

# whotopia

the canadian doctor who fan magazine

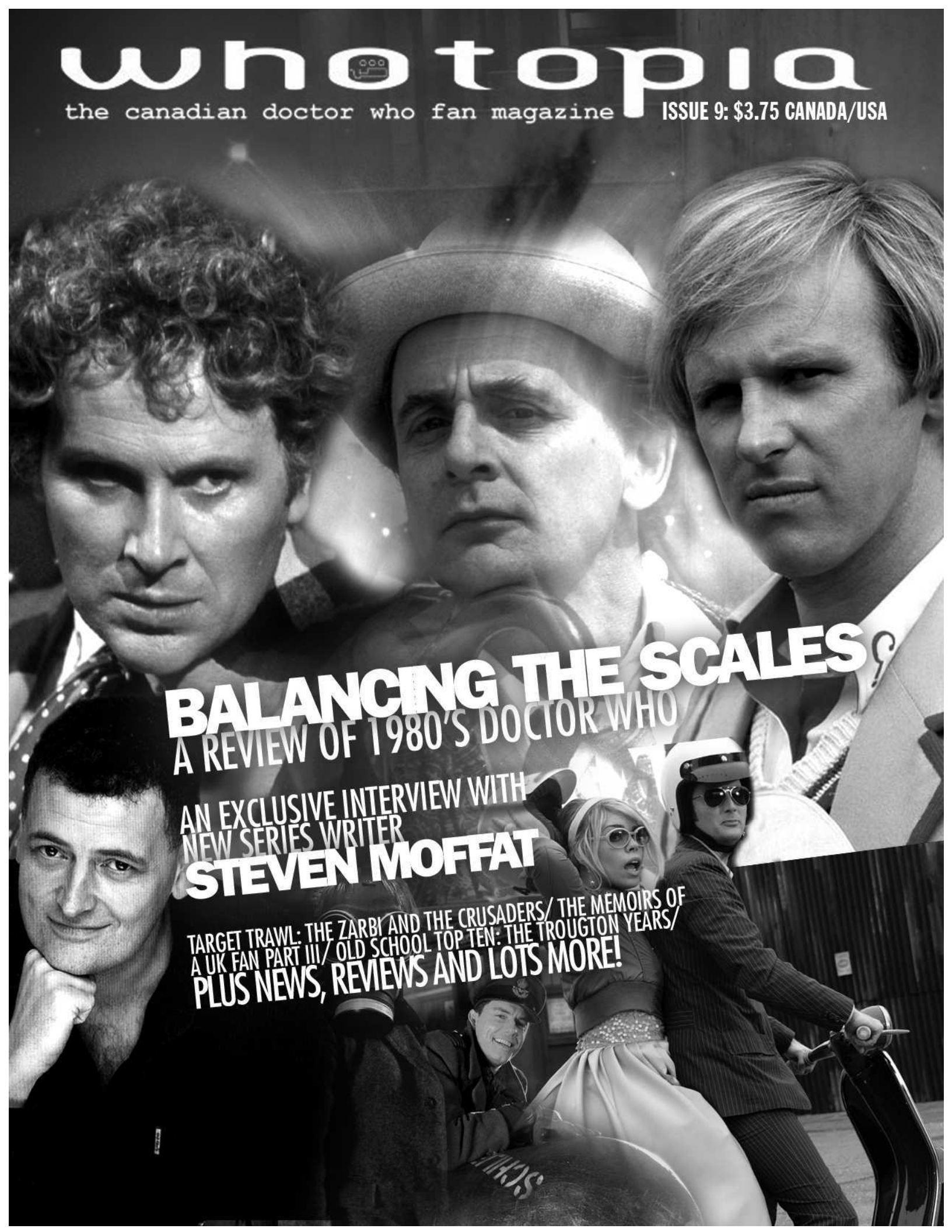
ISSUE 9: \$3.75 CANADA/USA

## BALANCING THE SCALES

A REVIEW OF 1980'S DOCTOR WHO

AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH  
NEW SERIES WRITER  
**STEVEN MOFFAT**

TARGET TRAWL: THE ZARBI AND THE CRUSADERS / THE MEMOIRS OF  
A UK FAN PART III / OLD SCHOOL TOP TEN: THE TROUGHTON YEARS /  
PLUS NEWS, REVIEWS AND LOTS MORE!





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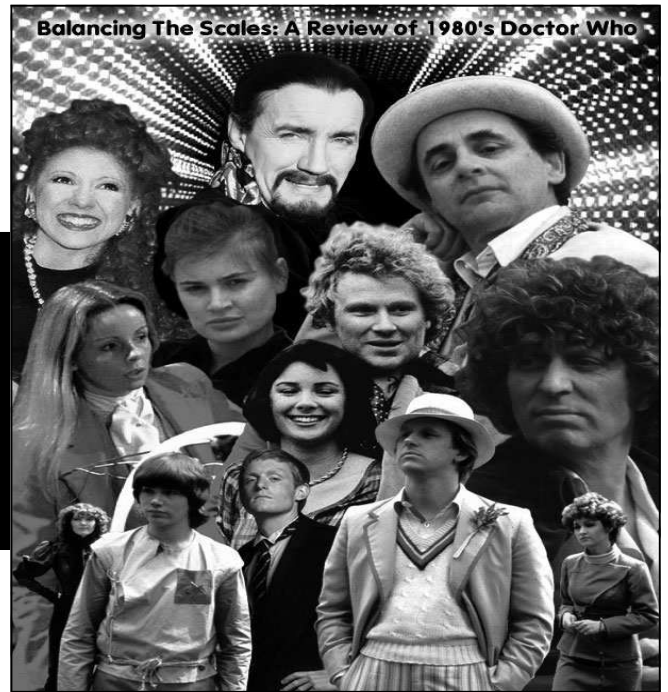
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issue 9  
november 2006

**12** Cover  
Balancing The Scales  
*Jez Strickley takes a look at the 1980's era*



Balancing The Scales: A Review of 1980's Doctor Who

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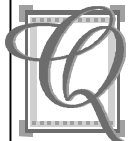
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## editors notes

**WHY I LOVE DOCTOR WHO**

Generally my response is that I find it to be a highly imaginative and inventive television series



Quite often by friends, work colleagues or from people I meet who find out I watch Doctor Who, I get asked what is it about Doctor Who that I like. I'm sure this is something many of you out there reading this can relate to. To a lay person its not always a question that be answered in 25 words or less. Generally my response is that I find it to be a highly imaginative and inventive British television series. But my love, if one can call it that, in Doctor Who goes much deeper than that if I really have to think about it.

I first got interested in *Doctor Who* back in 1981/82 when the PBS station that aired on our local cable provider was broadcasting the show. I'd seen bits and pieces of the odd episode here and there, but had never sat down and watched an entire episode. Then one day while flicking through the channels searching for something to watch, I happened to stumble across the first episode of "Robot", and something about the story caught my attention. The more I watched the more I wanted to find out what happened next, and before I knew it I was hooked. I'd always been interested in TV sci-fi, but there was just something about *Doctor Who*, which captured my interest and imagination. After that first story, I just kept watching more and more. I couldn't get enough.

The primary appeal of Doctor Who for me is that its British – I've always preferred British television to American - and the format of traveling in time and space totally fascinates me. There are so many possible adventures to discover that the show can never get stale. I love how inventive and clever the people who worked on the original series were by inventing such imaginative situations on such a limited budget. This was a unique television series unlike anything else. Even to this day I am amazed, impressed and floored by what the original makers of Doctor Who achieved.

Take for an example an episode like "The Web Planet". Sure its not the best story out of all of the ones made in the original series, but if you really take a serious look at that episode, one is totally amazed with what they achieved. On a budget that amounted to around \$5000 they created a world that is truly alien and different. A world where insects are the norm. If you really think about, what other show on television would you find the production team taking such an artistic risk? Definitely not in today's world, and not very much even in the television world of the 1960's. It is stories like "The Web Planet" and dozens of others that truly make Doctor Who different and unique, and that's why I love the show.

Until next issue...

Bob

**whotopia**  
the canadian doctor who fan magazine



**editor:** bob furnell  
**assistant editor:** john-gordon swogger  
**design & layout:** bob furnell  
**graphics:** john-gordon swogger  
**cover:** jack drewell  
**distribution:** jigsaw publications  
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**contributors:**

jez strickley, ken holtzhouse, david p may, nick mellish, rob mam-mone, misha lauenstein, andrew orton, nick giles, alex lydiate, andy hackett, chris kocher, martin hearn, michael s collins, claire chaplin, dean king, bob furnell, joe ford, evan f casey, charles norton

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**web:**

www.whotopia.freepgs.com

**e-mail:**

webmaster@whotopia.tvheaven.com

**contact:**

whotopia, 306-1246 cardero street, vancouver bc canada, v6g 2j1

# who stuff

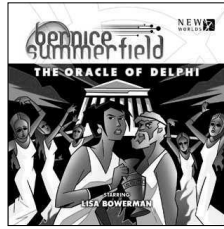
• **The Hand of Fear**  
**What:** BBC DVD  
**When:** 7 November



**When:** 23 November

• **The Mark of the Rani**  
**What:** BBC DVD  
**When:** 7 November

• **Talkback Volume 2: The Seventies**  
**What:** Miscellaneous book (Paperback edition)  
**When:** 23 November



**What:** Miscellaneous audio  
**When:** 30 November

• **Bernice Summerfield: The Inside Story**  
**What:** Miscellaneous book  
**When:** 30 November



• **No Man's Land**  
**What:** New Audio Adventure  
**When:** 20 November

• **The Oracle of Delphi**  
**What:** Bernice Summerfield audio  
**When:** 30 November

• **Second Flight: Back to the Vortex 2**  
**What:** Miscellaneous book (Paperback edition)  
**When:** 23 November



• **Old Friends**  
**What:** Bernice Summerfield book  
**When:** 30 November

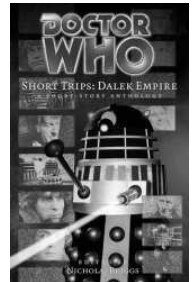
• **Second Flight: Back to the Vortex 2**  
**What:** Miscellaneous book (Hardback edition)  
**When:** 23 November

• **About Time 2: 1966-1969**  
**What:** Miscellaneous book  
**When:** 30 November



• **The Completely Unofficial Encyclopedia**  
**What:** Miscellaneous book  
**When:** 30 November

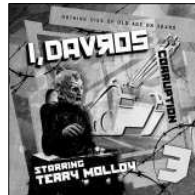
• **Short Trips: Dalek Empire**  
**What:** Short story collection  
**When:** 15 December



• **Howe's Transcendental Toybox Update No. 2: 2004-2005**  
**What:** Miscellaneous book



• **Faction Paradox: Erasing Sherlock**  
**What:** Miscellaneous book  
**When:** 30 November



• **I, Davros 3: Corruption**

# Letters

## Torchwood Thoughts

The more I watch 'Torchwood', the more it strikes me that it is not the spin-off show we were promised: what happened to the scripts written like 'Casanova'? Where is this series that was supposedly an adult version of 'Doctor Who'? The humour in it is virtually non-existent, the scripts are gritty but unnecessarily so, and the swearing is ham-fisted in just for the sake of it. Still, there's potential there; I just cannot see it clearly yet.

-Dan Chapman, via e-mail

## Doctor Who Season 2

The new Doctor Who just keeps getting better and better and better. I loved School Reunion. The way they handled the reunion between the Doctor and Sara Jane Smith was beautiful. This was followed by the Girl

in the Fireplace which I thought was one of the best episodes in the entire history of the series. Was not surprised to hear that David Tennant and Sophia Myles are an item. You could see the sparks in their on screen interaction.

-Frank Branchini, via e-mail

## Issue 8 Feedback

Just dropping a line to say I enjoyed the last issue of Whotopia. In an era where online blogs, websites and other ephemeral endeavours have significantly decreased the readership of traditional paper fanzines, it's nice to still get a copy of a Doctor Who 'zine you can hold in your hands and page through the old-fashioned way. I even enjoy the issues without an article or review by me in them!

-Arnold T. Blumberg, via e-mail



**We love to hear from our readers! Let us know what's on your mind regarding any aspect of Doctor Who or Whotopia.**

Drop us a line anytime either via regular mail or e-mail.

## Regular Mail:

Whotopia  
 306-1246 Cardero Street  
 Vancouver, BC, Canada  
 V6G 2J1

## E-Mail:

jigsawpublications@yahoo.ca

# Balancing The Scales: A Review of 1980's Doctor Who



Jez Strickley takes a look at Doctor Who's most turbulent era, the 1980's

Imagine a man inching his way steadily towards a cliff edge, intent on oblivion. For some *Doctor Who* fans this image of self-destruction reflects the course of the series during the 1980s. From the opening episode of Tom Baker's last season to the final line uttered by Sylvester McCoy, *Doctor Who* in the 1980s seemed to at once herald a brave new world and the end of the road, all rolled into one. Nevertheless, despite the obstacles looming ahead (needless violence and the Kandy Man to name but two) this review will plead in favour of the view that 1980s *Doctor Who* exerts a powerful influence on its twenty-first century incarnation and is a crucial part of the series' legacy.

Although the final episodes of season seventeen were transmitted in early 1980, season eighteen is generally regarded as the beginning of 1980s *Doctor Who*. From the glitzy new title sequence and bass-thumping theme music to the more serious plotlines, season eighteen represented a major change in the appearance of *Doctor Who*. A more stylised look coupled to some fine scripts delivered a set of stories which challenged the adult audience as much as they sent the children hiding behind the sofa. 'The E-Space Trilogy' was a case in point. Here was a package of tales which delivered monsters and mystery, folklore and suspense. This was *Doctor Who* at its best, straddling the adult-child audience with aplomb, delivering gems on all fronts.

Dealing with the new decade was not just about style and story telling, it also involved a shift in the Doctor's character. The sense of invincibility that had pervaded so much of the Fourth Doctor's tenure was slowly shorn away to reveal a Doctor who could no longer guarantee victory over the forces of evil. Tremas' demise at the close of 'The Keeper of Traken' and the Master's very personal triumph over the Fourth Doctor in 'Logopolis' each demonstrated a new perspective on the Doctor, one of fallibility and an awareness of his own mortality. This approach instilled a fresh aspect to the Doctor's persona and gave the series' scriptwriting team a new dimension to explore.

Understandably the marked shift in the series' appearance drew a mixed reaction amongst the fans but some element of change was inevitable; Tom Baker's stint as the Fourth Doctor was drawing to a close and without a fresh look the series would have appeared dated, losing its appeal and popularity in the process.

Tom Baker's departure left the production team confronting a challenge which had been looming on the horizon for several years, namely how to replace an actor whose on-screen personality had become an iconic part of the series. At times it felt as though *Doctor Who* was Tom Baker, so how could it continue successfully without him? It would have been unsurprising if a new lead actor had been cast in the same mould, but instead there arrived someone who, before uttering a single line, had already broken with his predecessor by the simple fact of being a good deal younger. The grandfatherly wisdom or avuncular charm of earlier incarnations



***From the glitzy new title sequence and bass-thumping theme music to the more serious plotlines, season eighteen represented a major change in the appearance of Doctor Who.***

tions was cast aside for one which challenged the traditional image of the Doctor, and for this 1980s *Doctor Who* deserves some credit.

Peter Davison's Fifth Doctor gave the series a new sense of energy and drive. Although seemingly young and naive he was able to confront new adventures with a genuine understanding of the precarious nature of life. It was ironic that an incarnation who was conscious of this fact should find himself faced with the death of a companion; this in itself was a master stroke, revealing a Doctor who despite trying his very best could not always win outright.

Beyond the challenges of creating a new and original incarnation, there arose an issue that was to become a recurring headache throughout the 1980s: the changing nature of the public's viewing habits. The series had maintained a vicelike grip over the Saturday teatime slot for much of the 1970s, but by 1980 times were changing. ITV's increasing challenge to what had been considered a BBC stronghold revealed that *Doctor Who's* influence over the casual viewer was no longer unassailable.

Perhaps as a reaction to this Peter Davison's first outing as the Doctor coincided with the

decision to change the scheduling of the series to a twice weekly weekday slot. Although there was some opposition to this change, the viewing figures for Peter Davison's first season were very healthy, especially in comparison to much of season eighteen. However, this move away from the series' traditional transmission time signalled the beginning of a period in which the battle for viewing figures would have an increasing influence over the format and scheduling of the series.

Viewing figures aside, the arrival of a young and evidently more energised Doctor appeared to be a tonic to the almost funereal atmosphere of season eighteen. This is no criticism of the Fourth Doctor's last outing; the darker, grittier stories deserve praise and given that Tom Baker's farewell was imminent they were highly appropriate. Nonetheless a contrast was needed and Peter Davison's portrayal perfectly captured a more vital Doctor.

In his opening season stories such as 'Castrovalva' and 'Kinda' demonstrated scripts which were progressive and inventive. The dramatic and unexpected arrival of the Cybermen in 'Earthshock', coupled with some good old fashioned menace in 'Black Orchid' breathed life back into the series. Although 'Timeflight', was a poor final offering, it couldn't alter the fact that season nineteen was solid in its production and thought evoking in its themes and ideas. It also fostered the hope that *Doctor Who* could successfully outlive the long shadow of Tom Baker's tenure and move confidently into the new decade.

Success is not easy to deliver on cue and although Peter Davison's second season struck a fantastically dark note with the introduction of Turlough, a genuinely complex companion, there seemed to be something that wasn't quite right. Perhaps it was the way a modern classic like 'Enlightenment' was followed by a story of much lesser stature in the shape of 'The King's Demons'; maybe it was the way 'Snakedance' and 'Arc of Infinity' offered so much on paper but somehow couldn't quite pull it off on screen. Possibly it was the season's twentieth anniversary motif that was just a little too heavy to deliver with any real conviction. Yet in spite of these criticisms the Fifth Doctor continued to grow and the viewer could always rely on him, as on his predecessors, to give even the most unlikely adventure a sense of believability.

Between seasons the twentieth anniversary special 'The Five Doctors' showed that there was much to commemorate about the series. Unfortunately the somewhat contrived story left some fans feeling that the whole exercise had been little more than a publicity stunt. Arguably that's true, but it was nevertheless entertaining and delivered what it set out to do, namely to celebrate the series' history and allow the fans to indulge in some honest nostalgia.

By the close of Peter Davison's third and final season his somewhat lacklustre middle act could be largely dismissed. The return of Dav-

ros, played with such brilliant instability by Terry Molloy and some fine moments of terror in the underrated 'Frontios' returned *Doctor Who* to its place in the sun as a piece of original children's science fiction. Interestingly, even when a story didn't quite live up to its billing there was a fillip in the guise of the Fifth Doctor's moral agonising. Witnessing the destruction of humanity's aquatic cousins in 'Warriors of the Deep' and being forced to destroy his android companion in 'Planet of Fire', revealed that even a weak story could still offer a chance for the Doctor's character to shine.

Neither of these tales, however, could overshadow the nearly flawless 'Caves of Androzani'. Robert Holmes' powerful writing, superbly realised by Graeme Harper's nail biting direction, took the series to a new level before finally reaching its dramatic climax with the arrival of the immediately intimidating Sixth Doctor, played by Colin Baker.

So far, so good. If 1980s *Doctor Who* had concluded with the penultimate story of season twenty-one it would probably be viewed as a time of innovation if nothing else. But this is not the case. Instead the arrival of the Sixth Doctor was to prove pivotal in the series' fall from grace, and marked a period in *Doctor Who*'s history that still divides fans and critics alike when considering the reasons behind its eventual axing in 1989.

March 1984 saw the introduction of the Sixth Doctor. His debut story 'The Twin Dilemma' was hardly the best of starts. Yet Colin Baker's performance was a master class in capturing the viewer's attention: unpredictable, brooding and arrogant. Here was a pronounced change in the Doctor's character. Gone was the vulnerability and naivety of the previous incarnation and in their stead was a brash and acerbic personality which hinted at a volatile nature just beneath the surface. This new Doctor was an excitingly original prospect, who if handled with care may have taken the series to further success.

Colin Baker's first complete season coincided with an alteration in the format of the series. The traditional twenty-five minute episode was extended to forty-five minutes, thus reducing the number of episodes and cliffhanger endings. This change was more than just cosmetic as it created a subtle shift in the pace of the stories, which needed to be accommodated. Furthermore, the twice weekly weekday transmission was also dropped in favour of the tried and tested Saturday teatime slot. Some fans were pleased with these adjustments whilst others were more cautious. They were mindful of the fact that after an absence of four years *Doctor Who* was no longer guaranteed pole position on Saturday evening television.

So, with a television schedule looking less than friendly season twenty-two needed a sharp set of scripts to get it off to a good start. The satire on television violence delivered by 'Vengeance on Varos' and the Davros-driven finale of 'Revelation of the Daleks' were fine examples,



demonstrating that the series could still be original. But what of the rest? The wasted opportunity represented by the Sontaran's return in 'The Two Doctors', the neither here nor there feel of 'The Mark of the Rani', a patchwork plotline in 'Attack of the Cybermen' and the badly realised 'Timelash' all led to the uncomfortable conclusion that there was something seriously amiss.

Sadly it was not only poor scriptwriting but also a marked increase in largely unnecessary scenes of violence, emphasised by a less than sympathetic Doctor, which brought the series under yet more pressure. Unsurprisingly the season struggled to consistently claim a creditable chunk of the viewing audience and in February 1985 the announcement was made that the series would be 'rested'.

For the first time in *Doctor Who*'s history serious doubt was cast on its future. Was it possible that after twenty-two years of popular success the series would be put out to grass on the basis of a single season's performance? Naturally both fans and critics attempted to rationalise why *Doctor Who* had been suspended, and it was perhaps an indication of its popularity that it did eventually return. However, its re-launch in the autumn of 1986 was not to see a new lease of life for the good Doctor, but rather

the beginning of a controversial period which was to herald a slow but steady decline in the series' popularity.

September 1986 saw the arrival of the eagerly anticipated season twenty-three. Although the fans were craving for new stories they were also conscious of the fact that *Doctor Who* no longer held a vaunted position in the eyes of some at the BBC. Season twenty-three desperately needed to be a huge success; yet before it had even started there was yet more tinkering with its format. On the one hand there was the return of the twenty-five minute episode, which could be construed as a positive development. On the other hand the number of episodes in the season was reduced to a mere fourteen, substantially diminishing the transmission period of the season. It was hardly surprising that some fans were worried.

Reverting to twenty-five minute episodes and cutting the length of the season were not the only changes; adjusting the Doctor's character was another. Gone was the aggressive and bullying Sixth Doctor of season twenty-two and in his place a more mellow and approachable version that was juxtaposed with a set of stories which were less violent. Fewer scenes of violence may have been all well and good, but the scripts badly needed to be convincing.

Season twenty-three's all-encompassing narrative 'The Trial of a Timelord' presented a single plotline covering all fourteen episodes. Had this gamble paid off it would have potentially brought the series a new lease of life. The regular cast were excellent: a terrific performance from Michael Jayston's Valyard and Lynda Bellingham's poised and dignified Inquisitor was played to perfection. There was a new monster in the shape of the wonderfully whispering Vervoids and further questioning of the Doctor's reliability in 'Mindwarp' (nicely reflecting the unpredictable nature of the Sixth Doctor's persona). The villainous Sil was given another outing and the Doctor's companion, Peri, was allowed to be less whining, giving her a much improved screen presence. Unfortunately all these positives couldn't change the fact that the season's overarching theme didn't quite work.

The umbrella plotline was too fatiguing and the opening episodes didn't have the grab needed to cultivate a loyal following over several months. It could be said that season twenty-three was a good piece of old fashioned story telling, but it took too long to warm up. Expecting the average viewer to stick with a fourteen episode epic through thick and thin was asking too much of a public who's changing tastes seemed to condemn *Doctor Who* to the television doldrums.

Inevitably something had to give and to the disappointment of many that something was the decision to regenerate the Doctor. A change of lead was perceived by some as the solution to the series' decline, but for those looking at the wider picture it was clear that it would take more than a new incarnation to improve its diminishing reputation.



The robot from Season 23's "The Mysterious Planet"



A scene from the seventh Doctor's first story, "Time and The Rani"

'Remembrance of the Daleks'. Sylvester McCoy's portrayal was darker and more intriguing and the scripts were tighter. However, there was still the appearance of the Kandy Man to remind fans that some of those in charge of the series seemed intent on delivering a self-parody, which did it absolutely no good at all in the eyes of the viewing public.

Sylvester McCoy's final season revealed an increasingly assured set of scripts and a lead who was comfortable in the role. 'The Curse of Fenric' ranks as one of the best stories of the Seventh Doctor's tenure and despite the confusing nature of 'Ghostlight', its glossy production sent out a clear message that the series hadn't lost its touch. Sylvester McCoy's interpretation now clearly harked back to the mysterious time traveller of the 1960s. Unfortunately the viewing public of the late 1980s was not to be tempted and despite improvements too few viewers were tuning in; so much so that by the end of 1989 the powers that be had decided that the series had run its course.

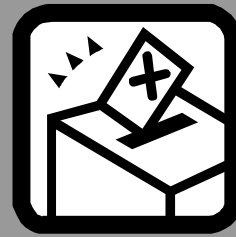
So, where does all that leave 1980s *Doctor Who*? It could be argued that from 1980 to 1984 the series was in safe hands and looked set to continue for a good deal longer.

It could also be claimed that poor writing and diminishing production values left the series heading for oblivion by 1986. Neither of these conjectures however, counter the view that 1980s *Doctor Who* strongly influences its twenty-first century successor and offers an impressive legacy to the mythology of the series.

Today's writers are well aware of how scripting issues in the 1980s led to stories and themes which ultimately brought the series' future into question. This, at the very least, is an important lesson left behind by 1980s *Doctor Who*. Furthermore, monitoring and anticipating trends in the *public's* viewing habits is crucial to the continuing popularity of the new series. Just a glimpse of how poorly this was sometimes responded to in the 1980s will almost certainly help the current executive team to keep the viewing climate in sharp focus.

In terms of the legacy presented by 1980s *Doctor Who*, it is the evolution of the Doctor's character that stands out positively throughout the decade, equalling if not surpassing the 1960s and 1970s and clearly demonstrating how originality can be tied to tradition. 1980s *Doctor Who* was not seen to be standing still, and in a decade when it arguably confronted some of its toughest challenges, there was no question of it shrinking from the task at hand. Perhaps that might offer a *raison d'être* for the Kandy Man and the robot cleaners of 'Paradise Towers', but maybe that would be stretching this particular review of 1980s *Doctor Who* a little too far.

Article by Jez Strickley



# VOTE

## What are your Top 10 Doctor Who Audio's of All Time?

Continuing our series of Top 10 Polls...

We want to know what your **Top 10 Doctor Who audios of all time** are for a series of Top 10 articles in Whotopia.

