05:48. She sighs.

Crawling out of bed she reaches for a light switch. Her light flicks on, illuminating a cosy and tidy dorm room, the walls covered with sheets of paper, hand drawn graphs and images of chemical structures. She wears Bradford FC shorts and a generic t-shirt as she reaches for her wardrobe.

INT. COMMON ROOM - NIGHT

A few traces of light trickle in through the window as Afshan sleepily spoons some cereal into her mouth. She's fully dressed in a button-up shirt as she idly looks at her phone. She's sat in a communal living area, surrounded by sofas and cushions. A handful of doors surround the room.

One door opens in front of her, marked with a shower logo. There's a flash of skin as she looks up and then a moment later HARRY, 22, steps out, hastily wrapping a towel around his waist. He is naked except for that.

HARRY

H-hello. I didn't expect anyone to be here this late.

AFSHAN
That's fair. I'm Afshan.

HARRY
Harry. I think I've seen you
before, actually? Wednesday night?

There's a pause. Afshan shrugs and shakes her head.

HARRY (CONT'D)
Well, I think you were a bit
sloshed, to be fair.

AFSHAN
Doesn't sound like me, Harry.

HARRY
Oh.

Harry gestures to the room he's just left.

HARRY (CONT'D)
I was just staying over with Maya.

AFSHAN
Yeah, I figured.

The two awkwardly look at each other.

HARRY
So...are you normally up this late?
Or, early, I suppose.

AFSHAN
I don't want to be rude, Harry, but
is there a reason you're here.

HARRY
Oh, yeah, I just needed a wee.

There's another pause. Then Harry remembers he hasn't done that yet.

HARRY (CONT'D)
Ah, speaking of!

Harry dashes off through another door. Afshan smiles to herself and goes back to her cereal.

INT. AFSHAN'S KITCHEN - DAY

Afshan flicks through channels on the communal television. Light shines in through the windows now.

There's some kind of commotion by the door to the flat. Afshan barely regards it as the door to the hallway opens and MAYA, 21, walks through.

MAYA
Sorry about that.

She comes and throws her arms around Afshan in an overdramatic hug.

MAYA (CONT'D)
He's no one you know. Harry.

Maya goes to fix herself some breakfast.

AFSHAN
I know, we met briefly last night.

MAYA
He said. You haven't been here since then?

Afshan shrugs.

AFSHAN
Bad dream.

MAYA
Another one? You should see someone, you know.

AFSHAN
Can't I just tell you about it? And you can tell me what's wrong with me?

MAYA
Babe, at least let me graduate first.

EXT. BRADFORD UNI CAMPUS STREET - DAY

Afshan walks down a street on her Uni campus. Litter is scattered along the road. Afshan is on the phone and we hear the vague noises of her mum's voice through the phone.

AFSHAN
Yes, I'm sleeping fine at the moment.

The noises on the other end sound concerned.

AFSHAN (CONT'D)
No! Mum, I'm fine, honestly.

The noises now take on a more argumentative quality.

AFSHAN (CONT'D)
I'm not raising my voice! I'm just-

The noises sound cutting. Afshan looks exasperated as she lets her mum talk. She tosses a cereal bar wrapper into a nearby bin. It misses and falls to the floor. Afshan sighs and goes to pick it up.

AFSHAN (CONT'D)
Mum, no, I'm not sighing at you!
Mum!

INT. LECTURE THEATRE - DAY

Afshan streams into a well-lit lecture theatre with a group of her fellow students. The room is decorated with medical graphs, images of skeletons and the muscle system, etc. She takes a seat towards the front as her lecturer starts speaking.

STANLEY, 56, her lecturer stands at the front of the room. He has young eyes but an aged face with greying hair.

STANLEY
Right then, everyone, sorry again for dragging you in here on a Saturday, unavoidable I'm afraid. If you want to make it in the world of medicine then you'll have to get used to being on-call!

The class unenthusiastically joins in for 'being on-call'.

STANLEY (CONT'D)
Right, the moment you've all been waiting for. I was very impressed with the quality of these results, you've clearly all been working hard...except for one or two of you but rest assured that there are plenty of other higher learning facilities that will happily take you on.

Stanley is met with a sea of worried faces.

STANLEY (CONT'D)

That was a joke, you've all done
very well. Kit, fetch the papers.

Stanley gestures to KIT, 28, a lanky looking PhD student who serves as his lab assistant.

Afshan sits at her desk as papers are handed out and sighs of relief and groans of disappointment sound all around her. Next to her, her friend, FREYA, 24, with long dark hair and gothic clothes, groans.

FREYA

Well, guess this whole summer was a
waste of time.

PETER, 22, a thin man with glasses and a scratchy beard, leans over Afshan to check Freya's result.

PETER

Oh get a grip, will you? That's a
perfectly good mark.

FREYA

What did you get?

PETER

A perfectly better mark than you.
What about you, Afshan?

Afshan shrugs and gestures to her empty desk. She puts a hand up. It catches Stanley's gaze. He raises his eyebrows questioningly then runs his eyes over Afshan's desk and nods.

STANLEY

Kit, you've left Afshan's in the
cupboard.

Kit gazes over at Stanley and then at Afshan. A flicker of surprise passes over his face.

KIT

Right, sorry.

Kit disappears into the cupboard. Stanley rolls his eyes at Afshan.

STANLEY

I'll put you out of your misery,
Afshan, it's a very good result.
You should be very pleased with
yourself.

Kit returns and hands the paper to Stanley, he tosses it to Afshan's desk. She looks down at it and smiles. Freya and Peter peek their heads in to have a look. Freya smirks at Peter, who groans and puts his head in his hands.

INT. LECTURE THEATRE - DAY

Stanley is at the front of the room. He is just finishing delivering a lecture, a diagram of an eardrum on the board behind him.

STANLEY

...so generally, that's how you'll want to deal with instances of tinnitus.

Stanley's eyes flicker to a clock on the wall.

STANLEY (CONT'D)

Alright, we've still got a few minutes left but I'm happy to leave it there.

Students start packing their bags.

STANLEY (CONT'D)

I'll be in my office on Tuesday this week instead of Monday, bear that in mind if you need to speak to me. I'm happy to arrange online meetings if anyone needs one. And make sure you focus on the Donaldson reading this weekend, if you only have time for one then make sure it's that one.

Students are already filing out through the doors of the lecture theatre. Afshan waves for her friends to go on ahead as she walks up to Stanley, who's packing away. He smiles as he sees her approaching.

STANLEY (CONT'D)

Afshan, hi, what is it?

AFSHAN

Uh, not much, Stanley, I just wondered where I lost a mark on question four?

STANLEY

Let me have a look...

Stanley takes the paper from Afshan and flicks through it. He scans the page for a second. In the meantime Afshan checks her phone. Her eyes widen in surprise.

Her screen reads "14 MISSED CALLS - MUM, 6 MISSED CALLS - DAD, MUM: please please pleas pikc up when u see this, plea..."

INT. UNIVERSITY HALLWAY - DAY

Afshan bursts through a door into the hallway, drawing confused glances from nearby students. She rushes down a corner into a more secluded hallway, her phone in her hand. She puts it to her face as she stands against the wall. She tries to regulate her breathing.

The phone answers. The noise from it is sharp and short. A muffled 'hello?'. A desperate question.

AFSHAN

Hello? Mum, it's me, is everything ok?

Crying comes from the other end...happy crying mixed with laughter. A man's voice can be heard as well, whooping and crying with relief.

AFSHAN (CONT'D)

Hello? Mum? Is that Dad with you? What's going on?

INT. POLICE INTERVIEW ROOM - DAY

A newspaper section shows a black and white picture of the face of a corpse. Its eyes are open and it looks peaceful. It is also, undeniably, Afshan's face down to every last detail. The picture is headed with 'DO YOU RECOGNISE THIS WOMAN?'

Afshan sits in a police waiting room staring at the paper. Her mum, RANI, 47, clutches her shoulders protectively as if scared that Afshan will disappear if she lets go. Her dad, HAMMAD, 51, sits more calmly but his hand grips Afshan's arm.

Rani has a fierce look on her face as she talks to a police officer. Hammad looks more calm as he speaks.

RANI

...and I knew it couldn't be our Afshan because I'd spoken to her just this morning, I just knew it.

HAMMAD

It was quite a relief to hear her voice.

The Police SERGEANT, 30s, talking to them is scrawling notes on a pad. He has a worn face and a gruff demeanour.

SERGEANT

And is your daughter an only child?

AFSHAN

Their daughter is not, no. But my younger brother is 17 and currently at school.

SERGEANT

And you're sure there's no other siblings?

RANI

Quite sure! I think we'd know!

HAMMAD

Alright, Rani, he's just trying to help.

RANI

Help? He told us our daughter was dead and now he's keeping us here and-

Rani's ranting fades out as Afshan stares ahead, overwhelmed by the whole experience.

INT. POLICE WAITING ROOM - DAY

Afshan sits baffled, her parents still to either side. Rani reads a magazine while Hammad scrolls on his phone. As Afshan watches, a woman strolls through the room and into a separate office. Her jacket has a crown insignia, a Superintendent.

Through a window, Afshan watches this Superintendent: Jean MURTON, 52. She wears her hair tied up and has a weathered face. As she storms into her office and begins filing through folders she shouts for an officer, although her shouts are silenced by the glass.

An officer hurries in and shows her a file. He points out the window to Afshan. Murton turns and stares at Afshan, then back to the file, then back to Afshan.

Afshan shifts in her seat slightly as Murton leaves the office and approaches her.

She glances up as Murton stops in front of her. The Superintendent allows the tension to grow before speaking.

MURTON

Are you...

Murton pointedly checks a file.

MURTON (CONT'D)

...Afshan Naqvi?

Afshan nods, slightly nervously.

AFSHAN

Yes.

Murton looks at the three of them, Afshan and her parents, for a second. She snaps the file shut.

MURTON

I'd like you to come with me,
please.

Afshan rises with her parents.

MURTON (CONT'D)

Just Afshan.

RANI

Like hell!

HAMMAD

Rani, please-

RANI

No! I will not allow them to take
her away from us after-

MURTON

Mrs...Sattan?

RANI

Sattar.

MURTON

Mrs Sattar, I'm afraid that due to
an administrative error we
registered your daughter as a
missing person. We're deeply sorry
for the distress caused, but as you
can see your daughter is perfectly
healthy.

(MORE)

MURTON (CONT'D)

You and your husband are free to go, but we just need to ask your daughter some questions first. Just for the record.

Rani thinks for a second.

RANI

Fine! But you can expect to hear from our lawyers!

Rani turns to Afshan.

RANI (CONT'D)

Don't tell them anything you don't want to. You've done absolutely nothing wrong.

Rani kisses Afshan's forehead and glares at Murton before storming off. Hammad kisses Afshan's cheek and shoots an apologetic look at Murton before hurrying after his wife.

MURTON

Your family lawyers get much use, do they, Miss Naqvi?

Afshan stumbles, not sure how to respond.

MURTON (CONT'D)

Never mind, if you'd please follow me.

INT. POLICE CORRIDOR - DAY

Murton pushes through some heavy doors as she strides through the heart of the police station. Afshan hurries to catch up while the Sergeant trudges behind them. Murton lights a cigarette as she walks.

MURTON

What you're about to see, Miss Naqvi, might seem strange, confusing, even quite disturbing. I'm going to ask that you approach this with a cool head and a willingness to answer questions that you might not fully understand. Can you do that?

Afshan nods but Murton, of course, can't see. She turns around to look at Afshan, a lit cigarette in her mouth, and cups her ear.

AFSHAN

Yes, miss.

Murton scoffs.

MURTON

You're not in school now. You can call me Superintendent Murton.

The three of them have arrived at a set of locked doors. An Officer, 30s, is waiting in a booth. He pricks up as Murton approaches.

MURTON (CONT'D)

I'd like to see C-4,5, and 6. Quickly.

OFFICER

Yes, Superintendent. No smoking in there, remember? Or inside. At all.

Murton glares at the officer as she stubs her cigarette on a wall and throws it into a nearby bin. The Officer roots around in some drawers and brings out a heavy set of keys, which he hands to Murton. Murton scrawls a signature on a form and pushes the door open, holding it for Afshan.

The Sergeant makes to follow but she halts him with her arm.

MURTON

You hang back. Stay by the door and let us have some privacy.

SERGEANT

Yes, Superintendent.

The Sergeant hurries inside as Murton pulls the heavy doors closed.

INT. POLICE MORGUE - DAY

Afshan stands in a wide morgue room. There are about 30 lockers on the wall in front of her. She spins around as the door shuts behind her and Murton strides in as the Sergeant lurks by the door.

MURTON

You know where you are?

AFSHAN

Is this...a morgue?

MURTON

Very good. Someone's been watching their crime dramas. Have you ever seen a body before, Miss Naqvi?

Afshan nods her head.

MURTON (CONT'D)

A real body? One that hasn't been dressed up and stuffed with preservatives?

AFSHAN

I'm a medical student so...I've seen a fair few cadavers.

MURTON

Perfect. I need you to look at some of these bodies, Miss Naqvi. You don't need to identify them or answer any questions, I just want you to give me your reaction upon seeing them. Is that alright?

AFSHAN

Why? What is it about these bodies?

MURTON

Well, you'll see for yourself.

Murton goes over to one of the lockers, C-6, and unlocks it using a key on the heavy loop. She pulls the drawer out, revealing a body covered with a sheet. She gingerly pulls the sheet over the head of the corpse and Afshan gasps.

The face is Afshan's. So is the head, and the hair. Everything about the corpse that Afshan can see is identical to her.

MURTON (CONT'D)

I'd like you to look at the whole body, Miss Naqvi. To see if the rest of it is as much of a match.

Murton turns away as Afshan lifts the whole sheet. Murton drags a cigarette from her pocket and places it between her teeth. She doesn't light it but bites on the end as she flips through a file.

AFSHAN

Ok.

Turning, Murton sees that Afshan has replaced the sheet.

AFSHAN (CONT'D)
It's all a match. Except for...

Afshan gingerly lowers the sheet again down to the corpse's neck. A long gash has been drawn across the throat, violently.

MURTON
Well, I could see that. We did notice this...

Murton holds up the left hand of the body. It's stubby and short, the fingers not quite formed properly. A finger nail juts out of the palm of the hand.

AFSHAN
No, that's not accurate either.

Afshan holds up her perfectly healthy left hand to compare. Her fingers are all fully formed.

MURTON
I see. We also noticed some mild scarring around the lower stomach area.

Afshan nods. Her voice sounds distant.

AFSHAN
That's me. I fell off a climbing frame and onto a rock when I was eight. My mum went haywire.

Murton nods slowly.

MURTON
I see...that was always consistent.

AFSHAN
Consistent?

Murton sighs. She turns to the doorway.

MURTON
Fetch me the casefile designated 'Gemini'.

In the darkness the Sergeant nods and heads through the door.

Murton turns to the lockers and unlocks the two doors above the body, C-5 and C-4. She pulls them out. They are also shrouded.

The door to the morgue opens and closes again as the Sergeant returns. He presses a file into Murton's hand and again retreats into the darkness.

MURTON (CONT'D)

Miss Naqvi, over the past week three identical corpses have been found. The one you just inspected was the third. It was called in after being found at a scrap heap near Lister Park.

AFSHAN

I don't...I don't understand.

MURTON

No? This first one was found in an underground car park in the centre.

Murton pulls the sheet down under the corpse's face, revealing horrible burns.

MURTON (CONT'D)

As you can see, someone attempted to burn it. This next one was found floating in the Leeds-Liverpool Canal. All three were found naked.

Murton reveals the face of the last corpse. It's washed out and the face has been slashed many times. Afshan gags upon seeing it.

MURTON (CONT'D)

All hitting you at once? As you can see, we're dealing with quite a serious situation. So if you could tell us anything you might know, it would help us immensely.

Afshan is on the floor, crouched against the wall of lockers.

AFSHAN

I'm sorry, I don't know anything. I don't know what's going on.

MURTON

Corpse C-4 is missing two hands and a foot and seemingly has no genitalia. C-5 has no toes and its right knee lacks functionality. C-6, as you saw, lacks fingers on its left hand. Other than that, all of these corpses seem to be identical copies...of you.

(MORE)

MURTON (CONT'D)
Do you have any information at all
which might help us?

Afshan's head is in her hands. She shakes her head from side to side.

MURTON (CONT'D)
All of these bodies have another
thing in common.

Murton places her hand on the shoulder of the first corpse. She roughly pulls it into a sitting position, revealing a naked back which is covered in symbols and runes.

