

BEYOND SPACETIME

FADE IN:

EXT. THE INLOCUS LANDSCAPE

In the white void, form gradually takes shape. From a great distance, it looks like we're zooming in on a black dot at breakneck speed; a singularity that expands as we fall into it. Possessing a spiral structure like a galaxy, we hurtle towards one of the arms and see that it's more like an intricate Mandelbrot curve; the fractal patterns repeat several times as we plunge ever deeper into this alien space. The lines of the curve are punctuated by dizzying arrays of dancing lights that interact like neurons firing in a brain. As far as the eye can see in every direction, these lights radiate uninterruptedly, changing colours and intensity chaotically. The space crackles with energy.

MAN 1 (V.O.)

We have a problem.

There is order at the heart of the chaos. Within a cohesive whole, the endless fractal twists into networks that are built layer upon layer.

MAN 2 (V.O.)

Where, Singulus-Major?

Singulus-Major talks to a subordinate who goes by the name of White.

SINGULUS-MAJOR (MAN 1 V.O.)

Humanity, Earth.

We come to rest in a region centred on a string of light enmeshed in its network. It looks like all the other lights in its neighbourhood, vibrating in the space. But where all the other lights are interacting in the same plane, this light has an additional connection, a barely discernible link to a different layer below it.

WHITE (MAN 2 V.O.)

There shouldn't be a connection there.

SINGULUS-MAJOR (V.O.)

This is a cypher's handiwork. I can see the ripples forming now.

(pause)

These are the coordinates.

A green cardioid appears next to the light, popping up like a window on a desktop, its symmetry along the horizontal axis. A dizzying series of 1s and 0s scroll across the cardioid.

The numbers come to rest, blurring to reveal a translation into English -

'HUMANITY | EARTH | EDINBURGH | 2021 AD'

The coordinates remain momentarily.

FADE TO WHITE

INT. TIM'S SCREEN - DAY

A white screen fades into an email app running on a laptop screen at maximised setting. A box at the top right corner pops open, showing a video feed of the day's BBC news in picture-in-picture mode. The news is from 8 February 2021 -

BBC NEWS PRESENTER

- ten years on, we look back at the Arab Spring and later in today's report we focus on Cartaginia, where the anti-government protests first erupted. But first we look closer to home because a row over vaccine shortages has seen the EU demand AstraZeneca to supply it with doses from UK plants -

On the left of the PC screen, the list of unread emails are in bold and a cursor moves to click on the reading pane, selecting the first, before mechanically moving down the list. As each email is selected, the contents appear in the main navigation area. The third email in the reading pane has a series of question marks instead of recognisable heading text.

WE MOVE OUT -

INT. BOXROOM - DAY

Tim McCullough looks at his laptop screen. He is seated at a desk in a boxroom that has been converted into a makeshift study; we hear his girlfriend, Julie, in the adjacent kitchen.

TIM

That's strange.

BBC NEWS PRESENTER (V.O.)

The Prime Minister has insisted that UK vaccine supplies won't be interrupted -

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

We hear the news coming from the other room; Julie is at the sink, washing a last dish. She looks out of the only window in the small kitchen. It's a top-floor flat and we see rooftops, trees without their leaves and light snow fall in the air. In the distance, we spot the unfinished Parthenon-like structure that is the National Monument of Scotland on Calton Hill.

BBC NEWS PRESENTER (V.O.)
Addressing MPs yesterday, Boris
Johnson said -

She turns and winces.

JULIE
No! Turn that off! That self-
entitled prick -

The sound has been lowered but can still be heard; she leaves the kitchen to stand at the doorway of the boxroom.

INT. BOXROOM - DAY

JULIE
Tim, turn off that awful man.

TIM
We still need to know what they're
planning.

He pauses the news feed and closes the picture-in-picture box; reflexively, he clicks on the next email.

TIM
Shit.

JULIE
Right. It's all endless shite.

TIM
No, I mean fuck. You just made me
open a junk mail.

JULIE
I didn't make you do anything, you
eejit.

Tim frowns, reading the screen, as she steps away.

MOVING INTO -

INT. TIM'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

A modest living room in a Victorian tenement, with bay windows looking out onto Leith Walk; we see tram works outside the window that have closed off most of the street. There are two phones on the coffee table; Julie reaches down for hers and starts flicking.

TIM (V.O.)

No attachments, no links. This is a seriously weird email.

She doesn't look up when he enters the living room with his laptop.