Your personal Top 10 can include:

- Big Finish's Siren's of Time through to Memory Lane
- Audios such as: Real Time, Shada, Last of the Titans, The Ratings War, No Place Like Home, Living Legend, The Veiled Leopard, Her Final Flight, The Maltese Penguin, Cryptobiosis
- Death Comes to Time
- The Paradise of Death
- The Ghosts of N-Space

Please list your audios in order of 1-10 with 1 being the best and so forth. Feel free to include a couple of sentences on why you voted for a particular audio. We may even use your comments.

Please do not include any of the BBC soundtrack audios, BBV releases, or the Bernice Summerfield audio's

The results will be published as part of a series of forthcoming articles in Whotopia.

Send us your Top 10 choices by  
December 1, 2006

jigsawpublications@yahoo.ca

or

Audio Poll  
c/o Whotopia  
306-1246 Cardero Street  
Vancouver, BC, Canada  
V6G 2J1





WHOTOPIA  
EXCLUSIVE

# The Steven Moffat Interview

Ken Holtzhauser talks with new series writer  
Steven Moffat in this exclusive Whotopia interview



Steven Moffat is fast becoming a TV legend to rival any of his creations.

Moffat, along with his wife producer Sue Vertue, has been responsible for some of British television's funniest moments and memorable characters.

After initially working as a teacher, his first work on television was writing and co-creating the children's drama series *Press Gang* in 1989. The series was immensely successful and ran for four years on the ITV network, with Moffat himself penning all of the forty-three episodes.

As is traditional for many of those in the British television world, he was asked to contribute to the bi-annual Comic Relief charity telethon. This allowed him to reveal to the world his lifelong Doctor Who fandom, providing the script for the science-fiction parody *Doctor Who And The Curse Of Fatal Death* in 1999. This lovingly rendered sketch mixed an obvious knowledge of Doctor Who mythology with affectionate humor and, unknown to Moffat, would chart the course of his writing future.

In 2000 he created and wrote the internationally popular sitcom *Coupling* for BBC Two, with his wife producing. The series proved to be highly successful in both the United Kingdom and America, running until 2004 and producing four seasons and twenty-eight episodes, all written by Moffat.

An American version of the same series was created in 2003, based largely on Moffat's original scripts, although this was less successful and was cancelled after just four episodes on the NBC network.

When Russell T Davies was given the opportunity to revive Doctor Who as a television series, he needed a very specific type of writer to help him shape the series. He specifically needed writers with a solid background in television writing as well as an obvious knowledge of Doctor Who mythology mixed with affectionate humor. Steven Moffat fit the bill nicely.

After season one's Hugo award winning episodes *The Empty Child* and *The Doctor Dances* and season two's *The Girl In The Fireplace*, Moffat found himself becoming as well known in the world of dramatic writing as he is in comedy. The BBC response was to give Moffat his own dramatic series, a modern day adaptation of the classic horror story of Doctor Jekyll



**Steven Moffat writer of several new series scripts**

and *Hyde* filming for BBC1.

Despite a punishing writing schedule of prepping for *Jekyll* and re-writes for his season three episode of Doctor Who, Steven was kind enough to answer a few questions for Whotopia and look into the past, present and future.

#### **What are your early childhood memories of Doctor Who?**

*Oh, I watched it as a tiny child, so I really can't remember a time it wasn't on, and I wasn't watching it - when wasn't too scared. *Tomb Of the Cybermen*, scared me off for a quite a while - and that was just the trailer. Became a fan with *Jon Pertwee*.*

#### **Did that contribute to an interest in becoming a writer?**

*I can't really remember wanting to be anything other than a writer - oddly enough, the very first thing I wrote, when I was very young was my own adaptation of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. It was rubbish. I also wrote *Dr. Who* stories of course. And here I am, my own six-part version of *Jekyll and Hyde* filming for BBC1 while I'm writing my series three Doctor Who story!*

#### **Did Russell T Davies know of your interest in Doctor Who or did you approach him?**

*Well actually we knew each other vaguely, and certainly knew each other's work. Not sure what got me the Who gig, beyond being an *Out and Proud* fan, and an established telly writer. I think both Julie and Russell liked *Coupling*, so that probably helped!*

#### **Having written for both Christopher Eccleston and David Tennant, do you subscribe to the Terrance Dicks philosophy of the "generic Doctor Who type" or do you tailor your writing to the actor's style?**

*Terrance is right about most things. Yeah, the Doctor is the Doctor - you keep at the back of your mind the face and voice you're dealing with, but other than that, you just write the character and know there's nothing you can throw at actors like and Chris and David that they can't deal with.*

#### **You've written for the books, Comic Relief skits and the show itself, ever feel like writing for Big Finish or the DWM strip?**



Scene from "The Girl In The Fireplace"

be in the same room as Sophia Myles ...

**Do you have an interest in writing for TORCHWOOD, given your being the writer that introduced Capt. Jack?**

*They were kind enough to ask, but I'm up to my eyes in other stuff. I've kind of promised myself (and, well, my agent) that the only show I'll be guest writer on will be Doctor Who.*

**Now that you have become professionally involved in Doctor Who, do**



Scene from "The Empty Child"

*Erm. Well, to be honest, my Who rule - prior to the show's return - was to keep it small and quick. A short story, a sketch etc. Fact is, I make my living out of writing, and, say, a Big Finish story would eat up a lot of time without much financial return. Ah, yes, mercenary, well here you go.*

**Is there an existing Doctor Who character you'd love in your secret heart to write for?**

*Not really. I like new stuff in Who. All brand new and shiny. The exciting thing is going out those wonderful blue doors and finding something completely new and different - a glimpse of worlds and people and lives that you've never had before and will never come again. I know it's an unpopular view, but the more returning friends and enemies in Dr Who, the smaller and more familiar the Doctor's limitless and terrifying universe becomes. All the paradigm stories, those show-defining beltors, are free-standing - The Daleks, The Ark In Space, The Horror Of Fang Rock, The Curse Of Fenric, City Of Death etc. I think hauling old stuff back is deeply and damagingly uncreative, and if it happens too much, kind of desperate. It's like when you're in a relationship, and it's dying, and go back to THAT restaurant, or THAT hotel, and try to get the magic back. Doesn't work, doesn't ever - 'cos one thing is impossibly different: it isn't NEW any more. And it's that exciting, shiny newness that you're looking for...*

**Has there been anyone cast in your episodes that have made you say "Wow! I can't believe they got him/her?"**

*Well I was very thrilled got Richard Wilson, but being honest, the pedigree of the people involved in Dr Who makes ANYTHING possible. Mind you, just getting to*



"The Curse of Fatal Death"

**you have a different perspective of Doctor Who fandom?**

*Lots of my friends are Who fans, so I know they're a wildly varied bunch. The nightmare ones are in the minority - and whatever their sins, they've yet to trash a pub, or menace the public!*

**When the writers get the episode briefs from RTD, do you ever hear about another episode and say, "Ooh, I wish I'd gotten to write that"?**

*Wouldn't have minded a crack at Jackie, 'cos I thought she was funny, and a lovely performance. Too late now though.*

**Has the pace and style of the new TV series affected your writing in Jekyll?**

*Erm. Well not really. All shows find their own pace.*

**Have you been surprised by reviews of your work?**

*I suppose I was quite surprised how well Fireplace went down with the fans, given the givens. Though, to be honest, I thought it was a terrific show, and one of the best scripts I've written. Actually, I'm hugely proud of both my Who stories.*

**What writers influence your work?**

*Every time someone asks me this question, my mind goes blank. It's happened again.*

**Which cast member of COUPLING would you most want to see guest on Doctor Who?**

*Ohhhhh.... I think I'll say Gina Bellman, 'cos I'm working with at the moment on Jekyll, and she's being fabulous. And I think she'd fit well into the highly colored world of mad old Dr Who.*

**Oh, one last question...how do you respond to fan speculation (like mine) that you are ideal to take over as Doctor Who's show runner after RTD steps down?**

*I don't. There isn't a vacancy. I'm fully booked. I can't imagine anyone doing a better job than Russell on this show, he's been extraordinary. He's changed television. Suddenly everything is fun and mad! A lot of British drama is worthy and important and feels like a light scolding from an opinionated drunk in the rain. With Russell's stuff, even when it's edgy and bristling with difficult ideas, you feel invited in, you feel engaged. People want to say he's raised the bar, but that's a very un-Russell idea - far too stern and macho and dull. It's more like he's fitted a sunroof. Yeah, that's it; he's taken British drama and fitted a sunroof. I think he'd like that.*

Steven Moffat, Thank you.

*Interviewed by Ken Holtzhouser*

*Whotopia would like to thank Steven Moffat from taking time out from his busy schedule to answer our questions, and to Ken for securing the interview.*

# Memoirs of a UK Fan

Part 3



by David P. May

**Part 3 – Fan of a Programme in Decline**

After a childhood growing up loving Doctor Who amongst many other children who similarly loved the programme I found myself, at the age of fourteen, to be the only person of my age in my social circles that still loved Doctor Who. Everyone else had 'grown out of it', although a special event such as a regeneration, **The Five Doctors** or the return of the Daleks might arouse some casual interest amongst the 'non-believers'. Which is precisely what **Resurrection Of The Daleks** and **The Caves Of Androzani** achieved in the Spring of 1984. This interest was only mild and momentary, however, whereas for me these were just the latest high-spots in a continuing obsession with the programme.

I liked **Resurrection** a lot although I didn't care for the new Davros design one bit. I thought Colin Baker would make a good Doctor but wasn't over keen on his costume when it was unveiled. I thought it made him look like a clown! Peter Davison's departure had been a surprise and a disappointment! How could he leave Doctor Who so soon??! The fourth Doctor had been in place for what had seemed like an eternity, but the fifth had come and gone in a very short time indeed.

To say I was a fan alone at this period is a little misleading, for whilst my classmates were completely dismissive of Doctor Who I did have a couple of friends in the year below me at school who were still fans. I'd known Carl and Simon for some time but more as casual acquaintances with similar interests. Now we became closer and they were the only people I knew who I could *really* discuss Doctor Who with. And, of course, there was still **Doctor Who Monthly** and the continuing supply of Doctor Who novelisations from Target books. Incidentally, it was in 1984, after nearly five full years of collecting them, that I finally completed the set which I was quite proud about! After that I was able to just buy each new one as it was released, far easier than having to track down some of the rarer older ones!

My parents seemed to be growing uncomfortable with my interest in Doctor Who. They'd had no problem with it for years but I was now receiving comments to the tune of "Haven't you got enough Doctor Who books already?" or "Why don't you hang around with boys your own age more?" on an increasingly-regular basis. Such comments fell on deaf ears. I wasn't going to pack in collecting Doctor Who books when I'd spent so much time and money completing my collection in the first place and as far as I was concerned I was in the company of boys 'my own age' every day in school and still had close friends in my own class, albeit friends who were not interested in Doctor Who. Simon, although in the school year below me, was in fact also born in 1970 as I had been, so it really didn't seem to be a problem to me. Perhaps the problem was Carl – he was about 18 months younger than me and very small for his age whereas I was very tall for mine, so we probably looked rather odd together, but we got on fine as far as I was concerned. As well as Doctor Who the three of us were all regular readers of comics such as **2000 AD** and Simon also shared my interest in home computers – we both owned Commodore 64s so would almost certainly have been friends anyway, regardless of Doctor Who. We all used to write our own comics together, including Doctor Who ones, and even started writing a script which we intended to send to John Nathan-Turner. Our 'masterpiece', which would have seen the Doctor and Peri pitted against both the Cybermen and the Ice Warriors, fortunately never progressed beyond the first page because it was awful. But we had such *fun*.

I did on odd occasions socialise with my classmates for a game of football (soccer) or a visit to the local swimming baths, but frankly I enjoyed Carl and Simon's company more, they just seemed much more in tune with my own interests. My parents would also have



*Davros & the Daleks in Revelation of The Daleks*

***I liked Resurrection a lot although I didn't care for the new Davros design one bit.***



*The Rani & the Master in "Mark of The Rani"*

***What I didn't enjoy of course was the truly dumbfounding news that the series was being 'rested' for 18 months.***

digs that I wasn't interested in girls but of course I *was* – I fancied the pants off Peri! I just didn't find it easy to connect with any of the girls I knew because they weren't interested in Doctor Who, or comics, or computers, or Laurel & Hardy films or any of the other things I was interested in. And I wasn't interested in the things they liked.

Season 22 promised to be a veritable feast for us fans. As well as being the first full set of adventures for a new Doctor and a relatively new companion, I knew that there were such treats to look forward to as the return of the Second Doctor and Jamie, the Cybermen, the Sontarans, the Daleks... In fact, other than **Mark Of The Rani** (which was merely average) I really enjoyed the season – yes, even **Timelash!** What I didn't enjoy of course was the truly dumbfounding

news that the series was being 'rested' for 18 months. This really was a bolt from the blue as up until that point Doctor Who had really been a permanent fixture, it was *always* just assumed that it would return each year. Whilst I was never in any doubt that the series would return in the Autumn of 1986, there was no disguising that this was a serious blow to its status. Only 18 months earlier the BBC had been holding it up as a flagship programme during the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations, now suddenly it was treating it with contempt. Not good.

My Dad's comment that I'd be 'grown up' by the time the programme returned did little to cheer me up. Nor was I impressed by the BBC's comments that the show had become too violent – there'd hardly been any violence or 'scary moments' in the last series, to my mind, plus it was on opposite **The A Team** on ITV which was full of violence!

The radio serial **Slipback** provided some interest and amusement that summer, although I struggled to get a clear reception for one of the instalments. And I also made what would turn out to be the last of my annual pilgrimages to the Doctor Who exhibition in Blackpool. I had no idea it was to close that year but even so the novelty had worn off for me by now. It was no longer magical and exciting, it was merely of slight interest to see the latest props and costumes up close. For the first time ever I didn't even buy a souvenir in the shop at the end. And was it just my imagination or did the exhibition seem less busy than five years' earlier?

I don't recall being any more excited about the start of **The Trial Of A Time Lord** than any of the previous seasons, despite the extra-long wait for it. I was still very much a fan, however, still buying the monthly and the books and various other pieces of merchandise. I enjoyed season 23 but not as much as season 22 and I was dismayed when news came through of Colin Baker's sacking early in 1987. The main thing, however, was that after some uncertainty, there *was* confirmation that the series would be continuing.

Whilst I waited for season 24, I had the perfect thing to help me pass the time. On 6<sup>th</sup> December 1986, the day the final part of **The Trial Of A Time Lord** was broadcast, my dad ordered a video recorder which we got a few days later. At last, at long, long last, I had the power to 'preserve' programmes, to watch them again and again as I wished. A small few Doctor Who episodes I had recorded from the tv onto audio tape as early as the **Destiny Of The Daleks** repeat in 1980, but it wasn't the same.

On 13<sup>th</sup> December 1986 I purchased my first pre-recorded video cassette, the one Doctor Who adventure that was then available at the 'budget' £10 price (the budget range was only just becoming introduced, most videocassettes retailed at over £20). The adventure was **Revenge Of The Cybermen**, one which I might well have chosen anyway if all of the Doctor Who adventures I'd already seen had then been available. I had clear memories of being thrilled and chilled by it as a five-year-old and hadn't seen any of it since save for that one-second clip of a Cyberman in **Logopolis**. The first few minutes gave me the most extraordinary feeling, seeing the old opening titles, Tom Baker, Lis Sladen and Ian Marter again was like suddenly remembering a long-forgotten dream, even more so than when I'd seen the repeat of **Genesis Of The Daleks** in 1982. I watched the whole 90-minute tape right through revelling in a vintage dose of my favourite programme. And that evening I watched it right through again! I thought it held up pretty well although I was mildly surprised at how dated some of the equipment in the Nerva Beacon looked and there was that *obvious* stock footage of a rocket taking off! And how bland the Cybermat looked – I'd only seen photos of the sixties versions.

Frustration arose at having just the one story in my

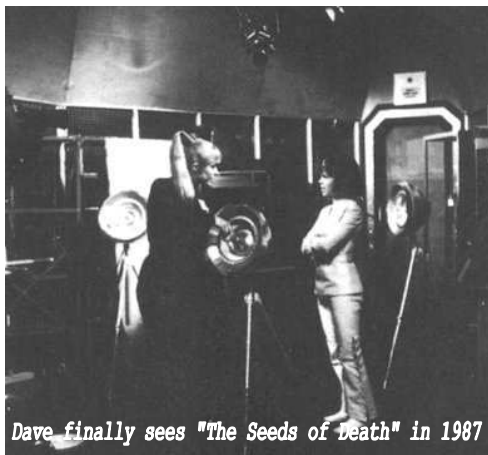
video collection. Still being on pocket money I couldn't afford the other Doctor Who titles which were £25 each, nor were there any episodes on television for me to record! Eventually I got **The Seeds Of Death** video for my birthday in February 1987 (great, a *Patrick Troughton* story!) and, in April, was able to record the two Peter Cushing Dalek movies when they were broadcast on BBC 1. I'd first seen these films in 1983 (the second one) and 1985 (the first one) which was as thrilling as seeing any of the old episodes. Before that all I'd been able to do was ogle their colourful video cassette boxes which I'd seen in the window of a rental store, teasing me with the knowledge that I could look but not view. Now at last I had them in my own collection!

**Death To The Daleks** and **Pyramids Of Mars** were acquired in May. I was more excited about watching the former but thought it looked a bit cheap and tacky and was surprised to find that **Pyramids** was far superior to it. **Pyramids** was also fun trying to see which bits I remembered – quite a few as it turned out.

Then of course season 24 was added to my collection, but even though I really *tried* to enjoy it, only **Dragonfire** came up to scratch for me, though the other three stories all had their own little moments. It was a shame though as they had all sounded extremely promising in a preview I'd read in **Starburst** magazine.

I left school at 18 in 1988 and lost touch with Carl almost entirely. Simon lived quite close to me but we saw each other less frequently too, our interest in the Commodore 64 waning now that it was being superseded by other more powerful home computers. It was also in 1988 that I heard on the radio one weekend that a Doctor Who convention was taking place locally. I knew next to nothing about conventions other than the fact that cast members went to them and you could get their autographs. I went along on the Sunday afternoon, quite oblivious that you were meant to register for these things and spend the whole day (or weekend) there, and walked into the hotel unchallenged and quickly found a room where Nick Courtney, John Levene, Carole Ann Ford and new companion Sophie Aldred were signing autographs. Wow! Real live Doctor Who stars in the same room as me! Then suddenly a steward announced that the signing session was going to end in five minutes! I therefore had no time to be starstruck, I had to quickly go round each of the stars and get their signature in a book I'd brought along with me, managing it in the nick of time. Then I wandered into a conference room to find writers Ian Briggs and Ben Aaronovitch being interviewed. I caught about ten minutes of that, had a look round the dealers room and picked up three copies of **The Frame**, the first Doctor Who fanzine I'd ever bought. I'd been hoping to watch some vintage episodes but according to an event timetable I found I'd missed the one that day (**Daemons** part 4). I was then accosted by a fan who started asking me all sorts of questions about when Pertwee was going to meet the Cybermen which really didn't make much sense at all. As soon as I realised that I wasn't getting through to him either I fobbed him off and made a sharp exit. And so I headed off home, having unwittingly gotten away with enjoying the benefits of a Doctor Who convention free of charge! Meeting the stars had been great but the rest of it was a bit overwhelming, it seemed to be full of middle-aged men and a few weirdos like the one who had accosted me. All in all, I wasn't in a hurry to go to a convention again...

So I'd met a few of the stars from the programme, a dream come true, but in 1989 I finally got to see the Doctor for real as Jon Pertwee toured in the stage play **Doctor Who – The Ultimate Adventure**. I thought the story was a bit juvenile and it was difficult to stomach Doctor Who being done as a musical, but there were some good laughs in it and what could beat



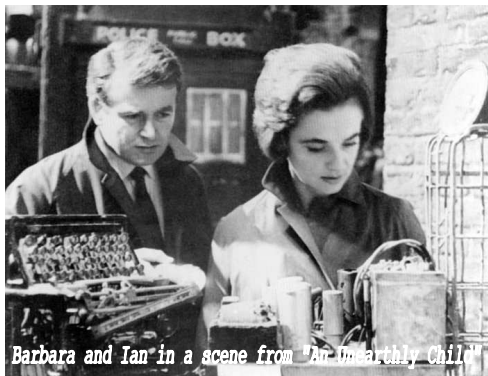
Dave finally sees "The Seeds of Death" in 1987

## *Eventually I got The Seeds Of Death video for my birthday in February 1987...*



Jon Pertwee with his co-stars in "The Ultimate Adventure"

## *In 1989 I finally got to see the Doctor for real as Jon Pertwee toured in the stage play The Ultimate Adventure*



Barbara and Ian in a scene from "An Unearthly Child"

the thrill of seeing the third Doctor in action right there before me. The laser displays were excellent too, but I think the funniest moment had to be the excessive use of dry ice to create mist which had all the children on the front few rows of the audience coughing and spluttering for five minutes!

In June 1989 I finally got to see the very first Dalek adventure when it was released on video. This was the first time I'd seen a William Hartnell story since 1981 and as soon as I saw the video on the shelf I snapped it up in my gleeful hands. The story did not disappoint at all. For me, seeing it for the first time at the age of 19, it lived up to all expectations – it was magical, it was mysterious, it was dramatic.

Likewise I mostly enjoyed season 26. I thought that here and there it could have been a bit better but overall I enjoyed it much more than any season since the 1985 hiatus. So, as the eighties and my teenage years came to a close I was still as big a fan of Doctor Who as ever. The problem was that as well as having no friends around me to share the passion, I now no longer had any programme either! Doctor Who ended in December 1989, not that that was immediately apparent. However, my love affair with the programme was not only set to continue, it was also going to take some truly bizarre twists and turns over the next decade...

*Article by David P May*

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# SEASON 2 REVIEWED: PART 2

**I**'m jealous: I want to be in Canada. Actually, let me embellish upon this: I'd love to be a *Doctor Who* fan living in Canada right now. I'd love to be in a Canadian fan's position and not know what Series Two will involve because, boy, you've got a fun time ahead of you all.

Remember last year when they said that Series One was going to be a trip of a lifetime? They were wrong: this Series is.

You've already seen *The Christmas Invasion*, so you know how amazing David Tennant can be: whimsical, amusing and schoolboy-cheeky at one moment, and then, quick as a flash, serious, dark and angry. Remember that sense of loss which Christopher Eccleston wore on his sleeve? It's here again too, but only every so often, and when you see it; when it's briefly glimpsed... you remember just why you love this show so very, very much.

I don't want to give anything away, because to spoil it all would be a crying shame, but rest assured that you are in for an amazing few weeks. Does every episode work? Well, no. For the record, I felt that two of them were rather weak (I won't say which ones though in a bid to not add any pre-transmission bias) but that the other eleven were wonderful. You won't believe just how incredibly varied it all is too, harkening back to the sixties in terms of its 'anything goes' appeal: *Love & Monsters* and *Rise of the Cybermen*, *New Earth* and *School Reunion*, *The Girl In The Fireplace* and *Tooth and Claw*... the differences are enormous and yet, as a Series overall, it just seems to work; as if all the different ingredients slot into place like a well-crafted jigsaw, all the diversity feels like it's meant to be there. Nothing feels superfluous, not one episode. The writing is just so strong, so quotable, so laugh-out-loud funny and deeply moving, that you want the show to win every single award it possibly can.

Visually, things are great overall too; whilst a few shots don't quite work, such moments are so few and far between that mentioning them seems like nit-picking (hello, my name is Nick and I'm a nit-picker.)

You remember how good the 'Next Time...' part after *The Christmas Invasion* looked? Trust me, it gets even better. Cat Nuns, Werewolves, Kung-Fu Monks, Ood, Cybermen! Oh, boy, the Cybermen! They're everything you ever wanted them to be: hard as nails, tall, well-designed, sturdy, emotionless. They'll break your heart with the things they do. Graeme Harper directs them with such ease that you can tell he's had a great time shooting his episodes, and when you're getting around two peachy shots per five minute section of story, you know something's going right. Graeme Harper: still every bit the genius we all remembered him to be.

That's another thing that's terrific in this Series—the directing. Euros Lyn proves time and again that he is great; James Hawes will make you smile; James Strong will have you crying out for more of his directing next year; and in just one episode, Dan Zeff shows himself to be more than capable. Added to all this, Ernie Vincze and Rory Taylor

both make the episodes look beautiful, making you appreciate just how vital a good Director of Photography is.

Yep, you've got a fun ride ahead of you, one that looks great and, yes, sounds great too. Murray Gold's scores are tremendous throughout this Series: please BBC, release a soundtrack CD!

It takes and develops a few of the themes present in Series One, throws many more into the mix, and slowly develops *Song for Ten*, the delightfully catchy number played in *The Christmas Invasion* whilst David Tennant was choosing his costume, in a variety of different ways. And, of course, there is the new and improved (again) theme tune complete with the Middle Eight! Okay, so you already know that one, but it's worth celebrating its return once more, with its triumphant air that makes every episode end on a high. Best theme tune ever, without a doubt.

If Series One was about moving on from your past, then Series Two is about celebrating life but accepting that everything changes too. "Nothing is set in stone, but make the most of it," appears to be the overriding theme, which leads me onto the next thing to look forward to... Sarah Jane Smith and K-9.

Actually, I shan't dwell on this, because, again, I wouldn't want to give anything too important away by mistake, but, good grief, they're great. Oh, Elisabeth Sladen, you made this fan cry his eyes out, and you know what? I reckon she will for you too. She's amazing, as is all the acting from the regular cast once again.

David Tennant makes the role of the Doctor his own so quickly, you'll forget that this is only his first Series, and Billie Piper is just amazing as Rose; the two of them together just appear to be having so much fun, and it's great to watch. Noel Clarke and Camille Coduri also maintain the high standards they hit last Series as well; remember how much you had grown to care for them by *The Parting of the Ways*? By the end of this Series, you're going to love them even more. And they're not the only ones: you've got so many other characters to care for too. Chloe Webber, Elton Pope, Tommy Connolly, Arthur... you'll love them all.

One more word before I go: avoid spoilers. I really mean that. Tempted to go on a website and whet your appetite? Don't do it. Please, I beg of you, just look at the 'Next Time' trailers instead and be satisfied. Don't ruin the twists and turns this Series provides you with; don't squander the chance of being truly surprised. You'll feel a lot better for it. Discover the amazingly quotable dialogue for yourselves; gasp with the rest of us but only once you've gasped on your own first (which sounds vaguely philosophical and should be my user name on the internet methinks). Surprise yourselves. You won't regret it.

You're going to laugh, you're going to cry, you're going to gasp, you're going to scream, and if you frequent the Outpost Gallifrey forums, the odds are that you're going to squeal as well!

*Doctor Who* is back, and long may it continue.

-Nick Mellish



# THE IDIOTS LANTERN

## EPISODE SEVEN

A friend of mine recently compared sitting down to watch the second season of Doctor Who with wanting to eat a porterhouse steak and feeling, once finished, that he had actually consumed fairy floss. There's a lot of surface appeal to Tennant's first season – it looks wonderful and glossy on the screen, the action is breathless and by and large, it is competently produced. But scratch the surface, and all you get, in my opinion, is more surface.