Upon seeing this, Afshan gasps. She clutches at her throat as images flash. Images of a slashing blade, the whir of a tattoo gun, screeching noises, a masked figure, and noises of masculine anger.

Murton shakes Afshan by the shoulders as tears stream down her face.

MURTON (CONT'D)
Afshan? Stay with me! Do you know
anything that might help?

AFSHAN
I've...dreamt these deaths! I
dreamt them happening! What does
that mean? How could I dream a real
murder? Why do they look like me?

Murton leaves Afshan slumped by the wall. She gestures for the Sergeant, who dutifully runs over. Murton talks in a hushed but urgent way.

MURTON
Amend this file, I want it under
category Purple. Call off all
officers currently working on it
and draft in all officers operating
with Special Clearance Category 4.
Get me on the phone with our
specialist.

INT. POLICE HOLDING ROOM - DAY

Afshan sits in a small police holding room. A CONSTABLE, 24, smiles at her as he leans by the door. She cradles a steaming mug in her hands as she watches a flurry of activity through a two-way mirror, rendered useless by the light in the adjoining office.

Afshan takes a sip and regards the Constable. She works to regain her composure.

AFSHAN

So, could I leave? If I wanted to?

The Constable smiles nervously.

CONSTABLE

Err...you could, technically. You aren't under arrest.

AFSHAN

So...can I go?

CONSTABLE

We'd really rather you didn't.

AFSHAN

But I'm not under arrest?

CONSTABLE

Yes, but...maybe we'd have to find something to arrest you for if you tried to leave.

The Constable smiles apologetically as Afshan sighs.

CONSTABLE (CONT'D)

Besides, why would you want to leave now? Our specialist is here.

The Constable gestures through the mirror. In the office, Murton is talking to a figure who removes their coat.

The figure is TIBERIUS, 25. They're a slender and short figure with a mop of white hair, wearing a tattered and torn greatcoat. Murton points through the mirror at Afshan. Tiberius turns and locks eyes with Afshan. Tiberius smiles.

Locks can be heard clicking as a door swings open to Afshan's waiting room. Shuffling in her chair, Afshan watches as Tiberius enters the room, followed by Murton.

Tiberius pulls up a chair opposite Afshan and smiles. Murton stands, arms folded, behind them.

MURTON

Afshan, this is Tiberius. They'll be asking you a few questions.

AFSHAN

Tiberius?

TIBERIUS

I know, very dramatic isn't it?
What were my parents thinking? Not
at all like your name though,
Afshan. That's a lovely name, very-

AFSHAN

What is this? Am I being
interrogated? I thought I wasn't
under arrest.

TIBERIUS

Oh, you aren't. You're free to go
if you'd like.

AFSHAN

So can I leave, then?

MURTON

We'd rather you didn't.

Murton speaks every word like she's chewing on broken glass.

AFSHAN

So you're keeping me here? I
haven't done anything wrong and now
I'm being interrogated? Just so
I've got that right?

Tiberius smiles, their hands up to diffuse the situation.

TIBERIUS

This isn't an interrogation, I
promise.

Tiberius leans in slightly.

TIBERIUS (CONT'D)

I'm not police. I'm a...third party
they bring in to deal with certain
cases.

Afshan looks as though she's been slapped.

AFSHAN

Third party? What, counter-
terrorism, is that it? Because I
look Muslim? I'm not white, so-

Tiberius desperately waves their hands to try and dispel this
idea.

TIBERIUS

No, no, Afshan, it's not that, I promise.

Afshan stands, her chair falling to the ground with a clatter. The Constable by the door looks alarmed. Murton stares coolly, malice clear in her eyes.

AFSHAN

I'm leaving, alright! I'm going! You told my parents I was dead, you dragged me in here to look at corpses, you made me feel like I'm going mad...I don't know how those bodies look like me, ok? I've got nothing to do with it. I hope you figure it out but please, just let me go home and ring my mum.

Murton stares for a second. With a barely perceptible wave of her hand she signals for the Constable by the door to stand aside. He nods and steps out of Afshan's way, revealing the door. Afshan takes the handle and pulls the door open.

As she goes to leave, Tiberius speaks. They speak quietly and calmly, but clearly.

TIBERIUS

Did they hurt?

Afshan pauses. She spins to face Tiberius.

AFSHAN

What?

TIBERIUS

The dreams. Did they hurt?

Afshan freezes. She slowly draws a hand up to her neck and lightly rubs just above her collarbone. She nods slightly. Her eyes start to well up slightly..

TIBERIUS (CONT'D)

You could feel it, couldn't you? All of it. The stabbing, the slashing, the burning. It disappeared when you woke but you could remember something and you didn't know why. In the shower...on the bus...watching tv...just flashes of something terrible and you had no idea why. Is that right?

Afshan nods. Tears are flowing more freely now. Her speech is slightly choked.

AFSHAN

Yes.

TIBERIUS

Afshan...I can't stop you from walking out of that door. I think you have every right to. But if you do then the dreams will continue. And maybe...maybe someone else is feeling that pain too. Maybe it kills them. Maybe we can stop it.

Afshan sighs. She nods slightly and closes the door. She wipes her eyes with her sleeves.

AFSHAN

I'm sorry, I don't know what's-

TIBERIUS

It's fine, Afshan, it's fine. It's normal. Come and sit down.

As Afshan rights her chair again and sits on it, Tiberius stands and walks to Murton.

TIBERIUS (CONT'D)

Give us some privacy.

Murton glares.

MURTON

Absolutely not.

TIBERIUS

Then go back to your darkroom and at least pretend.

Tiberius gestures to the office behind the mirror. Murton's gaze is unflinching. She speaks barely audibly.

MURTON

You don't talk to me like that.

Tiberius responds equally quietly.

TIBERIUS

I don't think you're creating a very good environment for learning information. Is she, Afshan?

Afshan shakes her head, half smirking.

Murton glares for a few more seconds before she relents. She almost spits her words at the Constable.

MURTON
Viewing room, now.

The two of them, Murton and the Constable, leave the room. They arrive in the viewing room and a few seconds later the light goes off and the window becomes a mirror. Afshan stares at herself in it.

TIBERIUS
Alright, let's swap so they can't
lip read.

At Tiberius' direction, Afshan sits in the seat facing away from the mirror. Tiberius throws their heavy jacket over some recording equipment by the desk.

TIBERIUS (CONT'D)
I'll tell her the important bits
anyway. Now, can I ask you some
questions, Afshan? They might seem
a bit strange and it might feel
like there's no reason for me to
ask them but I promise it's
important. And there're only a few
of them.

Afshan nods.

AFSHAN
Alright.

TIBERIUS
Thank you. Oh, and one last thing-

Tiberius reaches for a case they brought in with them. They open it to reveal a device about the same size and dimensions as a toaster. It's made of black plastic and looks very analogue, with wires running throughout it.

Tiberius plonks the device on the table and presses a button. There's a whir as it splutters to life. A small mechanical limb extends from it and emits a red light, which shines on Afshan.

TIBERIUS (CONT'D)
Sorry about this, it's just a
helpful device which is going to
tell me some things about you.
Nothing private, don't worry. And I
promise it isn't recording you. Is
that alright?

Afshan nods cautiously. Tiberius clicks a pen and opens a notepad from their case.

TIBERIUS (CONT'D)
Are you religious?

Afshan answers hesitantly.

AFSHAN
My...family is. I was raised
Muslim. I'm not...not Muslim, I
just...

TIBERIUS
It's not that important in your
life?

AFSHAN
That's right.

TIBERIUS
So you don't regularly go to the
Mosque?

AFSHAN
No. Only with my family for special
occasions...maybe sometimes if I
feel like it.

Tiberius nods. They focus on the notes they're writing, occasionally glancing up at the machine as it whirs and clunks quietly.

TIBERIUS
I do appreciate that this is quite
general, have you ever had any
experiences that you simply can't
explain?

AFSHAN
Like...paranormal experiences?

TIBERIUS
Sure, that's one way of putting it.

Afshan thinks for a second and then shakes her head.

AFSHAN
I once thought I saw a ghost as a
child. Nothing really other than
that.

A faint smile appears on her face briefly as she says this but Tiberius keeps taking notes.

TIBERIUS
Where?

AFSHAN
Sorry?

TIBERIUS
Where did you think you saw a
ghost?

AFSHAN
Umm...in my house. At night, in the
kitchen.

TIBERIUS
And what did it look like?

AFSHAN
Just a figure. I ran back to bed
when I saw it. It was probably just
one of my dad's jackets hung on the
back of the door.

TIBERIUS
Ok...interesting. Are you scared of
rats?

AFSHAN
Not really...I wouldn't like them
in my house, but...

TIBERIUS
Of course. Have you ever felt like
a passenger in your own body? Or
blacked out for long periods with
no explanation?

AFSHAN
Not that I can remember.

Tiberius scribbles something and then concludes their note
taking. They smile at Afshan.

TIBERIUS
And that's everything. Thank you
for answering honestly, I know some
of those questions might've seemed
a bit...odd.

They press a button on the device. The light shuts off as the
limb retracts. A small ticket is printed from a slot facing
Tiberius. They take the ticket and look at it for a second
before sighing through their nose and stuffing it in a coat
pocket.

AFSHAN
So that's everything?

Tiberius turns and signals a thumbs up to the mirror. They turn back to answer.

TIBERIUS
That's everything. You're free to go. Well, you always were, but you've been a great help.

Tiberius starts packing away the device.

AFSHAN
Can I ask a question, before I go?

TIBERIUS
Of course. Anything you'd like to know.

AFSHAN
What's...what's happening?

Tiberius falters for a second. They turn to look up at Afshan.

TIBERIUS
Let me walk you out.

INT. POLICE CORRIDOR - DAY

Afshan and Tiberius walk down the corridor. The pace is a lot more leisurely than before. Police officers stare as they walk past. Windows show the sun starting to set.

TIBERIUS
When you thought you saw that ghost, how did you feel?

AFSHAN
Ummm, scared.

TIBERIUS
Yeah, sure, but was there anything else?

Afshan thinks about this for a second.

AFSHAN
I suppose I was quite...happy for a second.

(MORE)

AFSHAN (CONT'D)

I'd been told there was no such thing as ghosts all my life and now it felt like...I'd discovered something. Something that everyone had told me didn't exist.

TIBERIUS

Like you'd discovered a whole new world?

AFSHAN

Right. One that existed just out of sight. One that my parents didn't know about but it was there. So long as you don't look directly at it you can always see it in the corner of your eye.

EXT. POLICE STATION - NIGHT

Tiberius and Afshan leave the police station. The sun has set enough for darkness to spread. Tiberius turns to Afshan. They're grinning.

TIBERIUS

That world is real, Afshan. It always has been. Maybe that ghost was just you dad's coat on the wall but there are ghosts out there. Hundreds of them. Ghosts and any other scary story your friends told you on the playground. It exists and a lot of it is very nasty. The police can't always protect you from it so that's where I come in. And that's what I think's going on with you. Something unexplainable and something nasty. And I'm going to stop it.

Tiberius reaches inside a pocket and produces a crumpled business card. They offer it to Afshan and gesture to a waiting taxi.

TIBERIUS (CONT'D)

For you. It'll take you back to campus or wherever you need to go. Keep that card on you and call me if anything changes.

With that Tiberius turns and strides back inside the police station. Afshan watches the setting sun. She lets out a heavy sigh.

INT. COMMON ROOM - NIGHT

A door unlocks electronically with a beep and swings open as Afshan makes her way into her communal space. She carries her bag loosely and sighs. She dejectedly walks through a door into her bedroom.

INT. COMMON ROOM - NIGHT

The common room is now occupied by Maya, who sits on the sofa watching tv. Some other house mates are busying themselves in the kitchen. Maya seems to be wearing a nice dress based on the skirt but her top is covered by a cosy looking jumper. She blows on her dinner as she eats on the sofa.

The door to the common room opens and Afshan skulks in. She's wearing comfortable looking clothes and her wet hair drapes over her shoulder. Maya smiles as Afshan walks over and sits next to her.

MAYA

Everything alright? Freya told me you had to leave suddenly.

AFSHAN

Yeah, everything's fine, it was a false alarm. I am knackered though.

Maya tuts sympathetically as she carries on eating her food. Afshan watches the television. There's silence for a second. Maya begins speaking with her mouth full.

MAYA

So, are you going out tonight?

AFSHAN

Oh, uh, no. I'm a bit too tired for that.

MAYA

Mmmm, get some sleep.

There's more quiet as Maya and Afshan comfortably watch the television.

AFSHAN

Do you believe in ghosts, Maya?

Maya is quite taken aback by the question.

MAYA

Ghosts?

She shrugs.

MAYA (CONT'D)

I guess not. I've never thought about it that much. Why would you? They aren't real.

Afshan just nods.

MAYA (CONT'D)

Oh, did I ever tell you that weird story on the Underground, though?

AFSHAN

No, I don't think so?

MAYA

It was just after my grandad died, so I was, like, 11-ish? So he used to work on the Underground, right, as an engineer. On the Circle line. And then one evening, about two weeks after his funeral, I was out in town with some friends and we were on the Circle. So the seat next to me was empty but in the reflection in the window I swear I saw him next to me. And I could smell him too.

AFSHAN

But you don't believe in ghosts?

MAYA

Well, I don't know. It was crowded so I couldn't see the window very well. It was probably just my imagination. And the smell was just my nose tricking me, I bet. Plus there's only so many ways people can smell and it was crowded, like I said. Confirmation bias, you know?

Afshan just nods. Maya lets out a big sigh.

MAYA (CONT'D)

It was nice, though. It felt like he was there, looking out for me. I've always liked going on the Circle line since then. To see if maybe I could catch a glimpse of Grandad.

Maya looks as though she's about to get quite emotional but she shakes her head and turns to Afshan.

MAYA (CONT'D)
What about you? Do you believe in ghosts?

AFSHAN
I'm not sure anymore.

INT. AFSHAN'S DORM - NIGHT

Afshan lies in bed, staring up at the ceiling. Her lights are off and there's no light peeking in behind the curtains and yet she's wide awake. She turns to her bedside and checks a clock. '03:51'.

Afshan sighs and pulls the crumpled business card from her jacket, left on a chair nearby. She switches on a lamp and inspects it.

The card reads 'Tiberius Mills, Unusual Investigations'. There's a phone number underneath, next to the letters 'U.P.I.'. Afshan drops the card onto her bedside drawer and sighs again, bunching up her covers and turning onto her side. Her hand reaches out and turns off the lamp.

INT. AFSHAN'S DORM - DAY

Light now pours in behind the curtain. Afshan is fast asleep until a car horn outside wakes her. She sighs and looks at the clock again. '11:31"'.

EXT. AFSHAN'S ACCOMMODATION - DAY

Afshan stands outside her accommodation. The sky is overcast and the campus is mostly empty. She is typing numbers into her phone whilst looking at the card. She hits enter and places the phone to her ear. It rings for about five seconds.

AFSHAN
Hello, it's, um, Afshan, from yesterday.

The noises on the other end indicate someone expressing pleasant surprise. Then a question.

AFSHAN (CONT'D)
No, no, everything's absolutely fine. In fact, that's why I'm ringing.

(MORE)

AFSHAN (CONT'D)
 Just to let you know that there's
 been no change. No dreams last
 night.

The noises on the other end indicate some satisfaction with this answer. Then another question.

AFSHAN (CONT'D)
 Today? Umm...what time?

The answer comes through.

AFSHAN (CONT'D)
 Ok..I can be there. Right. See you
 there.

Afshan ends the call. She puts her phone into her pocket, looks up at the sky, and sighs.

EXT. POLICE STATION - DAY

Afshan arrives outside the police station slightly out of breath, hands in pockets. She regards the entrance for a second, unsure if she really wants to go back in. The decision is made for her.

TIBERIUS
 Afshan!

Afshan turns to see Tiberius strolling towards her. They stick out their hand and Afshan shakes it. They're wearing the same coat as the day before.

TIBERIUS (CONT'D)
 Good to see you again. So, good
 night? No visions or dreams?

AFSHAN
 Uh, no, none.

TIBERIUS
 Good, that's what we like to hear.
 Shall we get out of the cold?

Afshan nods and Tiberius leads her inside the station.

INT. POLICE WAITING ROOM - DAY

Tiberius heads straight for the reception as Afshan glances around the room. A bored looking Police Receptionist, 29, raises his eyebrows quizzically.

TIBERIUS
Forensics, Gemini Case.

POLICE RECEPTIONIST
Can I see your clearance papers,
please?

