

TIGER STRIKE RED, 2022

Single-channel video (color, sound); 23:03 mins.

Courtesy of the artist, Public Dreams, London and Project Native Informant, London

Sara: I am baby. I am dreaming. I am real. I am hungry. I am hell. I am scary. I am angry. I am true. I am love. I am you. Why I have to speak English, mom?

Godhead: I don't know, baby. That's just what's on TV. Now shhh, sleep. Like Lawrence slept, convinced his dreams were true. Institutionalized by old gods, blue eyes turning red. How do you say in English?

Slug: Not again.

Peace: History is a horror story.

Slug: Really slow reality TV. The great British slasher.

Red: The fuck you looking at, King? This one's for Bathsheba and screw you for Medusa and the Buddha, and Queen of Sheba and Buffy. Fuck off, you fucking fuck.

My eyes are open you exotropic asshole.

Slug: I know you. You're that guy. What's your name? It's on the tip of my tongue. A-B-C-D. Daddy. The Devil. Delta, delta, delta. See, I do remember.

Doubt, doubt it.

Wait am I the only one who feels like we're going in circles?

I don't know. What do I know? I'm a ghostwriter. Deadpool, wannabe. My name is Slug.

It's Safi.

I'm beginning to question your reliability.

I write art history. Fanfic, mainly. Or is it fantasy? F-G-H-I. I-I-I-I-I guess it doesn't matter in the end. The beginning is the story of the I-I-I. J-*Judith Slaying Holofernes* configured in the round. Damn, Donatello. Wasn't expecting to see that. Anyone who grew up on the Internet seen a few beheadings, but that looks really real.

Red: J is for justice. K is for kismet. L is for loot.

∞T (pronounced InfiniTy): L is for law. La, la, la, lap cat, labor, loss, Linden, London, live. M is for meow. Marble, minotaur. N is for naughty, narrator.

Peace: O is for order. Order. Alphabetically. P-P-P-P is for paranormal, patience, patriot, peace, patrol, plague, planchette, heart-shaped tool used for automatic writing, plot. What plot? Power, pussy. Mind your Ps. Q-Q-Q is for Queen, Elizabeth the First. Quest as in Questing Beast, fabulous hunting animal of Arthurian legend. Q is for quill, queer and quote, query. Do you have any questions?

[TV]: What the hell is that?

[TV]: Should be in a museum.

Slug (Voiceover): What's that noise?

British Voiceover: Here we have the great choreographer Ram Gopal. His name erased and the film titled anonymously under *Indian Dancer in the V&A Museum, 1947*. Gopal toured during World War II. He changed the way Indian traditional dance was presented. He brought the musicians on stage so that they were more visible, and he introduced objects and gestures so that audience members could understand their significance.

Red (Voiceover): Did you hear this thing about how the government keeps a vampire in every library?

Slug (Voiceover): For what?

Red (Voiceover): I don't know. Protection?

∞T (Voiceover): Or posterity. I heard that she was turned by a Redcoat from the East India Company-

Red (Voiceover): Shh, she's coming.

∞T (Voiceover): -and she ate everybody.

Peace: You want to know how I got a taste for English blood? Alright.

Welcome, all. I see you've all brought your objects. Objects you've inherited. This is my object. This is my English breakfast.

My English vice. There is a rumor that a Redcoat bit me, but my power is not one the British gave me. Before I was kidnapped, I had a visitation. They were from somewhere way past our galaxy. They reminded me of the giant pet slug my grandmother had given me. They drank my blood. Then they boarded their ship and went on their way. After the Redcoats took me, I was sick for days. When I woke, of course, I was very hungry.

∞T (Voiceover): Wait. What's an English vice?

Peace: Fun, flowers, ah, flagellation. We have *In the Praise of the Whip*, *Under the Leash*, two copies of the *Flogging Craze 1878*, *The Whip and the Rod*, and *The English Vice*.

The English vice is a euphemism for the particularly English predilection for being struck upon the buttocks as an erotic activity. The roots of this run deep, molded by the institution of public schooling. This system itself is modelled after the church and military, which has produced a cohort of adults who suffer from feelings of shame and guilt and therefore enjoy receiving corporal punishment. The phrase is also sometimes used as a euphemism for the hypocrisy of the ruling classes of Britain.

Blue: Eat pain, love.

[TV]: Stars as the English aristocrat captured and humiliated.

British Voiceover: Ah, the toy tiger of Tippu. A man-eating automaton reanimated by the spirit of vengeance. Look how he sets upon the red-coated vulture. Fascinating that this fragile novelty survived so much. The journey by frigate, the greasy

fingers of the children of the East India Company, the German bombing of London in the Blitz and the manhandling of-

[TV interrupts]

British Voiceover: Could you kindly stop switching the channel?