All this means that watching *The Idiot's Lantern*, Mark Gatiss' second script for this revived series, leaves you desperately wanting more. *The Idiot's Lantern* certainly has a sense of style and knows what sort of story to tell, but like a lot of this second season, it's just so slight.

When you think about, not much really happened of any consequence during the 1950s. America went to sleep under Eisenhower, while a long decade of prosperity in Australia was briefly punctuated by a failed attempt to ban the Communist Party. Britain's slow slide from Empire to mere island nation accelerated quickly in the 1950s, punctuated by the failure at Suez. Into this milieu ride the Doctor and Rose, kitted out for a night watching Elvis gyrate those hips on the Ed Sullivan Show, only to discover they have landed in the drabness of 1953 Britain, on the eve of the Coronation of Elizabeth II.

Mark Gatiss has built up an enviable body of work in Doctor Who, particularly audios and novels. From his earliest book, *Nightshade*, Gatiss has worked with ease using the two standard Doctor Who storytelling templates – the historical, and the Quatermass style science fiction thriller. His two scripts for the new series, *The Unquiet Dead* and *The Idiot's Lantern*, continue this trend.

This reviewer has had a hard time understanding why, in an age where television drama is produced in 40-45 minute segments, the new series of Doctor Who doesn't feel dense enough. Watch an average episode of *The West Wing*, *Spooks*, *New Tricks* or *The Sopranos* and you walk away feeling that the writers have packed in as much incident, drama, humor and action as they could. With the new series, one is

sometimes left feeling that there is something missing from an episode, as if the writer/producers aren't confident with the material they have to fully engage the viewer. Only with *Tooth and Claw* has this reviewer felt that the production team has gone that extra step to really involve the viewer.

*The Idiot's Lantern* certainly comes close to achieving that goal. While the Doctor once again works out the solution to the problem in the last 5-10 minutes, the lead up to that point is well paced and played out. The depiction of 1950s Britain, with its slide into genteel poverty from imperial greatness, is deftly shown. Despite the ravages of the Second World War, despite the loss of empire, despite the drabness of ordinary life with effects of rationing, the people of Floriel Street look forward with happiness to the crowning of their new monarch.

Of course, something is watching and waiting, peering out at them from the corner of their living rooms. It's a trademark of Gatiss' work, especially with his efforts with *The League of Gentlemen*, that the ordinary can be very extraordinary indeed. The new televisions sold on the cheap my Mr. Magpie, are no exception, for within each lurks something dark and dangerous, eager to feed on those gazing upon it.

The atmosphere and tone of this episode strive for *Sapphire and Steel* – two strangers from another time appear from nowhere to offer help to a group of ordinary people facing a dangerous threat from outside human ken. While the presence of a more dynamic, more charismatic pairing in the Doctor and Rose differentiate this episode from anything *Sapphire and Steel* was able to show, it's not a question of which is better, but of a difference in feel. Where *Sapphire and Steel* deliberately went for mostly downbeat storytelling with occasional flashes of humor, here we see a lighter touch with flashes of darkness.

Which then, is the better option? The ratings success over the past eighteen months has validated the decision to target this revived series at a more family audience than would watch a more heavy going drama like *CSI* or *Six Feet Under*. However, in terms of what this reviewer likes, a darker storytelling tone would

be appreciated. You can tell where Gatiss would love to take this story by the pre-credits scene. It's all darkness and shadows, gloomy weather and flashes of light. An exhausted, stressed man looks at the paperwork in despair. Suddenly, the television starts speaking to him directly. Very shortly, his mind is not his own anymore, and the pleasant looking woman on the television who signed off moments before has started cackling insanely. Cue opening credits. And the Doctor emerges from the TARDIS riding a Vespa and all that atmosphere and tension quickly dissipates.

Apart from a general feeling of unease with the direction the second season has gone in, there are several plus points for this episode. The depiction of the relationship here between the Doctor and Rose has thankfully reverted to the good friends we saw last year, not the stalker Rose that has so irked this reviewer all year. An angry Tenth Doctor still seems a touch overwrought and unbelievable, but Tennant manages to hold his performance mostly together, moving up and down the emotional range with ease. While this reviewer believes that Tennant is too young for the part, in terms of looks needed to have the sort of gravitas required for the role, it is still an entertaining performance, and perhaps the production team has more of a say in his performance than we the viewers are aware of. Billie Piper is allowed to shine, her performance not hamstrung as in earlier episodes by the sulkier, jealous, tiresome thing she had become. Here she is more at ease, taking on the patriarchal bully in the Connolly household one moment, before venturing off blithely into danger à la the Doctor. A welcome return to form.

Earlier in this review I commented that underneath the surface of the average episode this season, there was more surface. Cruel, but aptly presented here. While an entertaining episode, it's all surface charm and glibness. Better writing and characterization would handsomely fill out the forty five minutes, eliminating the feeling of slightness that predominates. Instead, the Connolly family is painted in broad strokes – timorous wife, buffoonish husband, suppressed teenage son, dotty grandmother. The key to depicting a family in such a way that we actually engage with them



and their problems is not really to put them in danger, but to portray them deftly so that when they do eventually face the depredations of the Wire, we feel something for their fate, instead of shrugging our shoulders and waiting for the next scene to roll around. As this reviewer said earlier, it's a puzzle why the writers and script editors seem unable to consistently fill an episode with enough incident, drama and character. Perhaps the production team feel that the youngsters watching are more concerned with flashy spectacle not to care about engaging with more deeper emotions – and given the remit to appeal to family's turning the kids off would also alienate the adults?

Mention of the Wire brings us to the signal highlight of this episode – Maureen Lipman. It must be extremely difficult as an actor to portray a character effectively trapped within a small box. Lipman manages this feat with great aplomb, imbuing her character with the right measure of insane evil and malicious glee.

While her cries of 'Hungry' tend to linger a little too much at the end, it's refreshing to see a villain written and portrayed so well.

The rest of the cast do their best with superficial roles. Jamie Foreman as Eddie Connolly plays the character too broadly for my taste. Special praise should go to Rory Jennings, as the idealistic son prepared to stand up to his bullying father. Young actors who can actually act are relatively rare in this day and age of teen soaps, so kudos to the production team for casting Jennings, instead of yet another good looking blonde.

Euros Lyn has distinguished himself with his work on the new series, and pulls out all stops in depicting the events here. Not afraid to move away from normal run of the mill camera work, here he enlivens events with oddly framed angles, depicting a normal world rapidly running off the rails as the Wire's plans move to fruition. If he had a hand in toning

down Rose's jealous streak which has almost ruined the character, then more power to him. Of special note should go to the designers, who seemed to have gone the extra mile to accurately re-create a slice of Britain from 1953.

Overall, *The Idiot's Lantern* is very much a missed opportunity. The fans of the series have long argued that the very variety of setting and story telling are its greatest strengths. Why then, instead of really going in hard to scare and unsettle the viewers, did the production team decide to undercut the menace? Kids love to be scared because they know their parents are close at hand to protect and reassure them. Despite targeting the family audience, perhaps the producers underestimate their intelligence? Still, in a season that's fallen short of the benchmark season one set, *The Idiot's Lantern* isn't a complete lost cause. **6/10**

Reviewed by Rob Mammon



## THE IMPOSSIBLE PLANET / THE SATAN PIT

### EPISODE EIGHT / NINE

The first thing I noticed about *The Impossible Planet* was that it was written by Matt Jones, a name that immediately conjured up the phrase, *Beyond the Sun*, the second of the Bernice Summerfield audios produced by Big Finish, which I had found less-than-engaging. As it turns out, this story had some of the same faults as the other story: some parts were just plain boring, and some of the boring parts seemed to take far too long to finish. Perhaps this is partly due to the two-part nature of the story. I wouldn't have crammed this into one episode, though, so I guess that's the price to be paid.

After a season and a half without visiting a planet other than Earth (or New Earth), the Doctor and Rose finally land on another planet. Sort of. Actually it's more like a planetoid. And it's not inhabited.

I really liked the idea of the planet being 'impossibly' held in a stationary position above a black hole by an unexplained gravity well. Doctor Who hasn't ventured into the area of science-related plots very often. The fictional CVE from Logopolis comes to mind. This is usually more of an area that Star Trek ex-

plores, and I found it to be fun locale.

Episode one reveals Satan for a second or two and I thought that the image looked great. I kept hoping there would be more of Satan, and assumed that the cliffhanger to episode one would reveal him. I was disappointed there, but rewarded in part two by an unexpected amount of CGI of Satan.

The appearance of Satan was so impressive that I would say it's the best special effect ever to appear in Doctor Who, and I was shocked by how much screen time was allocated to the effect.

The confrontation with the Doctor had the surprising attribute that the villain didn't have a mind by the time the Doctor reaches him. So we witness the Doctor basically having a discussion with himself in order to determine the logical way to defeat the villain.

And once again, it is left to Rose to save the day, something that has been a recurring theme over the past two years. This is a continuation of the Seventh Doctor / Ace relationship which had the Doctor acting as a mentor to his com-

panion. With Rose, the clues are being dropped that she will end up having to use all she's learned to defeat an impending foe, leading to many rumors that she will die at the end of the season. Even Satan seems to think this will be the case, but perhaps he's lying to cause Rose and the Doctor to lose hope.

The defeat of Satan seems just a little bit reliant on chance: Rose figuring out that Satan was aboard the shuttle, and Rose having a weapon of some kind she could use against the host of Satan's mind. The Doctor was relying on both of these things in order to save the day.

The other excellent component of the story is the Ood. The new series has created very few new aliens, focusing far too much on Slitheen in Season One, but the Ood are a great new alien race. Unfortunately, they seem to have very little potential in their present form as a slave race with no real desires of their own. Perhaps some day we'll visit the Ood planet in the distant past and find out how they came to end up as voluntary slaves to the human race. They bring to mind the Monoids from the William

Continued on page 18

Hartnell story **The Ark**. They too were an underclass for no readily apparent reason. It's a little bit troubling that two Doctor Who stories forty years apart are predicting a time in Earth's future where slavery will once more be condoned by society.

The Ood look scary when we first see them, but then we're told that they're benign. That, of course, only increases the sense of unease whenever they appear on screen, and the whole time we're waiting for something to go terribly wrong and the Ood to start turning on the humans. And when they do, their frightening appearance adds to the horror all the more.

The remainder of the characters, the humans, is pretty standard, and none of them really stands out as memorable. They spend half of episode two in an **Alien**-style chase through the air ducting. The scene was quite exciting, but let down at the end when the supposedly airtight ducting led to a room via a grating that was anything but airtight!

The one very odd thing in this story is the Doctor's inexplicable urge to jump into a bottomless pit. This is on par with Sylvester McCoy's infamous scene from **Dragonfire** where the seventh Doctor climbs over a railing and hangs from his umbrella over a cliff. In **The Satan Pit**, the Doctor decides to uncouple his protective gear and fall, hoping that the bottom isn't all that far away. This is of course a really stupid thing to do, made all the stupider when one realizes that the rope from which he is hanging is attached to a winch that is thirty feet away from the edge of the hole. If they'd just pushed the winch to the **EDGE** of the hole, he'd probably have been able to make it all the way to the bottom without having to jump! And the fact that this whole incident occurs **AFTER** the cliffhanger, doesn't even give the writer a good excuse for including it!

Overall, I would say this story is an average Doctor Who story, but with an amazing monster that hopefully will return again to battle the Doctor. **7/10**

*Reviewed by Misha Lauenstein*



# LOVE & MONSTERS

## EPISODE TEN

It's the moment we've all been waiting for.

The fans are lined up along the trenches.

Judgement Day is upon us.

It's the Monday after the airing of 'Love and Monsters', whilst the newspapers and public have enjoyed the episode, fandom has reached the equivalent of WW2. Anyone brave enough to venture onto the Outpost Gallifrey forum will require a full army outfit and an extra anorak to get their opinions heard.

I'm sure this saying will become a cliché in the future of the Who world, but the fans will either 'love it or hate it'. Will this review praise it as RTD's finest episode, or rip it to shreds and demand that Mr. Davies be fired immediately?

Well, shock horror, \*cue the Eastenders theme music\*, it was...OK.

Let's get down to business first. This is NOT a Hinchcliffe gothic horror story, so it'd be ridiculous to look at it like that. Love and Monsters is a comedy episode that is meant to break the format and provide the production team with an easy ride whilst filming other episodes. The Doctor and Rose are off travelling in the far side of the production universe. So now that we've got the basics of what this episode actually is, does it work?

So it's about a group of fans obsessed with the Doctor, and what a brilliant premise! L.I.N.D.A is a fantastic piece of writing; you instantly fall in love with each and every group member. They're not a bunch of nerdy clichéd geeks, they're what the majority of Doctor Who fans are: normal people with a shared interest in something. Accompanied with ELO's 'Mr. Blue Sky', the episode seems to be going great.

The 'clip show' format of the episode works nicely, it allows for fun inserts; and cuts to the chase perfectly without having to go through tedious padding scenes to fill the time.

But with the Doc and Rose gone, we're left with a new guest actor: Marc Warren, and what a performance he gives. His character is likable, funny and always has an innocent charm about him, it's as though we know everything about him by the

end of those 45 minutes.

Whilst his romance with Ursula Blake is perfectly set up, the highlight of the episode has to be the revelation about the character's mother. The home movie clips of him as a child along with his Mother as she slowly fades away, accompanied by the perfect music, makes it one of the best scenes in the series. It goes to show that underneath the aliens and jokes and farcical nonsense, there is a solid emotional content at its core. Something similar to Cassandra's final scene in the nightclub during 'New Earth'

Camille Coduri's return as Jackie proves to be one of her best performances to date, although she hasn't appeared often, there is a notable improvement in her during series 2, ever since the Christmas special. Her comic timing and saucy approach suits the episode perfectly and it's great to have an insight to her life without the Doctor and Rose. It can only make you eager to see what will become of her in the series finale.

So far I'm being quite positive about the episode, although I've been positive about most of the new series. But nothing is perfect, and Love and Monsters is no Oscar winner.

I'm sure everyone was a little suspicious of Peter Kay and his acting abilities, but the revelation is that when playing Victor Kennedy, he's actually rather good! His entrance is brilliant and he gives a funny yet mysterious performance. "Cold and powerful" is the character's description, and he does it perfectly.

But then we get to the Abzorballoff.

It was almost like walking a tight rope. Sure he's funny, come on, his constant tongue waving and Bolton accent is hilarious. But when you've got a big rubber suit with that ridiculous back hair, standing in broad daylight (poor direction there), it can only look cheap, and I had to ask myself whether I was laughing WITH the episode or laughing AT it. It's the same with the pavement tile ending, but after a second viewing, I just accepted it as a piece of ridiculous fun, something that could only happen in Doctor Who.

As for the comedy? Well I'm always up for a laugh in Doctor Who; it's what defines the show when

compared to some of these god awful drab American sci-fi shows that you get on the sci-fi channel. Well, the episode pulls it off rather well. The Scooby Doo chase at the beginning is completely harmless and is bound to raise a smile or two. RTD has always been good at little one-liners and other gags, and 'Love and Monsters' is no exception. We get classic lines such as the "eczeema" gag and Ursula's "What a chest" comment, and who couldn't help but exploding with laughter at the reveal of the Abzorballoff's home planet?

It's got laughs, it's got emotion, and it's got great characters and a good premise. It's not

perfect, the latter half is a bit rough but in the end, it's good as a bit of diversity and a one off experiment and it leaves you ready to carry on with the show back to normal.

But as I mentioned at the start, Doctor Who fans will have had a different reaction, and I'm sure some of you may disagree with me, but Love and Monsters isn't just a comedy farce. L.I.N.D.A isn't just a group of loveable people; it shows what fandom COULD be. It's about how an interest in Doctor Who can be fun, harmless and a way to meet new people and have a laugh. But then there's Victor Kennedy, someone who taints fandom and takes all the fun out

of it, a person who is only intent on stripping down and analysing every segment.

So remember this, Love and Monsters isn't out to offend you, it's an experiment to provide fun, laughter, and 40 minutes or so without the Doctor. If you don't enjoy it, you've got next weeks episode to enjoy as things returns to normal, but don't take the fun out of something that many others enjoy, don't become a Victor Kennedy. 7/10

Reviewed by Jack Rees



# FEAR HER

## EPISODE ELEVEN

Fear Her was the last story to be made for the second series of *Doctor Who*, and seems to have been one of the last written, when Stephen Fry's planned script fell through. It seems churlish to define a story purely by this though, and that's probably what a million other reviews will do. But reviews get written by fans, and fans know too much about what goes behind the scenes, so sod all that: like 99% of the audience, I only care about what ends up on screen.

It is not usually a good sign when the best thing of your episode materialises in the opening scenes, but, like the TARDIS, it does here. The sequence of the Doctor trying to park the TARDIS in a narrow space and getting it the wrong way round is an instant favourite, and sets the episode off on a great note.

There is a certain sense throughout that the author is one who is not completely familiar with the current trends of the new *Doctor Who* series. Usually, this might be considered a bonus, allowing us to be given an idiosyncratic story, freed from the week-in week-out constraints that every other story works under. When working 'outside the box', there is the opportunity to do something outstandingly different and brand new. This might be a complete failure, like *The Celestial Toymaker* was in the past; on the other hand, you might end up with Part One of *The Mind Robber*. What lets Fear Her down is that the author's clear ability to have a different take on the programme does not push far enough, and what we are left with is tantalisingly close to something

amazingly innovative, but ultimately *too* close to what we've seen already. Someone asked on a web-forum if the episode would have been better had it been set in the misty Victoriana London of countless fictions rather than the dull old everyday street-life of near-contemporary London, and the only answer is that: yes, it would. This is one case when style does make a difference, and could have added to a magnificent idea. Pushing a story forward six years does not make it futuristic or different enough from all of the other contemporary London episodes this season, including the one immediately before and the two immediately after.

Reviewing a story based on the episodes surrounding it might seem a bit disingenuous, but it isn't at all. This is how the audience would have received them on first showing, and it makes sense – particularly in a series like *Doctor Who* – to make the most of your central premise of new times and places. Whether a result of scripts falling through or unavoidable deadlines, the use of these four episodes in a row seems nothing more than bad planning.

It has been suggested in the past that *Doctor Who* is at its best when it is contained, with a small community facing death and terror on a personal scale. Epic wasn't always the way to go for the programme. If this is true then the urban London street setting is the new series equivalent of the little country village menaced by Zygons. As if to confirm this, the story is practically a retread of *The Idiot's Lantern*, an adventure just three stories ago: Doctor and

Rose investigating people disappearing from a street in London, abducted by an alien power, and a climax at a big London monument.

It would be impossible for me to get through this review without mentioning *Penny Crayon*. The Su Pollard-voiced cartoon of the late 80s seems to have been the central inspiration for this story. As we all know, Penny Crayon's drawings are not like any other: they walk and talk and come to life, creating lots of bother. The series, about a young girl with magic crayons which would make anything she drew move and menace her and her friend Dennis, is fairly accurately recreated here – and in style as much as substance. The familiar London streets and moving drawings are present in both, as is the two heroes in peril motif. Watching the episode, we certainly seem to be in similar territory, and it feels at times as if you are watching a moving comic strip rather than *Doctor Who* – Fear Her could be straight out of the pages of *Whizzer and Chips*.

On first viewing, I had almost been under the impression that this story was written by Russell T Davies and the preceding *Love and Monsters* by Matthew Graham; *Love and Monsters* featuring, as it did, a bloke remembering strange events that happened to his mother when he was young. That it was Fear Her that came from the pen of the same man who wrote the fascinating *Life on Mars* is quite surprising though, with only Rose's attack by the Scribble being particularly inventive in the finished piece. The Scribble is a great concept, and is brilliantly realised by the graphics chaps: nota-

bly the bit where Doctor Who rubs a bit of it out with a pencil. What a fab idea!

The cast are very good here, from regulars to guests. By the last story he has so far filmed, David Tennant appears to have settled in the role somewhat, giving one of his better performances. I'm not one of these whinging people complaining about him giving the same whimsical style of performance that all of his predecessors had but everyone forgets because he's not playing the preconceived idea of the Doctor that's in their heads, and I think he's been wonderful this season.

Of all the regulars, Billie Piper is the one that had been getting a little tired of late, and neither the character nor the actress seem to have been given anything new for some time. This trend continues here. One week before the start of the big finale where she leaves (sorry to spoil it for you), it is probably unlikely that any major new character arcs will be created for her, but that doesn't mean a character needs to be under- or even worse, mis-used. Off-hand, I can't recall a single thing that she does in this episode, beyond get a bit weepy when she thinks Doctor Who is dead, and parade her

erect nipples.

The guest is pretty good too. The excellent Nina Sosanya makes what is a generic 'mother fearful for her daughter' character into a genuine person. I've never seen her give a bad performance yet; I'm sure you haven't either. The actress playing her daughter has come in for some flak, but she actually acquits herself well: the sequence of her possessed on the bed being a particular highlight.

Whilst *Doctor Who's* message has always been one of love and inclusivity, stating it so blindly as "Feel the Love!" seems to actively devalue it. And then there's the Olympic torch bit. Throughout this series, *Doctor Who* has been rightly praised for hitting the nail on the head when it comes to the emotional level of the programme; giving it a heart and a soul beyond mere adventure. Fear Her marks the first case where they get it horribly wrong. In isolation, the various elements might just have worked – one can almost imagine Tom Baker standing atop the Olympic podium with a big grin on his face, had the budget been there to do it. However, the cumulative effect of "the Doctor's still alive!", "the Doctor has lit the Olympic flame!",

"the young girl is alright!" and "Feel the LOVE!" is sickening, and so misjudged as to be laughable. It's very much an episode of pieces too. What exactly do the sequences at the Olympics have to do with the rest of the episode? No idea.

Overall, the whole thing just ends up feeling a little flat, and incredibly derivative. Mix up *Penny Crayon*, *The Idiot's Lantern* and *The Exorcist* in a big bucket full of Olympics, and this is what you get. Not that nicking from things is inherently bad - it's what *Doctor Who* has always done best! – but here nothing seems to have pulled itself together again, into one.

Great title though. 5/10

Reviewed by Andrew Orton

Artwork for *The Idiot's Lantern*, *Impossible Planet* / *The Satan Pit* by Nick Giles  
 Artwork for *Love & Monsters* by Alex Lydiate  
 Artwork for *Fear Her*, *Army of Ghosts* / *Doomsday* by Andy Hackett

*Army of Ghosts* / *Doomsday* review on page 30

# I AM A DALEK

To encourage young or infrequent readers to pick up a book, the British government has launched World Book Day, and part of that initiative is to have leading publishers, booksellers and writers bring short, fast-paced books to the public. With *Doctor Who* being one of the top shows in Great Britain, it's only natural that the Doctor and Rose should be one of the entries in the "Quick Reads" series – and that the book should feature the show's most popular enemy.

*I Am A Dalek* opens with the tenth Doctor and Rose hoping to land on the moon and tramp around like the Apollo astronauts, complete with space-suits and flags. But the TARDIS is pulled off-course (again) to an English coastal village where an archaeologist has uncovered something most unexpected – a dead Dalek. Meanwhile, an average young woman late for work is hit by a car and killed – only to heal before Rose's eyes and wake up with a head full of alien thoughts about conquest and destruction.

As you can see, the plot of *I Am A Dalek* isn't exactly a new revelation in *Doctor Who* storytelling. It shares many of the themes and ideas of Series 1's *Dalek* episode, right down to the signal that draws the Doctor into the mystery and the Dalek's connection to a human to ensure its revival. Looking further back to the original series, you'll notice similarities to *The Daemons* and dozens of other evils accidentally discovered by well-meaning scientists. Even the book's climax relies on the old talk-to-the-possessed-person-until-she-remembers-she's-really-good-inside routine.

But as an introduction to original *Doctor Who* fiction (which is what this is meant to be), *I Am A Dalek* is

worthy enough. Its foundation is an idea that harkens back to *Evil of the Daleks*: an attempt many millennia ago to imprint the Dalek factor on humans, which has only limited effect on human evolution but proves successful at least for this Dalek. Also, there's plenty of Dalek mayhem to please old and new fans, starting with the mutant's gradual re-formation and ending with a wave of exterminations in the village's main shopping district. (In between is an attack on a train that you wish could have been rendered on television, just for the spectacle of it.) And in keeping with the

new series' restoration of Dalek superiority, once this pepperpot is at full strength, it's an evil genius that's as dangerous as the Angel of Death.

**"The characters of the Doctor and Rose are done well, capturing the Doctor's sensitive soul and manic bravado..."**

The characters of the Doctor and Rose are done well, capturing the Doctor's sensitive soul and manic bravado, Rose's compassion and hard-won know-how, and their quick-wit chemistry together. It makes you wish Roberts could have written for both of the characters in a TV adventure (Rose was missing in "Attack of the Graske," and his "TARDISode" duties don't count) – but it gives hope that his Series 3 episode will be a winner. (In the spirit of Russell T. Davies, Roberts even includes a gay joke in *I Am A Dalek* – subtle, but still there.)

Kudos to Roberts for giving the two main guest characters some depth, too – that could have been the first to suffer in the book's shorter length. Kate, who shares the psychic bond with the Dalek, is a 28-year-old woman forced to live with her parents again because of bad credit and even worse decisions. But most tragic is Frank Openshaw, who is in charge of the dig where the Dalek is found. The book's touching coda

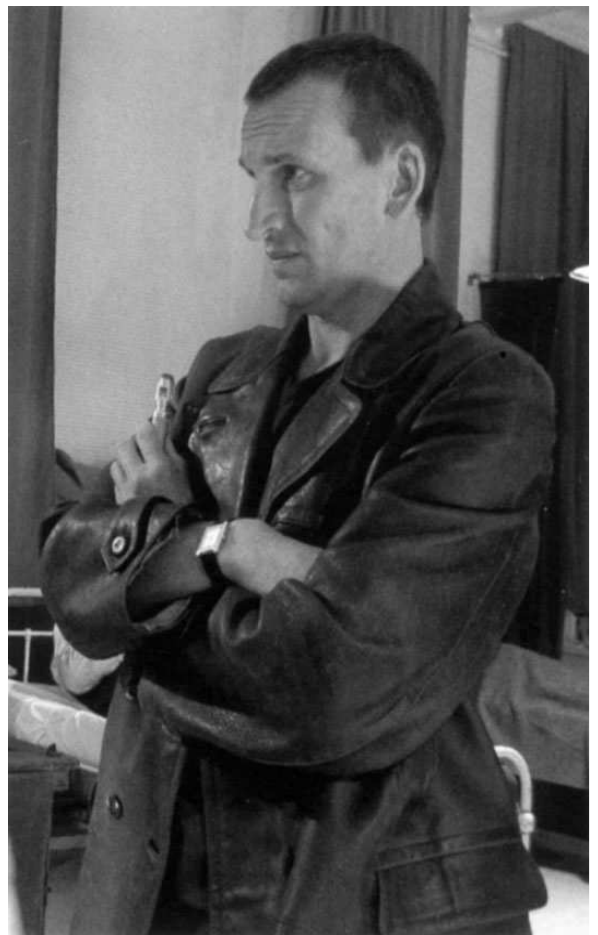


has the Doctor fiddling with Openshaw's past to give him a few more years with his future wife. While it doesn't negate the fate that awaits him (or does it?), the kindness shows the Doctor's real love for us "little people" who are going about our lives as best we can. 8/10.

