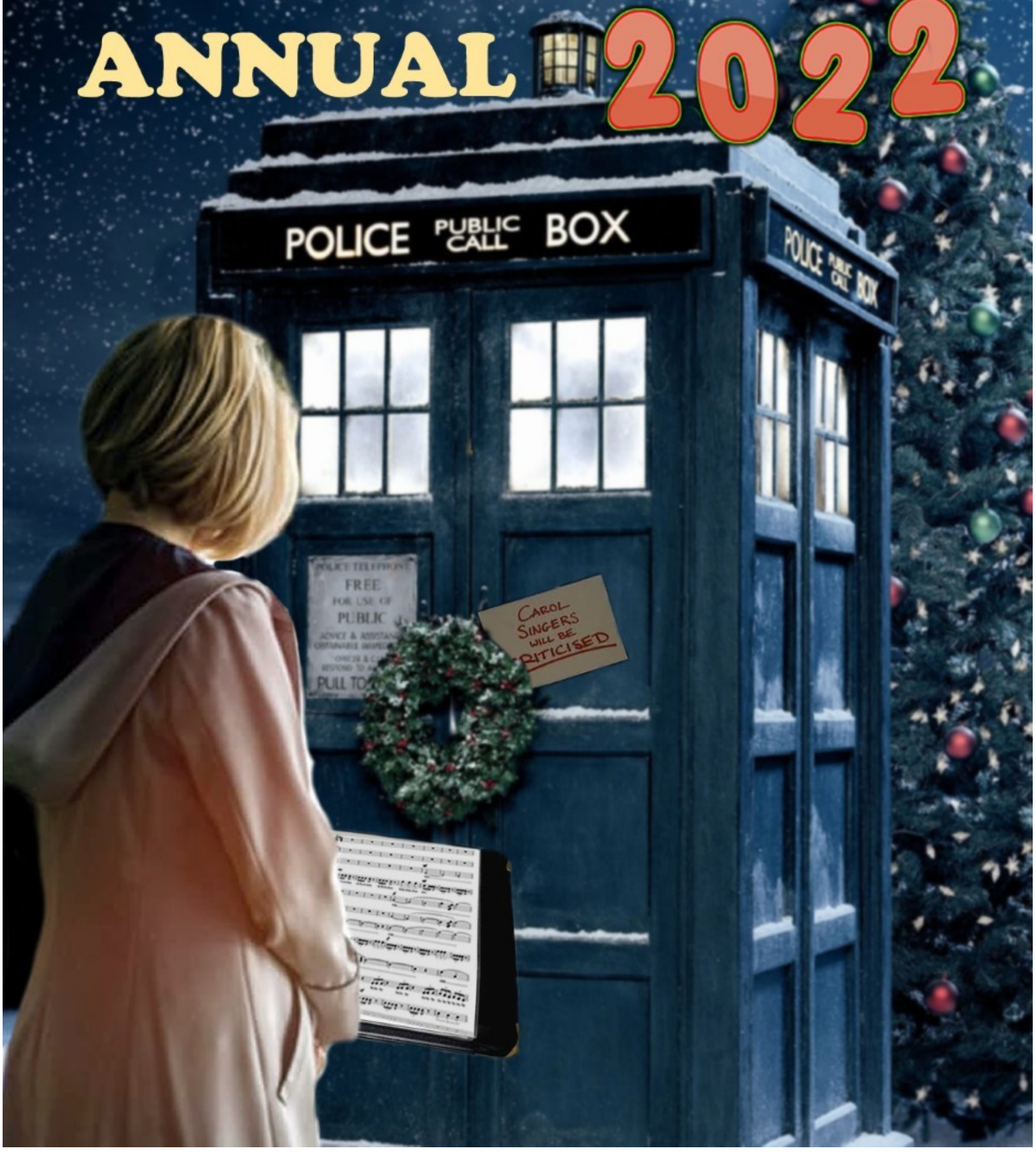


THE  
DOCTOR WHO  
COMPANION  
ANNUAL 2022





# Welcome to the Doctor Who Companion Annual 2022

Welcome to the second annual from *The Doctor Who Companion*!