Tiberius pulls some crumpled documents out of their pocket. They hand them to the unimpressed receptionist. The receptionist does a quick scan and shakes his head.

POLICE RECEPTIONIST (CONT'D)
Sorry, these aren't good for
clearance on this one-

MURTON
Let them through. They're with me.

Murton has appeared behind Afshan. The receptionist nods and presses some buttons. There's a clunk as a nearby door unlocks. The receptionist motions the direction of the door with his head.

POLICE RECEPTIONIST
Enjoy your visit.

Murton rolls her eyes as she leads them through the doorway.

INT. POLICE LAB - DAY

The three of them arrive in an official looking laboratory. A handful of forensics officers are checking documents and arranging chemicals.

MURTON
Right, you two stay here and I'll
go and get everything.

Murton strides towards the forensics officers.

TIBERIUS
Have you ever seen forensics in
action before?

AFSHAN
No, it's one of my modules next
term.

TIBERIUS
I suppose you're just getting a
head start then. Thank you for
coming today. I know it wasn't the
easiest yesterday.

Afshan shrugs.

AFSHAN

I just...I felt like I had to see it through to the end. And I suppose I'm quite curious to see what the results come up as.

TIBERIUS

Not every day that you can apply forensics on your own body.

AFSHAN

Exactly. They're not starting on the whole body, are they?

TIBERIUS

They'll do preliminary testing on a scrap of skin and then move on to the full body if they feel like they need to.

AFSHAN

And what are they hoping to find?

TIBERIUS

Any kind of abnormality. Anything that might give us a clue as to what's going on. Forensics requests only usually get approved this quickly for big cases so people must be keen to see some movement.

Tiberius and Afshan turn as a commotion starts at the end of the lab. Murton is shouting at the forensics experts.

TIBERIUS (CONT'D)

That...isn't usually a good sign.

Murton returns, her face screwed up in anger.

MURTON

It's a no-go. Apparently permission has been rescinded from higher-up.

TIBERIUS

What? Why?

MURTON

Do I look like I've been told why?

Tiberius sighs.

TIBERIUS

Do we know who rescinded
permission?

MURTON

Classified.

TIBERIUS

Classified as in you don't know or
classified as in you aren't allowed
to tell us?

MURTON

Classified as in no one will tell
me WHAT THE FUCK'S GOING ON IN MY
OWN DEPARTMENT!

This shout is aimed at the forensics people who pretend not to be paying attention. Tiberius rubs their chin before suddenly looking at Murton, startled.

TIBERIUS

We'd best check the bodies.

INT. POLICE MORGUE - DAY

The three drawers previously containing Afshan's dead copies lay open, empty. Tiberius sits on the ground, resting against the lockers, staring at the ceiling. Afshan stands, not sure what to do. Murton is furiously dressing down the receptionist.

MURTON

WHAT DO YOU MEAN, INCINERATED?

POLICE RECEPTIONIST

T-they were taken away last night.
High clearance.

MURTON

Why wasn't I told? Why did nobody
think to tell me what was happening
in my own bloody station?

Whilst Murton carries on shouting at the receptionist, Tiberius turns to Afshan.

TIBERIUS

Enemies in high places.

EXT. POLICE STATION - DAY

The sun is just starting to set as Tiberius and Afshan leave the police station. Tiberius' hands are screwed into their pockets. They seem lost in thought.

AFSHAN

Well...thanks for inviting me.
Sorry things didn't go as planned.

TIBERIUS

Hmm? Oh, of course, don't mention it. Look, I don't suppose you have any kind of beef with the Chief of Police?

Afshan smiles and shrugs.

AFSHAN

Not that I know of.

TIBERIUS

I just...I don't understand what anyone has to gain from this.

Tiberius flails in frustration.

TIBERIUS (CONT'D)

Look, I'm sorry to keep you out like this, but can I show you something? I think it'll be quite helpful.

AFSHAN

Alright.

INT. PHOTOGRAPHY ARCHIVE - DAY

A lock clicks as a door swings open into a dark room. Tiberius steps inside, followed by Afshan. They flick a switch and piercing lights flicker to life. They are in a storage area, surrounded by shelves filled with boxes and film reels.

AFSHAN

Are we supposed to be here?

TIBERIUS

I have an agreement with the owners. I helped them out with a problem a while ago and now they let me come and go as I please. It's a good resource.

AFSHAN

What was the problem?

TIBERIUS

A film that was driving people to murder, but that isn't important. I need to show you something.

Tiberius leads Afshan on, through the maze of shelves and boxes.

TIBERIUS (CONT'D)

So, what do you make of this latest revelation?

AFSHAN

Well...could it just be an administrative mess up?

TIBERIUS

Nah, I don't think so. No reason Murton wouldn't know about it otherwise.

AFSHAN

Maybe...is there a chance she's lying to us?

TIBERIUS

I don't always trust the police myself but there's no reason for her to lie. I've worked with her enough to know when she's invested in a case. She wants this solved as much as I do. For you.

AFSHAN

Me?

TIBERIUS

She's about as warm as an open freezer but she does care about people. She wants to keep people safe, you can see it in her eyes. She's taken a bit of a shine to you.

Afshan doesn't respond. Tiberius beams as they reach for a locked box.

TIBERIUS (CONT'D)

Ah, fantastic. Just where I left it.

(MORE)

TIBERIUS (CONT'D)
Now, Afshan, I need you to be honest. How are you feeling about this? Scared?

Tiberius pulls a set of keys from their inner pocket and unlocks the box. The keyring is a series of arcane and old looking keys, with a small teddy bear keychain.

AFSHAN
I don't know. I haven't really had time to process most of it. I struggled to sleep last night so...delayed shock, maybe?

TIBERIUS
Makes sense. Do you trust me, Afshan?

Afshan shrugs.

AFSHAN
I guess. You seem to want to help me. And you haven't done anything to make me not trust you.

TIBERIUS
I promise I'm not saying this to alarm you, but I did bring you to an empty archive building. You don't feel threatened?

AFSHAN
You're about 5 foot, I think I could take you.

Tiberius laughs, heartily and sincerely.

TIBERIUS
Well I can't fault you there. Look, you can trust me. So trust that I'm not trying to mess with you when I say that you have good cause to be scared. I need you to understand the level of danger that you're in.

AFSHAN
Because someone is trying to kill me?

TIBERIUS

And they're getting closer. I think someone's trying to use a ritual to end your life, and I think they get more of the ritual right every time you have one of those dreams.

AFSHAN

What? But...I'm not hurt. I've never been physically injured it's just...they're just dreams.

Tiberius sits against a shelf, the unlocked box besides them.

TIBERIUS

Listen, Afshan. Things are never just what they seem.

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

Light shines on a vibrant city as people stroll casually.

TIBERIUS (V.O.)

This world that I told you about...the unexplainable, the supernatural, if you'd like, it might seem isolated. It might seem like it exists in dark forests or far away oceans but it's everywhere.

A hooded FIGURE, 16, slips from the throng of people, seemingly unnoticed. He clutches his chest as he stumbles down an alleyway.

TIBERIUS (V.O.)

I know it might seem like another world, what I'm saying, but I promise you that it isn't. It's our world, it's in the tarmac we walk on and the air we breathe. And you'll know more than most that our world can be cruel.

The figure pulls down his hood. He stumbles to the wall as he drags himself down the alley. He examines the hand which he keeps pressed to his chest. It's covered in blood. He stumbles to the floor.

TIBERIUS (V.O.)

The thing about all of this stuff, the unexplainable, is that it's power. And it's power for free.

(MORE)

TIBERIUS (V.O.) (CONT'D)
You don't need to be strong, you
don't need to lead an army.

The figure reaches through piles of rubbish on the ground, flailing blindly. His hands close around a stone, carved with mysterious patters. The stone glows as they inspect it. A group of gang members arrive by the feet of the prone figure. They wield knives, one covered in blood.

TIBERIUS (V.O.)
Throughout history, the mystical
has been used as an alternate power
source. A way regular people could
struggle and fight against
overwhelming odds. But what do you
think people might be capable of if
that power fell into the wrong
hands?

The figure turns to look at the gang members, scared. The glowing rock turns red and they thrust it at the gang members. The air shimmers and suddenly the gang members are gone. The space where they were is stained with a light red mist. The figure stares at the rock. A smirk appears on his face.

INT. PHOTOGRAPHY ARCHIVE - DAY

TIBERIUS
Someone out there wants you dead,
Afshan, and I think they're using
quite a lot of power.

AFSHAN
But why? I don't have any powerful
enemies, I don't know anyone
important, I'm not-

TIBERIUS
Not now, maybe, but that's the
terrifying thing about this.
Divination is just one skill among
many. Maybe one day you'll invent a
cure for cancer and cost a
pharmaceutical company billions.

AFSHAN
So people can just...see the
future? Anyone?

TIBERIUS

Well, not quite. It's an incredibly technical, incredibly difficult skill.

AFSHAN

So I'm being targeted by a wizard that runs a pharmaceutical company?

Tiberius smiles. They open the box and reach inside.

TIBERIUS

There's powerful magic somewhere down the chain. Either in the person targeting you or whoever got them to target you. Look at this.

Tiberius produces a jade figure. It's a dragon holding a silver staff. They hand it to Afshan.

TIBERIUS (CONT'D)

Thousands of years ago, in China, there were a group of alchemists who had such power...they thought they ruled everything under the heavens. They could've done, if they'd wanted. The things they were capable of...their members conquered life itself. Do you remember from school? Being taught about the immortal Chinese alchemist order?

AFSHAN

No?

TIBERIUS

Exactly. That-

Tiberius points to the statue.

TIBERIUS (CONT'D)

Is all that's left of them. All that remains.

AFSHAN

How'd you end up with it?

TIBERIUS

Won a bet with a hermit. What I'm trying to say, Afshan, is that nobody is invincible. This is a dangerous game, I need you to appreciate that. Understood?

AFSHAN

Sure. Thanks for the heads up.

Afshan hands back the statue. As she does, she catches a glimpse of a blank polaroid in the box. As she stares, a picture starts to develop. It looks like a picture of her...but older. She's wearing some kind of ceremonial robe...and her face is covered in runes. There's something about the image, something crucial-

Tiberius puts the statue back and slams the box shut.

TIBERIUS

Alright, let's walk! Tell me, what theories do you have?

EXT. BRADFORD STREETS - DAY

The sun sets as Afshan and Tiberius walk side by side.

TIBERIUS

No, cloning, it's a good guess.

AFSHAN

But it's not really, is it? Because if they were clones then they'd be tiny naked babies. And they wouldn't have my scars. It isn't possible.

TIBERIUS

Well, not scientifically, no. But cloning via magic...it's not that tricky, not if you know what you're doing. You'd still need a bit of DNA but...well, no one does it.

AFSHAN

Why not?

TIBERIUS

The clone...it isn't really a full person. I mean, I don't want to get into what makes a person but...blood flows, the heart pumps, air enters and leaves the lungs, but that's it. There's no brain activity whatsoever. Not even reflexes.

AFSHAN

So what's the point?

TIBERIUS

Well, there isn't one. Not unless you need a perfect copy that does nothing. Are you aware of the concept of harm being done to a copy to harm the original?

Afshan pauses, confused. Then her eyes widen in recognition.

AFSHAN

Voodoo dolls?

TIBERIUS

Exactly. Well, technically they're all Hollywood. Harm done to a doll to harm a human is nowhere to be found in Caribbean magic. You know where it is found? Medieval English occultism. It's English magic!

AFSHAN

And how hard is it?

TIBERIUS

Very, if you're doing it from scratch. It's largely runic, though, so you can just copy it down if you have the right source. It might take some trial and error, through.

Afshan stops dead.

AFSHAN

Oh my god. The bodies...

TIBERIUS

Yeah. Look...let's sit down. I'll get you something to eat.

INT. FAST FOOD PLACE - NIGHT

Tiberius happily eats some chips. Afshan picks at some chicken nuggets.

AFSHAN

What about the dreams then?

Tiberius shrugs.

TIBERIUS

It's an understudied area. The process was originally used to create spare bodies for a host to inhabit. There's probably some psychic residue. And you're at your most attuned when you sleep.

AFSHAN

But they've been getting more vivid? So whoever it is...they're getting closer to getting it right? To harming me?

Tiberius moves aside their chips. They look slightly guilty.

TIBERIUS

I need to ask a favour. It's just a theory but I think that's what's happening. The only way to know is with a lab analysis of the bodies. And I don't have access to a lab...

Afshan's gaze on Tiberius is steely.

AFSHAN

That's why you wanted to talk?

TIBERIUS

I kept the skin sample, it's the only trace we have left.

AFSHAN

I can't-

TIBERIUS

You have access to a lab, right? You're a med student.

AFSHAN

But-

TIBERIUS

Please! I know it's a lot to ask but we might be running out of time. It could be the only lead we get to stop this. To save you...and maybe save others.

Afshan sighs deeply. She leans back, watching a ceiling fan slowly spin.

AFSHAN

Fine.

TIBERIUS

Thank you. Thank you so much,
Afshan. I'm going to pass you the
sample under the table.

Afshan's head snaps down to focus on Tiberius again.

AFSHAN

Here?

TIBERIUS

It's fine, people will just think
we're dealing drugs.

AFSHAN

I don't want people to think that!

TIBERIUS

Alright, I'll give it to you in the
car park.

Afshan strokes her forehead. She looks like she's in pain.

TIBERIUS (CONT'D)

You just need to check if it's a
match with you or if there's any
kind of aberration. That's all. Can
you do that?

AFSHAN

Fine. I'll let you know the result.
It might take a few days.

TIBERIUS

Thank you, Afshan.

INT. AFSHAN'S COMMON ROOM - NIGHT

The door to Afshan's accommodation beeps as she enters the
common area. She throws her bag onto a sofa and slumps down
on it, her hand on her forehead.

Afshan inches open the zip on her bag. Inside is a plastic
zip lock bag with an official police sticker on it containing
a scrap of skin about the size of Afshan's hand. Afshan
stares at it.

The beeping of the door disturbs Afshan's thoughts. She
hurriedly zips her bag as Maya stumbles in through the front
door. A young man, Alex, 23, stumbles with her, his hands
around her waist.

MAYA
Hiya, Afshan! How are you?

AFSHAN
I'm good, thanks Maya.

MAYA
Good! This is, Alex!

ALEX
Hi. I've just been getting to know
Maya. I swear I've seen you...

Afshan waves to Alex.

MAYA
Alex and Afshan, that's funny.
Very...similar sounds. Alex, you go
ahead, I just need to catch up.

Alex nods. Afshan awkwardly looks away as the two kiss for longer and louder than is appropriate. Eventually Alex heads off through the door to Maya's room, accompanied by much giggling.

MAYA (CONT'D)
What's up, Afshan?

AFSHAN
Nothing, Maya, just course stress.
Don't let me disturb your evening.

MAYA
You aren't disturbing. You're more
important than...whatever his name
was.

Afshan laughs. Maya looks slightly bashful.

MAYA (CONT'D)
He's really nice, actually. But
what about yours?

AFSHAN
Sorry?

MAYA
I've heard all about your new
fella! Strutting around with him!
That's where you've been today?

AFSHAN
No, it's not...they're just helping
me with something. Not like that!

MAYA

I heard the two of you were getting quite familiar...

AFSHAN

Well, whoever told you that was full of shit. They were just helping me with some...legal stuff.

MAYA

Huh...sounds serious...I hope everything's ok. I knew it was bollocks anyway, you never drink. You know where I am if you need anything!

AFSHAN

Thanks, Maya.

Maya smiles and then leaves for her room. She shrieks with laughter when she enters. Afshan screws her hands into fists and puts them against her forehead.

INT. MYSTERIOUS AREA - NIGHT

Drops of water fall into a puddle on hard concrete ground. The puddle, filling a small dent, is stained red by a languid flow of blood. Footsteps grow louder until a battered boot steps in the puddle, disrupting the pristine surface.

The figure wears a long brown coat. A balaclava covers their face. They wield a cruel looking combat knife, the blade stained a glistening purple colour and the handle a colourful green and orange. The kind of weapon seen as an accessory to a costume or in a fanciful videogame, now dripping with blood.

Muffled breathing can be heard, separate from the figure. Chains rattle gently. There's a slash. Tearing, ripping, bleeding. Liquid pooling on the ground. The breathing hitches slightly but there are no screams.

A series of stabbing noises. The breathing is faint. Then, accompanied by a man's cry of anger, one large slash. The breathing has stopped.

INT. AFSHAN'S DORM - NIGHT

Afshan wakes upright screaming. Her hands go to her neck. When they come away there's blood on them. She panics, scrabbling, trying to find the fatal wound but there is none.

