

KILL THE MAD KING DEAD



a tragical mystery
in five parts

series deck

THE CRIME

APRIL, 1997.

GUNSHOTS AT THE ROYAL SHAKESPEARE COMPANY—UNSCRIPTED.

The young ingenue playing Cordelia in this season's electrifying production of *King Lear* has just shot herself and her lead at point blank range in front of a live audience during the play's iconic final scene, sending both actors into emergency surgery and launching an investigation that reveals a thick, black web of secrets and sins.

WE KNOW THE WHO AND THE HOW FROM THE TOP.

WHAT WE'RE AFTER IS THE WHY.

THE FORMAT

5 episodes x 60 min

As our five-part drama unfolds, *two starkly different local detectives enter the scene* to untangle the precise chain of events leading up to the shocking murder-suicide attempt. Of course, there's no such thing as a precise chain of events in the theatre. Hidden **vendettas**, lifelong **shames**, and mortal **fears** among company members breed **conflicting accounts of a slippery truth**.

Accordingly, *each hour-long episode will shift the focus to a different leading character* linked closely with the crime. This hopscotch in perspective will shed more light (while casting more shadow!) on what actually happened between the first rehearsal and that fateful performance night. A fluid combination of real-time thrills, confessional flashbacks, and private memories prompted by police interrogations will stretch the canvas of our story taut, until it's tearing at the seams.

The deeper our detectives dig, the more desperately our players strive to keep their sordid pasts buried. Along the way, we discover intrigues and scandals galore: *intellectual property theft of award-winning material, the sadistic rituals of clandestine Hollywood cults, financial and emotional blackmail over a bastard child, a hit-and-run cover up that claimed an innocent life...* But not until the final episode do we see the grisly event that set our Cordelia's brutal revenge quest in motion: the suicide of her mother by *self-immolation*.

comps



WHOSE TRUTH
IS THE TRUTH?

THE LENS

The World of Queen Mab's Lear will be a study in shadow and thunder, heath grass and lightning, grieving trees, broken crowns, and the ancient wind moaning through haunted hollows. All that is gnarled and naked to the elements, yet stubbornly rooted to an earth that no longer feeds it. Refusing to surrender to the call of the sky. Lear's world waits upon a change only the mad king himself can usher in, a springtime of renewal and fresh hopes. Imagine **Julie Taymor's** flair for the surreal, transforming a harsh Celtic landscape into a pagan playground of deliciously barbaric supernatural forces; nature itself is a primary character in this drama.

We will see abundant, tantalizing glimpses of scenes from Mab's *King Lear* via flashbacks and memories of rehearsal and performance. Moments taken from the play will always heighten and accentuate interpersonal drama, underscoring the uncanny ability of art to imitate life and vice-versa. There's a reason this cast came together to tell this story; the story is working as much through them and they are through it.

As an option to bear in mind, in a deliriously wonderful world, we would rehearse, perform, and film the entirety of Mab's production with this show's cast as a supplemental bonus episode to round out our players' journey.

The RSC Rehearsal Spaces & Other Settings that we will visit in later episodes (such as Hampton Court Palace, the Dirty Duck Pub, the river Avon, and craggy Welsh cliffs) will take on their own primary sense of space and place along with a secondary lens depending on whose perspective we're inhabiting.

The Era our story deliberately situates itself within—springtime at the cusp of a new millennium—represents a fleeting moment when people were harder to access and less concerned with creating sound bytes and broadcasting their daily doings. For Mab's directorial vision and for our miniseries, the anarchy that lives within the landscape of Lear's fractured kingdom reflects the uncertainty of 1997 and an increasingly global society careening towards a new millennium, the rise of the internet, email, cell phones, Facebook, Twitter, etc.

THE TONE

ALTHOUGH EACH EPISODE MAY TAKE ON QUITE A DIFFERENT AESTHETIC SENSIBILITY DEPENDING ON THE CHARACTER DRIVING ITS CENTRAL FOCUS, THE SHOW AS A FIVE-PART PIECE INVITES THE FOLLOWING UNIFYING PRINCIPLES:

Cinematically, the contained, creeping violence of *The Night Manager* peppered with the haunting grit of *The Killing*—but tempered by the warm, pastoral intimacy of *Broadchurch*. When seeing through the eyes of our lead players, the world takes on their hues and views, their accents and projections. Some perspectives may be steadier than others, some colors more vibrant, some whispers more decadent.