Last year's seemed to go down well, so this year, we've packed in even more. A lot more, in fact. Whereas last year's was purely fiction, the 2022 Annual is a mix of fiction and non-fiction, including reviews of every episode of *Flux*; accompanying pieces on Mary Seacole, Weeping Angels, and specific characters from *Doctor Who* Series 13; and, in tribute to the *Doctor Who* legend who passed away in December 2021, an interview with Chris Achilléos. Plus plenty more besides!

And please excuse some self-promotion, but there's also an exclusive sample of my tome, *100 Objects of Doctor Who*, out now from Candy Jar Books.

I'm hugely proud of *The Doctor Who Companion's* 2022 Annual. And that's not showing off: all of this was done by the DWC's contributors; my involvement was limited to layouts. It's been a lot of work, but we hope you think it's worth it. As far as I know, we're the only site that gives readers an annual to download, completely free, and okay, yes, that does sound a bit boastful. But I'm in that sort of mood: I'm hugely proud of the team, of the site, and of the readers who form the DWC community. This year has been difficult, and my relationship with *Doctor Who* has felt strained, so grant me this little ounce of indulgence.

Because look! This annual is a whopping **85 pages!**

Oh, there was one other thing I did for this annual: set its (admittedly very loose) theme! Last year's was "companions"; this year's is "the times, they are a-changin'". As such, we start off with a delightful short story, inspired by real life, by Peter Shaw, involving Bob Dylan.

And Peter's even created a special Spotify playlist for you to enjoy, so [click on the link](#) to have a musical accompaniment throughout the annual!

**Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!**

Philip Bates,  
Editor and Co-Founder of *The Doctor Who Companion*.

**A SPECIAL THANK YOU TO JAMES BALDOCK, FOR CREATING THE  
STUNNING FRONT AND BACK COVER ARTWORKS.**



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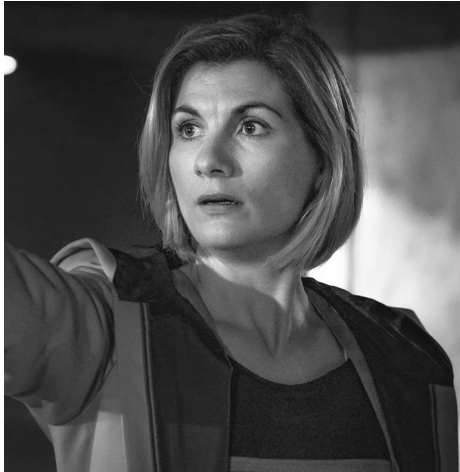
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And don't forget to join us on the DWC across the festivities for a plethora of features and the latest news, looking ahead to the New Year's Day special, *Eve of the Daleks....*

# Born in Time

**Peter Shaw.**



The wind that struck the motorcyclist felt like a hurricane. He careered off the road, sent flying face-first into the forest, his head of curly dark hair smashing on a rock. As he was sucked from consciousness, his mercurial mind pondered...

“Hurricane!” He knew that word. Its roots dug deep. The Taino Native Americans called the spirit of the wind, Hurucane. His blue eyes faded as two figures approached, one with a battered acoustic guitar slung over her shoulder. He rather hoped one of them was a doctor.

Yasmin Khan’s police training kicked in instantly. “Don’t move,” she told him. There was no response. “Doctor, give me your coat.” Yaz took off her own as well, rolled them both, and placed them either side of the motorcyclist’s neck. She was annoyed with the Doctor, who was simply staring into the blackness of the woods. “Could do with some help here!”

“Sorry,” said the Doctor. “You seemed to be doing alright. Something is happening here. But I don’t know what it is.”

“I think he’s broken his neck,” said Yaz. “Idiot wasn’t wearing a helmet. And he had sunglasses on. In this light!”

“We were blown off course,” said the Doctor.

“The TARDIS got blown in the wind? Well, not that far; I saw a sign saying ‘Woodstock’. Isn’t that where we’re heading?”

“The festival took place 60 miles away on Max Yasgur's Farm near Bethel.” The Doctor waved her sonic screwdriver over the prone figure then bent down to take a closer look.

“Then why is it called Woodstock?” asked Yaz.