She climbs out of bed, disoriented. She's breathing heavily as she runs her hands all over her body trying to find a laceration. There isn't one. She starts to regulate her breathing as she stares at her bed. It's covered in blood.

She glances down at her pyjamas, stained crimson. She pulls her shirt over her head, leaving her in a vest, and throws it to the floor. As she does so she catches a glimpse in the mirror and freezes.

On her back, faintly, are runes. They're blotchy and undefined. Afshan touches them. Black ink rubs off as she does and leaves behind a scar.

Afshan glances at the clock. '06:47'.

INT. AFSHAN'S COMMON ROOM - NIGHT

The windows still show pitch black. Afshan paces restlessly, her phone to her ear. She's dressed in a hastily thrown together collection of clothes. Her phone beeps against her ear.

AFSHAN

Tiberius, it's Afshan. I'm sorry, I know it's early but...I had another one. Another dream. It was much more real and...I think whoever it is, they're getting closer. They're getting better. Please call back when you can.

She clicks her phone off and shoves it into a pocket. She picks her bag up off the sofa and storms out of the door.

EXT. BRADFORD SIDE STREET - DAY

A sliver of sun illuminates the street Afshan walks down. She half-walks, half-runs down the street as a few early cars drive past.

INT. UNIVERSITY LAB RECEPTION - DAY

Afshan stumbles into an empty reception area. She heads to a vacant desk and furiously rings a nearby bell. She takes a second to collect herself and recover her breath. She rings the bell again.

A side door opens and Kit peers through. His sleepy eyes widen as he sees Afshan.

KIT
Afshan! What is it you need?

AFSHAN
I'm really sorry, Kit, I know it's really early but I need to use the lab. Is Stanley in?

KIT
He's out of office today, sorry.

Afshan's face drops. Kit smiles.

KIT (CONT'D)
Well, I can supervise you, if you really need to use it?

Afshan beams in relief. She runs over to Kit and quickly throws her arms around him. Kit clearly doesn't know quite how to respond.

AFSHAN
Thank you so much, Kit.

Kit lurches backwards.

KIT
Sorry I just have a...a thing about touch.

AFSHAN
Oh, I'm so sorry!

KIT
No worries, honestly. Come on, let's go.

Kit leads Afshan inside the lab.

INT. UNI LABORATORY - DAY

Kit and Afshan pull on safety goggles as they enter the lab. They're wearing lab jackets.

KIT
So what is it that you're wanting to look at?

AFSHAN
Just...it's like a puzzle thing. A challenge. My friend set it.

Kit breathes a heavy sigh.

KIT

I'm not sure that sort of recreational use justifies a laboratory trip. Stanley probably wouldn't have been happy about it.

AFSHAN

I know...sorry.

Kit smiles.

KIT

It's fine. I have some stuff I need to sort anyway so I'll let you get on with it.

Kit heads to the back of the lab as Afshan removes the skin sample from her bag. She pulls on some disposable gloves from a nearby dispenser and carefully removes the skin from the pouch. She places it on a sterilised tray and starts by sliding it under a microscope. She stares at it and then slides it out, replacing it with her own hand. She compares the two back and forth.

KIT (CONT'D)

Is that human skin?

Kit makes Afshan jump. He's looking over her shoulder at the skin, a bewildered look on her face.

AFSHAN

It's very realistic.

Kit sighs.

KIT

Look, Afshan, what kind of puzzle requires a medical lab? What is this? Do you need me to call the police?

AFSHAN

No! No, they know. This is...to tell you the truth I'm sort of working for-

The suddenness of Kit's movement takes Afshan off guard. He's on her in a second, pressing a rag over her mouth and nose. Afshan flails but Kit applies pressure, pushing her against the desk. She grabs for something, anything, and smashes an empty beaker against him.

Kit grunts but maintains the pressure as Afshan slumps. He wipes the shattered beaker into the rag and drops the shards into a bin. Blood trickles from his head. He picks up the scrap of skin and tosses it into a waste disposal unit.

Then he dabs at his head with a scrap of tissue before hoisting Afshan up and carrying her out of the room.

EXT. UNIVERSITY CARPARK - DAY

Kit walks Afshan into the car park. She's on two feet but barely conscious and he's guiding her, a hand around her back. He arrives at his car and hurriedly unlocks it. Two students are walking by. One is Harry, Maya's previous guest, the other a friend, FRED (23).

HARRY

So she ditched me and went off with Alex.

FRED

Oh, mate, that's rough.

HARRY

That's what I'm saying!

FRED

Oh hey, mate, is she alright?

Fred gestures to Afshan. Her eyes flicker open and closed, her pupils darting around. She's fading in and out of consciousness but isn't quite lucid enough to affect her own body.

KIT

She's fine, just had a rough night. Time to get her home, I think.

HARRY

A rough Sunday night? Fair enough.

Harry scoffs and starts to walk away. Fred puts a hand on their shoulder and stops them.

FRED

She looks very rough, mate, what exactly has she had?

KIT

Oh well...a bit of everything. One of those nights, you know. But I think it's best if-

FRED
How did she get back to campus
then, in this state?

Kit looks around. He's starting to look quite panicked.

KIT
Look, please, she's absolutely fine
but I should get her back home.

HARRY
Wait, I swear down that's Maya's
housemate...Atshan or something? I
saw her like this with you the
other night.

The Fred looks into Afshan's shifting eyes.

FRED
Hello? Can you hear me? Is
everything alright?

KIT
Everything is fine, stop
overreacting!

Harry student moves towards Kit and Afshan. Kit reaches suddenly into the car and brings out the knife Afshan saw in her dream. He waves it at the students who step back, their hands raising into the air.

KIT (CONT'D)
GET BACK! Fucking stay back ok?

Kit presses the tip of the blade to Afshan's throat.

KIT (CONT'D)
Get out of here. Or I'll do it.

HARRY
Fucking hell!

FRED
Alright, mate, calm down! Put that
down!

KIT
Get back!

Kit looks jittery. It looks for a second like the students might leap at him but they slowly start to back away. Smiling and nodding, Kit puts Afshan into the passenger seat, his blade still pressed to her.

KIT (CONT'D)
Stay where you are!

When he's satisfied that the students are enough of a distance away he runs round into the driver's seat and speeds off.

The students let out a shaky breath. The Harry collapses to the floor, their hand on their chest as they breathe. Fred presses their phone to their ear. It rings for a second.

FRED
Police, please.

INT. KIT'S CAR - DAY

Afshan slumps in the passenger seat, her head moving from side to side. Kit drives erratically. Afshan moves an arm up, with great effort, only for Kit to slap it back down.

KIT
Shit! Shit shit shit!

Kit drives down quiet backstreets before stopping his car at the end of a road. He looks around as he gets out. He reaches into the backseats and pulls out a heavy leather jacket and a gasmask before opening Afshan's door and pulling her to his side.

They're in a quiet area of the city. Abandoned industrial buildings covered in graffiti are all around.

INT. ABANDONED MILL - DAY

There's a light jingling as Afshan struggles against the chains pulling her upright by her wrists. Kit stands before her, sharpening his knife. He breathes heavily, psyching himself up. He nods to himself, then takes a canister of gasoline. He starts pouring it around the floor.

AFSHAN
W-why?

KIT
I don't need to explain myself to you.

AFSHAN
W-why are you...doing this to-

KIT

I said shut up! I don't have to explain to you, scum!

Afshan's hand curls around the chain holding her upright. She watches Kit in silence for a second, trying to control her breathing.

AFSHAN

My mum...I don't want them to have to tell my mum...

KIT

T-then I'll come for her next! Fucking scum.

AFSHAN

You've done this before, haven't you?

KIT

I said-

AFSHAN

Killed me, haven't you? Stabbed me, burned me, cut my throat. With...fakes. But not the real me. Do you really think you can?

KIT

How the hell do you know about that? Who fucking told you?

Kit rushes over, brandishing the knife. He holds it to her throat.

AFSHAN

The police. They know everything about you.

KIT

You're lying! You wouldn't have been in the lab if they'd known! They can't know about it! No one knows!

TIBERIUS

About that cheap trick?

Tiberius emerges from the shadows of the mill. They walk casually, hands in pockets. Kit spins around to face them and presses his knife further against Afshan.

KIT

You? How the fuck did you get here?

TIBERIUS

You know me?

KIT

Stay back!

Tiberius halts. They pull their hands out of their pockets slowly and hold them non-threateningly in the air.

TIBERIUS

I'm with the police. She's right, we know who you are. More are coming. It's over. But murder is a much harsher sentence than what you're looking at. Put the knife down, please.

Kit falters for a second. The knife comes down slightly.

KIT

They told me it'd be fine. They could cover for me.

TIBERIUS

Well whoever 'they' are, they've lied to you. You've been stitched up. Please, don't make it worse for yourself.

AFSHAN

He's called Kit!

Afshan manages to blurt this out. Kit moves the blade straight back to her throat. Tiberius steps forwards, arms out.

KIT

You don't know me at all.

TIBERIUS

I do now. Kit Hughes, right? PhD student, Uni of Bradford. I've done some research. Potential suspects.

KIT

I...I'll kill you too!

TIBERIUS

I don't think you will. And I don't think you'll murder her, either. You could've done that all along.

(MORE)

TIBERIUS (CONT'D)

The bodies, the clones. Easier to cull one of them than take a real life, right?

KIT

I'll do it! To save myself, I will!

TIBERIUS

Her mum's called Rani, you know? And her dad...Hammad right?

AFSHAN

Hammad.

Kit presses the knife deeper.

TIBERIUS

Stop, Kit! Please. Rani and Hammad, think of them. Think of all the Sunday meals with Afshan. The long car journeys. The parents' evenings. You aren't about to break a doll, you're about to end a life. You can't take that back.

Kit hesitates. He looks as though he's about to cry.

KIT

I never knew my dad. You know that? He was killed when I was so young. In Afghanistan. I never even fucking knew him. It was one of them that did it!

TIBERIUS

Bu not her, Kit, not Afshan, you know that!

KIT

It doesn't matter! They're all the fucking same! They're swarming over here, you know? You won't want to admit it, people like you never do, but we've got to fight back. I'm not a bad person, I'm just trying to defend my people.

TIBERIUS

Kit...you know this is going too far. Drop the knife. You'll get in trouble with the law, sure, I won't deny it but voodoo clones? Who'd believe that? A breakdown, that's all this is.

(MORE)

TIBERIUS (CONT'D)
Kill her, and it's most of your
life, gone. Like that. Kit...it's
not too late. Don't ruin your life.

Tiberius holds out a hand as an offer. Kit falters. Police sirens can be heard as blue and red flashes outside. The knife lowers. Tears stream down Kit's face. Then he lunges at Afshan.

TIBERIUS (CONT'D)
No!

Afshan slams a foot into Kit's face. Keeping hold of the chain, she swings forward, her feet smashing into Kit's torso. Kit stumbles backwards and Tiberius charges, jumping onto Kit's back.

The two struggle as Afshan tries to pry herself loose. Kit frees himself from Tiberius' grasp, leaving them just gripping Kit's jacket. Knife in hand, Kit charges at a flailing Afshan, grabbing her leg.

Using Kit as an anchor, Afshan heaves. The pulley holding up the chain gives way and Afshan collapses to the ground. Kit stumbles and, using the jacket as a layer of protection, Tiberius grabs him and swings him away from Afshan.

Tiberius bends down and helps Afshan untangle herself. As the two rise they see Kit holding a lighter, a small flame dancing in his hand.

TIBERIUS (CONT'D)
Kit...it's over. Don't make this
worse. You'll get a fair trial. The
people who coerced you into this
can be brought to justice, I
promise.

Kit pauses. Pure panic is on his face. There's shouting now outside. It's indistinct but it seems to be coming from a megaphone.

KIT
Blood and honour, y-you scum.

Kit throws the lighter onto the floor. The gasoline ignites. In seconds, flames leap all around.

TIBERIUS
Shit! Are you alright?

AFSHAN
What do you think?

TIBERIUS

Are you hurt?

AFSHAN

I don't think-

Kit gives a cry as he runs towards them. Tiberius braces for impact and steps forward, intercepting Kit. The two struggle, Kit's knife aimed at Tiberius' stomach. The blade slowly gets closer, Kit has the upper hand.

With a screech, Afshan leaps forward and shoves Kit. Wordlessly he falls onto the fire. Then his screaming starts. He flails as the fire consumes him. Afshan goes to help him, to try anything, but Tiberius grips her shoulders.

TIBERIUS

We have to go!

Afshan looks on helplessly as Kit flails. Tiberius picks up Kit's jacket from the floor, using it to clear a path through the smoke. Afshan looks behind one last time as the cries die off.

EXT. ABANDONED MILL - DAY

Afshan sits on the ground, a shock blanket wrapped around her shoulders. Police officers and fire fighters survey the scene in the background. Tiberius talks to Murton as Afshan stares forwards, controlling her breathing.

Footsteps approach. Tiberius. They sit themselves down on ground next to Afshan. They're still holding Kit's jacket.

TIBERIUS

We'll be alright. Murton understands it was self defence. She saw what he did to the bodies. I think she'll want to talk to you later, though.

AFSHAN

I killed him, didn't I?

Tiberius pauses.

TIBERIUS

You did. And you did it to save my life. Thank you. I know what an act like that means.

AFSHAN

I think you saved mine. How did you know where I was?

Tiberius produces a business card from their coat. They turn it over and indicate a tiny scribble in the bottom corner. Afshan looks closer. It's a rune. She takes her own card from her coat and compares. Hers, also, has a rune.

TIBERIUS

Rune magic has been common in this country since the Vikings. Especially in the North. Easy enough to use. You were basically carrying a tracker around. Sorry.

Afshan whispers a laugh.

AFSHAN

Well, it saved my life, I suppose. I think I'm done being watched, though.

She presses her card into Tiberius' hand. They take it.

TIBERIUS

I should've waited for the police to get there. I'm sorry. I called them as soon as I got your message but...I suppose I thought I could talk whoever it was down.

AFSHAN

You just charged in, trying to reason with a serial killer?

TIBERIUS

It was stupid of me. Truly stupid. I'm sorry. I put your life in so much danger.

AFSHAN

Well who knows? Maybe I'd be dead if you hadn't. You suspected him all along? Kit.

TIBERIUS

No. I just checked a list of your local faculty when I came onto the case. It pays to be prepared.

There's a pause. A group of firefighters direct a medical team with a stretcher into the building.

AFSHAN

I just don't get it. I saw Kit almost every week. He was always just a figure, stood in the corner of my lectures or in the corridor. But he hated me. Why?

Tiberius shows Afshan Kit's jacket. They point to some patches on the lapel. One is a Union Flag in a fiery red border.

TIBERIUS

See this? It's for 'Storm Legion UK'. And this one-

They gesture to a badge of a roaring lion dripping in blood.

TIBERIUS (CONT'D)

-'Iron Vanguard'. And this-

AFSHAN

Alright, I get it. He was a racist. Or a fascist, or whatever. That's what it all comes down to. He wanted to hurt me because I'm me. And I'm not like him. That's all it fucking was. There's no great mystery, no big reveal, no reason for me to be targeted at all. Just plain old hatred.

Afshan holds her head in her hands. Tiberius gently rubs her shoulder.

AFSHAN (CONT'D)

I was in labs with him week after week. And I never knew. He was burning with hatred this whole time. But why me? Of all the Muslims in this country, in this city, he specifically wanted me dead. Was I just unlucky?

TIBERIUS

Well...look at this. This was in his jacket pocket.

It's a picture. Two pictures. One of Afshan. She's smiling, posing, a social media profile. The other is Tiberius. It's much more serious, for work perhaps or a mugshot.

AFSHAN

What?

TIBERIUS

I think...he might have targeted you because you were connected to me.

AFSHAN

But...I didn't know you! I only know you because of him!

TIBERIUS

Targeted by people you don't know for things you haven't done yet, remember? Maybe we are just two people with separate targets on our backs. But maybe we do something together in the future, something that annoys someone very powerful. That's all it takes.

AFSHAN

So I just have to live the rest of my life knowing that? How long until there's another attack? If I do so much damage then they won't stop, will they? I'm just a dead woman walking.

Tiberius sighs.

TIBERIUS

No, you aren't. But it is scary, I understand that. More than you can know. I'll help, I promise. I'll teach you whatever I know to keep you safe. We have a mutual enemy now, someone influential enough to have police bodies disposed of and powerful enough to see this clearly into what's to come. Someone, or someones, who could teach a person with no occult experience how to use runes and create perfect copies. I intend to find out who that is and how to stop them.