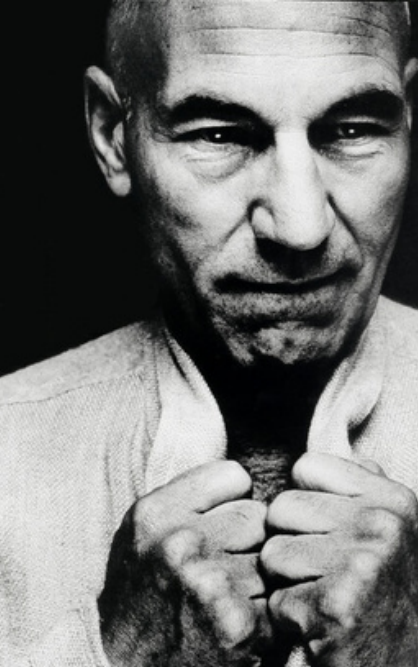
Stylistically, a dance between passion and play, danger and delight. Moments can turn from brooding to madcap to lethal without warning. We should indulge alongside our players in the infectious fun of make-believe while ever-mindful of the deep and brutal currents that drive people to sin. We must also consciously leverage inherent “crime genre” elements to enhance the sense of mystery, intrigue, and jeopardy that our detectives and players face.

Acoustically, quiet wonder and creaking stairs, the majesty of the theatre and the misery of isolation. Epic tragedy embodied in nature’s fury. Pink Floyd takes Vangelis out for a waltz. As paranoia and uncertainty increase, mundane sounds may terrify; a ringing phone may as well be a hammer to the skull—particularly for a character like DCI Chase. Violin strings are plucked until they snap. Birdsong may lull the weary into deep rest, or it may pierce guilty ears until they bleed.

WAYS TO OPEN THIS UP AS AN ONGOING SERIES:

anthology
potential

- **More drama at the theatre;** each season would center on a fresh eruption of violence at another Shakespearean play, potentially in different time periods:
 - *a WWII production of Macbeth goes haywire when an assassination plot targets a German sleeper agent, who happens to be playing Macduff*
 - *a Regency-era Much Ado About Nothing causes catastrophe and betrayal for the upstart, outspoken feminist in the role of Beatrice*
 - *a Victorian Twelfth Night reveals an illegal homoerotic romance that puts lives and liberty under threat*
- **Simply Stockwell & Chase** encountering more convoluted crimes in Stratford-upon-Avon:
 - *when the circus visits town, a dead clown and a wounded elephant stir up speculation about the monarchy*
 - *a film set duel leads to a real fight-to-the-death, laying bare a shameful part of Stratford's history*
 - *a professional wrestling improv comedy troupe crosses lines during their act and incites religious violence*
- **An entirely new cast for an entirely new crime;** each season would be set in the performance world, with the subjects mirroring the crimes thematically, either based on existing IP pieces or fictionalized--as below:
 - *a famous choreographer's swan song (an adaptation of Biblical parables) falls apart when two brothers in the cast become romantic rivals, with bloody consequence*
 - *a punk band on the rise nearly gets electrocuted during a performance by an unlikely saboteur*
 - *an avant-garde new opera about the Titanic set aboard a cruise ship steers too close to its subject's fate*



SIR REGIS CLIFFORD

as

KING LEAR



the players



ROWE JAMESON

as

CORDELIA





SAM LEE

as

EDMUND



CHARLOTTE HEATH

as

GONERIL



SERGEANT STOCKWELL



QUEEN MAB

Director



DCI CHASE

| ROYAL SHAKESPEARE COMPANY

Rowena “Rowe” Jameson (27) playing CORDELIA

Sometimes I'm alone in a ruined palace.