Reviewed by Chris Kocher

# SO YOU DON'T THINK NEW WHO IS REAL WHO?

## Chris Kocher responds to Ggreg Perry's issue 8 article



After a long 16-year hiatus (not counting the 1996 Paul McGann movie), *Doctor Who* is back on our television screens and more popular than ever – not just as a bit of U.K. cultural nostalgia, but a full-fledged phenomenon.

But still, some fans are unhappy.

I can't imagine that Ggreg Perry is alone in the dissenting viewpoints he expressed in issue 8's "*Is the New 'Who' Real 'Who'?*" However, speaking as someone who isn't always great with change (just ask my wife!), I do hope that most "old-school fans" (of which I am one) are a little more open-minded about how the new series is shaking out.

Let's examine the points one by one, and I'll try not to forget any.

**1. Ggreg says: "I know the show thrives on change ... but there were certain constants that always remained which now have been monkeyed with and have changed the show into something that no longer resembles *Doctor Who*."**

If you look at 1963's first episode, "An Unearthly Child," and the last episode of 1989's "Survival," the only constant things are a character called "the Doctor," a traveling companion, a spaceship called the TARDIS that's disguised as a blue British police box, and a 23-minute episode format. Otherwise, in 26 years, *everything else* had changed. Actors, producers and writers came and went; we learned that the Doctor was a Time Lord who could regenerate into different bodies; philosophies of storytelling altered every year or two (historicals, monster stories, Earth-based tales, Gothic-style horror, comedy, etc.), and so on. Heck, it even switched from black-and-white to color!

Frankly, I'm surprised how this *Doctor Who* revival

keeps so many elements of the original series, when it could just have easily been a "reboot" of the whole concept or something that ignores 26 years of mythology. We start with the ninth Doctor, picking up from McGann. The TARDIS still looks like a police box, even though in the new millennium that doesn't make a lot of sense to today's kids. The Doctor is still a wanderer, a scientist, an alien eccentric – not some kind of gun-toting Rambo who solves problems with his fists. And there is still a feeling of limitless possibilities

*"...still, some fans are  
unhappy..."*

with the storytelling (although I admit that's hewed in a bit in Series 1 as the Doctor sticks close to Earth).

If you want to see how badly things could have gone, read *The Nth Doctor* by Jean-Marc Lofficier. It chronicles the various concepts considered for the long-fabled *Doctor Who* feature film in the early 1990s as well as the 1996 McGann TV movie. What travesties did a series of hired guns come up with? All-new "first" Doctors motivated by romantic entanglements and a search for his father Ulysses, with the Doctor's grandfather Borusa as a disembodied spirit living inside the TARDIS. The Master as leader of the Daleks or head of Earth's infamous "Men in Black." Daleks that look like giant spiders or can take human form (like the T-1000 in *Terminator 2*). Throughout the script outlines, it's like someone took elements of the original series, put them through a shredder, and pasted the bits back

together again so that some parts would be recognizable, but the heart of the concept is lost. If these ideas had made it to the screen, it would not be *Doctor Who*.

Luckily, the new series has no such problems. I'm not going to say Russell T. Davies is right all the time, but it's clear he knows *Doctor Who* history forwards and backwards – and more importantly, he understands where the *magic* of the show comes from.

**2. Ggreg's argument: The 45-minute episode format ruins the pacing that was key to the original series.**

Sure, things move more quickly in a self-contained 45-minute episode – it's the nature of the beast, especially when you're dealing with intense action-adventure ideas every week. More ideas are condensed, or explained quickly, or fixed with the psychic paper and sonic screwdriver. (Remember, this is not *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, where characters could spend 10 minutes of screen time having meetings about what they should do next!)

But on the flip side, the pacing of the original series sometimes could be deadly slow, especially in the middle of a six-parter. Even in a revered classic like "Genesis of the Daleks," Sarah Jane and a fellow Thal prisoner spend a whole episode planning an escape, getting away from the guards, climbing to the top of the Kaled rocket – only to get caught at the top and end up right back where they started plot-wise in the next episode. As they used to say during World War II rationing: Was that trip really necessary?

Ggreg seems to think that the 45-minute format means no one but Rose gets character development. But what's impressed me most about the new series is how even the minor characters have at least one good scene that makes them more than just ciphers: Gwyneth the maid moons over boys in her particular

Victorian way; in the midst of crisis, Harriet Jones is worried about her mother's future; Lynda with a "y" wants to know what *Big Brother* viewers think of her, but quickly realizes there are more important concerns; and that's just off the top of my head from Series 1. Many characters in the original series have not been so lucky.

I'm not trying to say that there aren't problems with the 45-minute format – sometimes there are. (Mind you, when half the season is made up of two-part stories, that's about equal to an old four-episode tale – not to mention the ongoing season-long arcs that keep viewers guessing.) But each method of storytelling has its pluses and minuses.

Here's the bottom line, though: In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there are no half-hour serialized dramas (except for a couple of soap operas and some anime). It's a dead format and would be unusable for the BBC.

**3. Ggreg says:** "The most interesting concept for me has always been the Doctor as an eccentric alien scientist/wanderer, and the love of science aspect to the character. These qualities are entirely missing from the character Christopher Eccleston portrays, who apparently thought grinning like a loon and 'acting eccentric' was how to portray the Doctor."

Doesn't that describe Tom Baker's take on the character in Season 17? Repeat after me: "Would you like a jelly baby?"

Seriously, there is so much more to the ninth Doctor (and David Tennant's tenth Doctor, for that matter) than just grinning and acting eccentric.

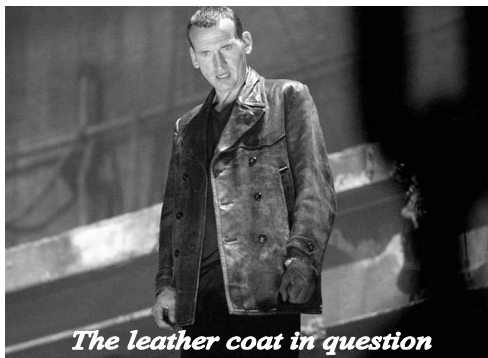
I doubt Tom Baker or even William Hartnell could have pulled off many of Series 1's finest moments. For instance: "This is what I'm going to do: I'm going to rescue her! I'm going to save Rose Tyler from the middle of the Dalek fleet! And then I'm going to save the Earth! And then, just to finish off, I'm going to wipe every last stinking Dalek out of the sky!" Could you hear Tom Baker doing that? Maybe Sylvester McCoy in his "dark Doctor" period, but even then it would have the potential to be horribly cheesy and unconvincing.

That's not to say Baker or Hartnell weren't any good – they were fine for the style of drama presented at the time. But let's not get all misty-eyed about how things used to be, because sometimes it was downright awful – and that includes performances by the actors playing the Doctor.

The reason why such scenes work with Eccleston in the role is that he is a skilled dramatic actor given a compelling backstory (the aftermath of the Time War) and some crackling scripts to work with. Does he get it right all the time? Well, no one does – but for the most part, the Doctor you see onscreen in Series 1 is a worthy continuation of the Doctors we've seen in the past.

**4. Ggreg says:** "The look of the character has been modernized and simplified to such an extent for today's audiences that this is a character I simply don't recognize anymore. Previously, the costume was always specific and unique to that particular Doctor and added something to the character. But dressing the Doctor like a London cabbie/actor-doing-the-talk-show-circuit does not a Doctor's costume (and I use that term VERY loosely here) make."

Arguably, original series producer John Nathan-Turner did a lot of things wrong with *Doctor Who* during its last decade on the air. To me, though, one of the biggest sins was how the Doctor and his companions no longer wore clothes – they had *costumes*, the same week in and week out. Tegan never got the inclination to change out of that flight attendant outfit; Turlough kept the schoolboy suit that he hated; the



*The leather coat in question*



*The Bohemian fourth Doctor*



*The sixth Doctor and Peri*

sixth Doctor kept that awful patchwork mess long after his mind had (allegedly) stabilized. While it might make sense for the Doctor to keep the same clothes day after day (he is an alien, after all), having humans do this made no sense whatsoever.

With that rant out of the way ... I always thought that the ninth Doctor's clothes reflected the Time Lord who chose them. He's a no-nonsense bloke who's nursing deep psychological wounds from a great Time War when he (apparently) had to kill his own people to save the Universe. Until he met Rose, he seems to have been in a deep depression and even lacked the will to live – classic survivor's guilt. Given those parameters, he is not going to be some dandy who cares a lot about his appearance. He's going to go for what's utilitarian and practical, and that's what a leather jacket and black jumper is. To do otherwise would strain credibility in the character.

**Ggreg adds:** "I'm not a costume designer, but how about a longer, floor-length black leather coat?"

Because then people would say it's too much like *The Matrix*, perhaps? And *Doctor Who* is definitely *not The Matrix* – just about the exact opposite.

**5. Ggreg says:** "Eccleston said in interviews that he never liked the character [of the Doctor in the original series] because he was 'too authoritarian.' ... In addition, Eccleston said that he played the role as instructed, as it was written for him. It was only a job to him, nothing more. Every other actor who played the

Doctor has brought something of himself to the part."

Hmm... let's see: northern accent, working-class guy, no-nonsense attitude. That certainly sounds like Christopher Eccleston to me. Now, whether those attributes were based on Eccleston's input into the character or were written for him based on Eccleston's traits is a chicken-or-egg dilemma that ultimately doesn't make much difference to what we see onscreen. (I imagine the true answer lies somewhere in between.)

As for the role being "only a job" (and I'd love to know exactly when Eccleston specifically said this) ... well, that's what acting is. Sure, some actors put more of themselves into a part than others, just like there are gung-ho lawyers and ones who merely do the bare minimum to get the job done, and so on. That said, I never felt Eccleston put any less than 100 percent into the role of the Doctor. Shooting days were long and grueling; he was onscreen for most of the episodes, which means more to learn and do and be responsible for; he was the public face for the launch of a much-anticipated revival of a British TV classic. If he really said it was "just a job," he's either being realistic or has some lingering bad feelings about how the BBC misattributed quotes to him when his departure was announced.

Also, there are plenty of examples of actors wanting to put more of themselves into the role of the Doctor only to have those ideas go unused. Tom Baker wanted his companion to be a talking head of cabbage perched on his shoulder, but that was rightly rejected for being too wacky. Peter Davison wanted his Doctor to have more humorous moments, but John Nathan-Turner wanted to maintain a contrast with Tom Baker. Colin Baker did not like the crazy-quilt costume chosen for him, but he bowed to Nathan-Turner's wishes. Ultimately, while they have some input, actors must make compromises and do what their told if they want to keep their jobs.

**6. Ggreg says:** "Most of the screen time is given over to Rose, who literally is the 'Buffy' for this series. More than simply an equal as intended, she often saves the Doctor and is given center stage (along with her family) far too frequently."

I'm not sure how Rose is "literally" the Buffy for the series. I certainly don't recall her drop-kicking anyone (apart from her gymnastics against the Autons in the first episode) or driving a stake into a vampire's heart.

It should be pointed out that the original series was based on the Doctor having equal footing with Ian and Barbara – the schoolteachers were often the prime movers of plots (like "The Aztecs" and "The Reign of Terror") and were capable of devising solutions to the problems at hand. The arrangement allowed for more mature and nuanced storytelling than having the "What is it, Doctor!?" companions of later seasons.

Russell T. Davies did the right thing by making Rose the viewpoint character for much of Series 1 – as with Ian and Barbara, it allows the audience to learn things about the Doctor and his world as Rose learns them. (The McGann movie would have been better had they taken this approach – along with a lot of other changes, of course.)

In Series 1, Rose does save the Doctor a few times, but not nearly as much as he saves her. (I could do a tally, but I won't for space reasons.) Remember also that this Doctor is damaged goods (no pun intended) when he meets Rose. After destroying Gallifrey, it's like he has a secret death wish – only Rose's presence shakes him from his dark ennui. In the meanwhile, Rose sometimes needs to take the initiative so a solution can be found.

What does this have to do with *Buffy the Vampire*

*Slayer*? The only similarities I see between Rose and Buffy are that they're both blonde, and they're both strong, competent female characters. Fact is, the old Jo Grant type companion would not fly today. Or, as my wife says, "There's no way you could have a screaming girl who trips and falls and looks longingly over her shoulder for the Doctor to rescue her like some kind of useless ninny, saying 'Please help me, Doctor!'" And she would know – she's seen all seven seasons of *Buffy*. (I've never watched *Buffy* and prefer *Firefly* – but that's another article altogether!)

As for the inclusion of Rose's boyfriend Mickey and her mother Jackie, it makes more sense to have family and friends that companions have left behind than to assume that *no one* notices when people literally vanish off the face of the Earth. When Ian and Barbara return after two years gone, weren't there questions? Didn't Ben Jackson worry he'd get court-martialed by the British Navy? (He had no idea he'd happen to return to England the same day he left with the Doctor.) Didn't Melanie Bush's colleagues in Pease Potage wonder why she stopped showing up for work?

Fans have certainly pondered those kinds of questions for years (witness this theme in so much fan fiction), and average viewers of *Doctor Who* in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are also savvy enough to wonder about those Rose left behind if Jackie and Mickey were not part of the series. Having them reappear in several episodes adds to the sense that these are real people with real feelings and real problems, and it also allows for interesting drama. When Rose vanishes, everyone assumes Mickey has killed her; Jackie worries that her daughter won't be safe with the Doctor; Rose wants to see the dad she never knew; and so on. As Series 1 and 2 progress, we see Jackie and Mickey grow along with Rose, and they not only come to accept the life that Rose has chosen but also start to help the cause in their own way. Mickey is inspired to join the TARDIS crew and to become a freedom fighter against the Cybermen, while Jackie keeps up the home front.

Are Jackie and Mickey used too much in the new series? That's obviously a matter of personal taste. At first, I admit I found them to be a little annoying – but at the end of Series 1 and into Series 2, I really grew fond of them because it's obvious they care so much about the Doctor and Rose.

**7. Ggreg says:** "RTD seems to think audiences won't relate to alien worlds or civilizations ... they need to have a connection with Earth in every episode. Huh?! How did the show manage to be successful doing just that almost every week for twenty-six years?"

What about the first couple of years of the Jon Pertwee era? Not only was the Doctor stuck on Earth, he was restricted to modern-day Britain. I bet there were fans then who said, "This isn't real *Doctor Who*! Why doesn't he go to alien worlds anymore?"

The decision to stick more closely to Earth in the new series is based on the same factor as in 1970: production costs. Pertwee-era producer Barry Letts could not in his wildest dreams have hoped for the funding *Doctor Who* now gets, but that budget is not infinite. Davies says as much in a recent BBC News interview: "People will say, 'Why doesn't he visit alien planets more often?' ... But that's because they are expensive. They're hugely expensive." He also points to the lower viewing figures when the TARDIS lands somewhere that doesn't have a tie to Earth.

Also, the original series wasn't always "successful" creating alien landscapes – the cliché of rock quarries and forests isn't inaccurate. Again, quoting from Davies in the same article: "The mockery we would get walking into a forest and saying that we're on the planet Zagfon! If you think we had one or two bad reviews in the second series, they would become like a



*Is Rose really the Buffy of Doctor Who?*



*Is RTD easily influenced?*

machine gun the moment we started doing that." And you know what? He's right on the money. (This time, pun intended).

**8. Ggreg says:** "The main point I find that proves just how disconnected this new series is from the original *Doctor Who* is how I keep hearing over and over from non-*Who* and non-science fiction fans how much better the new series is from the old."

It "proves" nothing of the sort. Frankly, the better special effects in the new series probably are the biggest reason for average viewers saying the new series is better. Whether we admit it or not, some people are able to look past the production values of a story and see the underlying magic of the story being told, and some people are not.

(I always say, though, that the original series did the very best it could with the money it was provided – it's no coincidence that people on the *Doctor Who* effects team later had a hand in *Star Wars*. And anyway, the effects on original series were never as bad as some detractors make it out to be.)

Apart from the effects, the more modern sense of storytelling should not to be discounted. Stories don't feel like they're contained within the four walls of the studio, but rely on tons of location shooting to add that sense of realism. Also, the characters are people you could meet on the street – they have families and neuroses and feelings and motivations and dreams. They're more than chess pieces that are moved around as slaves of the plot, which is sometimes how storytelling was done on the original series. (I know that's hard to hear, but it's true.)

Again, the new series is not always perfect, but it's the

kind of storytelling that necessary for a modern audience.

**9. Ggreg says:** "People I know personally who do like the new series haven't been turned into devoted fans like the original series did to so many of us. They like it, but don't find it anything special."

I'm don't know Ggreg's friends, so I can't speak for them. But I do know plenty of other people online who have become fanatical for *Doctor Who* based solely on the new series.

Also, you have to remember that, strictly speaking, the new series is not aimed at us – it's supposed to be for kids 9 to 15 years old or so. Like it or not, this was true for the original series, too. Just because "big kids" like me (and presumably Ggreg) also can enjoy it is just an added bonus.

As in the original series, Davies tries to make a show that works on multiple levels – one that the kids can love, and one that adults can appreciate. Writing it like that – so children are not lost and adults are not bored or turned off – is not easy to do. Sometimes the new series goes a little too far one way or the other, but with the swift pace of the show, the pendulum usually swings back to the center quickly.

**10. Ggreg says:** "The original succeeded on its own terms, doing its own thing, even with the aspects borrowed from other series. In the past, it 'Who-ified' these aspects, if you will. Russell T. Davies lets outside influences shape *Doctor Who*, instead of *Doctor Who* shaping those influences to its own ends."

Again, let's look at the Pertwee years: Someone could have said, "Hey, how come the new stories are just retreads of the *Quatermass* movies? Boy, I wish they'd come up with something more original!" Were the *Doctor Who* writers and producers being shaped by outside ideas, or were they adapting something for their own devices? Like many things, that's a matter of perspective.

Let's face it – *Doctor Who* writers always have been magpies, taking a little here and a little there, and oftentimes more than a little. Even the original series' premise borrows liberally from H.G. Wells' *Time Machine* and Pohl Anderson's "Time Patrol" stories (which nearly were adapted in place of *Doctor Who*). From there, it embraced B-grade monster movies ("The Daleks"), Shakespearean-style tragedy ("The Aztecs"), races against time ("The Keys of Marinus," "The Chase"), and so on.

As time went on, the format essentially became open-ended and allowed for outright fantasy ("The Celestial Toymaker," "The Mind Robber"), ecological morality play ("The Green Death"), the Frankenstein legend ("The Brain of Morbius"), social satire ("The Sunmakers," "The Happiness Patrol") Edwardian mystery novels ("Black Orchid"), and many others.

Does the new series do this any differently than in the past, to the extent that "it's more like a character called the Doctor was guest-starring in another series," as Ggreg contends? I wonder if fans of the show from "An Unearthly Child" thought the same when they saw, say, "The Deadly Assassin." So much had changed – probably too much for some people, and they simply stopped watching.

**11. Ggreg cites "The Unquiet Dead" and "Dalek" as two episodes that keep the *Doctor Who* spirit.**

"Dalek" is an interesting choice here – the Doctor is very frightened at the sight of the Dalek, then is very angry in a way we never saw in the original series but is entirely consistent with the character that's been established in Series 1 to that point. And by the end,

Rose and the audience question the Doctor's motives and have *sympathy* for the Dalek. Now if that's not a radical departure from the original series, nothing is.

**12. Ggreg says:** "Doctor Who has become another brand name to be franchised per American TV sci-fi standards. It looks and feels exactly like any modern American SF series these days."

Funny, I would say that with the new series, *Doctor Who* is arguably more British than ever. Take the accents of Rose and the Doctor – one is from northern England ("Lots of planets have a North!"), the other is working-class Londoner. This is a departure from the generalized British accents featured on the original series, especially in the leading roles. (Sure, Sylvester McCoy is Scottish, but he toned it down; Ben Jackson was Cockney, but that was long before the show played in America.)

Also, the pop-culture references are very British: *Heat* magazine, Ian Dury and the Blockheads, Cliff Richard, *Shiver and Shake*, *Eastenders* and others that went over my head. I'm an Anglophile and I had to look up some of these – but to average Britons, these are cultural nods that average Americans just wouldn't get.

Earlier, Ggreg complains about "pop culture-centered self-referential dialogue." Think about it, though – when you're out hanging with your mates, these are the kinds of discussions you have, whether you're dishing about the latest celebrity gossip or talking about the latest music or TV. To exclude these kinds of references in modern drama would seem artificial, outside of what Rose would do as a real 19-year-old shop-girl. The fact that the Doctor also gets these references speaks to the wealth of knowledge that he seems to have in his new series incarnations.

Do you really think a U.S. network would make a show like *Doctor Who*? An open-ended concept that has few standing sets and an alien for a main character would scare the heck out of most network executives, and did when producer Phil Segal marketed the McGann movie around Hollywood. But British TV has always been more willing to take risks and hope the audience follows if it's well-written and imaginative.

I'd also point out that if the new series was tailored to American sci-fi standards, they didn't do a very good job of it – it took 12 months before Series 1 showed on American TV screens. Among the scuttlebutt about why it took so long? The show was "too British."

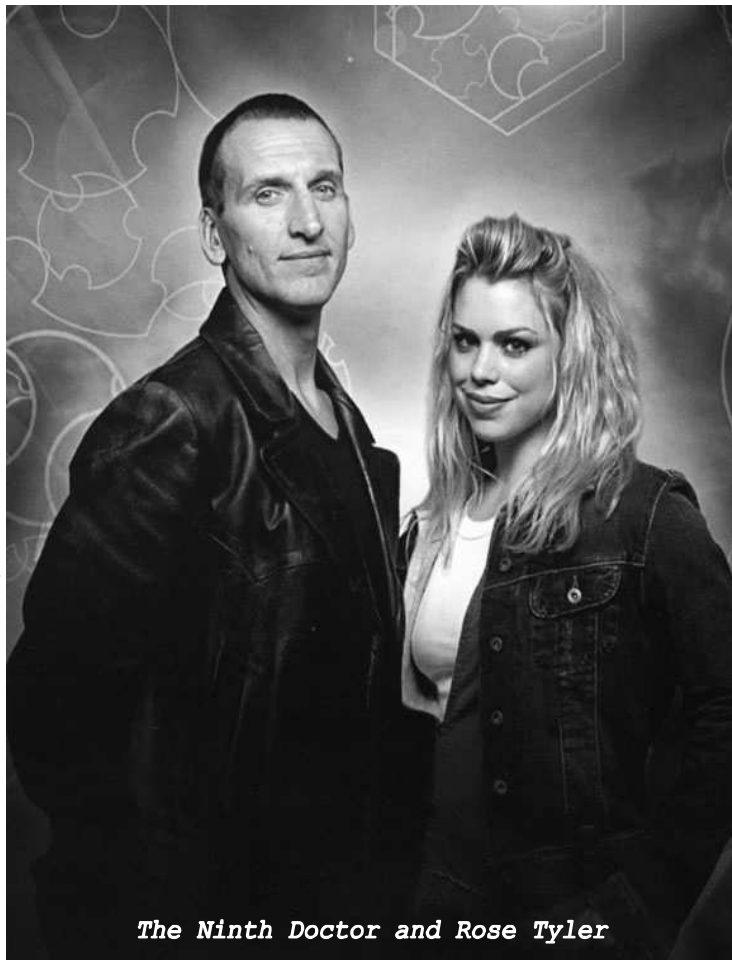
**13. Ggreg says:** "I'd even venture that this new *Who* would probably not succeed on its own merit and create a legend it did originally if it was a totally new series, like the first *Doctor Who* ever."

Well, that "legend" was nearly cut short in 1966, when it was obvious William Hartnell would not be able to continue in the role of the Doctor, and again in 1969 when Patrick Troughton left and it looked like *Doctor Who* was too expensive to continue. It was only by the end of Jon Pertwee's tenure that the series' future seemed secure – and even then, there was the 18-month "hiatus" during the Colin Baker years and the eventual cancellation in 1989.

The new series could not rely on the "success" of the

original series by slavishly copying it, because that would have earned the derision of audiences and led to the show's second cancellation. It had to adapt to the times and to the requirements of 21<sup>st</sup> century drama.

Could the new series have succeeded without the original series behind it? We'll never know that. But the original series – and especially the various spin-off projects between 1989 and 2005 – can be seen as a testing ground for so many ideas, some of them good and some of them not so good. Davies and his writers – all of them Doctor Who fans, not hacks who have no idea what made the show special – are able to pick and choose the good bits, add their own twist on things and produce something that retains the wonder and magic of all worthy *Doctor Who*. That's how production teams



The Ninth Doctor and Rose Tyler

did it for 26 years, and that how it's being done today.

**14. Ggreg says:** "Bottom line: There is no longer anything about this show that feels like a U.K. production. Brit SF used to have a distinctive feel to it, and Doctor Who in particular had a certain indefinable 'magic' that set it apart from the rest."

The look of the new series – the actual production aspect of it – has a lot to do with how television is a global art form now. What used to take years to cross the Atlantic in either direction can now show up on TV in a matter of weeks, or (ahem) on your computer screen in a matter of hours. Of course there'll be some evenness to it – and with science fiction, there *has* to be to make it credible viewing.

As *Who* fans have argued for years when confronted with accusations of poor acting or dodgy sets in the original series, it's the storytelling that really shines – and that fact wouldn't change even if the show was done as Chinese puppet theater.

**15. Ggreg says:** "In substituting Rosie the alien slayer and her family problems for real science fiction storylines, we have lost the sense of wonder and imaginative storytelling of years past."

I don't feel like anything's been "substituted" – if anything, having a good set of secondary characters is reminiscent of the UNIT years because it adds to the tapestry of the series as a "real" world.

No imagination? What about: Seeing the end of the planet Earth five billion years in the future? Encountering nanites that can cure but get human physiology all wrong? Channeling the power of the time vortex? Fighting werewolves alongside Queen Victoria? Visiting a planet hanging on the edge of a black hole? Having a child's drawings affect the real world? All that sounds pretty imaginative to me – and, more importantly, the concepts are all unique to *Doctor Who* among television dramas.

**16. Ggreg's finale:** "Let me end this with perhaps the most damning evidence of all. Michael Grade, the series' No. 1 enemy since Mary Whitehouse, had admitted that even he enjoys the new series. It's finally become respectable even in HIS eyes."

