# [***You, Me & The Apocalypse: backstage at the end of the world; Rhik Samadder heads to 'Apocalypse' Slough to meet the cast of Sky1's new comedy-drama and try to find its star, Rob Lowe***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:5H1X-5WK1-JCJY-G05W-00000-00&context=)

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**Body**

It's a triple-threat British day: cold, grey and wet. In the car park of a stately mansion in Aldermaston, a rat appears, running from the direction I'm headed. Does it know something I don't? I'm here to watch filming on unfathomably unlikely Sky TV comedy-drama You, Me And The Apocalypse. Set 34 days before a comet hits Earth, it features an insanely diverse cast that includes Rob Lowe and Pauline Quirke attempting to find their way to a bunker underneath Slough, to see out Armageddon. (When I'm there, the working title is Apocalypse Slough, which is 400% better, if not for an American audience. But screw them.)

Over the next few hours, the show's principals wander in and talk in a circumspect way about filming. The storylines are closely guarded - even they have only read half of the script. But they are palpably excited, perhaps due to not knowing whether the show is going to be any good. At least its subject matter is on point. With an accelerated society and growing concern about ***climate change***, we're culturally drawn to end-of-days scenarios more than ever. "I think about it daily," purrs Paterson Joseph, who plays hard-headed US general Arnold Gaines. "We're so complacent, screaming when there's a blackout. What do we do when the energy runs out, when the food in your fridge melts? Do we even deserve to be here?" It's strange to be talking to Peep Show's Johnson about this but he's connected to the theme, having previously filmed BBC's Survivors, in which a deadly virus decimated the planet's population. "True survival is being stuck up a mountain knowing it's fear that kills you," he confides, looking me straight in the eye. "Not Bear Grylls fucking around."

While the destruction of man is bad news, it's potentially great TV. You, Me And The Apocalypse's planetary threat is courtesy of a huge comet, coming in like a wrecking ball, possibly to a Miley Cyrus song. They can afford it. The show is lavished with the budget of a Roman emperor's birthday and filming is likened to a Tom Cruise shoot: car chases, a gunfight in the Natural History Museum. Locations include South Africa, Washington and, er, Watford. (Slough council weren't playing ball.)

"You haven't seen anything yet!" promises a Sky rep. This is literally true, and I'm not the only one. The cast haven't been shown any footage, and what they do know they're cagey to share. "I'm scared to," mumbles Joel Fry, "I've just done Game Of Thrones, and if you say too much on that show they cut your tongue out." Fry's hedonistic character Dave is on a quest to tick items off his bucket list. Tell me more, I plead. "I had to act having a suppository the other day," he offers. "I do my own stunts. But I would've got a bum-double for bum-shots."

The phrase "bum-double for bum-shots" ringing in my ears, I try to piece together what else is going on. We can infer the scope of the script's ambition, intersecting the lives of a starry cast, many playing against type. Series lead Mathew Baynton plays dual roles: unlucky hero Jamie and his cyber-terrorist twin, Ariel. Megan Mullally is a Texan white supremacist on the run, while Rob Lowe plays a foul-mouthed Vatican priest investigating the second coming of Christ. It sounds loopy enough to work.

Everyone is starstruck by the Yanks. "I'll be dropping Rob's name a lot at the next Birds Of A Feather read through," admits Pauline Quirke, who plays Jamie's mother. Lowe is nowhere to be seen, though, and Mullally is elusive, having taken ill. I've since seen promotional stills, so I know they're definitely involved, but at the moment this feels like the ravings of a fantasist.

Finally an American, Jenna Fischer, appears and confirms that Mullally is "definitely around somewhere". Fischer played Pam in The US Office, and Ricky Gervais's original version was set in Slough. Does she only accept jobs in some way related to the maligned Berkshire town? "Yeah. I spent nine years behind a desk and wanted to get out. Now I'm imprisoned under Slough."

Hellbent on working the phrase "doolally for Mullally" into my piece, I investigate a geometric concrete building nearby. She's meant to be filming here, but there's no sign. Like the stately home, it's a weird place. Dusty blueprints and half-eaten Fudge bars lie around, decades old. A plaque tells me the building was once an Atomic Weapons Establishment; not the sort of sign you want to see in a building that looks as if it was abandoned quickly.

Even the location is twisting my gourd; what's the final product going to be like? "Tonally it is an odd commission, too odd for terrestrial TV," a producer admits. "Luckily, US broadcasters are good at exploring bizarre worlds, and mixing up genres." What about the clear blue water between the US and British sense of humour? "We'll cross that bridge when we come to it," he says. I get the sense that either no one knows what they're talking about or someone has a masterplan. Apocalyptic failure or stratospheric smash: who could begin to call it? I wouldn't bet against a cast like this, but today it's wet, overcast and visibility is low. I make like a rat, and leave.

You, Me & The Apocalypse starts 30 September, 9pm, Sky1

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