Is it a rather juvenile joke or a potent symbol of anti-imperialist sentiments?

Peace (Voiceover): Principis, would you like to go first?

∞T (Voiceover): Ah, but, my show's on. I missed the other cat on TV. This is my great, great, great, grand god-kitten. She is the goddess of civilization and sunshine and lesbians. My hobbies are prowling, playing with my food, hunting ghosts, worshipping the sun, general cruelty, just normal stuff. We cats used to be killed for our association with witches in this country. I am the kitten of the cats you couldn't drown. I usually sleep 20 hours out of the day. I love to leave presents lying around, tearing them apart makes me so happy. Especially when things get messy. Many people are unnerved by my cool stare. We cats are autocrats of naked self-interest. Unlike dogs, you don't see us collared by the police. And when I sleep, I slip through the shadow. I dream of doing terrible things, tiger things. I think we may be the only animal who savors the perverse by reflecting upon its perfection. Which brings me to my presentation, *Tipu Reflections*. The English stole the sultan's dreams, literally, his nights were riddled with shapeshifters like me. My favorite is the original Tiger King's wet dream. It starts

like this: "Prior to the night attack, I had a dream that a handsome young man came and sat down beside me..."

Slug: Can we watch "Sword of Tipu"?

British Voiceover: Fine, as a treat.

[TV] British Newsreader: Oh, sorry about this break in the film, especially at this critical point, we're doing our very best to rectify the fault and we'll be rejoining the action just as soon as possible.

Red: Psst, let's go play Red Coats and Indians.

[TV] British Newsreader: Once again, our apologies for the break in the film.

British Voiceover: Excuse me. Can you kindly remove those delinquents? They're bringing down the tone.

Cockney Security Guard (Voiceover): Oii! Tell these kids to fuck off. This is a museum.

Peace: Shhh, this is a mausoleum.

Male Voiceover: You do it to yourself.

Red: Don't gaslight me.

Old, decrepit man. You can't scare me with prophecy. My future is my own. I don't need your version of history. "In the beginning?" No such thing. I have a theory about toxic masculinity. When Moses smoked the burning bush, he got higher off his projections of divinity, he came down off Mount

Sinai with his rocks and words. No one paid him no mind. So he pitched a fit and broke his tablets. Then he stomped all the way back up to smoke more of that sweet, Rubus Sanctus. Next night he came down and the Hebrews said he was glowing like some kind of immaculate male pregnancy. Saint Jerome translated the Bible into Latin Vulgate. It got a little messy. See, in ancient Hebrew it said halo. But in Latin he got horns. That's right. They definitely suit him. Make him look jaunty. Shame they cut him off here in the copy. It does play into my castration fantasies. I take my guitar and slice.

Peace: G-G-G. Gallery, Gorgons. Ah, grace. This is long. Let me make a cuppa.

Slug: Grace, there's a word that recurs repeatedly like a theme song in the Old Testament. As an attribute of God, it occurs some 13 times. That word is grace. The Hebrew word in the biblical text is *khen*, identical with the Arabic cognate, *hen*, it is used most particularly to describe the possessive love and first yearning which a mother camel has for its young.

Male Voice: *Henin?* [speaks Arabic].

Slug: Spiritual pain?

Male Voice: *Henin* is also like when you are homesick, you want to go back to your home or to your family. Especially when they're coming, they take away the son, the baby, she cannot sleep at night.

Godhead: Imagine what Poetica felt when the Romans took her daughters from her. The invading army flogged her in front of

her tribe, then raped the daughters in public. What would you do? The rebel Queen of Britain gave the original punk gesture, burning Londinium to the ground. But here she is now, stripped of truth, used as the ultimate symbol of British imperialism when her major act was to fight a world empire. They are why we speak English. And the reason we forget. The reason we have been gaslit. History repeats. History neglects. History forgets. What's the truth? Grace or *henin*.

[TV] Voiceover: Poppy's delusion is multilayered. She believes she's some type of hero.

Godhead: It lies somewhere in between.

No pain, no fear, out of the desert into empire. Now we are here.

Voice over: Not again, not again, not again

Red: Is it safe down here?

Red: I wanna leave.

Slug: I want to believe. I want to believe.

Red: The truth will set you free.

Radio: I mean you. All kinds of things.

Radio: And then you get the idea that the word means victory.

Radio: Which side of history do you want to be on?

Red: I am the possessor of history. My story is my property. I'm the greatest warrior queen the world has ever seen, part fem/fantasy, full real life human being. Come to fight the space Romans and Lunar Nazis and werewolf KGB and zombie royal family. Let it come down. I'll be waiting in the bunker trying to jumpstart this trash ship gallery. I am everybody and nobody.