Two things I can say about that. One, the show that Grade put on hiatus in 1985 was hardly one at the apex of its creativity. I like Colin Baker, but the scripts he had to work with were pretty dire. Two, just because Grade finally got his head out of his backside isn't a reason to condemn the new series.

I'm reminded of a guy I know who used to drive for hours to find anime videos – but now that it's more popular and you can find them everywhere, he's unhappy. Why? Because it's no longer the cult little thing that he fell in love with.

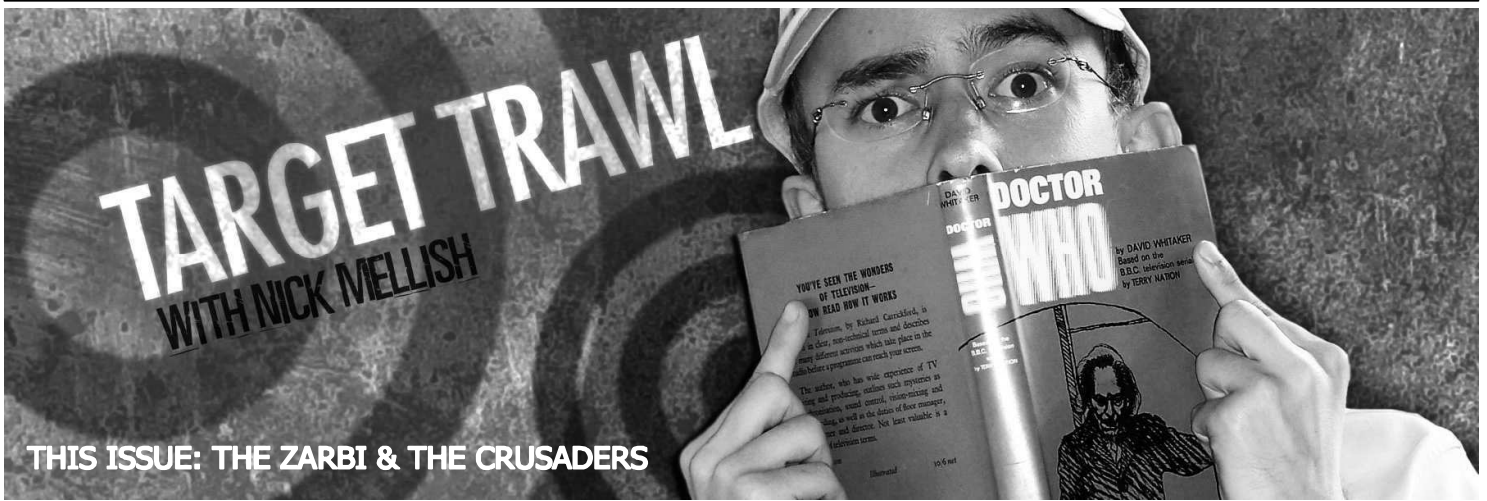
I suspect that Ggreg has similar feelings for the new *Doctor Who* – now that it's popular, it can't *possibly* be as good as it used to be. Me, I'm thrilled that *Doctor Who* has such a huge audience now, because it means that it'll be around for a long time to come. We can debate, discuss and theorize about something new, as opposed to rehashing the same old arguments or rewatching "The Daemons" for the hundredth time.

Here's my bottom line: Because the show essentially leapt from 1989 to 2005 (with the McGann movie in between), the changes are more jarring than if the show had stayed on the air and naturally evolved into what we see now. Make no mistake, though – style-wise and story-wise, the show would have ended up in the same place one way or another. The best part about a revival, though, is that it gets tons more publicity and attention than "just another season" of a show that's still on the air. That attention is what made viewers want to tune in, but it's the compelling stories and imaginative ideas that keep them watching week after week. Oh, to be a kid again and see it all with fresh eyes and open minds ...

The fact is, *Doctor Who* has grown up and entered the new millennium. If you don't like it – if you don't see the same show you loved as a kid – there's a simple solution: Don't watch it. But that's hard to do, because with *Doctor Who* you never know what's right around the corner, and you wouldn't want to miss a thing.

Article by Chris Kocher





THIS ISSUE: THE ZARBI & THE CRUSADERS

**One man. Some books. He reads, and then writes. Monosyllables.**

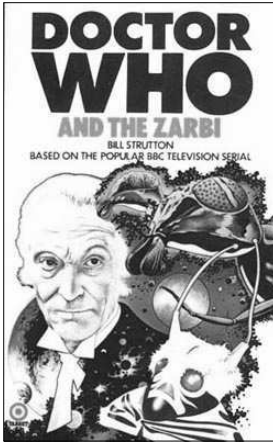
And so my quest to read every TARGET novelisation, in publication order, continued with the final stories in the original TARGET batch, namely *The Zarbi* and *The Crusaders*. Would they prove to be enlightening to the brink of brilliance, or would they be as dull, tedious and overblown as this introduction is proving to be? I whipped out the books, causing an accidental minor landslide of clothing as I did so, and, covered in socks, I began to read.

**Doctor Who And The Zarbi**

**By Bill Strutton**

**Based on The Web Planet by Bill Strutton**

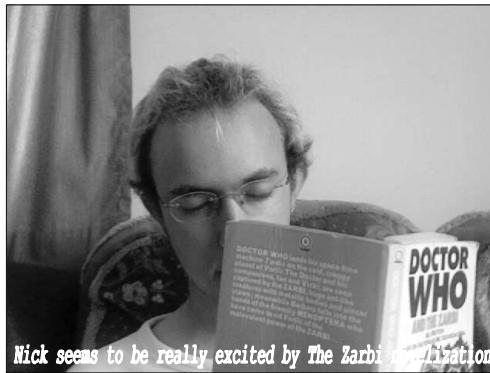
Did you know that, rather unsurprisingly, the word 'Zarbi' does not appear in Microsoft Word's dictionary? It's true: I just had to add it to my dictionary. Did you know that *Zarbi*, *Isoptera*, *Vortis* and *Larvae* all have two syllables? Well, you do now. Errr... did you know that 'Bill Strutton' is in no way an anagram of 'Verity Lambert'?



Ahem.

Why, you are probably asking, is this Nick person bombarding us with useless 'facts'? Well, it's because each and every one of the above nuggets of information is far more interesting than *Doctor Who And The Zarbi*.

Now, this is the sort of statement that ends up with the person making it getting injured, and not without reason; the first three TARGET novelisations are seen by fandom as being almost untouchable criticism-wise. They paved the way forward for many enjoyable adaptations over the years, showing how stories on screen could be expanded upon, contradicted



Nick seems to be really excited by *The Zarbi* novelisation

and developed without losing any of their charm or character. It is therefore painful for me to criticise *The Zarbi*, or at the very least it will result in pain when hordes of angry fans charge towards me, cutting my knuckles with pins dipped in lemon juice as die-hard Strutton fans chirrup in the background. However, if I am going to be honest (and there is little point in me not being if this article is to have any worth at all) then I shall have to criticise away and risk death-by-fan. I will restrain myself though, and not make an awful "Zarbi? More like Zzzzzzzzarbi!" joke. That would just be silly.

For years, I defended *The Web Planet*, claiming it to be a prime example of a good story let down by on-screen realisation; I now realise that I am wrong. I think that, quite simply, I dislike the actual story being told: I find it dull, tedious, overlong, and lacking in imagination. To pull off the last of these is rather special—this is after all the story involving no human characters at all bar the regular TARDIS crew. It has ant-like creatures, a web-like enemy, butterfly-like goodies, and all manner of weird and wonderful supporting aliens, and yet not one of them grabs the imagination. They simply seem like exaggerations of the familiar; whilst a degree of identification is not unwelcome in any story, it becomes a problem when it starts to rob the viewer of any potential thrill. Indeed, coming straight after *An Exciting Adventure With The Daleks* makes its shortcomings all the more prominent.

*The Zarbi* is the sort of novelisation that plays it straight, as it were. Most of what you get on

screen, you get in print. Characters act in the same way, the settings remain similar, and the plot rarely differs. That's not to say *The Zarbi* doesn't change things; for example the Animus is not mentioned by name in this novelisation, and the Optera thankfully lose a lot of their more irritating qualities, namely the way they speak: that really is one advantage this novelisation has over its television counterpart— you don't have to hear the Optera's various grunts.

The lack of on-screen restrictions here also mean that the Zarbi themselves can be far more active, and seem to be a greater threat, grabbing people with their pincers and scooting around here, there and everywhere at great speed.

These improvements on the television version of this story though are few and far between, and a lot of this is most definitely down to Bill Strutton's style of writing. For example... he has... an overload... of ellipsis... in the most... unnecessary... of... places. He also writes lines that should be threatening or sinister, but which fall flat on their faces due to other parts of the story; a good example of this is Hrostar telling Barbara that the Doctor may have betrayed the Menoptera since the Zarbi and their master have, quote, "uncanny means of persuasion." I'm not sure what Hrostar is on about here, because as far as I can see it, the most threatening the Animus gets is to bung a bracelet on Vicki or shove a tube over the Doctor's head.

In short, *The Zarbi* is a struggle; getting to the end of it was the most wonderful feeling since it meant I never had to return to Vortis ever again, and, boy, after the dull trek through this novelisation, all I can say is that I'm mighty glad this is the case.

**Doctor Who And The Crusaders**

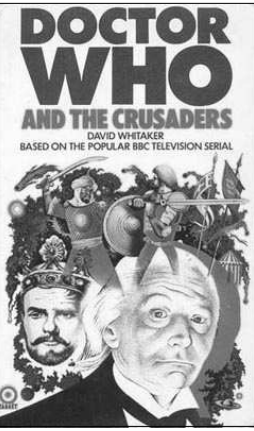
**By David Whitaker**

**Based on The Crusaders by David Whitaker**

The talking stones of Tyron! Martian chess! Lengthy discussions on the nature of altering history!

In one opening prologue, *The Crusaders* man-

aged to entertain and excite me far more than *The Zarbi* ever managed throughout its entirety. One thing is crystal clear, and that is how good a writer David Whitaker is; his prose leaps off the page, as does his dialogue, in a way that begs you to read onwards as quickly as possible. Not once does he let the pace slip in the hundred-and-seventy-odd pages that this novelisation lasts, which is quite an achievement.



with the Doctor and Vicki's story being clearly separated from Ian's and Barbara's. There is also a far greater emphasis on how Richard the Lionheart and Saladin are both very similar rulers; on screen it sometimes feels like a case of 'English good, others nasty', but Whitaker makes it very clear here that this is not the case. Indeed, for the most part, you are most definitely not on Richard's side here; he comes across as petty, selfish, foolish and rude, whilst Saladin is seen to be caring, fair and highly intelligent, at least in comparison. This really does make a refreshing difference from the usual 'goodies and baddies' divide *Doctor Who* so often reverts to.

Despite these strengths, it's not to say that this is the perfect novelisation: it has its flaws. Vicki, for example, is greatly underwritten compared to pretty much every other character, as if David Whitaker didn't have a grasp on her. Indeed, there is a strong sense throughout that Whitaker could quite easily have made do without her and not lost any sleep over it.

Another weakness, though one that is a product of its time, is some of the rather dodgy racial descriptions throughout, which really do make a twenty-first century wince. Now, it's almost unfair to comment on this since it is very much a product of the time in which it was written, but it still shocks nowadays, in much the same way that William Shakespeare's Jewish stereotypes in *The Merchant of Venice* are now the subject of much debate and anguish. Whilst it is never overly disrespectful as such, you cannot help but shake your head at some of the descriptions, but there you go.

Probably the main blunder in *The Crusaders* though does not in fact come from Whitaker's pen; rather it is Henry Fox's illustrations, which are quite frankly bizarre. For example, on page 139 in my copy, you get a picture of someone looking almost completely Ian standing, waiting to strike. This in itself is odd if you are familiar with what William Russell actually looks like, but it becomes even more bizarre when you notice that Ian's shadow bears no real



resemblance to Ian's actual pose itself. For one moment, I thought the Shadow was going to become an incidental character, years before *The Armageddon Factor* had even been suggested, but no, it was not to be; the Shadow Monster will have to wait for a piece of obscure fan fiction one day.

These flaws though are few and far between, and *The Crusaders* is never anything less than interesting and engaging. It's the sort of book you never want to finish, and as soon as you do, you have the uncanny urge to flip back to page one and start all over again.

**THINGS I LEARNT FROM THESE BOOKS**

- \* You can... never use... enough... ellipsis....
- \* Grasping Grasshopper grammar is very difficult if you are the Doctor.
- \* Been brutally tortured? Been painfully dragged across desert on a horse? Never mind; as soon as you get back to your home, you'll kill yourself laughing over your near-death experience.
- \* Sisters can be so unreasonable, and when they are, you simply exclude them from the rest of the story: serves them right.

*Nick returns next issue with more novel insights*

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# genesis of the daleks

You know how it is. You're minding your own business, travelling back to Nerva Beacon by transmat beam and then all of a sudden, you're in a misty quarry with a mysterious Time Lord. Typical. But the mission Tom, should you choose to accept it, is to sort out your greatest foe once and for all. Who could refuse? Well, Who didn't actually...

While fans who saw the whole original series would probably argue that the best Dalek stories may well have been in the Sixties (The Daleks, Dalek Invasion of Earth, Power... and Evil...), it's likely you'll find few fans who would not rate Genesis of the Daleks as the best colour story. It really does have everything going for it, right from the opening atmosphere in the Skaro warzone when the Doctor's given his mission and the trusty Time Ring, meets up with the equally hijacked Harry and Sarah - one of the best pairings for any Doctor - through to separation, interrogation at the hands of the Kaled military and seeing the very first prototype Dalek armed - literally. Then it's imprisonment on two separate sides of the fence, with Sarah striking a blow for freedom with her leading the attempted breakout in the Thal rocket silo while Ronson helps the Doctor and Harry to escape to the Kaled city to warn Councilor Mogran. Eventually meeting up again and being recaptured in the bunker, where our villain of the piece, the crippled Davros - perversely therefore the most physically powerful performance of the whole story thanks to Michael Wisher - gains vital future information from the threatened Doctor that could make the Daleks more powerful than ever, but ultimately hoist on his own petard when his creations use their programming against him and refuse to acknowledge him as their leader. Entombed by the remaining Thal soldiers in the bunker, they live on. 'This is only the beginning'...

Director David Maloney, a veteran of the series, arguably produces his best ever work here, thanks in part to new producer Philip Hinchcliffe's desire to get pace into it and create mood through low shots and lighting. The credit for the atmosphere certainly goes to lighting man Duncan ????? who in all areas provides just that. The script is possibly Terry Nation's finest, with the Naziesque themes giving more of a hook (passed over into costume) and while it may not be the best tale for Dalek dialogue, I'd argue that they are actually well served by being relegated to the role of grunts for much of the time for a change in this story, giving new character Davros the floor to really pull the

audience in with one of the best characterisations on the series ever - the character never again had such magnetic appeal as in his first appearance here. The theoretical exchange between him and the Doctor must rank as one of the best scenes of all time, certainly as far as demonstrating the extent of a character's motivation - after this, would you not trust Davros to implement any plan? I know I would...

With such stalwart guest casting in the form of Michael Wisher, Peter Miles, Guy Siner, James Garbutt, Dennis Chinnery, Ivor Roberts etcetera and excellent performances from them all, plus the regulars' fine form, there is no way that this cannot be high, if not highest, on the Dalek hit list.

*Director David Maloney, a veteran of the series, arguably produces his best ever work here.*

In this two disc release - there could be no justice on a single disc - we have an entertaining commentary provided by Tom Baker, Elisabeth Sladen, Peter Miles (Nyder) and director David Maloney. It's fair to say I think, in all honesty, that the latter three carry it for the most part, with Baker his usual eccentric self who seems to concentrate on who's still alive rather than much of the plot. Certainly Sladen is the very welcome glue in the commentary, with the production subtitles providing many other items of useful information as usual. And of course, the re-mastering quality is as up to standard as usual on both audio and video fronts.

On the second disc we have a wealth of extras. There are continuity announcements and trailers for all the different UK viewings of the story - including the BBC2 Dalek-2 continuity, a wonderful photo gallery that comprehensively covers all aspects from location work through studio rehearsals and recording on all the sets as well as some publicity material, a truncated edition of the children's magazine programme Blue Peter showcasing the models of a then 16-year old who'd won a BBC competition to design a monster (shame there's no caption at the end to say what happened to the talented teenager) and for those viewing on a PC or Mac Adobe Acrobat Reader files of the Radio Times programme listings and the 1976 Annual featuring the Doctor, Harry and Sarah.

The main extras are Genesis of a Classic and The Dalek Tapes. The later, narrated partly as



Davros and partly as himself by Terry Molloy, has many clips and contributions from actors and personnel associated with all the Dalek stories down the years and is as good a potted history of on and off-screen Dalek history as most viewers are liable to want or get, running as it does to an excellent 55 minute value.

Genesis of a Classic concentrates specifically on the story over its 62 minute running time using much the same format although the inclusion of the Teach Yourself Dalek In 6 Easy Lessons with voice man Roy Skelton I found to be unnecessary and irritating; I presume it was included to lighten things up, but I would much prefer this to be a separate extra I could consign to the 'do not re-view' pile, or at least one I could skip with 'next chapter'. A minor gripe though on the face of it as this is another excellent documentary feature, even if some of Baker's contribution is just pure eccentric Tom. Still...

This was always going to be one of the best releases on DVD story-wise; unless you hate Daleks that was a foregone conclusion. With the extras included, you can't go wrong. Go on, complete your mission for the Time Lords - buy it now. 9/10

*Reviewed by Martin Hearn*

THE

OLD

SCHOOL

TOP 10:

THE TROUGHTON YEARS



## THE TROUGHTON ERA FISH PEOPLE NOT INCLUDED

In fandom we love continuity. It keeps us safe at night. It provokes arguments and debate, and bitter splits between friends. One wrong word uttered by the lead star can lead to fandom declaring there is no eighth doctor. And as for UNIT dating: some comments on that have led to wars in small African countries. Continuity is important, I am sure we all agree.

And I am sure you will not be at all upset with me when I announce at the start that I am tearing up my own continuity rules from Part One for one issue only. That being, this top ten will include Patrick Troughton tales which will probably never make it out on DVD due to them being somewhat deleted from the archives. Given Troughton's sad state of non-existence for the large part, this was a sad but necessary step. However, given the circumstances I am sure you will forgive the job I have attempted in the meantime. And as I suggested in part 1 (The Hartnell Years) I strongly recommend the Loose Cannon reconstructions or of course the BBC audio/reconstructions as available. I wanted to put *The Underwater Menace* on the list just so Bob would have to put a picture of fish people in the magazine, but alas that alone will not get a place on the list, even if I do enjoy the tale as a camp classic.

And yes, for those of you who know me, this list will be really blatantly obvious. It's not really my fault though: I'm bias. For those of who you are in the dark, the number one choice will be explained in time. So the top ten...let it commence. And as promised in Part One, this list is a SPOILER FREE ZONE.

### 10 The Seeds of Death OUT NOW!!!

I thought it would make sense to start off with a story which not only exists in its entirety but is also available on DVD now! This was one of the last stories Troughton made as the Doctor, and tells the tale of a dastardly attempt to colonise the planet through the use of a weather station on the moon. This is the better of the two 1960s Ice Warrior stories, and since the Ice Warriors will no doubt return sooner or later in the new series (as one of the big 4 Dr Who monsters!) then it makes sense to familiarise yourself with your foe. Patrick and Frazer are on fine form here, with Troughton getting some genuinely funny moments, and the plotting is adequately enjoyable. And just wait till you see/hear what one solitary Ice Warrior can do.

### 9 The Macra Terror

"There ARE no Macra!" Sorry, had to get that out of my system. Could this be one of the most underrated tales in Dr Who history? Actually it's not even the most underrated from this era as this list will prove later on. Here we have a wonderfully subversive tale full of brainwashing, political agendas, work camps, fundamental joy, and giant killer crabs who thrive on poisonous gas. We land in what appears to be a destination for the hippies of the

future. However, one deranged character who claims to see giant crablike creatures called Macra has the Doctor convinced something is afoot. Why is Ben acting so strangely? Where is the all-seeing Controller? And what are Macra? Look out for the delightful Peter Jeffrey as the world-weary but honest Pilot. Incidentally, this story was written by Ian Stuart Black, who may have had a hand in the creation of *The Prisoner*, and indeed *The Macra Terror* shows similar genre trappings.

## 8 The Abominable Snowmen

Set in a not-so snowy Tibet (in actuality, Wales) the Doctor attempts to give back an old trinket he borrowed from a Monastery. Unfortunately for him, Jamie and Victoria a great evil intelligence has started attacking people with robot Yetis, and so the Monks are naturally a bit suspicious. Can Pad-mashambhava really be alive, three hundred years after the Doctor last met him? What is the secret of the silver spheres, and why do they keep disappearing? And is capturing a Yeti such a great idea? Part Two is to be found on the *Lost in Time DVD* and is worth a look just for the Doctors reaction to Jamie having an idea! As the predecessor to an infinitely scarier sequel, what we have in *The Abominable Snowmen* is atmosphere drenched claustrophobia devoid of incidental music, with pacing and acting so good the time will fly. Recommended viewing/listening.

## 7 The Invasion OUT SOON!

As promised by the BBC. And they are even animating the missing episodes for us. The Cybermen are in this. Not a spoiler, since the BBC plaster our favourite creatures on the front cover, thus wasting the surprise. When that happened for the book, Ian Marter was not happy. I digress. This is the template for *Rise of the Cybermen*, as egotistical International Electromagnetics owner Tobias Vaughan and his mysterious allies (yeah!) are at odds with the Doctor and his new found recurring friend, the Brigadier! What are in those crates? Can the Doctor and Jamie save Zoe for the clutches of the evil Packer? And is it really true – have the Cybermen really won this time around? (Hope springs eternal. Oh sorry, that was the bias creeping in) Anything with Nick Courtenay and Pat Troughton in it is surely worth a look. Watch out for many classic moments (including a scene that starts with the line “this is going to be a long twelve minutes”!) and the hapless Packer, possibly the most ineffectual evil second-in-command in *Dr Who* history.

## 6 The Web of Fear

And here is the infinitely scarier sequel as promised. There are Yeti bears in the London underground. Just going down into one of those tunnels to wait for a usually late train is terrifying enough. Try doing it with killer teddy bears and soldiers on the loose. I'm never getting a late night train again. It's all here: the first ever meeting between the Brigadier (a Colonel at the time) and the Doctor; Yeti's with guns; battles; a high

body count; claustrophobic tunnels; a traitor in the midst; more Yeti's, and pathos in the most unexpected places. This is blockbuster at its finest. And we only have the first episode left! Still thank goodness for reconstructions!

## 5 Power of the Daleks

What was it I was saying about recons again? This is *Troughtons* might debut as the Doctor and its almost completely lost, save for the few clips they have on the *Lost in Time DVD*. Excuse me while I cry into my Jack Daniels. This story made me like Daleks, and that is saying a lot. Never a big fan of them, although they did scare me when I was younger (but not as much as the Cybermen). Here the newly regenerated Doctor and friends land on the planet of Vulcan, where the colony's friendly mad scientist Lesterson has just uncovered a Dalek capsule at the bottom of mercury swamp. He then reactivates one of the Daleks inside, to terrifying results. Can you trust a Dalek, especially one that cries out “I Am Your Ser-VANT!”? Who is controlling the mysterious rebels? And can anyone stop the Daleks, when those who know anything are being locked away or killed? The Daleks at their most evil in the serious. Watch. Enjoy. Re-evaluate.

## 4 Enemy of the World

Here is one of the underrated gems of the Troughton era. Its too James Bond they claim. If James Bond films were like this, they'd be even more popular than they are. The Doctor, Jamie and Victoria land in Australia in the near future and are nearly killed by some bounty hunters. Just rescued in the nick of time, the Doctor learns he is the exact double of a leading statesman, Salamander, whose methods have rid the world of starvation. But is Salamander as white as he claims to his public? Where does Giles Kent fit into the big picture? And, if push comes to shove, can the Doctor act as the assassin to a man he has never met, if it means saving Jamie and Victoria? You're hooked, admit it. This also contains the single greatest plot twist in *Doctor Who* history. A twist so large, you'll rewatch the entire thing again in a new light. And no, I'm not telling you what it is. You have to watch it and have the “bloody hell” moment for yourself. Better that way, I think.

## 3 Tomb of the Cybermen OUT NOW!

I can't get two paragraphs down here without mentioning everyone's favourite Mondosians. For a long time this was the holy grail of fandom, the prodigal story. The one lost for years but returned in whole. And was it a disappointment? No, not at all. This is just brilliant television, with the Hines/Troughton double act in fine form. The Doctor and friends land on the planet Telos to find an archaeological party in disarray at the entrance to the long lost tomb of the cybermen. Since any normal person would run a mile at this point, the Doctor naturally helps to lead them down into the tombs, where they can see the dormant Cybermen. Sleeping Cybermen, it would be a bit scary if they woke up or were thawed out. But

what is the crafty Eric Klieg up to? And isn't the temperature starting to get warmer? An epic *Dr Who* tale commences.

## 2 The War Games

This story has ten parts to it. Since people often ask what justifies this length, I shall hit you with the main facts divulged in this tale: the first naming of the Doctors race; the second meeting of one of the Doctors race; the first appearance of his home planet; the farewell story of our longest serving companion, Jamie McCrimmon; and a wonderfully epic tale to boot. This is ten episodes because it justifies the length. From stepping out into the mud of *World War One*, things soon become clear as the Doctor is court-martialled that this is not France 1914. Especially when the Romans start to turn up. Has the Doctor finally been defeated? Who are the Time Lords? And does the War Chief not have a striking resemblance to The Master? Can of worms, opened. Steps back.

Lets have a drum roll for not only the greatest story of the Patrick Troughton era, and a must see for all *Doctor Who* fans everywhere, but quite possibly (and this is only my opinion) the greatest *Doctor Who* story of all time. That's the bias slipping in again.

## 1 The Moon base OUT NOW!!

It is out, on the *Lost in Time DVD*! *Doctor Who* does not get better than this. Controversial perhaps, but I've met people who would claim the same of *Time* and the *Rani*. Each to his own. The Doctor and friends land on the moon. Soon after, Jamie gets a concussion and is taken to the sickbay of the nearby Moon Weather Control base. From which the weather of a global warming devastated planet is kept in some form of control. Hobson the boss (the ever-wonderful Patrick Barr) is unhappy with the newcomers' arrival on the moon. He is even unhappier with the plague which is striking down members of his threadbare staff. And his attitude gets worse when the ill suddenly start disappearing. The Doctor and friends only have 24 hours to help before Hobson has them chucked off the moon. Is the Doctor a real Doctor? Why do only some people fall prey to the devastating virus and not others? And can the lowly base stand up to siege from a logical and precise army? I saw this story when I was four. It terrified me for months. Eventually I saw it again. To this date, it has yet to be surpassed in my heart as my favourite *Dr Who* story. Every time I see the episodes I catch some new moment that causes a smile. It may not be perfect, but its special, and its reputation is whole undeserved. You may not like it, which is understandable. But, as someone who was for a long time the only public supporter of the tale, I beg you to give it a chance. I'd do the same for your favourite story!