AFSHAN

It's all true, isn't it?

Tiberius nods.

TIBERIUS

I'm afraid so.

AFSHAN

Why do you do it? It's
so...dangerous.

TIBERIUS

Why are you training to be a
doctor?

AFSHAN

Because I want to help people. I
want to save lives.

TIBERIUS

Me too. And it is dangerous, very
dangerous. I deal with things that
humanity was never meant to
understand. I have to go toe-to-toe
with forces that defy every law we
think we know and wake up the next
morning as if everything's normal.
But it's worth it to stop people
like him and help people like you.

Afshan nods, resolute.

AFSHAN

I don't think anyone should have to
go through what I just did. No mum
should suffer a dead daughter
killed by a living voodoo doll. I
can't offer much but...if you need
any help with anything medical
or...whatever then...I can help.

Tiberius' face is still but their eyes are beaming.

TIBERIUS

It isn't fun, Afshan. You might end
up in more danger.

AFSHAN

I know. But this is the way I can
make a difference. A real
difference.

Tiberius grin spreads to their whole face. They hold out
their hand. Afshan firmly shakes it.

TIBERIUS

I'll be in touch.

INT. MYSTERIOUS OFFICE - DAY

There's a desk holding a single candle. It's burned about halfway down. The office seems to be a cave of some sort, the walls earthy and rocky, yet the roof is synthetic and clean. Two figures, one with a HOOD (49) and one with a CANE (17) sit on chairs by the table. A third figure, a HERMIT (90) sits on the floor. The Hermit's eyes shoot open.

HOOD

Well?

HERMIT

Yes. No change.

CANE

There were some deviations in the plan. But we ended up where we needed to.

HOOD

Deviations are par for the course. What matters is that all is still going as we had hoped.

HERMIT

Things now are in motion.

CANE

I'll assemble the others. Any loose ends?

HERMIT

Some. They'll tie themselves up soon, fear not.

HOOD

And the girl?

HERMIT

Her fate is already sealed.

The Hermit grins.

END

TIBERIUS

SHOW BIBLE

By Luca Campana

LOGLINE

A supernatural detective drama set in the North of England when the life of a promising young medical student suddenly collides with an eccentric and mysterious detective specialising in the paranormal; as the student is drawn into a tale of hauntings and magical extremism she'll have to decide which world she truly belongs in, the rational world of science and medicine or the esoteric world of the occult which threatens to consume her.

SERIES SYNOPSIS

Mysterious forces converge on the life of a young medical student, AFSHAN (26), when she is dragged from her day-to-day life and plunged into one of occultism and the supernatural. The police, led by Superintendent MURTON (52), are stumped when seemingly identical copies of Afshan's body appear around her home in Bradford. They turn to an idiosyncratic specialist whose interest lies within the paranormal.

TIBERIUS (25), the specialist in question, is an investigator who specialises in the mysteries that regular police forces struggle to answer. With a wealth of knowledge about the extraordinary, combined with Afshan's sharp wits, the pair make a formidable team. They're able to move towards a conclusion about how the crime was committed, even as Afshan struggles to wrap her head around the esoteric world she's just been brought into. When the perpetrator of the crime reveals himself, Tiberius comes to Afshan's aid. But the subduing of the criminal only raises more questions, as a mysterious entity seems to have orchestrated the whole thing...

Realising that they make a good team, Afshan and Tiberius agree to work together more in the future. Keen to discover more of this hidden world, Afshan gladly jumps in after Tiberius.

Tiberius is an episodic series, each episode will be largely self-contained but there will be an overarching story that carries through. Every episode will see Tiberius and Afshan investigating a new case and coming face-to-face with a new horror, but characters will grow and develop linearly over the course of the series.

The series will introduce more paranormal investigators as it goes on, each one an eccentric character in their own right. Afshan's character arc will focus on her search for meaning in a world of the irrational. She was a perfect medical student and had a fulfilling career ahead of her but can she ignore the allure of the supernatural? Throughout the series, Afshan will struggle with her search for identity as she slowly gives way to more magical methods, firmly committing to supernatural investigations. Her faith will also be shaken; she was raised a Muslim but how can she reconcile that with the occult? Her journey will be aided by other paranormalists with similar experiences. She will end the series, secure in herself but wary of what she might become should she forget what drives her.

Tiberius is an enigma, both to themselves and the people around them. A prodigy in the study of spirits and the metaphysical, their past and parentage is a complete mystery. Tiberius will begin the series as a pillar, strong and unwavering in their abilities. Cracks will show throughout the series, revealing the sadness and anger that lies beneath. They will engage in more desperate measures throughout, leaving them ultimately vulnerable and in a position to accept information from whatever source offers it...

The investigations performed by Afshan and Tiberius will eventually lead them to a shady organisation which offers some answers, along with much more danger.

SERIES 1

EPISODE OUTLINES:

EPISODE 1 – “SEEING DOUBLE”

A British Pakistani medical student in the city of Bradford (AFSHAN) is plagued by bad dreams. Every night she sees visions of slashing knives and searing pain. Her life is upended when she is called to the police station to identify a body; her own. She is shown by the local superintendent (MURTON), three corpses have been identified in the city in the past few days, each identical to her own down to childhood scars with some peculiar exceptions. A specialist is brought in, a detective who investigates the unexplainable (TIBERIUS). They build a rapport with Afshan, introducing her to the world of the supernatural. Before their investigations can go any further, someone from higher up has the bodies incinerated, hindering the investigation. Tiberius shares their theory; someone is using magic to create these copies of Afshan and using them as human voodoo dolls. As Afshan's dreams get worse the killer identifies themselves as KIT, a lab technician with seemingly no vendetta against Afshan. But when Tiberius and Afshan overcome Kit, his motivations are revealed; he was a far-right radical targeting Afshan for her race and spurred on by a powerful sponsor. But who is the sponsor? And what interest do they have in Tiberius? The two agree to stay in touch.

EPISODE 2 – “SCRATCH”

About a month after her encounter with Tiberius, Afshan is readjusting to university life, waiving police advice to stay at home. She receives a call from Tiberius, asking if she'd be able to help with a medical matter. Always keen to use her medical knowledge to help people, Afshan agrees. Meeting in Leeds, Tiberius introduces her to a British Jamaican man (HOWARD) who has recently moved into an old terrace house in the area. He has long scratches on his back and, after examination, Afshan cannot identify any indicators of the cause, human or animal. Tiberius concludes that the source must be a ghost and sets about accessing police files on the house. With the help of Tiberius' main contact on ghostly matters, the spirit of a young girl (EMILY), they surmise through recordings and footage that the spirit is of a man who owned the house and died peacefully in it two decades ago. They contact the man's grandson (MARTIN) for information. Tiberius speculates that the paranormal activity could be racially motivated, as none of the intervening tenants, all white, have reported activity. Martin is outraged, remembering his grandfather as kind and caring. Tiberius explains that ghosts are rarely whole people, but rather are the left behind emotions, often suppressed. Tiberius, Afshan, and Martin expel the ghost. Seeing the real world good that Tiberius can achieve, Afshan agrees to team up with them more often.

EPISODE 3 – “PROVOKE THE LORD TO JEALOUSY”

Tiberius receives a call for help from a colleague, a fellow occult detective working in Greater Manchester. Tiberius takes Afshan but warns that the situation is apparently escalating quite rapidly and warns Afshan that things could be dangerous. Tiberius explains that they are one of a network of detectives specialising in the supernatural that serves the whole country. Arriving at the scene, the duo finds an entire town cordoned off by police, with GCHQ assisting to control information flow. Afshan is introduced to Tiberius' colleague (RICHARD), an elderly and seemingly harmless man who has been an expert in the occult for years. He explains that the town is under some sort of spell, every evening the inhabitants are randomly killed by a horrific plague, every morning they wake again with no recollection. The infection has been spreading and threatens to engulf the whole region. The trio enter the zone and Afshan confirms the plague isn't medical, Richard and Tiberius suspect the involvement of a Demon. Through investigations, they piece together the story of a local Wiccan sect, largely promoting wellbeing exercises, infiltrated by a malicious agent who manipulated them into summoning an Abrahamic Demon (CHAX). They find the Demon and the summoner (ZARA). Out of options, Richard offers Zara's soul to Chax to banish them. The day is saved but a dejected Afshan suffers a crisis of faith.

EPISODE 4 – “TROUBLED WATERS”

Murton starts training Afshan in how to work with the police but can sense Afshan is having doubts. Afshan explains that she's losing her place in the world, becoming lost as to what she truly believes. Murton warns her that it rarely gets clearer for occultists. Tiberius invites Afshan to the annual meeting of the Occultist Union in Blackpool, where she can become registered as a salaried investigator of the paranormal. Arriving, they find many eccentric detectives, including Richard and an investigator specialising in nautical cases (AHAB). As the investigators gossip about aspects of work Afshan loses her temper. She tells Tiberius that she can't carry on, that she expected to discover secrets about the world but instead has ended up potentially losing her faith in a run-down hotel in Blackpool. Tiberius understands and confirms that they won't stop her if she wants to leave. Ahab receives word that there's trouble on an oil rig in the nearby Morecambe gas fields and that it's potentially serious. Around 20 investigators agree to go, including Tiberius who asks Afshan to accompany them one more time to help with potential casualties. The rig has been infested by some sort of entity, largely unknown. Afshan bonds with TANVI, an investigator who uses her Hindu faith as a way to channel healing magic, explaining that it's all about belief. The entity is eventually defeated, with Afshan playing a not insignificant role, but not before it taunts Tiberius about their lack of knowledge of their past. Afshan decides to register as an investigator. Ahab finds on the rig the same symbol that Kit held.

EPISODE 5 – “WHAT THOU WILT”

Tiberius introduces Afshan to an associate of theirs (PAUL) who has been helping him infiltrate the far-right groups frequented by Kit for some clue as to the sponsor behind his attacks. Paul says that from what he can see the groups were standard extremist groups with no links to the occult, although there were some mentions of the secretive Order of Crimson Stone, a far-right Satanic/occultist group. Tiberius asks Paul to continue his investigations and contacts REUBEN, a friend and the leader of a local anti-fascist group. Reuben knows a bit more about the Order and expects them to be at an upcoming rally. Afshan is called to the aftermath of the rally, after staying away for her safety, to find there's been an attack using some kind of runic power. Tiberius learns that the police had infiltrated the anti-fascist group and had been planning to make arrests and, furious, cuts ties with Murton. Paul warns them that the Order appears to be planning for some sort of attack. At University graduation day, Afshan spots Runes hidden in plain sight. Contacting Tiberius, they realise there will probably be an attack at the reception dinner. Out of options, Tiberius summons 'the Frantic Lord', who can potentially help. The mysterious figure agrees to remove the power of the Runes but promises to come back to receive payment later. With the attack foiled, Afshan and Tiberius swear to combat the threat of the Order.

EPISODE 6 – “MODERN DRAGON”

Tiberius speaks to Father MICHAEL, a Catholic priest. It becomes clear that Tiberius was raised in the orphanage that Michael runs, but the priest denies any knowledge of Tiberius' true origins, claiming that they came from an organization specialising in re-homing refugees but that no more is known. Tiberius leaves, as Michael makes a phone call to a mysterious organisation to report it. Afshan and Tiberius are invited down to London to help Tanvi with a job involving ghosts. The trio are asked by the government to investigate claims of a haunting which is holding up maintenance on the Underground. The three of them set to investigating but, after some initial testing, find little trace of any ghostly activity. Going deeper into the tunnels, they become convinced they are being pursued. A team of soldiers catches up with them as they discover some sort of testing facility, sporting the same emblem that Kit had in his possession. Tanvi is wounded in an altercation and when Afshan attempts to channel healing magic she lets lose a devastating wave which incapacitates the soldiers. Afshan and Tiberius are able to get Tanvi back to the surface for medical care and when they return, backed up by local colleagues, they find no trace of the soldiers or the facility but they do find a letter addressed to the two of them with the same emblem and one word 'Neralu'.

EPISODE 7 – “DARK SHADOWS”

Weeks after the previous episode, Afshan reports a plot by the Order of Crimson Stone to the police, having deduced the nature of a supernatural attack they were plotting. She calls Tanvi, freshly out of hospital, and mentions that she is adapting to the workload of paranormal investigations. Tiberius intercepts her, having gone missing searching for information on the mysterious ‘Neralu’. They explain that leads have been very hard to find but that, having pulled in some favours, they’ve been able to locate a facility buried in the countryside. The Union has been able to put together a small taskforce to investigate. Hesitant to join due to the danger, Afshan eventually agrees to go, keen to find the motivations behind Kit’s attack. Arriving at the facility with a small team, including Richard and Ahab, the group infiltrate the facility at night. They find halls full of danger, mysterious test subjects and bizarre demonic creatures, all of whom seem to recognise Tiberius. The group is separated until just Tiberius and Afshan remain. A room labelled ‘prophesy’ gives Afshan a glimpse of herself as an elderly hermit and Tiberius a vision of a young woman who looks like them escaping from a similar facility. Using a strong spell, Tiberius is able to break the magic keeping them lost; the two of them are greeted by ‘EDWARD’, a representative of Neralu. He explains the nature of Neralu (see below) and that motivating Kit was necessary to bring the two of them together. He offers the two of them a job with Neralu. Afshan is keen to refuse but Tiberius seems tempted by the chance to learn more of their past. The episode ends with a meeting of a mysterious group that seems to control Neralu. They discuss the success of their plans and their optimism that Tiberius will join the organisation. They replace Tiberius’ file, placing it next to one (labelled ‘EXPIRED’) titled ‘AUGUSTA’ and next to a third entitled ‘CALIGULA’.

THE FUTURE

The first series of *Tiberius* is intended as a complete story, albeit one with a cliffhanger. That being said, the story of Tiberius and Afshan is far from complete and a second series would once again focus on them as they carry on their supernatural investigations. My intention would be for Tiberius to accept the offer to join Neralu, leading to a slight rift between them and Afshan that would grow as the series continues and Afshan becomes more proficient in the paranormal. A second series would focus on the following:

- More paranormal investigations with the ancient and arcane blending with the modern.
- A look at how things are different in the shadow of a large organization like Neralu, with a more militaristic and rigid structure.
- Covert investigations into Neralu itself with an attempt to unravel the seemingly endless mysteries of the company.
- How Tiberius and Afshan's relationship evolves now that Afshan is no longer the apprentice and is an experienced investigator in her own right, one with different views to Tiberius.
- How can Afshan balance her life in the ordinary and temporal with her work in the spiritual and esoteric. Will she become the hermit of her vision?
- What plans does the mysterious 'Frantic Lord' have for Tiberius and Afshan?
- What is the ultimate goal of the shadowy council ruling Neralu?
- Who are Augusta and Caligula?

The world of the story is also quite ripe for exploration. The main goal with most of the concepts has been to blend the everyday dreariness of life in modern Britain (specifically the North of England) with the wonder of magic and the supernatural. There is lots of potential for how this would look in other parts of the country. What does paranormal investigation look like in a bustling metropolis like London or Birmingham? What supernatural dangers lurk in the vast rural landscapes of the countryside? How do mystic threats differ in places with very common folkloric heritage, like Cornwall or Wales? Scotland and Northern Ireland are purposely avoided to leave the door open for those regions to operate entirely differently.

CHARACTERS AND ORGANISATIONS

MAIN CHARACTERS:

TIBERIUS

Tiberius Mills, 25, is a mystery to everyone, even themselves. Raised in an orphanage and with no knowledge of their parentage, they were thrown into the world of the occult and supernatural and found their true calling. As a detective specialising in the mysterious and unexplainable, Tiberius is more of an academic than a wizard. They can't throw fireballs or cast lightning but they can tell the difference between a poltergeist and a ghoul and can mostly identify demonic sigils on sight.

Tiberius is charismatic and understanding. Unlike most popular detectives, they aren't a genius and deductions aren't their strong suit. Rather, they have a gift for interacting with people and they always seem to know the right thing to say to get that last bit of information they need. They have an uneasy working alliance with the police but they mostly operate independently, investigating unexplainable cases throughout the North of England.

Over the course of the series, Tiberius will become fixated on the mysterious organisation that seems to be behind the mysteries they face. Spurred on by the promise of extra information on their parentage, they will become more and more dogmatic before their friendship with Afshan finally pulls them out of their obsession, allowing them to make the final choice with a clear head.

Tiberius is quite small, with white hair and a mostly androgynous face. They use they/them pronouns, sometimes confusing people around them. Their gender isn't brought up particularly often, as they are a Paranormal Investigator who happens to be non-binary rather than a non-binary investigator who sometimes dabbles with the occult.