Hugo Evans:

I loved you, so I drew these tides of
Men into my hands
And wrote my will across the
Sky and stars
To earn you freedom, the seven
Pillared worthy house,
That your eyes might be
Shining for me
When we came

Death seemed my servant on the
Road, 'til we were near
And saw you waiting:
When you smiled and in sorrowful
Envy he outran me
And took you apart:
Into his quietness

Love, the way-weary, groped to your body,
Our brief wage
Ours for the moment

Before Earth's soft hand explored your shape
And the blind
Worms grew fat upon
Your substance

Men prayed me that I set our work,
The inviolate house,
As a memory of you
But for fit monument I shattered it,
Unfinished: and now
The little things creep out to patch
Themselves hovels
In the marred shadow
Of your gift.

Female: Our spaceship's leaving.

Red: Wait, where's Slug?

∞T: Hey, are you coming?

Slug: No.

Peace: Then we'll leave the TV for company.

CREDITS

Written and Directed by	Sophia Al Maria
Produced by	Chloe Culpin
Executive Producer	Mary Burke
Starring	Ayesha Hussain Elizabeth Peace Onwuka-Okoye Tosh Basco Sophia Al Maria
With	Bernice Mulenga Izzy Meikle-Small
Voices	Sara Al Marri Yumna Marwan James Early Mohamed Al Marri Hugo Evans
Director of Photography	Alana Mejía Gonzalez
Editor	Léo Parmentier
Sound Design	Joe Namy
Music	

“Lawrence” Fatima Al Qadiri

“O is for Order” Fatima Al Qadiri

“Gregorian Down” Fatima Al Qadiri

“Boudicea” Enya

“The Queen’s Soliloquy” Loretta Kay-Feld

**“The Queen’s Soliloquy
(a parody)”** Vocals - Kelsey Lu
Guitar - James Kelly

Music Mix James Kelly

Music Supervisor Phil Canning

“Indian Dancer in the V&A Museum 1947” Courtesy of British Pathé

Animation Adem Elahel

AI Software Engineer sportsracer48

AI Engine PYTTI 5 Beta

AI Operator Adem Elahel

Stylist Mei Ling Cooper

Stylist Assistant Alicia Ellis

Stylist Assistant Bongeka Dube

Designers

ASAI
Kwaidan Editions
Jawara Alleyne
Tabitha Ringwood
Ilias Little Shoebox

With thanks to Steven Philip Archive, Fiona at Rellik & Contemporary Wardrobe

Makeup Artist

Megumi Matsuno

Makeup Artist Assistant

Katarzyna Postaremczak

Action Coordinator

Dan Styles

**1st Assistant Director
& Assistant Producer**

Izzy Meikle-Small

**1st Assistant Camera
2nd Assistant Camera
DIT**

Lou Macnamara
Rebecca Richards
Elliott Chyi

Steadicam Operator

Hannah Jel

Stills Photographer

Bernice Mulenga

Gaffer

Carolina Schmidtholstein

Sound Recordist

Chase Cooley

Production Assistant

Charlotte Beaumont

Footage Conform

Rachel Durance

V&A Staff**Project Director**

Christopher Turner

Project Manager

Nazek Ghaddar

Assistant Project Manager

Beckie Billingham

Filming Assistant	Livia Turnbull
Filming Assistant	Donata Miller
Filming Assistant	Debora Moritz
Security	Wilson James Officers
Security Officers	Steve Moore
	Kevin Roper
	Alexander Alabi
Security Supervisors	Kasey Stevens
	Olimpia Dordea
	Norris Connolley
	David Rouillaux

Sound Designer	Joe Namy
Sound Mixer	Joe Namy

Colourist	Aiden Tobin
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Companies

Public Dreams

Works Cited (in order of re-appearance)

Amyl Nitrate in Jubilee by Derek Jarman

Episode in which Buffy is Gaslit - Season 4 - Buffy The Vampire Slayer

Arabic Theme Song of Princess Knight (Princess Sapphire)

Fighting Kali in The Golden Voyage of Sindbad - Ray Harryhausen

Danny John-Jules as The Cat in Red Dwarf

Yumna Marwan performing the Marsaillaise in Little Birds

A Man Called Horse

Sword of Tipu

Tipu's Tiger V&A documentary

Blakes 7

Jonathan Rhys-Meyers performing "The Ballad of Maxwell Demon" in
Velvet Goldmine

Scream 3

2001: A Space Odyssey

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Devrim Bayar

Ferja Al Marri

Frédéric de Goldschmidt

Laura Cagusi

Luca Racchini

Marta Papini

Mathilde Agony

Mohamed Al Marri

Nanette Palo

Naomi Shimada

Nicolo Terraneo

Orlando Vicente-Thompson

Phil Allison

Potato Parmentier

Sarah Al Marri

Sonia Blech

Wu Tsang

Yumna Marwan

Zakariah Smart