*Article by Michael S Collins*

# SEASON 2 FINALE REVIEWED



# ARMY OF GHOSTS DOOMSDAY EPISODES 12/13

**W** Well, where to begin? When I first agreed to review these two episodes, I knew they'd be forming the season finale but I never knew just how significant they'd turn out to be. Not just the departure of Rose Tyler and an introduction (of sorts) to Torchwood, but also the storyline fans had been waiting almost forty years to happen – Daleks versus Cybermen!

Furthermore this two-parter came in on the back of two of the more controversial entries in the Doctor Who canon, Love And Monsters and Fear Her, both of which had fandom divided as to whether they were successful instances of Doctor Who extending its own boundaries or simply Doctor Who going off the rails.

Army Of Ghosts, however, saw Doctor Who back on much more familiar territory albeit starting with a teaser in which Rose signposts her own death. True, the death of Rose had been foreshadowed earlier in the season so this in itself was not much of a shock, but it was certainly a puzzle – if Rose had died, how come she was alive to tell us about it?

The next puzzle presented was the mysterious ghosts that have appeared all over the world and, more to the point, how they had become so accepted. Jackie Tyler was the key here. Whilst some fans bemoan the whole 'Tyler' baggage that has come with Rose, it has proved to be worth its weight in gold in dramas restricted to 45 minutes as frequently we're able to see what is supposedly happening across the

## SPOILER ALERT

entire world by taking one isolated case in detail and usually its through Jackie. Because we know Jackie already, no time is wasted in establishing who she is, only that her late father has apparently returned from the dead. Of course the Doctor and Rose know that this can't be the case and see right through the ghosts (pun intended). Once again I found the Doctor and Rose immediately jumping to the right (and very obvious) conclusions within minutes of arriving within a situation when everybody else seems oblivious to the sinister goings-on (see also The Long Game, New Earth, The Idiots Lantern and Fear Her). I know we're supposed to see The Doctor and Rose as clever, but making everyone else appear completely thick is not the right way to go about it.

Still, I liked the idea that the ghosts turned out to be Cybermen breaking through pores into our universe. And I also liked the idea that Torchwood see the Doctor as being almost as much of a threat as any other aliens, although I do have to question that such a top-secret all-important defence organisation would have such slack security as to not only let the Doctor poke his nose around but also let Rose and Mickey get into such an important area and also let Cybermen infiltrate it and take over

their staff so easily. Even when the staff scream out loud there's no one to raise the alarm!

It was great to see the Cybermen arriving on our Earth in such huge numbers making their threat seem all that much more greater, as did the swiftness and comparative ease of their conquest of mankind. Images of the Cybermen actually entering people's houses must have had kids scurrying under their beds in panic! Of course they quickly have Torchwood under their control too, and the Doctor at their mercy, but then Russell T Davies falls into his usual trap and has the Doctor ask a few questions of his enemy which are then very courteously responded to. Just how credible is a villain who patiently entertains such questions and happily provides explanations? Can the Doctor not just observe the Cybermen's actions and make deductions? Having his questions neatly answered for the sake of plot exposition is extremely lazy writing!

This time the key explanation is that the mysterious sphere held in Torchwood (a sphere that does not register with anything in our universe and yet rather bizarrely can still be seen with the naked eye) is not of Cyber origin. Which leads in to an almighty cliff-hanger as the Daleks emerge from it! Okay, okay, I wasn't too surprised about that, especially given previous teasers, but it was still a big moment I thought. Just a shame the CGI'd Daleks didn't look quite natural enough.

And so to Doomsday. And the moment we'd all been waiting for, Daleks meet Cybermen. Initially I liked the way this shaped up, with both antagonists demanding that the other identify themselves, which summed up their whole ethos – that each instinctively sees itself as superior and should be obeyed. Unfortunately this quickly degenerated into a rather childish slanging match – since when did Daleks make ironic comments or crack jokes? Why did the Cybermen offer the Daleks an alliance at a stage when they should still have been confident of defeating them?

Unfortunately the Cybermen came across as a bit naff in this episode – they simply don't do very much at all except get blasted by Daleks. We see a family cowering in their own living room as a Cyberman stands over them but what is it doing? Absolutely nothing! There's a whole squad of Cybermen standing in rank outside the Taj Mahal – again, doing absolutely nothing! And even their Cyber-conversion process is flawed as Torchwood's Yvonne Hartman apparently retains her humanity after the process has been performed on her. And just how can a Cyberman cry? Do they have tear ducts all of a sudden?

We see Daleks swarming all over London after the 'genesis ark' turns out to be a dimensionally-transcendental prison holding millions of them – a nice twist I didn't see coming. But again the action scenes seemed a bit hollow. We don't see Daleks or Cybermen being particularly clever or nasty, there's just a lot of shooting, a few explosions and one or two token extras being killed. If these are the most evil, deadliest races in the universe then we should be seeing more moments like the Daleks sucking out the technician's mind. We feel the impact of death more when it's a character we've come to know in some way, rather than an extra in the street we've never laid eyes on before.

As for the Daleks fearing the Doctor so much, why don't they just shoot him when they have the chance?!? Don't they ever learn? Their credibility is diminished every time they fail to take this opportunity without good reason and it happened again here as it did in *The Parting Of The Ways* last year.

Another glaring fault in the episode came when Pete and Jackie Tyler met in the corridor. Suddenly the hectic pace of the episode stopped dead for several minutes and with (one presumes) millions being killed all over the world and not a moment to lose, the Doctor suddenly seems content to sit still for a few moments for the sake of a domestic reunion. Even overlooking these facts, I can't help but feel the impact of this scene could have been far more powerful if neither Jackie *nor* Pete were aware of the other's presence in the building and that there had been no one else around when they bumped into each other by chance and they have to work out for themselves who they are. Then towards the end of the episode Rose, thinking one or both had been killed, could have had a tearful reunion when they turned up alive and together.

When the action recommenced it was time to banish everything alien out of our universe and it suddenly became obvious where Rose was going to end up. I'm all for a bit of tension but what was all that about with Pete snatching her in the nick of time as she was sucked into the void? How did he know when to catch her, where to catch her? How did he know she even needed catching?

Rose's exit was milked for all it was worth. It dragged on and on and on. When you think of some of the other really emotional companion departures – Susan, Ian & Barbara, Jamie & Zoe, Jo, Adric, Tegan – these were all dealt with swiftly without any detriment to the impact of the moment. Taking Jo's departure, this was effectively achieved in just three shots – Doctor swigs his drink and sneaks out from the party, with Jo the only one half-noticing; Doctor looks sad as he gets in Bessie; Doctor drives off alone in the dark evening. Those three shots, all without a single word uttered, said it all. Here, the impact of Rose's departure was almost diminished because the emotion was laid on with a trowel. The whole driving to Norway / Doctor saying goodbye bit could and should have been dispensed with. It's a sad fact of life that you don't always get the opportunity to say goodbye to the people you love most and this should have been reflected.

Even then, the poignancy of the Doctor being alone was rudely shattered by the Catherine Tate cameo at the end. I'd have thought the idea of seeing how the Doctor gets over his loss a bigger draw for the Christmas Special than seeing Ms Tate arrive in his TARDIS but maybe the production team wanted to avoid anything too downbeat. Modern Doctor Who does seem to have a habit of pulling its punches and continually having a happy ending.

It probably reads as though I've spent this whole review picking holes in the entire story. Well I have, yet in spite of all these criticisms it still added up to an extremely good, action-packed adventure. The acting and direction were generally good, there was a sufficient element of mystery leading to a good cliffhanger and the whole thing built up and up towards a feeling of real climax, a couple of the gratuitous Tyler scenes aside.

So that's it, the Rose Tyler era finished. Having her stranded in another universe, with Mickey, her Mum *and* Dad (and another baby Tyler on the way) was a nice idea as it pretty much rounded off *all* their individual character arcs. You do have to wonder though if we're going to have this level of attention to every 'permanent' companion from now on... Is the Doctor going to fall in love with all of them? Are they all going to have a family? Are they all going to be so much smarter than everyone else around them?

Doctor Who in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is pulling ever further away from its 20<sup>th</sup> century counterpart. The Doctor may be a nominal alien but he's no longer an alien *character*. He's a human with human frailties and emotions, who just hap-

pens to have a TARDIS, a sonic screwdriver, psychic paper, an encyclopaedic knowledge of other civilisations and an overly-eccentric persona. Nor is he any longer a man who can be lost in a crowd – this Doctor is happy to get as much global coverage as it takes (even grinning to TV cameras as he carries an Olympic torch), and the threats he battles are similarly known about right across the world. The companion is no longer the viewer's representative in the episode, there to ask our questions at any given opportunity. She's a bit of a know-all herself, truth be told. And together they have their own private club, where they have a tendency to look down their noses at anyone (even her 'former' boyfriend). A far cry from the days when even the average man in the street could be the Doctor's friend and command his utmost respect. New Who is very 'now' with topical jokes and metaphors, and (it would seem) no limit as regards the humour levels employed. In short, the dynamic has shifted a lot and how long it will continue to weave its spell is debatable.

This season has seen the return of two old companions (Sarah and K-9), two old enemies (Daleks and Cybermen) and a further character (Pete Tyler) from a previous season, as well as numerous references to previous stories (Rose, Dalek etc). The Doctor has, on occasions, shown a dubious morality, and there have been big names from light entertainment appearing in the series (Catherine Tate, Peter Kay, Derek Acorah, Maureen Lipman...). Hang on, weren't these the sort of policies that John Nathan-Turner was so heavily criticised for? Maybe Doctor Who has changed less than we realise...

*Reviewed by David P May*

## NEXT ISSUE



## TORCHWOOD SEASON ONE EPISODE REVIEWS

# WHAT THE FANS THINK

Fan opinion on New Earth to The Girl In The Fireplace

**WHOTOPIA** went to the fans to get their opinions on the first four episodes of Season 2. Here is what some of them had to say...

## EPISODE ONE NEW EARTH



A grotesque, unworthy start to the second series. Terrible writing, worse performances making this as appealing as an acid enema. Please, never again!

-Rob Mammone, Australia

Cassandra's back(side) in a far-future tale that's not very deep until the left turn at the end. Enjoyable if you don't consider the science.

-Chris Kocher, USA

Crap...enough said.

-Dean King, Canada

Some very good dialogue in this episode, Rose possessed by Cassandra was brilliant. Mixing all the antidotes together didn't really make sense though.

-Claire Chaplin, England

Interesting scenario, unexplored ideas (e.g. the religious cats), tedious mind-swapping, equally-tedious Doctor and Rose mutual appreciation and a woefully poor plot resolution.

-David May, England

A waste of 45 minutes of screen time. No plot, bad writing and cringe inducing behaviour by the Doctor and Rose. Great SFX and direction though.

-Bob Furnell, Canada

A glossy and busy opener, far too many plotlines for 45 minutes to sustain but full of energy and campness. Uneasy but fun.

-Joe Ford, England

## EPISODE TWO TOOTH AND CLAW



Except for the tacked on ending, a perfect marriage of atmosphere and tension. Is this the same writer responsible for the bilge that was New Earth? Tennant comes into his own here.

-Rob Mammone, Australia

Visually rich with a number of ideas that gelled together well, a good action adventure let down by the sometimes tactless behaviour of the supposed heroes.

-David May, England

Much better but a bit OTT especially the Hong Kong style acrobatics at the beginning. Pauline Collins was very good as Queen Victoria.

-Dean King, Canada

Now this was an utterly brilliant episode. It set Torchwood up well. A quite scary episode that also had a nice amount of humour in.

-Claire Chaplin, England

Dynamically directed and tightly written, this is one of bet yet. Tennant is superb and the atmosphere is terrifically scary.

-Joe Ford, England

Kung-fu monks + werewolves + Queen Victoria = more combined elements than any three historicals in the original series. But is it too much?

-Chris Kocher, USA

A real disappointment. Could have been so much better.

-Bob Furnell, Canada

## EPISODE THREE SCHOOL REUNION



A hammy, unlikely plot enlivened by the welcome return of Lis Sladen and K-9. Since when was Sarah in love with the Doctor?

-David May, England

Hooray for Sarah Jane and K-9 (and Mickey, too)! But aliens foiled by their own goo? That seems a bit too convenient.

-Chris Kocher, USA

The Doctor rediscovers old flames, and Rose finds out what could be in her future. And there are aliens in a

school! Genius!

-Michael S. Collins, Scotland

Pure nostalgia fest for Sarah and K9 fans (like me). Who else cried when K9 sacrificed himself? C'mon, own up!

-Martin Hearn, England

An uneasy mix of old and new. Murray Gold's music has never been better, ASH criminally wasted, and Piper's pouting getting on my tits. Tennant's finest performance to date.

-Rob Mammone, Australia

Very well done and nice to see Sarah Jane & K9. Some well written lines for Ricky...uh.. Mickey.....uhhh what's his name????

-Dean King, Canada

Disappointing. Very little plot to keep the story going, K-9 was underused, Sarah Jane acted like a lovesick school girl which was totally out of character. Better story than the first two of the season.

-Bob Furnell, Canada

## EPISODE FOUR THE GIRL IN THE FIREPLACE



Brilliant!!!

-Dean King, Canada

A story featuring more of The Doctor than Rose at last. Emotional scenes, clockwork droids, and the Doctor inventing a drink a century too early. Fantastic!

-Claire Chaplin, England

Picturesque, touching, exciting, romantic, original... Nice twist at the end too! Best of the season by a mile! A poor first TARDIS trip for Mickey though.

-David May, England

This new Doctor has a wandering eye and a romantic soul - and he's willing to leave Rose stranded to save his new love.

-Chris Kocher, USA

Any show that has the Doctor and King Louis lamenting the passing of a whore isn't Doctor Who. What TGITF is is a fine story with a well written script that mentions the Doctor, but isn't Doctor Who.

-Rob Mammone, Australia

The Doctor falls in love. And by the end of a gripping and often amusing historical event, is left heartbroken. A tearjerker.

-Michael S. Collins, Scotland

A pseudo-period piece with a lovely running theme of the life of Madame de Pompadour. Great moments, sumptuous look, more please!

-Martin Hearn, England





# the price of paradise

Isn't it odd...we all know Colin Brake can deliver, well at least I do because I utterly adored the last two seasons of BUGS and yet his debut novel for the BBC line, *Escape Velocity*, went down like a cup of sick and his follow up, *The Colony of Lies*, whilst hardly as offensive was described in *Doctor Who* magazine as 'the worst release in ages'. *The Price of Paradise* is a huge improvement on those two, and I think I know now why Brake's previous efforts were so poorly received.

I think Colin Brake is an excellent children's writer, *The Price of Paradise* is clearly geared at an audience younger than myself and while I could enjoy it on those terms, the young'uns would probably lap it up as the best *Doctor Who* novel they have read. Both *Escape Velocity* and *Colony* were supposed to be geared at the late teens-New Adventures audience and frankly, they were far too simplistic and clichéd for that unfor-

The *Price of Paradise* is much more focussed, it has a strong narrative which (for good or for ill) it doesn't really veer away from and offer up any great surprises, but at least Brake is able to concentrate on one plot, a small group of characters and make them *work*. The Paradise Planet is Laylora and it is nicely presented in the opening chapters as a lush and verdant garden of Eden, one of which the natives have lived comfortably on for many years. Until fifteen years ago when a pod crashed and a young boy joined the tribe, when earthquakes started unsettling the land and horrific creatures started attacking the people.

Enter the Doctor and Rose and the space hopper *Humphrey Bogart*. The crew of the ship are all nicely characterised, not in any great depth but they all come across as real people on a real mission. I particularly like the cold and unfeeling Professor Shurlough, who barely bats an eyelid when one of her crew is killed in a fire on board the ship.

***To be frank I found the first half of the book a wee bit too simplistic for my tastes...***

Most of the book is taken up with the Doctor and Rose's attempts to discover why the Wikitu are attacking in such numbers and why Shurlough is so determined to find out that Laylora is the Paradise Planet of myth. They come across their discoveries at a nice pace, and the book's biggest plus is the idea of the sentient planet trying to protect itself. Whilst this has been dealt with before (*Beltempst* and *Half-life* both had intriguing shots at the same idea), here it is brought down to the simple but effective idea that the planet is kept in perfect balance and that any intruders on the planet are a reaction akin to anaphylactic shock. It's a fascinating concept and the methods in which the planet attempts to dispose of its unwanted infection is quite exciting, the audience never knowing what is going to be chucked at them next.

To be frank I found the first half of the book a wee bit too simplistic for my tastes, as though I was being talked down to, but in retrospect I can see that Brake was merely putting everything in place for his far superior second half, in particular the climax which has a quadruple whammy of dangers for the crew to face. I'm not sure whereabouts it was but about halfway through my attention suddenly piqued and I didn't stop until I had finished the book.

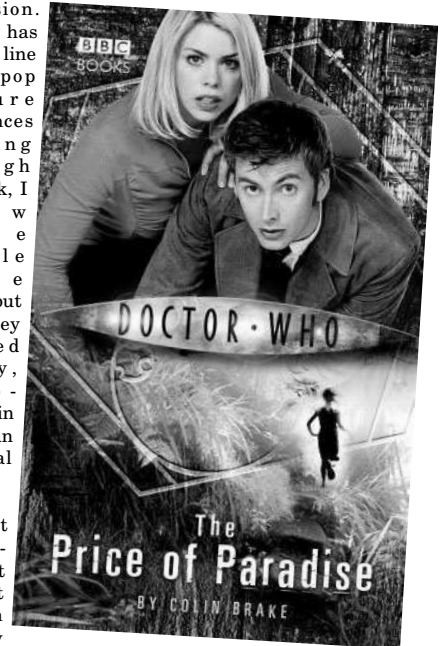
Throughout both the Doctor and Rose are well characterised and I had no trouble believing these were the people David Tennant and Billie Piper play on the

television. Brakes has a nice line in pop culture references running through his book, I know some people hate these but I felt they worked nicely, especially in such an unusual setting.

It isn't literature, it won't win a

any awards and I can imagine older readers getting frustrated with the level of sophistication (ie, lack of) but looking at this as a children's novel I would say this works on practically every level. The plot is fast paced and zippy, the ideas are creative and the characterization is good enough for you to (possibly) shed a tear on the last page. I thought it was charming, if undemanding: **6/10**

*Reviewed by Joe Ford*



# the nightmare of black island

The best NSA of this bunch by a square mile and written by an author who is given far too much flack in my book. Mike Tucker has delivered an excellent piece of writing here, one which works on practically every level (plot, prose, characterisation and imagery). It even has a tremendous cover.

It is a great book for both the 10<sup>th</sup> Doctor and Rose who get to shine individually and as a pair. I enjoyed how the book focussed on the Doctor's independent lifestyle, pointing out of several occasions that he is the last of his people and the only one holding a torch for the ideals they believed in. He can be desperately excited in places, but also insanely serious too...whilst still having time to care about the people he meets on his travels and sneer at the monsters too. Its funny but he seems equally comfortable being chased through the woods by all manner of creatures, calmly munching an ice cream by the seaside, sensitively investigating the personal history of an anguished mother and creeping around a dirty old lighthouse in search for answers. I love how brave and unflinching Rose is in this book, willing to investigate the rectory on her own, creeping down the dark tunnel, finding her way through the cellar, mouthing off to the aliens when she is caught. When she is hooked up to their machines it is clear that her adventures with the Doctor have affected her greatly, she projects images

***The plot is ingenious and it spits out clues in exciting set pieces...***

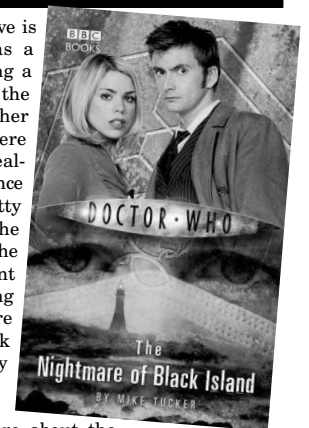
of the Nestene Consciousness, the Daleks and the Slitheen.

The plot is ingenious and it spits out clues in exciting set pieces, clues that dovetail seamlessly in the finale to provide one hell of a memorable climax. Scenes such as the fisherman being dragged into the sea half devoured, the Doctor and Rose investigating the spookiest woods ever, legions of nightmarish creatures cutting a bloody swathe through a colony of seals...these are scenes that will delight children and adults alike. It is clear early on that Mike Tucker enjoys writing his set pieces and he gives each one a real sense of importance, cranking up the fear factor so once you reach the end of the book you have several fabulous horror moments with Balor breaking free of his bonds, only half completed and utterly insane and stalking through the rectory, first devouring Hadron then growing to obscene proportions and skewering and tearing the Cynrog to pieces. Lovely stuff!

One complaint I do have is that having a child as a central role is becoming a familiar trait with the NSAs. Listen up other potential authors, there are other ways of appealing to a younger audience than having a spotty faced youth helping the Doctor to save the day...such as intelligent writing and exciting plots, both of which are displayed in this book so I'm not sure why Tucker bothered.

I want to tell you more about the details of this book but it would spoil the surprises as they hit. Don't get me wrong this is no work of literature but for a rock solid piece of storytelling, one that maintains its pace and entertainment throughout, this is probably the best example of how to get the new hardback format right since *Only Human*. For a delicious slice of kiddie horror, you cannot go wrong with *Nightmare of Black Island*: **8/10**

*Reviewed by Joe Ford*




**FICTION**

# Tea At Midnight

by **Evan F. Casey**

**T**he Doctor was idly watching the kettle on the stove, waiting for the telltale steam to wisp out of the top vent. He was lounging against the wall of Jackie and Rose's cramped but functional kitchen, a little smile on his face as he heard the rest of the apartment sleeping. The kettle began to whistle, and he deftly picked it off the burner and poured the boiling water into a teapot quickly, trying his best not to wake anyone. He let his mind wander while he waited for the tea to brew, thinking of all the things that had happened in just a few days. Fighting off a Dalek invasion surely wasn't anything new, nor was giving his life to save another, but he felt a twinge of remorse for his ninth incarnation all the same. It had been definitely one of the shortest, and the shell-shocked wanderer never really got a chance to grow into himself before another sacrifice was necessary. "C'est la vie..." The Doctor said quietly, he knew he wouldn't change a thing if he had the chance to anyway.

A prickle at the back of The Doctor's neck told him he was being watched before he heard the quiet breathing or single heartbeat; it was calm, a little slow. "I hope I didn't wake you," he said as he turned to face the alcove leading to the bedrooms. Rose's mother Jackie was standing there in the same simple dressing gown he had seen her in the first time they met, such a long time ago and yet in just a blink of an eye.

"Not at all, I've been having trouble sleeping for quite awhile now, it's your fault really." Jackie's expression was neutral; at least it wasn't the rage or absolute fear he'd seen previously. "Because of Rose." The Doctor said plainly and directly, with a definite twinge of sadness there. "I didn't take her, or force her to come you know, I just asked."

"I know, I know she's her own woman and she'll make her own choices, but do you have any idea what it's like?" Jackie was getting a little more emotional. "She goes off in that box of yours and she could be anywhere, fighting off horrifying aliens billions of miles away, or getting

infected with some terrible extraterrestrial disease or getting killed by Jack the bleeding Ripper for Christ sake. I can never know where she is or what she's doing, unless she comes back here to get a change of clothes or to get Mickey to do something. She doesn't talk to me nearly as much anymore, and I can't stop worrying. How can you possibly know what that's like?"

During all of this The Doctor's face showed genuine concern and empathy. He walked over and guided her to the small kitchen table and poured her a cup of tea, using the break to form his thoughts into a proper response.

"I've got a granddaughter you know. Maybe even a great granddaughter now, I left her here in that box of mine as you called it. She was happy here, she had found a nice man, respectable, although I thought he was a bit daft..."

Jackie's eyes widened a bit as he continued.

"We were exiles you see, sent away from our home. She barely even remembered it, but she knew she lost something important and precious. She wanted to come here, to this little jewel of a planet to live as a regular teenage girl. I couldn't imagine why at the time, I thought of Earth as a privative backwater, a dinky little world orbiting a simple little star on the western spiral arm of the Milky Way. That was a very long time ago for me, such a long time ago. I left her because I knew that's what she really wanted. She didn't know it herself, not yet, but she didn't want to gallivant around space and time with her old hobbling grandfather, righting wrongs and battling evil forces. She wanted a nice quiet life, a simple existence on a nice world where she could grow up to be her own person and not worry about tomorrow."

The Doctor's eyes brimmed with tears, that he quickly wiped away with a napkin.

"People travel with me; I don't actively seek them, not most of the time. They see what I do, how I live, and they want to be a part of that life for a while. To see new horizons, and things they

could never have dreamed of. Along the way they inevitably end up seeing things they wouldn't have imagined in their most horrifying nightmares. I do my absolute best to make sure those nightmares don't hurt anyone. I live my life fighting, not that I intend to, but I see wrongs, and injustice, and I feel it's my duty to end them, where I can, when I can.

Jackie looked into The Doctor's eyes, and for just a moment, saw the incredible depth reflected in them, victories and defeats, triumphs and failures, all on scales she could barely even begin to imagine. These weren't the guarded blue eyes of The Doctor she had known, these eyes had a depth and complete honesty that was so fleetingly rare. She reached out and took his hand.

"I treated them all like my own granddaughter. I endured punishments for them, torture for them; I gave my lives for them. I would never give anything less and I doubt I ever will. I can't promise you Rose will come back to you. I wish I could, I wish I could swear that nothing will ever happen to Rose while she's with me and when she wants to come home she'll be completely unharmed, free of scars, pure and unblemished. I'm not a god, I don't have power over life and death and I never claimed to. But there is one thing I can swear to you. I will give anything and everything, I will do all in my power, and all that I can to keep your daughter out of harm, because even though I may not look it, I do know what having a daughter is like, and I would never want to inflict that loss on anyone if I could do anything to stop it."

Jackie cried a little, she saw this man, this alien; someone she felt was nothing but a common drifter, a louse and an arrogant bastard. She saw what he was sitting there, a man of such strict virtue and concealed pain she was sad that she had ever doubted him.

"I'm sorry."

"No, don't be, not at all. Like I said, I understand."

# the web planet

1965. Still a way to go before Man would take his one small step onto the surface of an alien world. But here was Doctor Who's attempt to do just that, with no human characters appearing other than the four regulars. A tale of a planet where the TARDIS is brought down and dragged away by a mysterious force with an affinity for gold, a landscape populated by barren rocks, acid pools and precious little else, and alien life forms so alien they would never end up in Star Trek...

For many years The Web Planet has ducked and weaved from being fondly remembered story through disappointment to downright apology within fandom and now in its restored form it's really difficult to understand why that should be. It ably presents a truly alien society at war with each other and for the most part transcends the limitations of the facilities available to realise it.