AFSHAN

Afshan, 26, comes from a perfectly ordinary household in a perfectly ordinary (if slightly dull) place. Academically gifted, she chose to become a doctor because she saw that doctors make the world a better place. After years of medical school, she's close to achieving that dream and living a perfectly ordinary, albeit lifesaving, career. Her introduction to Tiberius turns everything on its head. It's unusual for people to just get a knack for the occult as easily as she does but she just seems to have a talent for it. She makes a great detective and when a potential way to save lives appears, Afshan can't resist.

Afshan is whip smart. She has years of medical training under her belt and can identify wounds and ailments confidently but medicine isn't her only forte; she's good with numbers, adept with electronics, and gifted at putting two and two together. She quickly finds her place in investigations, being able to predict outcomes and establish connections before most others. But her confidence can come across as arrogance and she's very hard to get through to once she has an idea in her head. She lashes out easily and doesn't suffer fools, making it hard for her to make friends in a stressful environment.

As the audience surrogate, the series will focus on Afshan's introductions to the supernatural and her reactions to the new information she learns about the world. She will struggle with faith and nearly abandon the magical world before the allure of knowledge draws her back in. Ultimately, she will end the series with a sense of contentment in herself and her future but a weariness about who she might become.

Afshan is British Pakistani, having been born and raised in England. She has dark skin and hair and a Bradford accent mixing traditional Yorkshire with Pakistani pronunciation. Her family is Muslim but her religion isn't a massive part of her life outside of weddings and other big events.

SIDE CHARACTERS:

MURTON

Superintendent Murton, 52, is a leading officer in the Bradford Police Force and Tiberius' main point of contact with the law. An experienced and storied officer, Murton has little time for those around her and detests any show of incompetence. Whilst she might not be best popular with her team, she's a fantastic officer who has been able to keep the department together through many horrific cases. She believes fully in the rule of the law and is willing to commit immoral acts in the name of the greater good. She has a soft spot for Afshan, who she sees herself in.

RANI & HAMMAD

Rani, 47, and Hammad, 51, are Afshan's parents. Located nearby but outside the city they, like most parents, spend their time worrying about Afshan's wellbeing, especially as she is more and more wrapped up in the supernatural cases of Tiberius. Whilst they are never let fully into the loop, they are able to tell when things are becoming dangerous. Afshan's choice to lie to them about the exact nature of her work is one of the first signs that she is becoming more drawn into a dangerous world. The two of them remain one of Afshan's strongest links to the rational.

Rani is short tempered and quick to demand answers whereas Hammad is more relaxed but no less concerned for Afshan.

PETER & FREYA

Peter, 22, and Freya, 24, are two of Afshan's closest friends at University. They struggle to keep up with her sometimes and often get drawn into the intricacies of University life in a way that Afshan doesn't. As the series progresses, Afshan will become increasingly annoyed at the disconnect of what is supposedly important to Peter and Freya (results, parties, nights out) and the life and death scenarios that she faces. A rift will form between Afshan and her friends as she struggles to maintain interest in her old life. The end of the series will see Afshan realise her mistake and long for simple problems again, hoping that her friends will forgive her.

KIT

Initially appearing quiet and unassuming, Kit, 28, is a teaching assistant in Afshan's classes. Awkward and shy, his stuttering demeanour towards Afshan could be confused for affection, when in reality it is much more deadly. Radicalised by the far-right, Kit is the perpetrator of the first case in the series, the living 'Voodoo Dolls'. His intent as a character is to showcase the ways in which magic could merge with modern social issues. Like the threat of the far-right, magic is unseen, hard to detect, and could have affected anyone around you. Although Kit is killed at the end of the first episode, his actions stay with Afshan as a cruel reminder of the hatred people can bear and as a motivator to ensure that no one else falls victim.

MARTIN

Appearing in the second episode, Martin, 62, is a soon-to-be retiree who has a connection with a restless spirit. He has absolutely no connection to the supernatural whatsoever and rarely considers the immaterial outside of occasionally accompanying his wife to church. He finds the assertion that his deceased grandfather is now haunting a family preposterous; he finds the idea that the haunting is racially motivated even more so. An electrician, Martin has no place in the world Tiberius and Afshan represent. And yet his willingness to embrace the strange and his eventual understanding of the circumstances around the haunting are what make it possible to exorcise the ghost. He represents the possibility of a better world through understanding and tolerance, although there'll be lots of foul language on the road there.

EMILY

Emily, 133, is the ghost of a young girl who haunts a manor house deep in the Moorside. Whilst most ghosts are fractions of a person, the echoes and memories of a human being held together by strong spectral energy, Emily is a rare instance of a ghost which is a full copy of her human soul. Having died in tragic and no doubt mystical circumstances in the late 1800s, Emily has the mind of a child with over a hundred years of existence. She's a good friend of Tiberius and allows them to stay over at the manor when lodgings are required, also acting as a contact with other spirits. She provides advice on how to deal with other ghosts and acts as a confidante to Tiberius, offering surprisingly sage advice. There's an air of tragedy about Emily and whilst she is initially hostile to Afshan she eventually proves to be a source of sound council for her.

RICHARD

Richard Link, like Tiberius, is a paranormal investigator. Every investigator has a location that they're assigned to monitor for paranormal activity and Richard, 72, is in-charge of Greater Manchester. Richard is the opposite of Tiberius in many ways; refined, gentlemanly, elderly, and incredibly skilled as a detective. He has a pre-existing and very fond relationship with Tiberius, having mentored them for a time. Richard's specific skillset lies with instances of Demon activity; having studied Abrahamic mysticism at Cambridge, Richard is considered one of the country's leading experts. His life hasn't been spent behind a desk, however, as Richard has travelled all across the world to build up his knowledge. Behind his gentleness there is a required ruthlessness; after so long in the business he knows that there are very few Demonic cases that end without lives being lost and he appreciates that sometimes investigators have to take the choice that leads to the least harm rather than the most good. He acts as Afshan's introduction to the shadier sides of paranormal investigations and to the notion that it can be a brutal business.

ZARA

Zara, 21, is the young woman who summons a Demon in the third episode, leading to the intervention of Tiberius, Richard, and Afshan. A young queer activist, Zara is not the villain of the episode but she is undoubtedly the cause. The Wicca group that she joined was, like a lot of modern Wiccan groups, dedicated mostly to healing and mindfulness; Demons have little place in Wicca. When Zara joined, she had no problem in advancing to a position of influence and importance within the coven due to her charisma and charm. There was genuinely no malice in her attempt to summon a Demon, even though it did entail lying to most of the group's members about the exact nature of the ritual. A wannabe revolutionary, Zara planned to summon a Demon associated with wealth redistribution in her own cry of anger against an oppressive system. Zara is not stupid, nor are her coven. Her story isn't of a naïve group of activists stupidly causing more harm than they prevent but a story of optimists underestimating the amount of hate that could possibly be directed at a group of young women. And, of course, Demons feast on hate. Zara is kind, charming, and intelligent. Her eventual death to seal the curse she unleashed is a tragedy.

AHAB

Adam 'Ahab' Remi, 49, looks the typical sea captain. A great big beard, raggedy clothing, a closed-off demeanour; his nickname is no mystery. It's no wonder that his manner seems so closed off, however, considering his line of work. In a series full of paranormal investigators, it's Ahab that truly stands out. There are horrors on land, certainly. Demons, ghosts, dark magic. But the sea is a different matter, and the sea is Ahab's domain. Fuelled by decades of superstition, the seas contain horrors that no one can truly comprehend. After years of working in such conditions, it's no wonder that Ahab is as enigmatic as he is. He doesn't enjoy the company of others and his eyes have a thousand years in them. Whilst his allegiance seems to be to the Union, it's really impossible to tell.

TANVI

Tanvi, 26, is a Union occultist, one of a handful operating in London due to its high concentration of supernatural cases. A daughter of Indian migrants, Tanvi was raised in the Hindu faith and still practices her religion. She channels her faith to access a deep pool of supernatural abilities that allow her to support others. Her magic can't heal a wound or revive the dead, but it can ease pain and speed up the healing process. As a result, she has become a very valuable member of the Union and is a core part of any group assignments. She finds a close friend in Afshan due to their similar age and interests and she provides Afshan with encouragement that religion can exist alongside the occult. With a sharp wit and good sense of humour, Tanvi doesn't find it difficult to make friends but she finds a true connection with Afshan. She has an optimistic worldview which makes it easier for her to bear the demoralising aspects of her work.

PAUL

Tall, bald, muscular, covered head to toe in tattoos of varying quality, Paul, 53, looks the stereotypical skinhead. But there isn't a swastika or Iron Cross anywhere on his body, or at least there aren't any that haven't been covered up. Hailing from a broken home in the North of England, Paul found community and purpose with a group of nationalists, eventually falling further and further to hooliganism and Fascism. He also found himself falling into circles he didn't initially understand that dealt with matters like the supposed mythical supremacy of Aryanism or the pre-Christian power of Runes. Before he knew it, Paul was deep in far-right magical lore, conducting rituals and ceremonies dealing with blood magic. One poor ritual led to Paul being seriously hospitalised; on the verge of death he took stock of his life and realised how much had been spent on hate. Once recovered, he began trying to heal the wounds he'd inflicted. Now, 20 years on, he isn't a member of the Union but he maintains a strong connection with the occult. He met Tiberius on a job and a surprisingly potent friendship developed which sees the two of them collaborate frequently. Loyal and fiercely humanitarian, Paul now lives to right the wrongs he committed in his youth.

FATHER MICHAEL

A Catholic priest, Father Michael Donato, 70, has run an orphanage for most of his working life, seeing it as his own way of contributing to God's great plan. Over the years he's raised many children, some of them coming from unsuitable backgrounds and some from unprepared parents. Tiberius was seemingly no different, a child presented by a company that relocated young refugees. Michael raised them as he would any other and encouraged them as they started to delve more into the spiritual. Now Father Michael acts as an occasional confidante to Tiberius, offering sage advice and another perspective on certain problems. He doesn't know the full extent of Tiberius' work but he knows enough to support it, understanding that it seems to help people. Kind and fair but also firm, Father Michael is less of a father to Tiberius and more of a teacher.

ORGANISATIONS:

ORDER OF CRIMSON STONE

The Order of the Crimson Stone is a magic group operating largely within the North of England but potentially with branches nationwide and links to several other organisations. Acting as both an occultist and political group, the Order of the Crimson Stone claims to follow a lineage of thought dating back to the Danelaw and the rule of Vikings. Specialising in Runic magic, the Order also incorporates Abrahamic Satanism, Hermeticism, and some aspects of English Chaos Magic. In reality, the organisation is a far-right group attempting to use magical means to inflame racial tensions. Several specific details such as the number of members, physical organising points, leadership, and exact ideology are shrouded in mystery and it remains difficult to find any information on the group. It is one of a few similar groups, but this one was brought to Tiberius and Afshan's attention when it was revealed as the group that gave Kit the knowledge necessary for his attacks. That this group had such knowledge implies either high-level occultists within the group or powerful sponsors. The group remains a dangerous and present threat to Tiberius and Afshan and one which shows the very worst that magic can bring out in people.

THE UNION

Protecting the general population from supernatural threats is dangerous business, and it's important that those in the field have proper representation. Enter the Union of Paranormal Investigators, known fondly as UPI, the Occult Union, or more commonly just 'The Union'. More than just a common trade union, UPI acts as the employment centre for all those in the business in England and Wales (Scotland has its own union and there's a separate entity for both Irish states). UPI registration is considered a licence to officially practice occultist investigations and allows an investigator access to a UPI salary, the surprisingly well-paying funding source for investigators. Supposedly this funding comes straight from the government although its true source is a bit shadier. Perhaps a certain company has interests in the Union...

The Union coordinates members and assigns each investigator a region to oversee. In total, there aren't more than 100 investigators registered as Paranormal Investigations continues to be a rare profession. There is a small leadership committee of no more than 5 members, voted for on an annual basis but rarely changing. Most investigators would rather be in the field than organising Union affairs. In the rare instances that a case requires multiple Investigators, the Union is responsible for organising this, although many investigators choose to invite others to cases individually. Ultimately, the Union is a background force in the lives of many investigators but it can provide a crucial resource for meeting others in the same field.

NERALU

Shrouded in secrecy and misdirection, the nature of Neralu is a mystery. When discovered after great effort by Tiberius, it appears to be an organisation that specialises in occultism with an abundance of resources. The facility which the two finds themselves in is a bizarre mix of modern white walls and ancient caverns wherein each room contains a secret more terrible than the last. It is only upon demonstrating their power that Tiberius receives an explanation.

Neralu is a company which, for over 100 years, has provided weapons and equipment to governments and NGOs. Specifically, the goods manufactured by Neralu are occultist in nature. Combining state-of-the-art research and development with ancient knowledge, Neralu has been able to influence the course of history by supplying certain sides with miraculous devices and devastating weapons. Hidden, even from the most knowledgeable occultists, Neralu has built a secret empire of commerce and shadows. On top of manufacturing and research, Neralu maintains an extensive private army, a taskforce trained to respond to occult and supernatural occurrences that no one investigator could ever hope to counter. Enjoying the patronage of many modern nations, Neralu acts with almost complete impunity in these cases, always getting the job done. The members of the task force are rarely trained in occultism and often have little knowledge of their targets other than how to eliminate the threat. As such, the company is always looking for more knowledgeable recruits...

That much is revealed to Tiberius and Afshan. As ever, there is much more at play. Neralu is not simply a company providing goods and services; they maintain influence in almost every major national and international legislator body. Surviving as the occultist research branch of the East India Company, Neralu has high influence politically and economically. Many of the individuals met by Afshan and Tiberius have been receiving money to spy on the pair, reporting back to an organisation they know nothing about. But what are Neralu's ultimate goals for the two? That remains a mystery.

MALEFACTORS:

WRAITH

The wraith which Tiberius and Afshan encounter in the second episode is, in many ways, a standard example of a malicious ghost. Throwing objects around empty rooms, becoming stronger at night, leaving vicious scars on peoples' backs; all of this is a standard workday for Tiberius. What makes this particular spirit so perplexing is not the damage it's done, but the damage it hasn't. The previous inhabitants of the house reported no paranormal activity, so why wait until now? Tiberius and Afshan eventually deduce that it's due to the race of the current inhabitants, a family of Caribbean migrants. The spirit is of an old man who died in the house many decades ago and who was, according to all that knew him, a wonderfully kind and generous man, a pillar of the community, and not someone who would lash out at those of a different race. And, whilst he did hold some old-fashioned views, he was never particularly outspoken about it. A spirit, however, is not a full soul. Often, they are just certain feelings and emotions, those felt particularly in life. And so, the spirit encountered in the second episode is not the lingering soul of the man who died in the house, it is the sadness and anger and fear which was whipped up over several decades and pushed to the back of the mind. The fear of the other, the immigrant, the overflowing rivers of blood was planted in the mind decades ago and yet even now, even though the politicians and the man both are gone, the hatred remains.

The wraith is scarcely seen, often manifesting as a shadow on the wall or a silhouette behind a curtain. When briefly glimpsed, it looks like an emaciated man with tears streaming down his face.

CHAX

Often depicted as a Duke of Hell, Chax is a demonic spirit who appears in the Ars Goetia. Physically, they resemble a stork and speak with a hoarse voice. Said to be one of the angels who joined the rebellion against God, Chax is a power more ancient and learned than any group of Wicca enthusiasts can handle. The grimoires claim that, if summoned and kept within a protective triangle, Chax will become a faithful servant of the summoner. They can remove the sight, hearing, and understanding of any target the summoner chooses and, notably, they are known for stealing money from Kings' houses and returning them to the people. It is this last quality that makes Chax so attractive an entity to the summoner, hoping to utilise them as an infernal revolutionary tool. There is nothing that obviously went wrong with the ritual; the necessary chants were performed properly, the protective triangle was established. The power being summoned was simply too powerful for those summoning it. Chax enjoys spreading terror and anger amongst the general population, slowly increasing their reach. Why they are doing this or what their eventual goal might be is unknowable and irrelevant. As Richard explains to Afshan, a demonic invasion of this kind is better thought of as an infection or natural disaster. When confronted, Chax speaks in riddles and rhymes and knows things that cannot possibly be known.