TIM

Listen to this:

(he reads off the screen)

'Subject: The Flying Robe

Dear Sir

Further to my letter dated 27 August 1952 and to your acknowledgement card specifying 18 October 1952 as being the date the manuscript was received, I should be glad to know whether the book has been accepted.

As advised in my abovementioned letter, the situation in Cairo is very tense. May I remind you, therefore, not to mail back the manuscript in case it is rejected by you, but to let me know so I might ask you to kindly forward it to another publisher in Cartag. If a postage fee is chargeable I will be very glad to pay it.

Yours very truly'

He looks at her; she's still on her phone.

TIM

Did you hear?

JULIE

(distracted)

You should write back - you know like that guy who replies to spammers to wind them up.

TIM

Don't you think it's weird though? And just look at that font!

We zoom in on the email; the sender's name, 'Souheil Aratingi', is at the bottom, but the 'To' and 'From' email address bars at the top are blank. The email has been written in a highly ornate script.

Tim moves to show her the screen. He almost laughs.

TIM

What *is* that font, Marie Antoinette sans serif?

JULIE

You're the book designer.

He steps in closer with the screen.

TIM

Look.

JULIE

(she looks)
Where?

TIM

What do you mean where? There!

We look at the screen from her perspective; it is entirely white.

JULIE

There's nothing there.

TIM

(irritated)
Here. 'Dear Sir'
(he trails a finger on the screen)
'Further to my letter dated 27 August 1952' blah-blah. Don't you see the pretty words -

JULIE

Why do you always talk to me like that?

She returns to look at her phone.

TIM

What? I'm just saying look at the bleeding email.

Still showing her the laptop, he returns briefly to the BBC webpage to resume the news feed; Boris Johnson is addressing Parliament -

BBC NEWS
(featuring Boris Johnson)
Alas, I must tell you -

She looks up to glare at him; he pauses the player and returns to the email.

TIM
You could see that, right?

JULIE
That's not funny, Tim.

He clicks 'Forward'; a new window pops up and he adds Julie's address. He reads as he types -

TIM
'Tell me you're not blind'

He presses send.

TIM
You saw what I did there, right?

Julie moves away and heads for the door.

JULIE
Takes a lockdown to know what people are really like, and sometimes you're a pretty wee shite, aren't you.

TIM
What the hell's wrong with you?

JULIE
In fact, for the record, you're about as good at being funny as BoJo is at running a country.

She leaves the living room.

MOVING INTO -

INT. HALL - DAY

A small hall with a messy assortment of jackets and coats on hooks by the front door; Julie reaches for a coat and puts it on.

TIM (V.O.)
I wasn't being funny.

He joins her in the hall.

TIM
What's the matter? And where are
you going?

JULIE
Out.

TIM
You've already been out today.

JULIE
Well, you'd better report that to
the lockdown police.

She opens the door.

TIM
Can you at least check your email?
Do you see the message I sent you?

She pauses at the door, checks her phone and shakes her head;
she exits, closing the door behind her.

TIM
For fuck's sake -

He pauses then opens the door to call out -

TIM
Will you be getting the pasta from
Tesco, or shall I?

EXT. INLOCUS

In the INLOCUS landscape, we see the region as previously,
centred on a string of light enmeshed in the network.

SINGULUS-MAJOR (V.O.)
Initiate an extraction. Bring in
that human subject before he
establishes any more damn
connections.

WHITE (V.O.)
Yes, Singulus-Major.

A red light travels briefly along the link between the
layers.

SINGULUS-MAJOR (V.O.)
Damn those cyphers.

EXT. LEITH WALK - DAY

It is winter and there is a fine covering of snow everywhere. The trees are bare. Traffic on Leith Walk has been limited to one way and down only one lane; the rest of the wide street is fenced off for ongoing tram works. There is rubble everywhere and diggers can be seen in different sections. A makeshift pedestrian crossing has been erected that is closed off on either side by fencing. There are few cars and only the very occasional Lothian double-decker bus trundles by.

EXT. PEDESTRIAN CROSSING - DAY

An old woman stands at the pedestrian crossing, waiting for the light to change. She's wearing a facemask and shakes her head with clear disapproval when Tim comes to wait beside her: he is not wearing a mask and is not respecting the two-metre distance. She pointedly takes a step away from him.

Tim pushes the button to activate the pedestrian light and she shakes her head again. Wordlessly, she indicates the ground; a circular sign at their feet reads -

'These lights are activated
automatically between 7am-9pm.
Edinburgh Council keeping you safe
and helping the NHS.'

Tim nods and shrugs. When the pedestrian green man lights up, they both start to walk but she slows down to let him go ahead, shaking her head again. She sighs audibly.

