

BBC climate thriller The Rapture isn't so far-fetched

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Dr Gabrielle Fox (Ruth Madeley) with Bethany Krall (India Amarteifio) in the *The Rapture*. BBC/Mammoth Screen. Photographer: Simon Ridgway



Amid an unending heatwave in contemporary Wales – and increasingly violent weather around the world – a psychological thriller unfolds.

Two years after an accident that killed her husband and paralysed her from the waist down, Gabrielle Fox returns to work as a [psychologist](#) at an adolescent internment unit. One patient, 16-year-old Bethany, is accused of murdering her mother by stabbing her several times with a screwdriver.

This is the premise of the [BBC TV adaptation](#) of [Liz Jensen's 2009 novel](#), *The Rapture*. While slightly predictable, its narrative highlights the motivations that drive people towards climate action, including a sense of responsibility and desire for justice.

Bethany (played by India Amarteifio) denies any involvement in the murder, although she was found at the crime scene covered in blood. A week before the death, she had drawn a gruesome vision of her mother's face with a screwdriver stabbing her eye. Fox (Ruth Madeley) is given the task of helping her patient accept responsibility for allegedly murdering her mother.

Bethany's parents are the founders of a successful spiritual movement, the Faith Way. Its "Choose Hope" slogan is widely used on social media to undermine the denunciation of climate catastrophe by activists from the Climate Front – an eco-activist organisation that protests about the extraction of fossil fuel extraction, both on the streets and in the courts.

Views of former industrial sites, long beaches at low tide, giant electricity pylons next to neat, detached houses, solar panels over rooftops and scattered wind turbines are integral to the story. Regular temperature stamps show conditions exceeding 40°C as a direct threat to life.

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Bethany stands up to The Faith Way in BBC TV series *The Rapture*. BBC / Mammoth Screen
Photographer: Simon Ridgway

When it comes to climate change, we are not wired to deal with overwhelming complexity – but we can tune into relatable stories that [emphasise common experiences and values](#). Parts of *The Rapture* might seem crazy and far-fetched, but some aspects are entirely plausible.

For example, the climate activists tarnished by the Faith Way claim that the local windfarm project is greenwash, because the energy company behind it is seeking permission to open new oil drills in the North Sea.

Local MP Caroline Wren (Lisa Palfrey) justifies prolonging the life of fossil economies based on energy security, and approves building a data centre close to a protected natural area. The MP, whose family suffered the consequences of deindustrialisation with the loss of coal mines, argues that her aim is [job creation and regeneration](#).

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Furthermore, there is to be a parliamentary ballot on proscribing the Climate Front as a terrorist organisation – but the activists deny any violent means, and suspect they have been infiltrated so as to be delegitimised in the eyes of the public.

The power play between organised religion, social media influencers, energy corporations and politicians is woven into the narrative from the start. Fox does a few internet searches that return news headlines and people's profiles. She attends the MP's public speech and, shortly after, sees the activists' response in a video post.

Even if some of this interconnected information feels a little forced, it's easier to relate to it because it feels more like current affairs than science fiction.

When Fox finds evidence that Bethany might have some visionary power, some viewers could be sceptical of a supernatural ingredient being thrown into the eco-thriller mix. But they may still stay tuned to unravel the exact motivations of characters representing the government, media, corporates and eco-activist players – because "the personal is always political", as Fox says.



Climate anxiety and parental repression may have sparked Bethany's visions. BBC / Mammoth Screen
Photographer: James Pardon

It is Fox's weaknesses that make the story more nuanced and intriguing. I empathised with her rising vulnerabilities in adapting to her new, paralytic life. She is a woman of science, alert to evidence and cunning, but her actions can be impulsive and wrongly calculated.

While searching for the missing links in Bethany's story, she crosses various professional boundaries. Fox admits her guilt over the accident that took her husband's life may be playing out in her involvement with Bethany. In revealing her self-doubt, she makes it easier for others to manipulate her good intentions.

Tension and truth

The series' tension thrives on the [uncertainty of knowledge and a gradual revelation of motivations](#). The narrative also draws attention to the manipulation of beliefs and erosion of truth.

The Faith Way is a post-Christian enterprise, devised to unite people based on their anxieties and need for connection – while demonising climate activists and channelling people's energies towards de-political action. The series makes clear how conformity can be orchestrated by flooding social media feeds with clickbait headlines and manufactured evidence.

If Bethany must take any form of responsibility, it is measured through a fair assessment of her knowledge and motivations. She represents the future, as a member of the younger generation and victim of injustice. Not only is she accused of matricide, she will suffer the consequences of a climate catastrophe she has not provoked.

Just as Fox has to accept the grief and loss provoked by the accident, Bethany is forced to accept the anguish of the assassination of her mother, whom we can metaphorically identify with mother Earth.

Towards the end of the five-part series, I felt I could partly accept that climate anxiety and parental repression have led to Bethany's visions and hallucinations. When the truth is revealed, she emerges not as a cynic or doomsayer, but as someone who stands for a desire for truth and justice, and can take responsibility.

In this sense, the series moves past the predictable and the cartoonish to speak about common values and the responsibility of human actions. And this may inspire worried viewers to strengthen their sense of agency and personal power when it comes to climate action.

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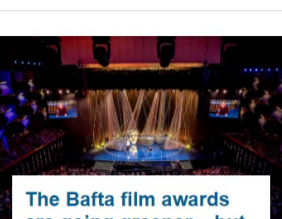
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John Green

Having watched and enjoyed the series I think it serves as an extremely good reminder of the huge dangers posed by both religion and capitalism and what an poisonous cocktail they can be when they join forces. Both play on and feed people's fears in order to gain control over them.

The supernatural elements of the series made it intriguing while the realistic elements made it extremely sad.

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