A blazing young star on a meteoric rise through the UK film and television scene, Rowe Jameson has garnered dazzling reviews and dozens of offers through her searingly impassioned, righteous, and above all devoted portrayal of King Lear's most beloved (and most wronged) daughter. With her delicate beauty and Sphinx-like charm, the ascent to super-stardom is practically guaranteed. But a brutal specter lurks behind the spectacle of success: revenge. From the time Rowe was born, her troubled mother sentenced them to a life of wandering exile on the road, barely surviving off stolen funds, vagabonding and busking, never settling in one place, chasing a phantom of bygone love. Rowe learned early on how to blend in or disappear altogether, how to live off the streets and assume whichever personality would keep her alive or buy her next meal. She developed a certain aloofness, the impression of a ghost who might slip through your fingers just as you reached out to touch her—and she rarely let anyone close enough for that. But as much as they struggled, in her own way, Rowe's mother managed to create moments of beauty and escape: feasting on “a sin of berries,” dancing in the woods to summon the fairies, stalking imaginary villains through abandoned alleys. After a time, her mental instability took its toll; she would mourn and rage for hours nonstop over a man who had scorned her affection (not Rowe's biological father, whose identity is irrelevant to the story). The anguish of this unrequited love drove her to true madness. When Rowe was only 15 years old, her mother burned herself alive in front of Rowe, whispering, “I go the wild way.” The man who drove her mother to suicide? Sir Regis Clifford, legend of the screen and stage. From that moment, Rowe oriented her entire existence to seeking vengeance. She became an actor with the singular purpose of finding her way to him, and when she landed the role of his Cordelia in *King Lear*, she knew her moment had arrived.

Sir Regis Clifford (75) playing KING LEAR

What if all my life, I've only seen through one eye?

The man can command. If he weren't an actor, he'd be standing at the bow of a Royal Navy ship, bound for parts unknown. A bona fide knight and legend in his time, Regis has soared to the pinnacle of his craft—collecting BAFTAs, Oliviers, Tonys, and even an Oscar for good measure. But as age bears down upon him, he feels the keen wind of descent. He's a fading star, an afterthought. And this may well be his last great hurrah. When a young sylph slips into his life in the form of Rowe Jameson, bright-eyed and awestruck, eager to please but fueled by her own fiery instincts and desires, group rehearsals give way to private rehearsals, which quickly turn tempestuous. The tension heats and mounts until, in a moonlit garden maze, they breach their nearly 50-year age gap and plunge into a primal sexual pit. Regis lusts after Rowe's light, feeding off the bright promise of a life she's just beginning to live, hunting after his own faded glory. Only when he's deep enough to drown does he realize that an ulterior agenda may be at work. But by then, between playing Lear and loving Rowe, he's already half-mad as it is. When Rowe tries to end their (not so) secret tryst without warning or explanation, Regis nearly cracks completely. Only through the stabilizing influence of his favorite ex-wife does he begin to get a grip again. But Rowe's unexpected murder-suicide attempt unwittingly unearths a most abhorrent, shameful secret from his reckless, alcoholic past: the taking of an innocent life. After locking away the ugly truth for decades, Regis hears it knocking once more. Will he finally answer?

| ROYAL SHAKESPEARE COMPANY

Charlotte Heath (36) playing GONERIL

We met in a desperate hour.

Jilted and jealous never make for good bedfellows, especially when you're aging out of all the best roles you'll ever play. A dedicated, hardcore stage actress who never quite made the transition to screen, Charlotte knows her brief moment in the spotlight is coming to a close—at least until she ages back into Shakespeare's hags. To boot, much as she loves the theatre, it's not the best ally against property taxes and diaper bills. Being a single mother is hard enough; being a single mother who acts six days a week at a pauper's pay is an exercise in insanity. Luckily, Charlotte always did have a knack for attracting people's dirty laundry. Knowing how and when to leverage filthy little secrets is a skill she's honed to a knife point. This came in particularly handy nine years ago, when she found herself pregnant, unmarried, and heartbroken. After her own torrid entanglement with the infamous Sir Regis Clifford, Charlotte sought consolation in the arms of an old flame. Although she didn't know precisely which man was the father, she seized the opportunity to guilt Regis into paying child support—lots of child support. A few years later, when he demanded a paternity test, she pulled her trump: not only did Charlotte know that Regis had drunkenly killed an unidentified vagrant; she knew exactly who that vagrant was. She upped the cost of his hush money, and a rather tenuous peace settled between them. Until Rowe Jameson entered the scene. Bitterness doesn't begin to capture what crashes over Charlotte when she witnesses her own mistakes repeating themselves. Torn between envy and pity, she appeals to Queen Mab for an intervention, but Mab tells her to bugger off and “mind her own.” As the situation turns volatile, she entreats Regis himself to stop, but he's already beyond reach. Her final plea to Rowe ends on a queer, foreboding note, propelling Charlotte into her own tailspin of regret and self-pity at the local pub, where she collides with an equally dejected Sam, leading to a fraught, impassioned, fumbling liaison they will barely recall the next morning...