Tim walks briskly ahead, stepping firmly on the fine covering of snow, reaching the fenced area -

EXT. MIDWAY POINT - DAY

The fence has vanished and the trees are in full leaf. On the ground, the snow has gone and tracks have appeared.

TIM
What the -

He spins around.

We see traffic everywhere on both sides of the street. We hear a bell and screeching brakes.

We turn to see the blur of a tram face on, then back to see Tim's look of sheer horror.

EXT. ABOVE LEITH WALK - DAY

We rise briefly to take in the commotion: the traffic going into town has come to a sudden stop, some pedestrians on the pavement run into the street. We can barely make out Tim's body on the ground, lying inertly in front of the tram.

The tram driver, visibly shaken, opens a door to emerge. The closest vehicle is an ambulance; two paramedics jump out with gear and run past the driver to attend to the fallen man.

From this distance, we can only just hear the tram driver -

TRAM DRIVER

He came out of nowhere!

(the paramedics aren't paying attention to him, so he repeats helplessly to a growing crowd, his voice trailing off)

He came out of nowhere!

We rise to take a final look at the scene, with Calton Hill in the background and the Parthenon-like structure that is known as the 'Shame of Edinburgh'.

EXT. CAIRENE SKYLINE - DAY

From the vantage of a balcony on a top floor, we see the Cairene skyline and the Nile beyond. A cardioid fades in on-screen; it is inset and appears like that in the INLOCUS, with a dizzying series of 1s and 0s scrolling across. The binary coordinates morph into its English translation -

'HUMANITY | EARTH | CAIRO | 1952 AD'

There is a cacophony of sounds - car horns blaring, people shouting, a muezzin's call to prayer - and we look down at the street below: an old tram has just pulled in to a station, whose sign reads 'Massara' in English and Arabic. There is a traffic jam and a sea of people; some are dressed in galabiyahs, others in Western suits and clothes of the 1950s. They carry banners in Arabic (English subtitles): 'Gamal Abdel Nasser' and 'Long live the glorious revolution'.

EXT. BALCONY - DAY

A man watches the crowd from his balcony. The man is Souheil and behind him is a table and two chairs; on the table is a manuscript with a title page in Arabic (English subtitle) -

'The Flowing Robe'

INT. HOSPITAL WARD - DAY

Tim blinks, regaining consciousness. We initially see through his eyes: a blinding white light. We hear a woman singing softly in a foreign language (Georges Brassens's 'Les copains d'abord' in French) -

WOMAN (V.O.)

*Au rendez-vous des bons copains,
y'avait pas souvent de lapins -*

The room is bright and Tim is stretched out on a hospital bed in a ward of four; there is one other patient, a man of Tim's age, who looks on with interest.

The nurse is Khaira; she wears glasses and squints at the chart, singing almost under her breath -

KHAIRA

*- Quand l'un d'entre eux manquait a
bord, c'est qu'il était mort -*

TIM

(weakly)
Dead?

KHAIRA

Oh!

She smiles nervously and speaks with a French accent.

KHAIRA

You are awake! How do you feel,
Mister McCulloukh?
(she pronounces a hard 'kh'
sound)

TIM

Where am I?

KHAIRA

You are in the Royal Infirmary.

TIM

McCullough.

KHAIRA

Sorry?

TIM

My name is Tim McCullough.

KHAIRA

Ah, OK. My name is Khaira.

(hard 'kh')
I thought we were both like lochs.

She leans down, takes his temperature and tenderly checks the gauze bandage around his chest. She is uneasy but carries on conversationally -

KHAIRA
I like the kh in Scotland - how some people say dreich and dauchter. When I was in France, people can't make that sound. Even some of my friends and family and friends call me Kéra.

TIM
Khaira -

KHAIRA
Bravo.

TIM
- what happened to me?

KHAIRA
You were in an accident.

TIM
Accident?

KHAIRA
You were hit by a tram, Mister McCullough. It is a miracle that you survived.

TIM
(frowns)
Was that real?

KHAIRA
You are OK, but you have some bluesing. I'll bring the doctor now to explain.

TIM
Bruising?

KHAIRA
The doctor will explain.

TIM
Aren't you supposed to wear a facemask?

KHAIRA

What?

TIM

A facemask, PPE or whatever.

Khaira is already walking away.

TIM

Shouldn't I be wearing a mask as well?

The other patient in the ward is Sy. He has been following the conversation with interest.

SY

Mind you don't sound too mad, pal. You'll end up in the Royal Loony instead.