From the ant-like Zarbi controlled by the parasitic Animus with its claws sunk deep into the heart of Vortis to the larvi gun venom grubs that are their mobile cannons, through the subterranean stunted Optera devolved from the beautifully graceful butterfly-like Menoptra that have come to reclaim the planet, this is a costume fest bar none that the programme tackles and successfully presents. Yes, there are a few rough edges regarding the interaction of the creatures within the confining studio, but I'd argue that any programme would have the same problem on this budget and time constraint - and 99% of them wouldn't even be brave enough to tackle them.

Like many stories, The Web Planet is probably overlong at six episodes, but unlike many others of the length it generally sustains better, and this is probably due to the totally alien setting and society - I doubt the same story with humanoid characters would have worked as well. It is over ambitious true, but it is well acted by all the cast - the Menoptra actors receiving special notice because of the skills of actress Rosalyn de Winter coaching them on the insect movement - and is a good solid tale of good versus evil. You need know nothing more really in all honesty.

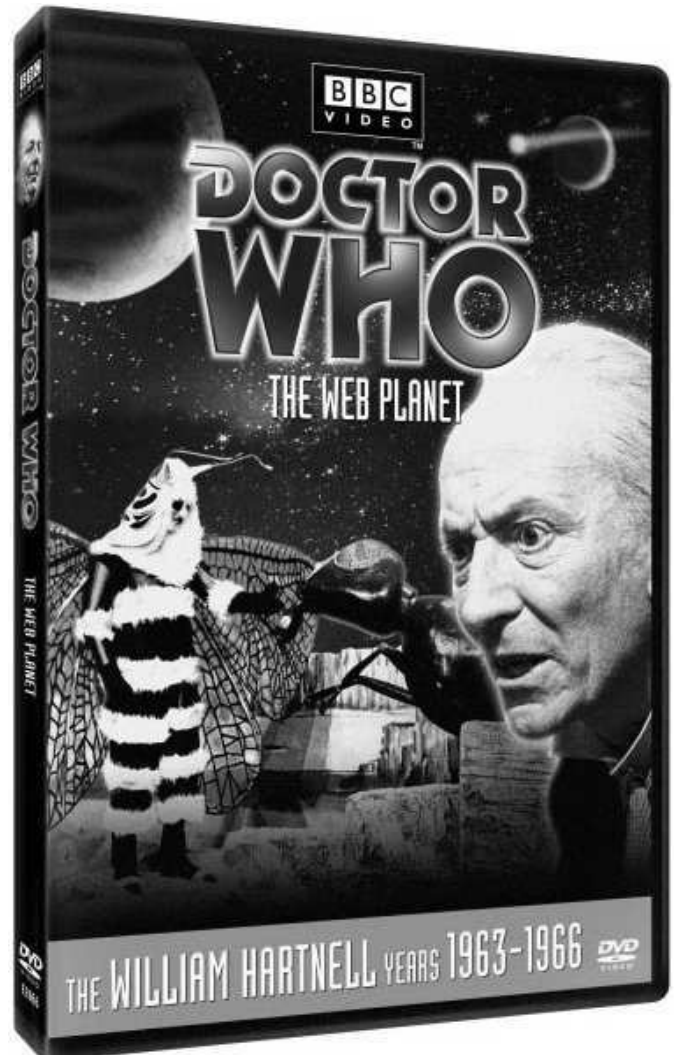
The quality of this release was always going to be a topic for debate because of the smeared filters used over the camera lenses for the Vortis landscape shots - would VidFire make a nonsense of this attempt to try and give an alien landscape more 'realism'? Well, to be honest, no it hasn't. The fears are largely unfounded and all we have here is a nice clear picture all the way through, still with the 'smeariness' for the landscape shots. The soundtrack is also nicely cleaned up, although it is a shame that as the 'musik' of Les Structures Sonores is so difficult to track down, a music only option hasn't been included. A Spanish

soundtrack for episode 6 has though, and is a nice addition (if you understand Spanish, just funny to us ignorant people!) The commentary track is also a good addition, though I personally feel that the moderated versions, as presided over here by Gary Russell, are a little stilted compared to those just featuring stars and production personnel. Those featured here are producer Verity Lambert, director Richard Martin and actors William Russell (Ian) and Martin Jarvis (Hilio), and what they contribute is good but not necessarily what you would like to know when you hear it - comments on what you're watching tend to be few and far between as they concentrate more or less on answering Russell's prepared questions. Still, I may well be in the minority on that score.

Other extras on this single disc release include a nice and thorough photo gallery, including some colour shots, the 1960's Chad Valley "Give-A-Show" toy projector slides truncating the basic story into a few artwork frames, and an audio presentation, The Lair of Zarbi Supremo, a text story from the first Annual read by William Russell with a nice turn of characterisation for his former co-star William Hartnell. The Annual itself is also presented on disc, but is only accessible when played on a PC or Mac in Adobe Acrobat Reader, a feature that continues on into other releases and while nice for completists is maybe of dubious value.

The final extra, and by far the best is Tales of Isop, the 35 minute documentary on the making of the story with contributions from many associated with it. Apart from 'the usual suspects' these include designer John Wood whose designs contribute so much to the look and success of the story and Maureen O'Brien, who has only recently started to talk about her time on the series. For this reason alone Tales of Isop is a must see, even if it could do with being a little longer and featuring more from the likes of Ms O'Brien.

Presented (in its UK edition at least) in one of the best DVD covers thus far, The Web Planet might not instinctively leap out at you for pur-



***Like many stories, The Web Planet is probably overlong at six episodes...***

chase based on its past reputation as an ambitious failure, but it really should be on your list for viewing in the near future - if only so you can reappraise a story deserving of more plaudits than brickbats. 7/10

*Reviewed by Martin Hearn*

# the art of destruction



A slow moving and turgid first half develops into a much more interesting and intelligent second half but by that time I had all but lost interest in the book. A shame because Stephen Cole has assembled some intriguing ideas here but they don't feel as though they gel into a coherent or satisfying whole.

After reading his interview in DWM two things spring out at you once you have read the book; that it was written in a hurry and that he was trying inject some kind of social commentary into the book. Neither of these things is particularly bad things, some very good books have been produced under pressure in the past (Shadow in the Glass) and commenting on the problems of today in a science fiction setting has long been recognised and exploited. Unfortunately in this instance both are a massive hindrance. The thin plot feels as though it is stretched to at least double its length and the opening 80 odd pages are packed to the brim with endless attacks and chases that lead to very little. The *real* plot doesn't really kick in until about page 100, not a good sign. Regarding the commentary of the problems in Africa, there was some real potential to delve into the issue of poverty, slavery and exploitation but these hardbacks are aimed at younger children and the word count has been reduced so there is only so far you can go. Had this been an EDA or an NA I could imagine the rebels that attack the volcano base for food would be violent, swearing rapists...alas here they are little more than kids with guns. The nearby town of Gouronkah could have been visited in great detail, we could actually get to experience the poverty of its people but

instead we only get hints...why bother exploring human misery when you can stick in another scene of alien blobs attacking people?

I'm possibly being too harsh on The Art of Destruction because there are some good points. Stephen Cole has always been excellent at writing memorable dialogue for his characters and this book is no exception, much of the 'script' for this book (some people would say these NSAs are little more than scripts with skeletal prose clinging on) is entertaining. In particular the Doctor is brilliantly captured, and whilst perhaps there is one pop culture reference too many, Cole has captured his wildness and unpredictability beautifully. Certainly I had no problem seeing David Tennant saying the lines and if they release audios of the latest batch of books I think the witty and powerful lines will fit him like a glove. Another huge plus (although following in the wake of The Resurrection Casket that had a similar, and funnier character) is the inclusion of Faltato, the great hulking monster with excellent taste in art who is used the finer things in life! Any scene with the Doctor or Faltato...or even better both is instantly recommended.

I think the biggest issue I had here is that I know that the author is capable of so much more. At his best (Ten Little Aliens, Timeless) Stephen Cole is a master at great plot twists, intelligent dialogue and adult prose. Reduced to writing for children his books feel as though they want to be grittier, stronger in content and I can see potential for both this and Feast of the Drowned being excellent EDAs. His ideas are still good (the art treasures trapped in a volcano is a vivid image) but they are wasted on plots which are geared more for entertainment than *involvement*. As such they feel diluted and thus wasted. The plot for The Art of Destruction is nothing more than a glorified Tooth and Claw, a trap within a trap but without the atmosphere of that story. When you actually realise the lengths the people Valnax have gone to to preserve their art you probably be as boggled as I was, it felt as though this was one stretch of the imagination too much (although this does lead to the intriguing exploration of the idea of identity near the end of the book which frankly is probably the best scene).

I was disappointed with this book, I'm sure there is a great Doctor Who story to be had centred around a whopping great volcano (oh yeah, The Fires of Vulcan!) but this clearly isn't it. One idea too many, endless padding and a plot that doesn't quite flow, it is the weakest of a disappointing batch of NSAs: **5/10**

Reviewed by Joe Ford

# something inside



Paul McGann has experienced a varied run as Doctor over the course of his time working with Big Finish. After a slightly weak first season, McGann and BF struck gold with a consistently stronger second series, which featured an excellent performance from India Fisher, aided by some cracking stories knitted together by an intriguing storyline.

Since then, however, it seems to have slid downhill slightly, with several notable exceptions.

The problem your reviewer faces is this: after all this time, what sort of Doctor is Paul McGann portraying? Yes, McGann's Doctor conforms to Terrance Dicks oft quoted, 'never cruel or cowardly', but surely there should be more to this incarnation than being polite to old ladies, not drowning kittens in the sink?

Sure, the Eighth Doctor is as bold as brass, does not suffer fools gladly and likes a good debate, but you could say that about Doctors one to seven and beyond. Being a fan of Liverpool FC may pander to McGann's background, but an interesting character insight it isn't.

Your reviewer thinks part of the problem lies with the character of Charley Pollard. When she was a walking paradox threatening the underpinnings of existence, McGann's portrayal was much more interesting, more vital, in fact. Now that Charley's 'arc' has been resolved, she has become the archetypal companion, forever twisting her ankle. C'Rizz promises to stir the status quo up nicely, but it is agony getting there. Perhaps this has all been acknowledged with the recent announcement that a new series of McGann Eighth stories, set sometime in his future, with a new companion in tow, is to be broadcast on BBC 7 from the end of 2006. I certainly keenly await what new producer Nick Briggs and company of put together.

Which leads us to *Something Inside* (hooray, I hear you cry). Trevor Blaxendale had form coming into this story, having penned the execrable The Dark Flame. While nowhere near as bad, thankfully, the problem with *Something Inside* is that it isn't very interesting. Blaxendale has put together a collection of half backed ideas and themes we've all heard/seen before and made only half interesting by the under explored setting.

Urbane torturer? Tick. Mad scientist? Tick. Band of desperates eager to escape confines of prison? Tick. Noble sacrifice for good of

***Sure, the Eighth Doctor is as bold as brass, does not suffer fools gladly and likes a good debate, but you could say that about Doctors one to seven and***

all? Tick. All of these are tried and true elements of Doctor Who, and handled well, can still make for an exciting, involving adventure. Sadly, none of these elements gels together. What we get is more a plodding yarn than a tense, claustrophobic thriller.

Despite my earlier comments, McGann is a very, very good actor. Here, he comes into his own. When not shackled to a colourless interpretation and forced to invest some life into this amnesiac Doctor, he brings a desperate edge lacking in his previous work. This Doctor is still motivated by the best of intentions, and follows such instincts, but is willing to push himself past the limits the Doctor would usually set for himself.

Conrad Westmaas continues to impress, exposing the darker edges of C'Rizz's character. As noted earlier, the degeneration of Charley Pollard as a vital contributing character to the range continues apace. Her forced cheeriness and 'never say die' attitude long ago stopped being endearing and now simply grate.

Of the guest cast Louise Collins as Jane is simply appalling. Her delivery is leaden and if anyone asked her to act this reviewer fears she should drop dead with shock. The duo of Rawden (Steve Elder) and Mr. Twyst (Ian Brooker) play their respective parts satisfactorily. It is a pity such good actors are forced to work with such boring archetypes – urbane torturer and arrogant scientist. Peter Miles and Michael Wisher did it so much better – what we see here is the faintest of echoes.

The production achieves its usual high standards, so I won't bore you with the usual superlatives. There are two standouts, one that demonstrates the previous sentence, one that is such a shocking aberration it must be noted. The first is the aural depiction of the Mindworm – an unsettling crackling buzz that announces death is unnerving. The aberration relates to the music – shockingly inapt in places, it actively works against what important scenes are trying to convey.

All up, a disappointing effort. It does what it sets out to do, which is tell a story in four parts, but misses an opportunity to be better than merely average. One looks forward to seeing how the new McGann stories at year's end pan out. And whether McGann grasps the opportunity to tweak his character and breathe the new life into it. Something Inside should not be the template for this leap forward into the unknown. **4/10**

*Reviewed by Rob Mammone*

# cryptobiosis

Latterly a gift to subscribers, this year available to purchase, *Cryptobiosis* poses the eternal conundrum – is it good enough to pay hard-earned money?

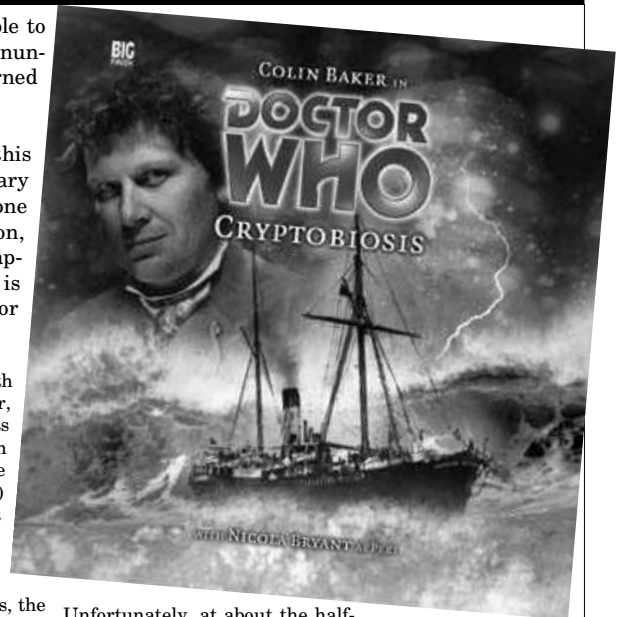
My dim recollection from last year is that this release was from the open submissions that Gary Russell announced. It appears to have been one of the very few stories deserving of production, and when you consider Big Finish received approximately four hundred submissions, one is entitled to ask was it the cream of the crop, or indicative of a very average crop indeed?

Penned by Elliot Thorpe, *Cryptobiosis* sees the Sixth Doctor and Peri aboard the merchant ship Lankester, helmed by Captain Callaway (Michael Cuckson) on its journey from Madagascar to New Orleans. De Requin (played by Tony Beck, sporting quite possibly the worst attempt at a French accent in acting history) seems to be a conscientious officer, an able assistant to Captain Callaway. But is he too solicitous? And what is the secret of his relationship with the seemingly crippled Amy, locked away in her cabin below decks? Caught in a storm, with two mysterious deaths, the scene is set for a very entertaining thriller.

This is not exactly what we get. All the elements of a 'base under siege' thriller are there – an isolated location with a menace from within, with treachery and murder for company. Thorpe begins his story in this manner, and for the most part, it is quite effective. The elements are realised by sound design maestro, Dave Darlington, supplying a haunting backdrop of rain, crashing waves and the doleful tolling of a bell. You almost feel you are aboard this little storm tossed ship, alone in the great margins of the Atlantic.

Thrust straight into the action, the Doctor and Peri very quickly come under suspicion. On first listening last year, Captain Callaway's condemnation of the Doctor appeared absurd, so much so that it fatally undermined the rest of the story for this reviewer. Listening to it once more, the reasoning makes more sense, but it is so blatantly a contrivance aimed at flushing De Requin out, that on wonders why De Requin didn't cotton onto it immediately. Obviously, authorial intent demanded that De Requin couldn't immediately be exposed, but it does damage the story from this point.

Colin Baker and Nicola Bryant are particularly strong in this story. While Bryant's accent sadly undercuts some of her emotional responses to Amy's situation, she is allowed to play a more forceful role than usual, and handles it with aplomb. Baker's Doctor here is as mercurial as ever, with the right touch of continued amazement at the variety of life on his favourite planet. The Sixth Doctor played by Baker for Big Finish may be miles away from his television performance, but its gentler nature makes for a more interesting listen. Special mention must go to Michael Cuckson, who invests Captain Callaway with a noble dignity that lends gravitas to even the most clichéd dialogue he is forced to give. He works well with the Doctor and this reviewer hopes that Big Finish makes greater use of him in the future.



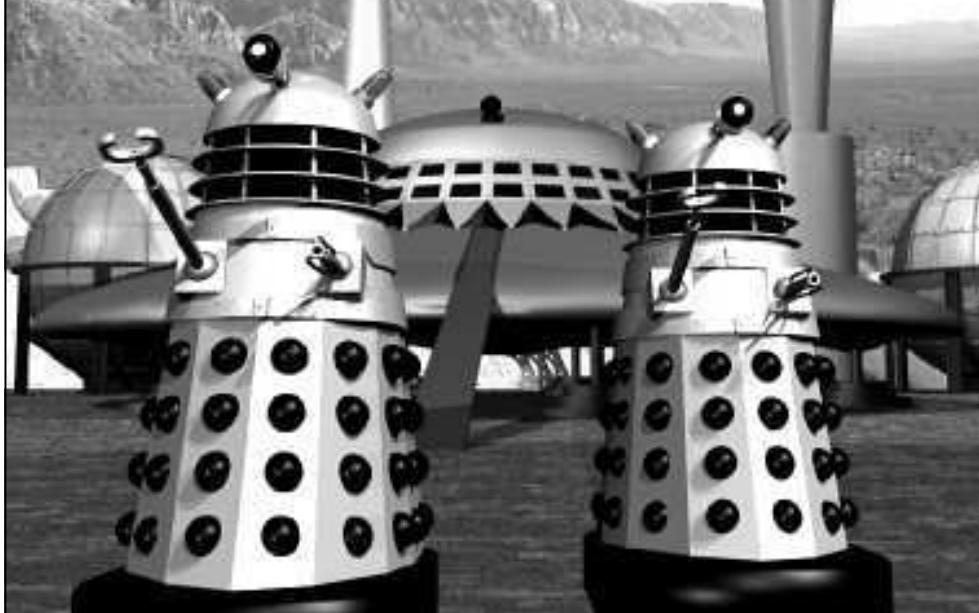
Unfortunately, at about the halfway mark, the story veers off its projected track, and becomes a bit of a laboured muddle. Amy's (Naomi Paxton) true nature is obvious to spot, quickly removing all semblance of mystery from her strand of the story. De Requin's plan, once revealed, is simply ludicrous. How he intends to seriously profit from parading Amy's true nature to the world isn't explained. Granted, by story's end, he is insane, but he must've been sane at the beginning to have conceived it. There is also an oblique reference to the Forge, shoehorned into the story to allow De quin to recap the plot to his listener, and by extension, the audience. Since such a reference is at odds with De Requin's plans for profit, one assumes little thought went into it, and not surprisingly, nothing comes of it.

By the end, Thorpe has managed to tie all the loose ends up. The appearance of Nereus, Amy's father and grandsire her daughter Galatea, previously imprisoned in the wall of her cabin, the story winds to its inevitable conclusion. Calloway conforms to the stereotype of all Victorian captains, and goes down with his ship. De Requin is exposed as the crazed lunatic he is, and goes to a just reward, raving madly all the way. When the Doctor and Peri leave, the audience is left with the lonely crash of the waves to contemplate what might have been.

So, while *Cryptobiosis* is a worthy effort as a subscriber freebie, it isn't quite up the standard required to automatically spending money on. If this was the best the open submission call was able to generate, then it goes to prove that writing for audio is a darn sight harder than most of us fans think it is. For completists only. **6/10**

*Reviewed by Rob Mammone*

# THE ARCHIVES OF PHYRNE



*The Archives of Phyrne* is one of the bleaker episodes in the *Dalek Chronicles* saga; it concerns the Daleks attacking a hidden planet in a bid to gain weaponry to use in their oncoming battle with the Mechanoids. Whilst the Daleks invading a planet for information or simply to ruffle a few feathers and kill some folk is nothing new, here everything appears to be that bit nastier.

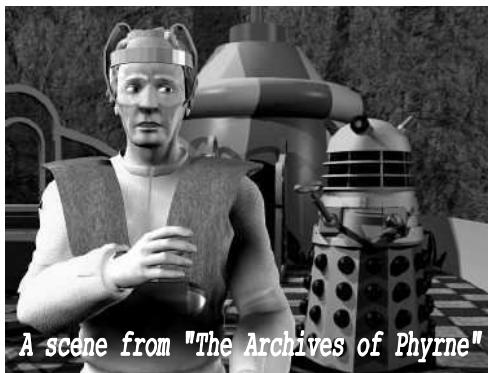
The Phrynians are petrified that they will be discovered, attacking the Daleks and hiding their information as best they can; this desperation is what adds the darkness to the story, with them willing to even die so the Daleks never learn the truth. It all feels a lot grittier than some of the previous stories, and gives *The Dalek Chronicles* a rather harsh edge, something that has been mostly absent in the previous stories. Whether or not this is necessarily a good thing is questionable—it certainly reinforces the notion that the Daleks are ruthless killers, but it seems at odds with the rather light-hearted stories that have popped up before it. The Daleks are shown to be merciless and intelligent throughout, from the mass extermination of the Phrynians to the use of their unfortunately named vibration machine (ooh-err!). Whatever the case may be, the series never really strayed into territory quite as bleak as here, so as a one-off it sticks out for better or worse.

I must confess that it all seems too much of an oddity to me and that it is one of my least favourite stories in the series, and yet the animated adaptation by Altered Vistas is, once again, fantastic.

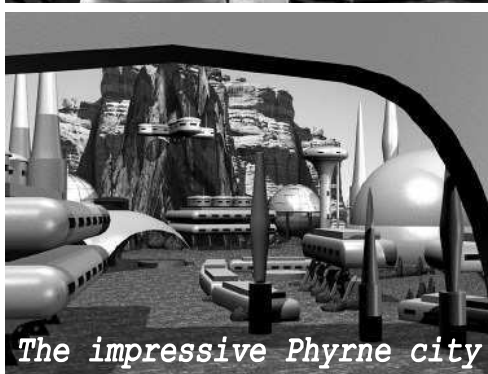
These animated adaptations have come a long, long way since *Genesis of Evil*. The earlier adaptations are terrific fun, but they feel a lot like tele-snap reconstructions; nice stills matched



*The Phrynians counterattack with big shiny red missiles*



*A scene from "The Archives of Phyrne"*



*The impressive Phyrne city*

with the occasional burst of movement. There is certainly nothing wrong with this at all, and the results are very impressive, but watching these later stories just hits home how far they have come in terms of realisation.

The animation now is amazingly fluid, with the lip-sync being spot on for the most part and the movement being very rarely jerky (only one shot, of the Controller and Saf running as seen from behind, doesn't quite work, but even that looks more than passable).

There are some terrifically peachy shots in this instalment too.

One that springs to mind is the launch of the Phrynian missiles; after a launch that reminds you of *Thunderbirds*, they shoot into the sky impressively and then, even better, the camera pulls back to reveal it is all being watched on a screen: it really does look great, and shows how a nice, subtle effect works wonders when pulled off well.

Another impressive sequence occurs when the Daleks go on an exterminating rampage; the dying Phrynians are very well animated, and one shot involving a victim falling off a roof after being killed looks very nice indeed.

As always, the lighting is very nice. There is a wonderfully subtle lighting effect when the Controller is watching the missiles being launched, and you can make out the panels' lights flickering off his face. The shots of the Daleks looming in their own spaceship also work well, making it all very moody.

The directing is good too, with some nice cross-fades between scenes and, as mentioned above, a few imaginative deaths that work very well.

The acting is again universally great, with the partnership of Saf and the Controller (played by Aaron J. Climas and Stuart Palmer respectively) really working well. The Dalek voices are again good, with the modulation this time being a tad reminiscent of the *Death to the Daleks* voices at times, something matched with the silver casings of the Dalek troops.

To be honest though, the thing that probably impressed me the most in this instalment was the frankly marvellous sound design; the music is very subtle and nicely underscores the action, and the voices are mixed into the action very well, not seeming like they have been arranged from a patchwork of different sources and blending together with the pictures nicely.

To top this all off, as a bonus there is a video for the truly awful Roberta Tovey song *Who's Who*. Oh boy. Any song that claims the Doctor looks at home sitting on a horse deserves a mention, but not in a good way. The video is also terrifying and will no doubt be giving me nightmares for months to come.

At the end of this story, Saf says "Yesterday is dead; we must build for tomorrow." I guess the same can be said for the adaptations; the old style is gone and the newer one is coming on in leaps and bounds. I for one cannot wait until the next episode.

All of *Altered Vistas's Dalek Chronicles* adaptations can be ordered from: [www.alteredvistas.co.uk](http://www.alteredvistas.co.uk)

Reviewed by Nick Mellish



Nick Briggs was there right at the beginning, not with *The Sirens of Time*, but way back, working with Bill Baggs and later Gary Russell on the

Audio Visuals. Having honed his craft – writing, acting and music for two decades, Nick Briggs brings us an excellent new entry in the big Finish range – *The Nowhere Place*.

The odd menacing Dalek aside, it's not often the Doctor feels fear. The Doctor tends to take most obstacles in his stride, but imagine a place that shouldn't exist, where billions upon billions of souls are condemned to an eternity of nothingness, where up is down and black is white. That place is *The Nowhere Place*.

Briggs' latest tale attempts the same sort of marriage of science fiction and chills that *Night Thoughts* effortlessly managed. However, it also matches *Singularity* in terms of the epic scale of events. Faced with problems in two timelines brought about by a race of creatures that

should no longer exist intent on perpetrating genocide repeatedly a *Time's End*, the Doctor and Evelyn are hard pressed to come out the other end intact.

It has been too many years since Briggs last wrote for the Doctor Who range from Big Finish. His last work, the sublime *Creatures of Beauty*, with its gritty, fractured narrative was a listening highpoint for this reviewer from that year's batch of stories. Here, Briggs has written a story that aims to puzzle and unnerve the listener, from the first moments to the haunting finish. For the most part, he succeeds admirably.

Briggs' writing has never been anything less than

***Briggs' latest tale attempts the same sort of marriage of science fiction and chills that Night Thoughts effortlessly managed.***

solid. Here, his script allows the main supporting character, Captain Oswin, played capably by Martha Cope, enough room to give the audience a sense that they are more than mere background noise. Cope invests her character with, at first, competent authority, before descending into frustration and uncertainty, before regaining her equilibrium too inadvertently save the day.

The relationship between the Doctor and Evelyn

underpins the entire story. They work very, very hard to express the fear and uncertainty each character faces, and after three months of David Tennant's portrayal, marked by the ease in which every difficulty is overcome, it is refreshing to see a Doctor fear his fear and triumph.