Sam Lee (29) playing EDMUND

Maybe we've tried all our tries.

Gifted and cursed with a chin that would make Michelangelo weep, Sam epitomizes everything that Hollywood studio execs (and their bank accounts) demand from a silver screen god. Vibrant, witty, with a dash of bad boy charm—the perfect recipe for teen heartthrob status and bloated box office sales. Hot off the fresh reboot of a time-tested superhero franchise, Sam's got all he can do to keep his ravenous fangirls at bay. But the tortured artist trapped beneath the gorgeous veneer longs for a challenge, for recognition, for something juicy and raw and real. To prove he's more than just a pretty face. To channel the invisible demons that have dogged him since his earliest days in entertainment. Sam's still haunted by what he allowed to happen when he was just a vulnerable adolescent searching for his breakout role. Predators masquerading as gatekeepers pressured him into joining a secret society, a dark underbelly of the industry that power brokers use to manipulate innocents into all manner of perverted, debasing acts. The abuse and trauma he suffered at the hands of these twisted sociopaths had been repressed for too long, and stepping into Edmund's skin finally granted Sam much-needed catharsis. Yet despite the healing journey of *King Lear*, he senses a familiar troubling of the waters in the strange dynamic evolving between Rowe and Regis. As his affections for Rowe deepen, so does Sam's inner conflict. Regis has taken on a mentoring role, helping Sam to stumble past his own blocks and resistance and navigate the hallowed planks of the RSC's humbling mainstage. But his own scars flare in warning at what he believes is a textbook case of sexual harassment: Regis is clearly taking advantage of Rowe's precious naivete and bullying her into his bed. As her would-be knight, Sam feels he must make a noble stand and fight for his helpless damsel. But old debts from his past come to claim their due.

| ROYAL SHAKESPEARE COMPANY

“Queen Mab” aka Maeve Gwendolyn Carney (anywhere from 50-75), Director

Let the work do the work.

A woman of undulant mystery and titanic presence, Mab strikes terror and thrill into the hearts of aspiring and veteran thespians alike. Decades of unstoppable workaholism and uncanny brilliance have secured her status as one of the most sought-after directors and writers in the world. And when the “merry tyrant of the seven stages” enters a space, lightning will most definitely strike. With a bevy of award-winning shows to her credit, she has finally achieved the rarified privilege of being able to pick and choose what she commits her time to—except, of course, when one of the world’s greatest living actors all but demands that she bring her talent and vision to his career-capping Lear. Mab wishes she could refuse; it’s “the undertaker of undertakings,” after all. But it’s also the Everest of Shakespeare, and at the end of the day, there’s really only one man who can reach the summit. And he needs her. It’s simply too delicious a challenge to resist, and so Mab throws herself in, mind, body, and soul. Lear consumes every aspect of her life; she lives, eats, and breathes the play. It fills her waking visions, her restless dreams. She forgets lunch, she forgets dinner, she forgets bathing. She runs her actors ragged. But she always delivers, no matter what malarkey and madness may be afoot behind the scenes. True to her reputation, this season’s production of Lear has catapulted the RSC and Sir Regis back into superstardom. But something’s been gnawing at her heart, a certain nausea of knowing. Mab’s no fool; she knows what’s happening behind the scenes, but she also knows it’s creating magic on stage, night after night. And to Mab, that’s worth its weight in backstage drama. It takes Rowe’s violent desperation and the subsequent police presence to jolt Mab back to reality, awakening a terrible betrayal she’s been suppressing for years. Mab may be a gifted director, but her earliest victories came at a cost: the pilfering of a talented but handicapped sister’s work. If the truth comes out, it will cost her entire empire, and she’ll do almost anything to keep that from happening.

| STRATFORD CONSTABULARY

Sergeant Stockwell (49)

We let one another down. That’s human. It’s how we lift each other up that’s divine.