TIM

Shouldn't you be wearing a mask as well?

SY

You've been out for a day. You stepped in front of a tram yesterday and they must think: freak accident or suicide attempt. Their money's already on suicide. So try not to sound like you're at a tea party for mad hatters, wearing a Victoria sponge for a hat. Name's Sy, by the way.

TIM

What are you saying?

SY

Last year, in 2024, one in four believed their heads were just screwed on wrong. There were about the same number of cuckoos the year before: that is, in 2023. Catch my drift?

Tim looks nonplussed. Khaira and a female doctor enter the ward; she has a stethoscope in her pocket. Sy winks at Tim and speaks quietly -

SY
Remember, Covid is still with us
but it's just a seasonal thing now,
like the flu. And today's Friday,
20th of June, 2025. Tomorrow'll be
the longest day.

Sy smiles and picks up a newspaper when the doctor addresses Tim.

DOCTOR
Welcome back to the land of the
living, Tim - may I call you Tim?
How do you feel?

The doctor nods at Khaira who draws the curtains around Tim's bed.

INT. BEDSIDE - DAY

The doctor removes her stethoscope from her ears and returns it to her pocket. She consults his chart.

DOCTOR
What can I say - the Fates smile on
you, Tim.

We hear Sy's voice from beyond the curtains -

SY (V.O.)
Ha!

DOCTOR
(troubled)
Thing is, Tim, this is all a bit of
a mystery. You see, other than some
scrapes and superficial bruising,
you seem absolutely fine. I see no
reason to keep you here any longer.
You'll be discharged tomorrow.

TIM
It's that bad, huh?

DOCTOR
No, of course that's very good
news.

(hesitates)

Our A&E department are very curious about the emergency call they received regarding your accident. The call seems to have been timed such that they were at the scene at exactly the right time. Lothian Police will want to ask you some questions about that as well.

(pause)

And we also need to book you in to see our resident psychiatrist. That's normal procedure for this sort of - um - accident. Anyway, unless you have any questions, we'll apply more numbing antibiotic ointment to your chest, change those bandages and take it from there. OK? Great.

She smiles awkwardly and turns smartly on her heels and leaves. Khaira opens the curtains.

TIM

(to Khaira)

What's today's date?

Sy fires over the top of his newspaper -

SY

Friday, 20th of June, 2025.

TIM

Is that right?

KHAIRA

Yes, of course.

SY

(smiles)

Told ya.

INT. HOSPITAL CANTEEN - DAY

Several hospital staff are in the canteen. Khaira and three others are at a table; we recognise one of them as the paramedic at the accident.

KHAIRA

She's a good doctor, but she is like an ice cube sometimes -

PARAMEDIC

(laughs)

Is that a French expression?

KHAIRA

I wouldn't know.

(she smiles sweetly)

I'm Scottish now.

NURSE

We're all Scottish now - no matter how you voted.

KHAIRA

No, really. That patient from the tram - if I was the doctor I would say, are you really, really all right?

NURSE

Did he mean to walk in front of the tram?

KHAIRA

Exactly, I would ask him that as well.

NURSE

You should.

KHAIRA

She's so cold - brrrr.

(pretends to shiver)

PARAMEDIC

(softly)

He was completely gone. In all my years I've never ever seen anything like that. He should not be alive.

INT. BEDSIDE - DAY

The curtains around Tim's bed are closed. He is sitting up; there are several cuts on his chest and back. Khaira squeezes some lotion on her hands which she applies gingerly on his skin.

KHAIRA

It is a miracle - your bluesing has already almost all gone.

(pause)

Did you want to walk in front of the tram?

TIM

No. I, er, I didn't see it.

She washes her hands and gets a new bandage; she leans in to coil it around Tim's torso.

KHAIRA

You died.

TIM

What are you talking about?

KHAIRA

One of the paramedics who saved you - he's my friend. Yes, you died. You were dead for 22 minutes. They try to bring you back for 10 minutes in the ambulance. But they cannot, so they switch off the siren. And then, just before they are back in the Royal Infirmary - pfft - you are not dead anymore.

TIM

I don't understand.

She has finished the bandaging but stays bent over him for a while longer.

KHAIRA

I also do not understand. But in Islam, we believe there are many creatures that we simply cannot understand and usually cannot see.

TIM

How is this happening?

She straightens up.

KHAIRA

Maybe it is happening because you are a jinnee, Mister McCullough?

TIM

What?