Special mention must go to Briggs for taking the risky course of playing his own creation, Ridgely, and the manifestation of the alien race in part four. Ridgely is there when the ringing of a train bell in 1952 reaches forward to 2197, binding the strands of the story together. Briggs invests Ridgely with a quirky, mercurial life that is a perfectly pitched counterpoint to his dour, suspicious minder, Palmer, played with grim enthusiasm by John Killoran.

As ever, one searches for new ways to describe the consistently high standard BF brings to the sound design and music. Instead of retreading old ground, this reviewer will simply say that Briggs has once again matched his high standards, which are very high indeed.

*The Nowhere Place* is a very welcome mix of high concept and aural eeriness. The image of a door hanging in space is an arresting one and the effect on those around it put to clever use. While the story is confusing in a couple of places, it is nonetheless a very strong entry in what has been a consistently entertaining run this year. A pity, then, that Briggs' appointment as Gary Russell's successor may lead to another interminable gap between Doctor Who stories. **8/10**

Reviewed by Rob Mammone

the nowhere place

timeless passages

Economic storytelling at its best, this is a lovely blend of science fiction ideas and sparkling dialogue. I wouldn't go as far to say it is one of the better Bernice audios but frankly this is one series that rarely disappoints and always offers up *something* interesting and entertaining. Benny doesn't go through any terrible trials, she doesn't learn anything about herself...just like she says in the charming final scenes it is just like the old days, going off to a planet and having an adventure.

Daniel O'Mahony is such an interesting writer, I don't know if I always appreciate what he is writing but I have no qualms about admitting he is one of the best fictional writers Doctor Who ever had. He enjoys pushing the boundaries and experimenting, *The Man in the Velvet Mask* is hardly your typical first Doctor story, *Falls the Shadow* is a terrifyingly brutal (both physically and psychologically) novel and *The Cabinet of Light* plays about with the idea, the power of the Doctor without him hardly appearing. All three books are beautifully written, O'Mahony has a fabulous ear for creative prose and has the ability to plant the reader into his books with consummate skill. How his lyrical prose would translate onto audio was an interesting matter for speculation...the answer of which is hardly surprising. His dialogue is excellent, his ideas are well worth your time and the plotting is expertly configured to provide some decent surprises in the last third. If it wasn't for that fact that it had no relevance on the range as a whole, this could be a great example to hold up and suggest other writers follow suit.

After the complicated *Tartarus Gate* it is great to centre on Benny again and give Lisa Bowerman a chance to show off her considerable vocal talents. Technically Bernice should feel like an awfully stale character these days but thanks to Bowerman's addictive performance it makes the wait between adventures intoler-

able (especially since the Bernice series seems plagued with delays more than any other). What impressed me most her was Benny's reaction to Wolfe's corpse, her mothering instincts, her detective work in the library, her intimate relationship with her diary, her dinner date with Spool, her sparring with the assassin...oh bugging her hell just the everything she does really. She's fab, lets leave it at that.

What I have always loved about this range is that it manages to tell clever and involving stories with half of the resources and running time as the Doctor Who stories. I won't lie, the Benny CDs don't always come across as technically flawless as the mother range, they almost always wind up being better stories. Its almost as if the writers here know they have to fit their story until a limited time with only a few actors so they go all out to make it punchier, more imaginative and full of clipped but memorable dialogue. The Doctor Who adventures mostly seem to be the reverse, okay stories (lets take *Pier Pressure* as an example this year) with pretty half arsed plot and pace but enlivened by a great musical score and vivid sound design. That's not to say the Benny stories are lazy with their productions, the music is usually always great and the sound design often sets the scene beautifully.

*Timeless Passages* is a great example of this, a script that starts out relatively simply but intriguingly. Bernice is sent to the Great Labyrinth of Kerykeion which is about to be taken over by new management and Bev (who is now running the Collection in Braxiatel's absence) wants the rarest books in their great library sent back to the Collection. Things soon get more mysterious and exciting, Benny talks with a librarian who nobody has heard of, Wolfe (the new owner of the planet) is murdered most gruesomely and most bizarre of all a snappy talking robot assassin disguised as a knight is rampaging through the library trying to kill

Benny. With just a few cleverly placed plot devices, the library, the baby, the corporation O'Mahony manages to create a script, which incorporates all of these into great

surprises. Nothing is quite what we think and when we discover the truth behind the building itself, another, far more fascinating story starts to develop. Nobody is dead or alive; nobody is who they seem to be...confused, well go listen I'm trying to keep this spoiler free.

The wisecracking android assassin is a brilliant idea, one, which could have fallen flat on its face but it's presented here with utter relish and I found its scenes with Benny to be a real highlight. With dialogue such as...*"For the money! I kill for bread, nor am I ashamed to admit it!" "Get to the lift Professor"...There's nothing wrong with my hearing you quivering old fart!" "My words worth sod all...you're just going to have to take your chances!"* he comes across as a Douglas Adams creation with a rather dirty mouth! It is this sort of humour that the Benny range can encourage and flaunt where the Doctor Who range can only look on admiringly.

A clever story with an engaging narrative, fine performances (although another excellent one from Bowerman) and a satisfying ending...what more can you ask for? **8/10**

Reviewed by Joe Ford



# inferno

'Can you hear that? It's the Earth, screaming out its rage!' Possibly by turns the bleakest yet also the most optimistic story of the entire Jon Pertwee era, *Inferno* from his first season shows just how things could have developed, had the series not chosen to become a little more homely within the UNIT setup.

At this point, the Doctor and the Brigadier are still at odds with one another, and in fact the Doctor is at odds with anyone opposed to his getting the TARDIS to work, especially Professor Stahlman of Project Inferno that UNIT is helping guard and also advise. This doesn't stop him running his own experiments using the project's power and the friction between him and Stahlman results first in a limbo journey from which the Doctor barely escapes, then a full blown transition into a parallel world where the project is further advanced and everyone bar the Doctor has an alternative, fascist double. Both worlds are spiralling towards destruction at the insistence of the two Stahlmans to reach the penetration of the Earth's crust as swiftly as possible, despite the protests of people like the Government's Sir Keith Gold and mining expert Greg Sutton. Even second in command Petra Williams has doubts but none are listened to by the Stahlmans, especially after they are infected by the primeval ooze coming up the bore pipes, turning them into madmen and worse; creatures who thrive on the rising heat levels near the drill head. Trapped in the alternative world, the Doctor fails to stop a volcanic eruption taking the project and the Earth with it, but does escape back to his own world where he is just able to thwart Stahlman and shut down the drilling.

Based on real-life abandoned projects by the Russians and Americans, writer Don Houghton came up with this excellent tale of grim industrial horror that completed an excellent first colour series for the programme and its new star. However, producer Barry Letts and script editor Terrance Dicks decided it couldn't sustain its 7 episode running length and Dicks added the whole concept of the parallel world setting in order to get them out of a crisis situation. An old insurance company commercial had the tagline "We won't make a drama out of a crisis." By adding this extra concept to an already strong idea, Dicks managed with Houghton just that, and a very fine drama too.

Apart from the script length problems, recording proved problematic when director Douglas Camfield was taken into hospital at short notice because of heart problems and it is a credit to producer Barry Letts as well as Camfield's own careful pre-planning that it

barely misses a beat when he takes over. Had anyone not been told, since Letts is not credited for directing, I doubt many people would suspect. This is as slick as any drama of that age, and slicker than most while still retaining the substance.

Another two disc set finds us with the remastered story on the first with informative production subtitles as usual and a commentary provided by producer/director Barry Letts, script editor Terrance Dicks, Nicholas Courtney (Brigadier/Brigade Leader Lethbridge Stewart) and John Levene (Sergeant/Platoon Under Leader Benton). The vast majority is provided by the first three as Levene's comments were dropped in having been recorded some months before during a trip to the UK. However, his contribution shouldn't be underestimated, adding well to that of the others all of whom manage to keep the whole thing on track, entertaining and relevant for most of the story, no mean feat for this length.

The second disc contains all the extras which are great fun and good value, as well as a slightly improved i.e. plain English menu system (on the UK version anyway). The obligatory photo gallery provides plenty of rehearsal and location shots, though fewer are in colour than maybe would have been expected. The previously released Pertwee Years VHS introduction by Jon himself to his first scenes in Spearhead From Space and episode 7 of *Inferno* are included in their entirety and nice to see again. The 1971 Annual and Radio Times programme listings are also included for PC / Mac owners as Adobe Acrobat files and while are nice to have I suspect are superfluous to most people who only view their discs on TV. This does seem to be a regular extra now, though I do wonder what will happen when all the annuals have been released - will they start over again? A further extra is a deleted scene from the UK transmission. People viewing the story on PBS may remember it as it was included on American copies of the story; Jon Pertwee uses one of his least convincing voices to provide a radio report and it was wisely dropped from the UK transmission.

We then come to two extras, both of which advertise themselves as 'Part 1'. The main one is The UNIT Family, looking at the genesis of UNIT from its early origins in The Web of Fear and The Invasion through to the end of *Inferno* and the loss of Liz Shaw, and is a good documentary on the thoughts behind it and the people who played a part therein in front and behind the camera. The second 'Part 1' is a Visual

Effects Promo Film, all BBC pronounced English detailing some of the model work and effects made by the department for shows including *Doomwatch*, *Marty Amok*, *Not Only But Also* and *Doctor Who*, including *Ambassadors of Death* and *Inferno*. The clipped English narration certainly advertises it as Part 1, so maybe the remainder, if it still exists, will appear on a future release.

The final extra is *Can You Hear The Earth Scream?* and as a documentary feature on the story it is very good. My only real disappointment with this is that it only runs to 35 minutes - the *Genesis of the Daleks* feature runs to over an hour and while I realise that the likes of Pertwee are no longer with us, I do feel that more could have been made of it, such as increased contributions from John Levene and also a contribution from Christopher Benjamin who played Sir Keith. His input into the *Talons of Weng-Chiang* release was excellent and having met the gent I know he'd be able to give a good contribution but there's nothing and that's a shame.

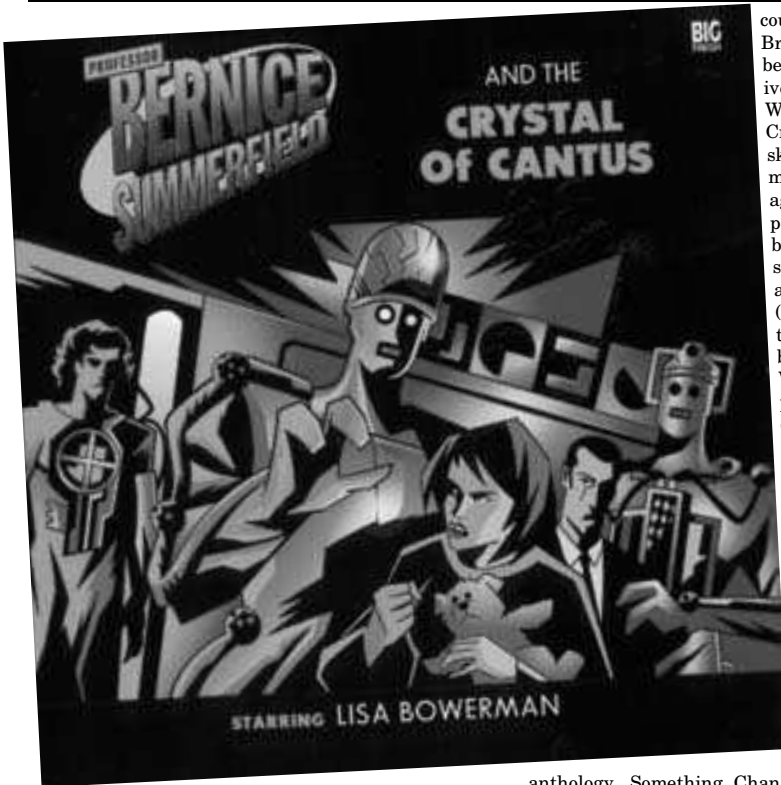
Overall, *Inferno* is an excellent package. The story, like all six parters and above, is overlong, but nonetheless is still very entertaining and provides a gritty realism that not many stories could make a claim to and the package of extras is very good value. *Inferno* on DVD is a welcome blast from the past - just watch out for that lava, it's closing in... 8/10

*Reviewed by Martin Hearn*





# professor bernice summerfield and the crystal of cantus



That was *fantastic*.

The Bernice Summerfield was in danger of becoming The X-Files of the Doctor Who universe with its intriguing hints and whispers of a back-story and a 'grander plan' but without confirming anything or bringing it all out into the open. Well its now out in the open and the answers were certainly worth waiting for.

It is a shame because a story with Benny and the Cybermen really should be the most exciting about this adventure and whilst it is as exhilarating and gripping as you would imagine the metal meanies don't stand a chance against the dramatic arc developments. Whilst not all of the regulars appear in this story the three most important do and it is what occurs between them that makes this so special.

Braxiatel has always threatened to topple Benny as the most *interesting* character in this series because he is so darn enigmatic. He has been around since the early days of the New Adventures and has grown as a character to a point where he is actually as 'listenable' as the Doctor himself. He became an important regular in the Virgin Benny novels before becoming the essential head of the Collection where the Benny series we now enjoy takes place. To add some fascinating background colour we can also experience his life on Gallifrey in the series of the same name, finding out how close he is to President Romana and why he chose to leave Gallifrey.

But back in season three Braxiatel forced Jason to forget a terrible secret that he learnt about Brax when they confronted themselves in the mirror. Since then Jason has been suffering terrible headaches when he tries to remember gaps in his memory, such as that incident with the Purpara Pawn where he was accused of murder. Hints have been left that Jason has been Braxiatel's puppet ever since then but what on Earth

could be so important that Brax would use Benny's beau in such a manipulative fashion? What is so brilliant about Crystal of Cantus is how skilfully it weaves in so much continuity but manages to make it all seem pre-planned and (even better) make the answers satisfactory and worthy of a story in its own right (instead of just winding the answers around a basic plot). Life During Wartime plays a huge part in Braxiatel's justification, the Fifth Axis invasion of the Collection proving that drastic steps are needed to protect the collection. A short story in *A Life Worth Living* also proves vital to the overall story, Brax manoeuvring his players into position skilfully (and if you go back and read *A Summer Affair* by Joseph Lidster it is all there in the text). And the last short story

anthology, *Something Changed* leads to a dramatic climax where Braxiatel kills scientist Doggles to save the multiverse, proving how ruthless the guy is if the situation is bad enough. Finally Braxiatel's plan comes to fruition on Cantus, home of an entire Cyber-army. As the pieces all fall into place it soon becomes frighteningly obvious to Jason that everybody, Benny, Ms Jones, Ronan, even Peter have been used by Braxiatel to ensure the future of the Collection. The Cybermen are a ready-made army to be exploited if they have a leader who is willing to wait and rest with them until the Collection is in danger. And Braxiatel has a willing slave in Jason Kane...

It is an audacious twist, which comes entirely out of the blue and strikes you dead in the chest. The scene where Jason suddenly realises he has been manipulated and will be sacrificed by Braxiatel is one of the most terrifying audio moments in ages. You learn how little Brax genuinely feels for Jason (how he mimics his earlier "We're like *that*" sent chills down my spine) and how arrogant he thinks Bernice is. I always knew the Time Lord could be icy cold and selfish, even a little bit nasty at times if his friends are in danger but his attitude towards Jason here is downright terrifying, willing to do anything, right down to lying to and hurting his closest friends to protect his life. In the end of the day it is not Benny who has been used so, understandably, it is Jason who gets the big confrontation scene with Brax. Squeezing his throat and telling the big guy to fuck off is superbly written and deeply uncomfortable after all they have been through to-

gether.

You have to give the series credit for not letting you get comfortable. Bumping of Clarissa Jones, suggesting Peter might be a murderer, the invasion of the Collection by the Fifth Axis, the burgeoning romance between Bev and Jason and now outing Braxiatel as the terrifying schemer that he really is. It is this series' consistent quality and fascinating developments that have kept me so enraptured for so long. As Benny and Jason discuss at the end, things are totally different to how they started on this series and nobody knows how things are going to be from now on. Brilliant maturity for a series and I will be eager to find out just how the Collection copes without Braxiatel.

Joseph Lidster has written a superb script, his finest to date. It has been a fascinating experience watching Lidster mature into such a striking audio writer; his initial script (*The Rapture*) was an interesting idea but a pushed a little too hard, Master saw much more potential with a superb two-handed second episode, *Terror Firma* pushed Doctor Who drama to a stonking new level and was crammed full (too full) of great ideas and finally his UNIT story *The Longest Night* lack subtlety but made up for it by supplying a gripping real time drama. All of Lidster's strengths are in evidence here, especially his ability to push a series boundaries and pull several gob-smacking rabbits out of his hat. There is a brilliant narrative style, with Benny, Brax and Jason all commenting on and pushing the action onwards, being interrogated by student Parasiel. It is especially good when Parasiel and Brax talk together when you realise how far Brax has gone and start to fear for the kids life.

The Cybermen are relegated to the second division but just as Lidster managed to exploit the Daleks, he makes some astute observations about the Cybermen too. Benny's anger when Parasiel just wants to the story push forward to the bits with the Cybermen is especially good, I loved it when she explains to him how horrifying it would be if the Cybermen invaded the Collection converted all of his friends. Nothing could quite have prepared me for the depravity of Lidster imagination

when he reveals just what Cybermats are made out of and Benny's hysterical reaction drives the horror home even more. Even better though is Jason's fear when he is being turned into a Cybercontroller, to hear his terrified voice in a Cyber modulation drives home the point that they really were people once. The hints that Jason might still be under their control are a nice touch especially the last line of the play, Excellent...

The *Crystal of Cantus* is the Benny range on great form but lets be honest, this is a series that rarely *isn't*. They've got the format, the length and the tone of this series down to a fine art now and it pleases me so much to see another six releases coming out this year with some damn fine writers behind the scripts. It is this sort of story that has seen this character survive so long and prosper into a seventh season.

Bravo: 10/10

Reviewed by Joe Ford



Unless you are a die-in-a-ditch McCoy hater, this year's crop of Seventh Doctor stories has been particularly entertaining. An interesting blend of ghoulish terror, historical angst and fly on the wall documentary now sees the addition of the almost great psychodrama, *Red*.

For the anti-McCoy jihadists cluttering the fetid margins of the Internet, the news that McCoy has once again risen to the challenge of Stewart Sheargold's script should occasion much frothing at the mouth. For the rest of us, *Red* mixes a genuinely alien landscape with questions about the morality, and indeed, desirability of violence. For the most part, we are treated to an unsettling atmosphere as the lives of those in the Needle begin to unravel. The depiction of this placid paradise collapsing into red ruin is compelling; though in the end, as cliché hoves into view, we are treated instead to the usual BF talkfest as the clock counts down to disaster. But the journey to that point is fascinating.

The Needle is a living construct populated by an elite who has willingly been chipped to remove the ability to cause harm through violence. Monitored by Whitenoise, a sentient computer designed to monitor their thoughts, edit their memories, and enable them to lead perfectly happy, docile lives. Outside the Needle, in the shanties below, the rest of the population scrounge for a living, free of Whitenoise's fetters, but living a hard life in the Needle's shadow. These people had originally embraced being neutered, before renouncing it, and their lives in the Needle.

By then, are the residents of the Needle dying terrible, violent deaths? Peaceable one moment, ranting killers the next. What has infected the placid little community and what role will the Doctor and Mel play in unpicking this mystery?

Listening to episode one at 4 in the morning while roaring down the highway at the beginning of a 5-hour drive was always going to be a memorable experience. What made it truly enjoyable was the happy meshing of acting, writing and sound design. The world of the Needle is a truly unique, unsettling place, brought to life splendidly. The depiction of the murder's, Mel and the Doctor's encounter with the Needle and its inhabitants, and the twisted nature of those residents create one of the most unique opening episodes of any Big Finish release.

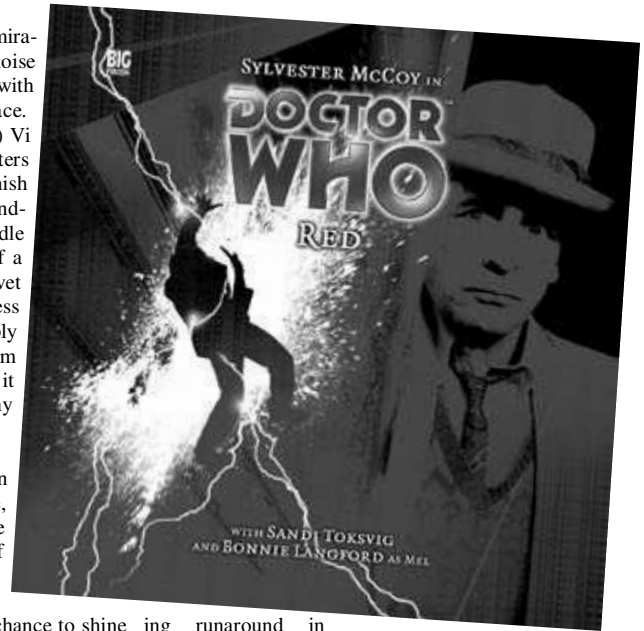
The main supporting cast performs admirably. John Stahl's depiction of Whitenoise manages to imbue a soulless machine with just the right amount of smug menace. Sandi Toksvig's deprived (and deprived) Vi Yulquen is one of the more outré characters you are likely to encounter in a Big Finish story. Ostensibly a prim and proper sounding woman, the Matriarch of the Needle quickly reveals herself to be a husk of a person. Too craven to leave the velvet prison of the Needle, she nonetheless craves the one commodity in short supply – pain. The journey she takes from searching for harm to finally experience it and her reaction to it, are one of the many highlights of this play.

Sean Oliver as Chief Blue, the human element in the policing of the Needle, and Kellie Ryan as Celia Fortunate round out the main cast with a couple of serviceable performances.

McCoy and Langford really do have a chance to shine in this story, once their characters are separated as the narrative splits. Mel falls in with a Nuane and Draun, brother and sister who live in the town beneath the Needle. There, in an effort to heal her injuries from the fall from the Needle, she experiences a drug called Slow, which compresses time, enabling her to heal. The lives of these people outside the Needle is expertly drawn, and the morality they display goes some way to demonstrating how the far from normalcy this human colony has strayed.

Back in the Needle, safely chipped, the Doctor becomes inexplicably linked with the force known as Red, which manifests itself in the bodies of those about to kill. McCoy excels here, outraged at his forced chipping. He manages to walk the difficult line in not overacting when mimicking the actions of the killers in the Needle. Given that in similar situations in previous stories he goes right over the top, McCoy has either learned to temper his enthusiasm, or actually listened to Gary Russell's direction. Though, his pronunciation of 'tortoise' is, frankly, bizarre.

The one lamentable aspect of the story is the way it becomes more ordinary as it unwinds. We go from a strange new world in episode one, to an average sound-



ing runaround in episode four. The journey to that point is fascinating and entertaining, but the resort to noble sacrifices and long-winded exposition is disappointing. But up to the point, *Red* is a real treat to listen too.

What does it mean to abandon the ability to create violence? What sort of person do you become if you can't inflict harm? Or, more insidious, what sort of person craves harm? In his liner notes, Sheargold partly answers this with the following - those who become deprived on account of being deprived. The world of the Needle is full of people wanting something they can't have, and when they get it, paying the penalty. Whitenoise wants control, but ends up losing it utterly. Chief Blue wants to find the murderer, and when he finds it under his nose, loses his life as a result. Celia Fortunate wants to retrieve her memories, but when she does, the horror of she really is lies plainly at the heart of the mystery. Yulquen's search for harm drives her past the point of sanity, and reveals her to be the loathsome creature she really is, not the genteel Matriarch represents to the world.

In the end, *Red* is a more than worthy effort, an atmospheric tale that asks a series of pertinent questions that reflect the nature of our world today. Depriving humanity of all his emotions, good and bad, makes him even more dangerous. While the end of this play may disappoint with its familiarity, for the most part, *Red* provides excellent and thought provoking entertainment. 7/10

*Reviewed by Rob Mammon*

***Listening to episode one at 4 in the morning while roaring down the highway at the beginning of a 5-hour drive was always going to be a memorable experience.***

**next  
ISSUE**



**TORCHWOOD EPISODE REVIEWS  
EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH BIG FINISH AUTHOR JOE LIDSTER  
AND MORE!**

**WHOTOPIA ISSUE 10**

## FICTION

# The Chase

by Charles Norton

He ran. The ground stormed hard under his feet, and the rain coursed across his face and stung at his eyes. The rain appeared to quicken just as his run began to slack, and the burning tang in his mouth pierced a little stronger as his breaths came in fitful chokes and stabs.

He raised his hand up close to his face to look down to a joggling watch, bobbing up and down on his wrist in sympathy with the sprinting; as his feet continued to kick away into the puddled earth, and cracked and streaming pavements. Skidding to a stop, he shot a panting glance back over his shoulder, and through the haze, to the road behind. The water streamed across his back, and sprayed at his legs.

In his mind, he saw them following a little further back around the last corner; their

impassive steely shells sliding quick through the pouring water, the rain veining out across their domes and the bumped surface of their iron skirts trundling over the deserted cobbles; the rain dripping from a single storked eye sweeping the wet roads in front, looking for him.

He swallowed another metallic mouthful against his trembled breathing, and darted off back round the corner of another empty street; not waiting to see the next polished dome glint out of the drizzled alleyway behind him – two bulbs on its top flashing further orders onto the death squad.

The sky glowered and rumbled overhead, bruised and bleeding above the terraced streets, chimneystacks and factories below. The clock chimed quarter past five from the face of Saint James'. He sped off to the next turning.

The rain lashed and splattered against the frame of a familiar blue door at the other end of the street. He quivered as he remembered the creatures' glide across the copper floors of a gaudy city, menacing towards the old man and his granddaughter. He looked up over the harsh cobbled incline to the blue door towards which he was headed, and scanned the turning below for pursuers. There weren't any.

He jogged as fast as he could still manage up to the head of the street, where he was sure the Doctor would be waiting for him. He reached the blue door, and let his hand crash up against the wood three times before his energy appeared to give out.

There was a pause. Finally the door came to pull slowly open, and a line of water pattered down onto the floor, to pool at his feet. A head popped out through the emergent crack.

"You're late," the head said, with only faintest interest. "Wipe your shoes on the mat, and put your coat up on the hook. There's some milk and biscuits on top of the mantelpiece"

She let him in, and he burst into the front room, throwing his duffel coat to the floor and scuffling to his knees in front of the television set.

"It's already started," his mother's voice continued from the kitchen. "One of the metal cruets with the sink plungers has come up through the sand. Hartnell's looking worried."

He didn't hear her. He sat in front of the screen, the static crackling off the glass, and the images glowing a silver blue across his face. He reached out his hand for another chocolate biscuit, and quietly sipped his milk.



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