Once a man of the cloth, Stockwell jumped ship on Jesus and changed careers late in life. He has yet to disclose the full story behind this momentous choice to anyone, and he probably never will. Suffice it to say, the man has his reasons, and his God knows them. Answering the call to join the constabulary proved quite the challenge for a bloke in his early forties, but his infinite wellspring of patience and amusement with human nature helped him through the stickier bits of training and ageism. When he finally began to pursue real cases, his years of work in the pulpit paid off; he’s a natural disarmer and can get just about anyone to talk, whether they mean to or not. Stockwell will serve as our primary barometer for Truth throughout the five episodes, both internally for the characters involved and externally for the audience.

Detective Chief Inspector Chase (37)

Like she’d erased herself already.

Prickly and precise, DCI Chase worships order, logic, and clean lines in her wardrobe. Due to a nearly crippling sensitivity to sound known as hyperacusis, she finds the real world incredibly confronting. Police work is doubly debilitating, even in the sleepy hamlet of Stratford. Sounds trigger a panic response in her sympathetic nervous system, distorting her field of vision, stifling her breathing patterns, and generally mucking up her day. But Chase’s sensitivity is merely one aspect of a special gift that also allows her to hyperfocus on details and people. Simply by stepping into an empty room and studying its contents, she can see ‘wraiths’ of its past occupants. Over the years, Chase has learned to balance her passion and talent for crime-solving in the pursuit of justice with her limitations. But her domestic partner Ron’s recent promotion to a job in Manchester has thrown Chase’s perfectly structured life into chaos. Ron refuses to turn down the offer, and he wants Chase to join him and leave Stratford in the dust. But Stratford is home and (usually) quite calm. A bloody impossible ultimatum.



the episodes

BETRAYAL

SALVATION

VENGEANCE

MEMORY

SEXUAL TABOOS

MENTAL HEALTH

OWNERSHIP

PERCEPTION

GUILT

SOVEREIGNTY

COMPLICITY

MANIPULATION

| EPISODE I: QUEEN MAB

With a bang, the opening episode launches us headfirst into an attempted murder-suicide. When the young star Rowe Jameson shoots legendary actor Sir Regis Clifford and herself on stage at the Royal Shakespeare Company, the live audience is just as horrified and bewildered as the company members. Investigators Stockwell and Chase arrive on the scene and become our main vehicles for understanding what was going on behind the curtains and what could have possibly led a girl with so much promise to commit such a brutal act. Queen Mab, the play's director, is our entryway into the private world of the theatre, and through her we soon begin to glimpse the interpersonal dynamics at work. Although she's resistant to divulging anything about her people to strangers, Stockwell manages to coax a slow trickle of details from her. Mab's ensuing flashbacks and memories suggest that Rowe and Regis were enmeshed in their own drama, antagonizing Hollywood star Sam, who clearly harbored deep feelings for Rowe. The nature and extent of any of these relationships is unclear, but we get the feeling that things had been coming to a head. Meanwhile, we learn that Rowe is in critical condition and undergoing brain surgery, while Regis is out of the woods but also still in surgery. Through Mab's unfolding recollections and Chase's search of Rowe's apartment, filled with dozens of dead roses but otherwise spotless, we develop an impression of Rowe as distant and ephemeral, an elusive but seductive sprite who seemed to cast spells (whether she intended to or not). We also discover that Mab has her own dark secret hidden on a floppy disk worth burning; Sam catches her in this act, looming over her with veiled threats and intentions of his own.