THE ENTITY

Generally, Paranormal Investigators are a pretty knowledgeable bunch. This goes double for those who focus on nautical cases as they are regularly exposed to threats on which there is little to no prior research. As such, the fact that The Entity is a complete unknown to all Investigators is an indication of how mysterious it truly is. Too temporal and physical to be a ghost, too powerful to be a mere incantation, not communicative enough to be a Demon. It appears to be a sentient being somewhere between a fungus and a gelatinous substance. It infects the people and infrastructure around it and can cause hallucinations, convincing the infected host to follow instructions. It grows rapidly and yet every tendril and weed seems to be part of the same nervous system. It isn't like anything anyone has ever encountered before and, when it is eventually overcome, it disappears without a trace. Whatever it was, it was likely placed on the oil rig by a malicious actor; why or who remains a mystery. It takes the combined power and knowledge of several top investigators to eventually defeat it, leading to a concern that future instances of the same entity might be common. Throughout the infestation, The Entity makes attempts to communicate with the investigators. Whilst these attempts start with abstract squiggles and incomprehensible flashes of light, they eventually morph into familiar noises and glyphs that start to resemble human languages. The eventual decision to destroy the being without waiting to establish communication is controversial when taken by Ahab but ultimately may have saved lives aboard the rig. The true nature of The Entity remains a mystery but it is likely something incomprehensible from beyond the stars.

THE FRANTIC LORD

It's rare that Tiberius gets into questions of theology or the divine. When Afshan suffers her crisis of faith, Tiberius simply responds that such matters are beyond them. Similarly, as a television programme, *Tiberius* never makes attempts to put the universe to rights or answer existential questions. It's simply a world in which magic and the supernatural are present and generally are powered by belief, meaning that Abrahamic Demons and Hindu spirits can be neighbours in the suburbs of Birmingham without confirmation or denial of any one faith system.

That being said, the Frantic Lord is a power that remains unmatched throughout the rest of the series. The fright inspired within Tiberius implies that this particular Lord is beyond anything Investigators are used to facing. As for the Lord himself, his exact nature remains a mystery and Tiberius refuses to divulge. However, there are some clues. The bandaged eye, the way their slight limp implies a torso injury, the mastery they have of runes, their corvid companions, their habit of speaking in riddles, Tiberius' warning that the Lord is a master of trickery; those with an interest in Norse mythology should find no great challenge in finding their true name. Appearing as a slightly emaciated old man and dressed all in rags, the Frantic Lord looks no different than many of the poor souls that find themselves on the streets of major cities. Mostly speaking with a frail voice, the Frantic Lord smiles and laughs to gain trust and thunders and booms to command. They position themselves to stay in shadows and tend to keep their face hidden. Their eventual return is all but guaranteed.

TRISMEGISTUS

Only glimpsed at the closing of the pilot and right at the very end of the series, Trismegistus is the name of the mysterious body overseeing Neralu. Officially acting as the company's board, this group of seven individuals is more mysterious and arcane than anyone suspects. Shrouded in the dark red light of their board room, they discuss the plans they've woven and the events to come. They imply some deep history with Tiberius and a knowledge of their origins. Similarly, they seem to know Afshan's future and seem optimistic that it will lead them to their eventual goal. What that goal is, and who the members of Trismegistus truly are, remains a mystery...

CREATOR'S STATEMENT

The idea for *Tiberius* came to me on a car journey through Bradford. It was the combination of three separate strands of thought.

The first was location. Having been born and raised in West Yorkshire, I was conscious of how rarely this region was depicted in popular visual media. Those left behind industrial towns are so often left out of popular media and, when they are included, it is often exclusively for crushingly sad stories or to show decay and ruin. On the other end of the spectrum, I felt that working towns were often somewhat fetishised as rough and ready places producing hard men and gangsters. I wished for a middle ground, to see these areas portrayed truthfully as underfunded and run down centres of stagnation but also to acknowledge that there is plenty of joy and wonder to be found within. I wanted a story where there could be magic in a dark carpark and power in the dandelions growing through cracked pavements. This sense of wonder in the mundane goes beyond location and can apply to anywhere in the country.

The second came as I was thinking about detectives. Everyone has a detective in them, a character they'd like to see right some of the evil wrongs in the world. I realised that a lot of detectives were troubled geniuses who lashed out against those that loved them or who were unable to form meaningful bonds with those around them. I wondered what the opposite would look like, a detective who couldn't tell what kind of toilet paper someone used by glancing at their nose but who excelled with people. Someone that could extract information from anyone but wouldn't always know exactly what to do with it. Of course, a stumbling detective who can never quite catch the killer wouldn't be a very gripping story, so that brought on the idea of a companion, someone who was sharp enough to fill those gaps. Enter; Afshan. My idea certainly wasn't entirely novel, but once in my head I couldn't stop thinking about it.

Finally, I was thinking about the supernatural. I'd gotten very into researching magic and the supernatural over the last few years, I suppose as a way to cling onto the hope that there's something more to this world than how it appears. Ultimately, I don't believe in the spiritual or magic, but every time I researched a new sect of British magic or a Solomonic Demon I realised that there was a story there just begging to be told.

All of these thoughts suddenly snapped together in my head and before I knew it, *Tiberius* was born. There was the story that I always returned to, on long walks or drifting off to sleep. Before long I had other characters plotted, storylines began to appear, otherworldly creatures began to stand in the heroes' way. One day I finally decided to let *Tiberius*, Afshan, Murton and the rest out of my head and onto a script and before I knew it, I had a complete first draft of the pilot.

I've loved developing the plot of a complete series for *Tiberius*. The stories and adventures of these detectives have brought me nothing but joy, and I hope the same is true for you!

- Luca Campana

A NOTE ON MAGIC IN *TIBERIUS*

As magic and the supernatural are depicted differently across many different mediums, I'd like to take the opportunity to talk about the depiction of mystical elements within the series.

Magic isn't particularly commonplace within the world of *Tiberius*. It isn't a setting where you can see wizards firing magical bolts at each other or people teleporting across the world. Tiberius isn't a powerful wizard or a vengeful mage, they (and their occult co-workers) are a scholar. They simply have a knowledge of a subject area that most others are unaware of; summoning circles and runic power and other mystical aspects are simply rules of the world to Tiberius, much like gravity and entropy. What separates occultists from regular people in *Tiberius* is just that they are attuned to a series of rules and laws that others aren't aware of.

As a lot of the magic seen is based off of European magical traditions, it is largely quite ceremonial and often inspired by Christianity, including one story featuring an Abrahamic Demon. I've tried to tackle this head-on, especially with Afshan coming from an Islamic background, to explain how this would be received in a multi-cultural and increasingly atheist country. Because the story is largely set in the North of England, I've also tried to make Norse mysticism a core part of the magic system. Due to the suppression of Celtic and Druidic beliefs by the Romans, Norse influences are by far the clearest remnants of pre-Norman mysticism in the modern English magical tradition.

Spirits and hauntings are also present in the series. Whilst there are plenty of references to ghosts in traditional magic, they are often linked to Demons and presented as inherently linked to Abrahamic faiths. As such, aspects which are more 'paranormal' than occult are more inspired by sci-fi. Episodes revolving around ghosts, and the whole series in general, will attempt to mix candlelight rituals with clunky machines beeping when they detect ESP.

MA Submission Essay:

Observations and Reflections from writing *Tiberius*

By Luca Campana

Introduction

For my MA submission I have written the pilot episode and show bible of a supernatural detective series called *Tiberius*. Set in the North of England in the modern day, the show focuses on Tiberius and Afshan as they solve mysteries and right wrongs related to supernatural and magical forces. When writing the series, I realised that there were many aspects of it that I wished to know more of. The following essay stems from my desire to learn more about these subjects.

This essay has been roughly separated into four parts, each one focusing on a different aspect of *Tiberius* that I wished to learn more about. The first two focus on the far-right and their relationship to popular visual media, both as subjects and appropriators. I then examine 'magic realism' as a genre to discover if *Tiberius* can be said to fit within. Finally, I briefly touch on the role of women as victims in visual media. I conclude by summing up my conclusions on each topic.

I have welcomed the opportunity to research these topics in more detail and I feel as though this essay has helped me a great deal in becoming a more knowledgeable writer.

The far-right in visual media

One of the first aspects of research I wanted to focus on was the way that the far-right are presented in visual media generally. In the pilot episode of *Tiberius*, it emerges that the killer was motivated by far-right hostilities towards the character of Afshan, a British Asian Muslim. The script bible also elaborates on how I intend to depict a far-right group as an ongoing threat to the characters throughout the series. I wanted to ensure that my portrayal of such a controversial subject was appropriate.

I wanted to make it clear that *Tiberius* is situated in the real world and that the threats that the protagonists face are grounded and political. I felt that having the killer be motivated by far-right ideals would be a good way to demonstrate this from the offset. Additionally, I felt that having the far-right be a threat resonates with protagonists who exist somewhat on the fringes in terms of their identity, a gender and racial minority. I wanted to make sure that I portrayed a far-right character correctly, however, and didn't accidentally make them sympathetic or toothless.

In their study on how media exposure relates to common beliefs and conceptions of the far-right, Selvanathan et al. warn that excessive coverage of certain topics in the media has resulted in those topics receiving a negative image in popular perception¹. For example, an abundance of coverage of migration in Europe was shown to lead to the development of anti-immigrant opinions². Evidently, creatives behind the media must be conscious of what they display on television so as not to do real world harm. Whilst *Tiberius* is clearly fiction, and never claims to be otherwise, it has

¹ Hema Preya Selvanathan and others, 'Far-right movements in the Western world: How media exposure relates to normative beliefs and attitudes toward the far-right', *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 28: 4 (2025), 774-794 (p.776).

² Ibid., p.776.

been shown that fiction can also impact the way people view the real world³. The results of the study conducted by Selvanathan et al. shows that people generally regard the threat of the far-right as far more prominent than it actually is owing to frequent media coverage⁴. Relating this to *Tiberius*, I was worried that depicting a shady far-right group as a genuine threat might overplay the danger of the extreme right. The in-universe far-right group in *Tiberius* was based on the ‘Order of Nine Angels’⁵, a real world extreme right group linked to satanism and magic. In depicting an analogous group in *Tiberius*, I would have to stress that such groups are incredibly rare and offer little genuine threat to anyone in such a way that doesn’t remove the fictional threat to the characters. This would be a very challenging task which opens up questions about the responsibility of fiction in preventing real world concern.

The exact way in which the far-right is depicted also raises questions. Shuttleworth et al. have conducted work on how the far-right is depicted in documentaries⁶, however I feel that their work is very much applicable to fiction. They note three main flaws in ways in which the far-right⁷ are depicted; exceptionalisation, in which far-right ideas are presented as fringe whilst the inherent oppression critical to the liberal democratic order goes unmentioned⁸; euphamisation, in which less worrying terms such as ‘populist’ are used⁹; humanisation, in which far-right actors are presented with sad histories that seek to justify their bigotry¹⁰. Euphamisation would be easy to combat in *Tiberius*, characters are unflinching in their condemnation of the far-right. In terms of exceptionalisation, Kit (*Tiberius*’ far-right character) is presented as fitting in with the normal institutions of day-to-day life and my plan was for later episodes to explore how far-right groups can move freely around justice systems. It would be crucial for these far-right characters to espouse views which are commonplace of the electoral far-right today, to mitigate these electoral positions being seen as tame, an issue raised in the study wherein democratic far-right groups are normalised by their comparison to the extreme right¹¹. Humanisation is problematic as the need to not humanise the far-right seems to conflict with the practice of writing sympathetic and multi-layered characters. In *Tiberius*, Kit claims that his hatred towards Muslims is a result of his father dying in Afghanistan, potentially humanising him. A solution would be to demonstrate that his father’s death is not the reason for his beliefs but rather his beliefs cause him to exploit his father’s death to cause harm, something there wasn’t enough time to develop in the pilot but could be explored in later episodes.

³ Scott Parrott and Carloine Titcomb Parrott, ‘U.S. Television’s “Mean World” for White Women: The Portrayal of Gender and Race on Fictional Crime Dramas’, *Sex Roles*, 73 (2015), pp. 70–82, (p.73).

⁴ Selvanathan, ‘Far-right movements in the Western world’, p. 785.

⁵ Daniel De Simone, ‘Order of Nine Angles: What is this obscure Nazi Satanist group?’, *BBC News*, 23 June 2020.

⁶ Luke Shuttleworth and others, ‘The Far and Extreme Right in Documentaries: Euphemisation, Exceptionalisation, and Humanisation’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 48.3 (2025), pp. 441–71.

⁷ It should be noted that the ‘far-right’ group in *Tiberius* would fall under Shuttleworth et al.’s definition of the ‘extreme right’; ‘far-right’ is used here for ease of understanding and uniformity.

⁸ Shuttleworth and others, ‘The Far and Extreme Right in Documentaries’, p.448

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.448.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.453.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.452.

Rich has identified the ways in which cinema has failed to accurately portray a current and relevant depiction of the far-right, often focusing on terrorist groups of a jihadist nature, rather than the statistically more prevalent far-right¹². He points out that Hollywood often depicts neo-Nazis and the far-right as disaffected youths without delving into the deeper structural and sociological reasons people turn to extremism, such as the inherent white supremacism of the American system, likely to avoid controversy¹³. Whilst a full examination of the far-right is outside of the scope of *Tiberius's* pilot episode, one future episode would delve into a far-right group in more detail, and it would be important to ensure that this episode is well-informed and grounded in fact.

Depicting the far-right in media is a tough balancing act. On the one hand, depicting the far-right as too active and threatening risks causing real world panic and the overestimation of extremism as a force. There is also a risk in depicting the far-right as too inactive, however, and misleading the public on the nuances of extremist politics. Overall, there was plenty of literature on the far-right in news media and documentaries, but less of a focus on the ethics of the far-right in fiction. It seems that studies on how to depict the far-right in a way which is appropriate, without removing good writing practice, are lacking.

Far-right appropriations of popular media

As well as examining the ways in which the far-right are depicted in popular film and television, I wanted to investigate the ways in which the far-right are influenced by popular visual media. The far-right are known to appropriate pieces of popular media for use as propaganda or for aesthetic purposes¹⁴. *Tiberius*, as a series with a non-binary title character and Muslim protagonist, is unlikely to attract the far-right. I feel, however, that it's important for all creatives to understand how far-right appropriation can function in order to prevent it from happening to their creative output.

Historical media seems to be a particular fascination of the far-right. This is not a new phenomenon, historical fascist movements used the past to try and justify their own ideologies. The German Nazi party often used Norse symbolism in its iconography¹⁵ and many high-ranking Nazis were believers in Norse occultism¹⁶. Similarly, the Italian Fascist party made use of Roman iconography and attempted to portray their fascist state as the successor to the Western Roman Empire¹⁷. So prevalent were the links drawn by fascist propagandists and Rome that many of them still persist today. When Elon Musk performed an alleged fascist salute at Donald Trump's second inauguration¹⁸ many of his supporters claimed that he was

¹² Paul Rich, 'Hollywood and Cinematic Representations of Far-Right Domestic Terrorism in the U.S', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 43.2 (2020), pp. 161–82, (p.162).

¹³ Rich, 'Hollywood and Cinematic Representations of Far-Right Domestic Terrorism in the U.S', (p.178).

¹⁴ Paulie Doyle, 'The Culture Wars Have Reached Warhammer 40K', *Vice*, August 12, 2020; Anita Chabria, 'Lizard people, deadly orgies and JFK: How QAnon hijacked Hollywood to spread conspiracies', *Los Angeles Times*, December 7, 2021.

¹⁵ Rachel Morgan, 'How Nazi Propaganda Appropriated the Vikings', *The Collector*, December 8, 2023.

¹⁶ Aidan Neher, 'Norse Mythology and Nazi Propaganda', *The Cross Section*, September 6, 2017.

¹⁷ Kenneth Scott, 'Mussolini and the Roman Empire', *The Classical Journal*, 27.9 (1932), pp. 645–57.

¹⁸ Editorial, 'Elon Musk's gesture at Trump rally draws scrutiny', *BBC News*, January 20, 2025.

instead performing a ‘Roman salute’, of the kind dating back to the Roman Empire¹⁹. There is no evidence of such a salute ever existing in Rome, instead the gesture was an invention of Jacques-Louis David in his 1784 painting “The Oath of the Horatii” and was appropriated by Mussolini’s fascist party²⁰. Here is a clear example of fascists appropriating an inaccurate piece of history, caring far more about the aesthetics of the past over facts. Worryingly, those Fascist misappropriations of history still had some influence in the modern day.