EXT. IBERIAN COAST - DAY

Pan across a terrain (modern-day Cadiz) where a solitary horseman rides across fields and along the shore with the sea on his left. A cardioid fades in on-screen, as before, the series of 1s and 0s morph into its English translation -

'HUMANITY | EARTH | CÁDIZ | 216 BC'

The rider reaches a wooden palisade; after a short exchange with guards at the gate, he is admitted into a Punic military camp.

EXT. CARTHAGINIAN CAMP - DAY

We rise to see the layout: the tents are arranged in an orderly fashion within the palisade, with the largest tents in the centre for the general and his officers; at the fringes are separate enclosures for the horses and battle elephants.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE TENT - DAY

The rider reaches the centre, dismounts and salutes an officer outside the tent. They have a short inaudible exchange and both enter -

INT. INSIDE THE TENT - DAY

Bare interior: there are several stools, or sella, around a table at the centre; and a curtain separates the sleeping quarters. Three men stand at the table; they are looking down at an unfurled map. General Hasdrubal is having a meeting with his two most senior advisers: Masinissa, the Numidian prince in charge of the cavalry; and Carthalo, Hasdrubal's right-hand man. The conversation is in Punic (sounding like ancient Aramaic; English subtitles).

OFFICER

We've received a message from your brother, my lord.

He nods to the messenger, who salutes, bows and extracts a papyrus roll that he presents to Hasdrubal.

MASINISSA

(grins)

Has the great Hannibal beaten the Romans again, so soon after Cannae?

CARTHALO

What does it say, Hasdrubal?

MASINISSA

(to the messenger)

Is it true that most of southern Italy is defecting to him. Have you heard anything?

MESSENGER

No, my lords. I was given the message in Qart Hadasht. I was only told to deliver this urgently.

HASDRUBAL

When was it sent?

MESSENGER

Yes, my lord. It was handed to a captain of the trireme naval support in Italy 11 days ago, and it sailed to Iberia and arrived in Qart Hadasht yesterday.

HASDRUBAL

Good.

He dismisses the messenger with a wave. The messenger and officer salute, bow and exit as Hasdrubal unfurls the scroll. He reads the message and then sits on a stool, perplexed.

CARTHALO

So, Hasdrubal?

MASINISSA

Yes? What does Hannibal say?

Hasdrubal hesitates.

HASDRUBAL

Carthalo, when we received orders from Carthage two months ago to march to Italy and join up with my brother, you wanted us to delay. And yet you, Masinissa, wanted us to act immediately. Have either of you changed your minds?

MASINISSA

No. Why should we fight the Romans in Iberia when we can put pressure in their homeland? We can end the war by striking fast and hard. Our army combined with your brother's veterans and his Numidian cavalry will be unstoppable.

CARTHALO

And what about Iberia, Masinissa?
The Romans control most of the
north now and our authority over
the tribes is already at its
weakest. If we move the army now,
we'll lose the entire peninsula.

MASINISSA

(agitated)

But win the war! Carthalo, I
sometimes wonder if you've joined
Hanno - his peace-at-any-cost party
in Carthage. Got to keep those
merchants happy. Is that you, too?

CARTHALO

Hanno is a politician and so he is
a coward - don't ever mention his
name next to mine again.

Hasdrubal raises his hand to bring calm.

MASINISSA

So let's march on Rome with
Hannibal! We have 4,000 infantry,
500 cavalry and 20 elephants.
Hannibal has lost all his
elephants. Just think how
unstoppable we'll be when our
armies are combined!

CARTHALO

And Iberia? We must protect our
flank. Iberia is Carthage's flank.

MASINISSA

Rome's legions in Iberia would have
to withdraw to protect their
homeland.

HASDRUBAL

So which of you is blind, my
friends?

Both turn to frown at their general; he hands them the
message. There's only a short sentence, which reads in Punic
(English subtitles) -

'Tell me you're not blind'

There is an uneasy silence.

MASINISSA

Clearly it's a good thing Hannibal doesn't fight his battles like he writes his letters.

CARTHALO

Yes. We need to ask your brother exactly what he means by that.

HASDRUBAL

Then we are agreed. Bring that messenger back.

INT. DOORWAY - DAY

Outside the front door to Tim's flat, the door opens and we see Julie.

JULIE

(astounded)
What the fuck.

TIM

Hello, Julie.

JULIE

What the fuck!

TIM

Can I come in?

JULIE

What do you want?

A man calls behind her.

MAN (V.O.)

Is everything all right?

JULIE

Yeah, yeah. Just someone I used to know.

TIM

What do you mean?

JULIE

(addressing the man)
Just going out for a bit, pet.