| EPISODE II: EDMUND

While Rowe's identity and past remain obscure, our suspicion shifts to Sam. He strong-arms Mab into keeping anything else she may or may not know about Regis and Rowe's relationship private from the detectives, and he forces her to share what's on the disk. The audience doesn't get to see it just yet, but it's enough to alter Sam's opinion of her irrevocably. Stockwell zeroes in on Sam through his own instincts and conversations with other cast members, leading into Sam's flashbacks of the group on a rock climbing excursion in Wales and performing a medley of scenes from the play for a private fundraising gala at Hampton Court Palace. A few dangerous slips at the Welsh cliffside could have been accidental or deliberate. We also see fleeting images of Rowe, Regis, Sam, and Charlotte navigating an enormous hedge row labyrinth at night, teasing the audience about the mysterious dance of desire they were all entangled in. Through private memories, we learn more about Sam's feelings for Rowe and his disgust with Regis—none of which he shares with Stockwell. In Sam's eyes, Rowe is the victim of a predator. But at the same time, Regis has taken Sam under his wing through the grueling rehearsal process. Regis is more than just a monster; he's a mentor. A friend. In real-time, Stockwell witnesses an unexpected stranger showing up and confronting Sam, leading to a series of disturbing revelations about what Sam endured in his early LA days. Meanwhile, Chase is digging through the scant trail of breadcrumbs Rowe left behind while trying to sort out her own personal drama with her partner Ron, who continues to pressure her into making a decision about moving away from Stratford. Regis is still recovering from surgery, and it looks like Rowe may survive. Whether or not her brain will recover remains uncertain. At the end of the episode, through Sam's memory, we finally see the first kiss between Regis and Rowe—which Charlotte has witnessed as well.

| EPISODE III: GONERIL

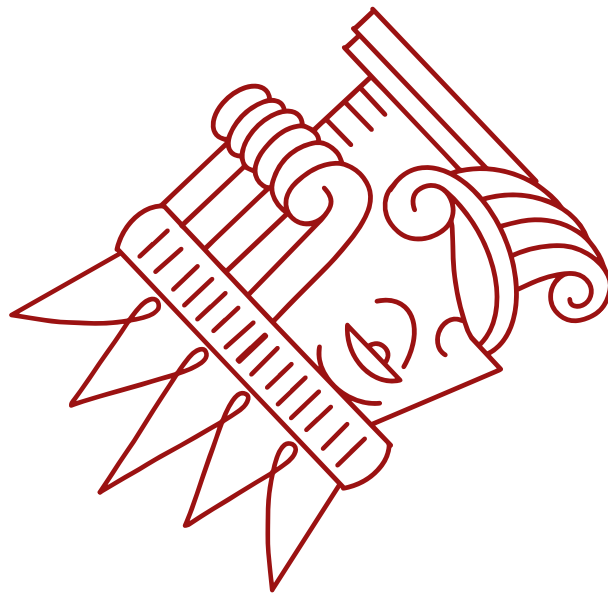
Despite Sam's attempt to conceal the truth, Stockwell has surmised that Regis and Rowe were involved in a torrid affair and that Charlotte, clearly bitter and resentful in her own right, may be more willing to spill the full story than her fellow company members. Chase rejoins Stockwell, and together, they interrogate Charlotte, who easily cracks—mostly to deflect attention away from her own secret, which she is frantically working to keep under wraps. She reveals everything she knows about the affair, and we see more flashbacks of what happened at the cliffs, the Palace, and other now-familiar locations from the past. Charlotte tries to get Mab involved, confronts Regis about Rowe as a would-be peacemaker, then finally goes to Rowe herself. Rowe's cruel reaction to Charlotte gives us the first hint that there's more to her than victimhood. She's up to something. Charlotte tries to go back and warn Regis, but he refuses to listen. He's too far gone. In real-time, Stockwell confronts Mab about the affair. What did she know, what didn't she? Why would she keep these secrets? Meanwhile, Sam is assaulted, and Chase rushes onto the scene to intervene, bringing Sam full circle with his past. At her own breaking point, Chase ends her relationship with Ron. Finally, through private memories, we learn about Charlotte's brief fling with Sam and her heartbreaking tryst with Regis, their bastard love child, and the blackmail scheme that followed. By the end of the episode, Regis is awake.

