

WRITER EXCLUSIVE

The Aim Of The Rose

Rochelle (Isis Hainsworth), not having much fun.

The Clarkson twins on **Red Rose**, their new social media-obsessed horror series

WE ALL KNOW THAT SMARTPHONES ARE THE BANE OF a teenager's life and that certain apps are, well, not exactly good for us, but what if there was an application which really was dangerous, and exposed its users to an evil supernatural entity?

That's the mouthwatering concept behind *Red Rose*, a new eight-part series due to air on BBC Three and iPlayer in the UK and on Netflix worldwide. Created by twins Michael and Paul Clarkson (*The Haunting Of Bly Manor*, *See*, *The Wheel Of Time*), it was actually during a meeting for soap opera *Hollyoaks* in which they were asked if they had any ideas for a TV show.

"We said yeah, we've got this horror – it's like *Scream* and *The Ring* set in Bolton, which is our hometown," says Michael. "We always knew that we wanted to do something set in Bolton, because growing up in the '90s, when we were watching horror films, we always wondered what it would be like if that was set in a working class northern town."

The series' Lancashire location is its greatest USP. It's rare to see a fantasy series this grounded in reality. Like a supernatural *Happy Valley* or a fantasy-tinged Shane Meadows show, it's the realism of its characters and locations that give its horror such power.

"What we tried to depict, we were like 'absolutely no poverty porn,'" says Michael. "Sometimes you watch stuff that just makes you feel depressed about that kind of social background, but we never felt depressed about our social background – we just got on with it."

So what kind of fictions fed into *Red Rose*? What series or films or books were part of the twins' "mood board" for the show? "We always refer to this show

as *Scream* meets *The Ring* meets *Derry Girls*," laughs Paul. "There's also a few *Star Wars* moments that have crept into this and also *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*."

In the series, the Red Rose app encourages its users to take on increasingly dangerous challenges. Did the show come out of the twins' fear of our addiction to social media?

"It's a tool," says Paul. "But I personally think right now it has been worse than it has been good."

"There are a lot of good elements to social media," adds Michael. "When I see representation of LGBTQ+, I personally feel a lot more connected to a world than when I was younger. It can either be a weapon, or it can be a healing device," he continues.

"What we really wanted to say with *Red Rose* is the more aware you are of it being a tool that can be used in either way, you can take power back, for your own mental health. So we're hoping that *Red Rose* highlights to anyone watching that, yeah, it's good, and yeah, it's bad, but you need to be in control of your world and know what you need to do in order to navigate it."

Both say that although the series is self-contained, there is, they hint, scope for a follow-up. "As writers," says Paul, "we always felt frustrated watching shows that would quite obviously keep it open to get a second series, which for us doesn't ring well."

"A series deserves to have its full story and full timeline with a filmic option. So yes, it's self-contained, but there's an option for a second series to be done." **so**

Red Rose is on BBC Three and iPlayer later this summer.



The rest of the gang, also not having much fun.