Rory MacLellan has done lots of fantastic work studying modern far-right militias which claim to be the successors of medieval military orders. One group, ‘The Knights Templar International Novus Ordo Militiae’, which mostly works in arming anti-refugee paramilitaries in Bulgaria and Hungary, has its members swear a knight’s oath when joining. It is taken almost verbatim from Ridley Scott’s historical epic *Kingdom of Heaven*²¹. Another paramilitary group, the ‘Order of the Eagle’, uses images from *Kingdom of Heaven* heavily in its marketing and a third group, the ‘Ordo Militaris Catholics’, uses images from the *Assassin’s Creed* video game franchise²². Here, depictions of the past in pop culture are used as propaganda for right-wing groups, raising questions about the responsibility of creatives in their depictions of the past. *Kingdom of Heaven* depicts a telling of the crusader states in which the Knights Templar lead Christians into a pointless, devastating war that ends with the Muslim capture of Jerusalem²³. It is a film with explicit themes of the need for multi-faith dialogue and diplomacy and yet the image of thousands of soldiers marching under the crusaders’ cross is enough for the far-right to strip it of all nuances. This raises a worrying question, how can creatives protect their work from being appropriated?

Lots of far-right created media is of the ‘blueprint’ type, depicting fascist dystopias, but Young and Downes point out that the brutal violence and frequent sexual assault found within the ‘gritty medievalist’ genre makes it perfect for right-wing fantasies²⁴. The medieval era is also favoured by the right-wing because of perceptions that medieval Europe was pre-migration and therefore ethnically homogenous²⁵. Focusing on *The Black Flame*, a neo-Nazi propaganda book based around a medieval detective story, Downes and Young make the worrying point that average audiences could read the book and, aside from occasional homophobia, not notice anything particularly far-right about it. The protagonist being depicted as a brute who upholds his own personal morals can be seen across the noir genre²⁶. In ‘Constructing Fear’, Alex Law points out that fascist iconography is common across

¹⁹ Ashifa Kassam, ‘Did Elon Musk give a Nazi or Roman salute, and what’s the difference?’, *The Guardian*, January 21, 2025.

²⁰ Samuel Agbamu, ‘Elon Musk and the history of the ‘Roman Salute’’, *The Conversation*, January 23, 2025.

²¹ Rory MacLellan, ‘Far-Right Appropriations of the Medieval Military Orders’, *The Mediaeval Journal*, 9.1 (2019), pp. 175–98 (p.178).

²² MacLellan, ‘Far-Right Appropriations of the Medieval Military Orders’, (p.183).

²³ *Kingdom of Heaven*, dir. by Ridley Scott (20th Century Fox, 2005).

²⁴ Helen Young and Stephanie Downes, ‘Popular Fiction and White Extremism: Neo-Nazi Ideology and Medievalist Crime Fiction’, *Literature Compass*, 19.11 (2022), pp. 1–11, (p.3).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.8.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.7.

American popular visual culture. From *Dirty Harry*, a cop who breaks the rules to inflict tremendous amounts of violence in-line with his own personal sense of justice, to *Rambo*, a film which is essentially a “thinly-disguised revenge (narrative) for the national humiliation” of the Vietnam war²⁷. Mel Gibson frequently turns historical figures, such as Jesus and William Wallace, into proto-fascistic icons through his fetishisation of bodily suffering and punishment²⁸. American action films are full of masculine heroes dishing out violence to solve problems and often undergoing bodily harm as an act of sacrifice to attain their goal. These narratives fit fascist ideas of the cult of death, eternal war, and action for action’s sake²⁹. It is up to creatives to take a more active stance against such notions becoming a common part of visual media. That far-right tropes fit so well into lots of popular fiction raises further questions about the use of violence in media and at what point it becomes gratuitous.

Joker, released in 2019, served as an origin story for the titular *Batman* villain and began debates about its political content before it had even moved to theatres³⁰. Whilst the worries of *Joker*-motivated violence never materialised, the far-right did use the film in propaganda³¹. The film focuses on a disaffected working man who adopts the ‘Joker’ persona to unleash violence on those that he has perceived as having wronged him. There is nothing explicitly right-wing in the film; the vilification of the rich and powerful would instead suggest a populist left-wing ideology, although director Todd Phillips has insisted the film is apolitical³². Regardless, the iconography of the film proved irresistible to the far-right who attempted to use the film to draw sympathetic audiences into the right-wing pipeline³³. The same happened to Rorschach, a character in Alan Moore’s *Watchmen*, originally written as a parody of fellow creator Steve Ditko’s right-wing beliefs³⁴ who has since become an icon for the far-right³⁵. The overwhelmingly visual culture of the far-right, focusing on memes and iconography³⁶, allows them to strip deeper meanings from works and tout them as surface-level propaganda, even if the media being propagandised was meant as a parody. This presents a challenge for creators, how can the far-right be depicted in a way which won’t potentially be used in propaganda whilst still being engaging and threatening? More studies on the ethics of depictions of the far-right are necessary.

Magic realism

I had assumed that *Tiberius* fell within the magical realist genre, depicting the supernatural whilst being grounded within the real world. As far as I was concerned, this was what ‘magical realism’ entailed. However, upon researching the topic, I

²⁷ Alex Law, ‘Constructing Fear: Images of Fascism in Popular Film’, *Media Education Journal*, Winter 2023.74 (2024), pp. 17–23.

²⁸ Law, ‘Constructing Fear’, p.21.

²⁹ Umberto Eco, ‘Ur-Fascism’, *The New York Review*, June 22, 1995.

³⁰ Ej Dickson, ‘Why Everyone Is Freaking Out About ‘Joker’’, *Rolling Stone*, September 27, 2019.

³¹ Paul Stocker, ‘Joker, the far right and popular culture’, *Open Democracy*, November 1, 2019.

³² Sam Adams, ‘*Joker*’s Director Says His Movie Isn’t Political’, *Slate*, September 10, 2019.

³³ Stocker, ‘Joker, the far right and popular culture’.

³⁴ Alan Moore, ‘Toasting Absent Heroes’ (interviewed by Jon Cooke for *Comic Book Artist #9*, 2000).

³⁵ Susana Polo, ‘Dear Ted Cruz: Rorschach is not a hero’, *Polygon*, July 29, 2015.

³⁶ Lisa Bogerts and Maik Fielitz, ‘The Visual Culture of Far-Right Terrorism’, *PRIF*, March 31, 2020.

realised that there was more to the genre than I had first thought. The following section details my findings from my research and concludes with my thoughts on if *Tiberius* can be said to still count.

In his 1986 article 'On Magic Realism in Film', Fredric Jameson describes the genre as a detailed adaptation of village folklore³⁷. Whilst magical events taking place within an otherwise grounded setting is a key feature of the genre, to distil it down to just that risks turning it into a façade. Jameson notes that early works of magic realism were often historical and used the magical to represent the grounded almost as a metaphor that was tangible in the rational world. The example given is soldiers of a dictator being presented as pig-men in 1983's *La Casa de Agua*.³⁸ Jameson ultimately argues that the purpose of magic realism in visual mediums is to show things that can't be communicated through the visuals of pure rationalism³⁹. The pig-men in *La Casa de Agua* instantly show the audience how the populace feels about these soldiers, and in a much more visceral way than most exposition could deliver.

The idea of the magical being used to portray heightened ideas mixes well with Stephen Hart's notion that magic is used to express the joy of existence⁴⁰. Building on Stephen Slemon's 'Magic Realism as Post-Colonial Discourse'⁴¹, Hart argues that magic realism has long been the realm of post-colonial writers who used the supernatural as a tool against imperialism⁴². Highlighting the example of Gabriel Garcia Marquez's novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Hart argues that the magical was juxtaposed with the empirical. Colonial forces desired for everything to be rationalised. Marquez used the magical to rebuff this, to represent something inherently irrational and outside of colonial understanding. Magical realism was inherently Marxist and anti-colonial and used to push back against the settler capitalism of colonising forces⁴³. Salman Rushdie also used magic to explore postcolonialism⁴⁴ and Ben Okri used the concept to mirror the way colonised nations laid on the verge of the living and dead⁴⁵. Here magic becomes more than just a tool to express heightened emotional and political sentiments, but a way to push back against empire.

Sarah Sceats took this exploration further with the works of Angela Carter. Carter used the magical to explore gender and femininity; her collection of fairy tales, *The Bloody Chamber*, subverted traditional nursery stories by using them to focus on the sexuality and empowerment of women. Her take on Beauty and the Beast, for example, is an explicit tale of female marital slavery, as the protagonist is lost to the Beast by her father in a game of cards, only for the story to end with her shedding

³⁷ Fredric Jameson, 'On Magic Realism in Film', *Critical Inquiry*, 12.2, pp. 301–25, (p.302).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.308.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.323.

⁴⁰ Stephen Hart and Wen-chin Ouyang, 'Introduction: Globalisation of Magical Realism: New Politics of Aesthetics', in *A Companion to Magical Realism*, (Tamesis, 2005), pp. 1–22, (p.1).

⁴¹ Stephen Slemon, 'Magic Realism as Post-Colonial Discourse', *Magic & Other Realisms*, 116. Spring 1988, pp. 9–24.

⁴² Hart and Ouyang, 'Introduction: Globalisation of Magical Realism', p.3.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.4.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.10.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.11.

her skin and becoming a beastly tiger herself⁴⁶. The implication is clear, with Beauty's transformation representing her ability to take control of her own life.

With this knowledge in mind, can *Tiberius* claim to be of the magical realism genre? The label is quite liberally applied these days, Hart notes that Bloomsbury advertised the Harry Potter series as Magic Realism⁴⁷. However, magic realism can be presented in modern and commercially popular franchises. Alison Crawford made a very compelling case that *Family Guy* could be considered magical realism, challenging notions of constructed realities in animation and playing on anxieties about corporate culture with its surrealist jokes⁴⁸. At risk of exonerating myself, I think I can be forgiven for assuming that *Tiberius* was of the magic realism genre. The label has become quite disconnected from the initial meaning and in some cases has come to describe works of fiction that would perhaps be better described as fantasy. Nonetheless, the magic of *Tiberius* is not the same as the strange occurrences found within magic realism and I no longer feel it accurate to refer to the series as such. I am, however, very glad to have taken the time to research the genre; the magical has been historically blended with the real to push for social change and describe great injustices, from colonialism to gender discrimination. I hope *Tiberius* follows this legacy, even if falling into a different genre, and I know that the history of magical fiction as progressive action is one that I will take with me whenever writing future projects involving the mystical.

Female victims

As part of the detective genre, *Tiberius* is a show in which bad and violent things often happen to people to move the plot forward. I believe that there is absolutely nothing wrong with writing these kinds of events, however I was aware that there can be problems if such matters aren't approached in the right way. I was especially conscious that women often tend to be particular victims of violence in these programmes. A full examination of the role that women play in detective fiction, and if this role is harmful in real world contexts, is entirely out of the scope of this essay. That being said, having written a detective story in which the victims are all female bodies, I felt as though it was necessary for me to do some research on the role of women as victims in fiction to ensure that I wasn't following harmful tropes. The following section is my summing up of the information I encountered.

I very consciously wanted to avoid any interpretation that Afshan's clones had been sexually assaulted in my script. Whilst sexual assault can be used as a plot device to great effect, I simply felt that I lacked the knowledge or writing experience to portray it with the sensitivity that is due such a serious topic. Shadia Siliman made the argument that television dramas often get sexual assault wrong. Various social justice movements have illuminated the prevalence of sexual assault in American society; often script writers have employed assault in an attempt to make characters

⁴⁶ Sarah Sceats, 'Flights of Fancy: Angela Carter's Transgressive Narratives', in *A Companion to Magical Realism*, ed. by Stephen Hart and Wen-chin Ouyang, (Tamesis, 2005), pp. 142-150, (p.144).

⁴⁷ Hart and Ouyang, 'Introduction: Globalisation of Magical Realism', p.12.

⁴⁸ Alison Crawford, "'Oh Yeah!': Family Guy as Magical Realism?", *Journal of Film and Video*, 61.2, pp. 52-69.

seem more likeable⁴⁹. Siliman points to American political drama *Scandal* as an example. In this series, a scheming Lady Macbeth-like character is revealed to have been raped when younger, with this assault causing an almost overnight character shift from innocent to evil⁵⁰. Rather than portraying the character in a layered way, her assault is shown as a moment that changes her fundamentally, stripping her of agency and defining her by her trauma⁵¹. Whilst introducing sexual assault as an element to make a character more sympathetic might seem like a good idea, it can ultimately reduce a serious crime to a cheap moment of characterisation. Writers should be careful not to end up with characters defined by their trauma.

A study by Scott Parrott and Carline Titcomb Parrott examined gendered and racial dynamics in police programmes in the US. They found that women were far more likely to be victims of crime than men in a police series although, notably, there was no significant gender difference in victims of violence⁵². This is likely so that male police officers can still act as action heroes who are harmed whilst defending the public whilst women can remain the victims. Men vastly outnumber women in US police shows, not just in the force itself but in the cast as a whole, likely because police action is seen as men's business only⁵³. In reality, statistically, black men are the most likely demographic to be murdered and most murders occur at the hands of someone known to the victim. In US police programmes, white women are the most commonly killed group, and then usually by a stranger⁵⁴. This study shines light on the way women are seen as the perfect victims and men the perfect saviours from hordes of strangers trying to cause harm.

Finally, a study by Wellman et al. found that, in slasher films, the sexuality of characters was linked to death rates⁵⁵. Women who engaged in sex acts on film were much more likely to be killed off and brutalised, suggesting a subconscious desire to see sexually liberated women harmed under the male gaze⁵⁶. Meanwhile, female heroes tended to dress sexually but refrained from sexual activity, stressing the tension between women in visual media having to appeal to the male gaze whilst also remaining pure⁵⁷.

Having performed this research, I do feel confident that *Tiberius* doesn't fall into some of the pitfalls that can be present in fiction. That being said, I am aware that I have barely scratched the surface on literature regarding the portrayal of women. There are plenty of aspects of my script that could be scrutinised through a feminist lens; Afshan's role as a companion to the protagonist for example, or the fact that the death of female clones very literally leads to female bodies with no personality or

⁴⁹ Shadia Siliman, 'Embracing the Bad Victim: Sexual Violence and Sympathy on Popular Television', *Popular Culture Studies Journal*, 7.2 (2019), pp. 140–58, (p.148).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.153.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.154.

⁵² Parrott and Parrott, 'U.S. Television's "Mean World" for White Women', p.78.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.78.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.80.

⁵⁵ Ashley Wellman, Michele Bisaccia Meitl, and Patrick Kinkade, 'Lady and the Vamp: Roles, Sexualization, and Brutalization of Women in Slasher Films', *Sexuality & Culture*, 25.2 (2021), pp. 660–79, (p.676).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.674.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.674.

reason for being other than to die violently. I am happy with the content of *Tiberius* as it stands, however I look forward to delving into this topic more in future.

Conclusion

In this essay I have examined a multitude of different topics relating to my time writing *Tiberius* and come to conclusions on each of them.

On the matter of depictions of the far-right in popular media, I have argued that current academic guidelines are lacking. There is a tension between portraying the far-right as unsympathetic whilst still presenting compelling character drama. This is an issue which seems to lack a quick fix and I suspect that further academic research is needed to address this. In the meantime, I am content that the depiction of the far-right in *Tiberius* is appropriate and doesn't feel too sympathetic.

Research is also lacking on how to protect media from being appropriated by the far-right. This is especially pressing as the far-right is known to use popular aesthetics for propaganda. Creatives obviously cannot be expected to stay away from any topic which the far-right might wish to appropriate, especially when those topics include Christianity, for example. Ultimately, perhaps, the responsibility lies with society in setting up robust barriers against the far-right rather than individual creatives. How this would occur is far beyond the scope of this essay but creatives should generally be mindful of topics like excess violence.

Tiberius is a series that cannot claim to uphold every tradition of the magic realist genre, instead fitting more naturally into the Supernatural genre. That being said, the legacy of magical realism is one that I would very much hope to emulate with *Tiberius* and I hope that magic and the supernatural continue to be used to push for positive social change in media and that the term avoids becoming a marketing tag.

When writing media, it is important to avoid certain cliches when it comes to female victims. It is especially important not to equate victimhood with sexuality. As a character, Afshan avoids certain tropes and I am happy that *Tiberius* lacks obvious tropes. There are still parts of the script that could stand to receive further scrutiny under a feminist lens and I will be sure to be conscious of these ideas as I progress as a writer.

I am delighted to have been given the chance to research these topics in more depth and overall feel much more ready to write more stories with these themes. I sincerely hope that there is much more *Tiberius* in future, as writing this project has been a privilege and a delight.

Final word count: 4188

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