| EPISODE IV: LEAR

In real-time, at the hospital, Stockwell and Chase finally get to question Regis, with his favorite ex-wife standing loyally by his side throughout. Knowing everything is too far gone to hide anymore, Regis confesses the entire evolution of his twisted affair with Rowe via flashbacks. We see the way Rowe subtly lured him into believing he was the alpha and aggressor, then caught him in her snare, then tortured him with fits of wild devotion, sudden callousness, jarring instability, pushing him away in shame at their taboo partnering, then begging him to return, losing herself in her role and in their mutual obsession. Through unraveling flashbacks revealed in the other episodes, Stockwell and Chase piece together enough of everyone else's troubled pasts to prompt Regis into sharing more. With reluctance, he finally reveals Mab's plagiarism as well as his side of the Charlotte blackmail saga and some of the demons Sam's been battling. Mab tries to kill herself in shame over her past and over what she allowed to happen to Rowe and Regis, but Stockwell stops her just in time. Rowe is also now out of surgery but still unconscious. Sam's being treated for minor injuries. Most of the other main players have crowded the waiting area of the hospital to see Regis and pray for Rowe—and also to keep up with the latest revelations and scandals behind Rowe's shooting. In his private memories, Regis is haunted by the hit-and-run he covered up and desperately afraid that Charlotte or Mab, the only two who know about it, will expose him. Will he spend the rest of his life in prison? At this point, a combination of luck, fate, and good sleuthing have united Chase with two people who claim to be Rowe's long-lost grandparents.

| EPISODE v: CORDELIA

While Rowe is still unconscious, her alleged grandparents weave a disturbing tale about Rowe's mother, Edwina, whose mental illness drove her away from the family at the fragile age of 15. Little did they know, she was already pregnant with Rowe at the time. The family spent years searching for Edwina and assumed the worst, but not until seeing Rowe's face in a news bulletin about the shooting at the RSC—a face nearly identical to Edwina's—did they realize they may have a granddaughter. They came to the police, and Chase showed them the picture of Rowe's mother that she recovered from her purse. The grandparents confirmed it as their daughter. When Rowe finally awakens again in real-time with her brain intact and is presented with loving grandparents, she unveils the rest of the mystery behind her past. We hear and see the story of her mother's supposed affair with Regis, the revenge quest Rowe took upon herself, the dark road she walked with Regis, and the unexpected feelings of respect and tenderness she developed for him. How those feelings complicated her mission and called into question whether this man was the same man her mother had described. Only through a final confrontation with Regis and her grandparents do we receive confirmation that Rowe's mother suffered from erotomania; she imagined the affair. Rowe's entire life purpose was based on a mad illusion. Rowe and Regis share a moment of reconciliation, and he agrees not to press charges on her if she checks into a mental health rehabilitation program, which her grandparents fully support. The entire sequence of events inspires Regis to face his own greatest sin once he has fully recovered. After asking Charlotte for the identity of the vagrant he murdered, Regis seeks out the surviving family member to confess his crime. To his great shock, the family member exonerates him and asks only that he find a way to honor the memory of this lost soul, whose own struggle with madness led him down a wayward path...



THE MADNESS

SOME THOUGHTS ON OUR CORE THEME

We're embarking on a voyage into a maelstrom, what one may call a fool's errand. But why take to calmer seas when we can sail full-tilt into the mouth of madness? Where else can we probe our own proclivity for damnation and redemption but in a broken landscape where the rules have unraveled? That's the world of Lear and, by extension, the world of our saga.

What King Lear himself undergoes in Shakespeare's tragic telling of the tale should serve as a stark lesson for all of us. And, as in the case of this miniseries, it can also serve as a catalyst for anyone involved in bringing it to life. What Rowe's violence awakens and unleashes within the rest of the cast shouldn't come as a surprise to any of them. The mind is but a fragile extension of the self, and as soon as it begins to splinter, reality splinters right alongside it. The question of madness, therefore, is never much further than a mirror. We all have within us the potential to fray at the edges until we come undone.

It's also madness that sets this course of events in motion, from the moment Rowe's mother burns herself alive, to the moment Rowe shoots Regis and herself on stage, to the entire cascade of drama that follows. This show will give us the opportunity to explore madness, to trace its contours. Because whatever it may look like from the outside, it's seen as anything but madness from within. Accordingly, the exact nature Lear's madness takes on in the play is as critical to the telling of this tale as how deeply Rowe's mother believed in her own delusions.



THE IMPULSE

WHAT INSPIRED MY VISION

We learn as much from the doing of Shakespeare as from the seeing. It's performed again and again throughout the centuries, imbued with the spirit of the age into which it's born anew. In recent years, I began to yearn for a fresh conversation with Shakespeare. To engage with him not through a direct performance of his work (which is always delightful and illuminating), but through an interpretation of how his work still lives in the world—and always will, I hope. But before I elaborate, a quick flashback...

As an angsty teen, I was always partial to *Hamlet*. Knowing that *King Lear* was my father's favorite play, and because we enjoyed butting heads over literary taste, I indulged my little rebellion by actively avoiding the piece for years. Moreover, although I'd heard *Lear* referred to as the pinnacle of tragedy and the greatest of the Bard's works, I'd never been in a rush to explore the story of a 'mean old man losing his mind.' It would find me in its own good time, I figured. And it did.

The idea for a piece about *Lear*, Cordelia, and the actors playing them caught up in some kind of liaison came to me suddenly, unexpectedly. A chance to explore that strange space where society's taboos may be suspended through the blurring of boundaries between the self and the character. When I finally sat down with *Lear* after beginning to develop my own side of this story, I was breathless, spellbound.

My father endured the early stages of Alzheimer's and then passed away from cancer in 2024, while I was pregnant with my daughter. He spent most of his days in Asadullahpur and Lahore, Pakistan. He was a *zamindar*, akin to a feudal lord, but also the son of a professor of English literature and great lover of Shakespeare. Every time I told him about this project, he quoted his favorite line from *Lear* with gusto:

"I AM A MAN MORE SINNED AGAINST THAN SINNING."

As we undertake our journey in *KILL THE MAD KING DEAD*,
we leave it to our audience to judge.

creator's bio

| SOPHIA KHAN | WRITER & CREATOR



A passionate Sci-Fi nerd with a penchant for Shakespeare and Irish folk music, Sophia has lived and studied in Pakistan, China, England, Italy, and the US. She seeks and creates bold roles with depth and nuance that sweep across cultures and challenge moral paradigms. After earning her BA in Classics & Theater from Dartmouth College, she received two masters' degrees in Religion, Ethics, and Politics from Harvard and Yale Divinity Schools. She then worked with Harvard's Carr Center for Human Rights Policy and freelanced for various nonprofits, think tanks, and journals, including *Huffington Post*.

Since coming to Hollywood, Sophia's feature-length, TV, and short scripts have ranked as: top 10% at the Academy Nicholl Fellowship and Slamdance Film Festival; Final Round at the Sundance Feature Film Lab; Semifinalists at WeScreenplay Diverse Voices Lab, Screencraft Sci-Fi & Fantasy Screenplay Competition, Filmmatic Inroads Fellowship, Filmmatic Short Screenplay Awards, and Screencraft Short Screenplay Competition; top 10% and Red List on Coverfly; Quarterfinalists in the Shore Scripts TV Pilot Contest and Screencraft Film Fund; Shortlist for the First Flights x Theta Short Film Fund; and Official Selections at the Nostos Screenwriting Retreat and Silicon Beach Film Festival. With her husband, Joey De La Cruz, she formed production company **Shakaboom** (full slate available upon request).

Sophia stars as Dr. Evelyn Roth, the lead playable character in **PROJECT VESPERI**, a video game releasing in 2025. She recently won best acting duo at the Dark Comedy Film Festival for her role in **DOLLYVILLE**. Her acting training includes movement, voice, stage combat, rigorous scene study, improv, and audition workshops. To round off her classical instruction, she auditioned for and completed an intensive Acting Shakespeare program at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London - a critical foundation and inspiration for much of the texture and substance in **KILL THE MAD KING DEAD**.

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