She checked the readings. “Mostly because the investment group that funded it – it wasn’t all free-love hippies even then – was called Woodstock Ventures, but also because of the



town's association with...' The Doctor carefully pulled back the curly mop of hair from the injured man's face. It revealed a hook nose and gaunt face, an unmistakable profile that had adorned countless posters, newspapers, and album covers. "... Bob Dylan."

"Who's that?" asked Yaz.

"Bob Dylan," answered the Doctor, incredulously.

"Yes, who is he?"

"Bob Dylan."

"No, the man you were talking about — isn't he some kind of folk singer?"

"Yes, Yaz! This is Bob Dylan! Him. Here. Now! Catskill mountains on the outskirts of New York, 29th July 1966 – we've been blown back in time as well as space! This is Bob Dylan's famous motorcycle crash!"

"I'm sorry, Doctor," she looked directly at her. "But this man is dying. I've seen injuries like this before. If he ever wakes up, he'll be brain dead or in a coma. God knows how long."

The Doctor waved her sonic screwdriver over the man's body. "No!" She cried.

"What have you done, fixed him?" asked Yaz.

"This isn't a magic wand." Yaz threw back a look of incredulity. "It really isn't. I've just put him in a temporary stasis bubble. That should buy us some time to find out what's going on here."

"He's come off his motorbike and needs medical treatment," Yaz stood up and looked around. No cars had come up the mountain road all the time they had been there. Not a good sign.

The Doctor was staring out into the forest again. As Yaz was about to speak, the Doctor shushed her. They both stood motionless and listened. Something was breathing in the undergrowth. But not a person. A deep, earthy breath that reeked of something large and dangerous.

The Doctor whispered: "Just up the road from here is a small town called Bearsville. Can you guess why they called it that?"

Yaz sniped back: "If it's a bear, just say: 'it's a bear!'"

"Great big furry back and furry hair. Ah, think I'll call it a bear." The Doctor smiled, unconvincingly. "What we are going to do is wait. And if the bear approaches we drop to the floor. We lie on our stomachs, face down. Then clasp your hands over the back of your neck, elbows protecting the side of your face."

"Yes," replied Yaz. "Or you could use your sonic non-wand to scare it off, just like you did



with the Golem of Antincra last Wednesday.”

“It’s not magic. I used a large swathe of power to create the stasis bubble. Bubbles are like that, stasis ones even more so. Probably couldn’t unscrew a battery cover with the power that’s left. Which is really annoying, as you can never find those little screwdrivers. Why do they only come in Christmas crackers...?”

“Doctor, I think it’s coming for us. We can drop, but what about him?” She indicated to the injured biker.

“OK. New plan. You drop. I’ll run. Take the bear with me.”

“No!” Yaz screamed as the bear charged towards them.

“Too late!” the Doctor replied as she hurtled into the forest, pursued by a bear.

Yaz felt so alone. Her mind slipped back to when she was 19, on a camping trip with her family. Dad’s stupid idea. She went for a walk with her sister, Sonya, and they got lost on Ecclesall Woods. There was a heatwave and the pair hadn’t packed any water. Sonya collapsed and Yaz cradled her, singing softly to keep her spirits up until someone found them.

Yaz knelt down next to the unconscious biker and felt the urge to do the same. She closed her eyes and started singing, “When the rain is blowing in your face. And the whole world is on your case, I could offer you a warm embrace, to make you feel my love.”

“Stop that now!” The Doctor had returned, bear free. It was just a few minutes later, but it seemed like an eternity.

Yaz felt insulted. “I was in the police choir, you know!”

“Beautiful. But you can’t sing that song!” the Doctor replied.

“Why not?” asked Yaz.

“Because,” the Doctor nodded towards the biker, “he hasn’t written it yet!”

“That was Adele!”

“You really need to broaden your musical education.”

“How did you get away?” Yaz was astonished.

“Gust of wind, the bear disappeared,” the Doctor replied. “Which I thought was odd. Because – you know – bears don’t usually do that.”

“How long have we got?” asked Yaz. “He needs an ambulance.”

“Hopefully minutes, but stasis bubbles are unsteady. Particularly inside temporal anomalies.” The Doctor’s smiles were getting less and less convincing.



“Okay. Tell me what’s going on.”

As the Doctor launched into an overcomplicated explanation, she noticed Yaz’s face becoming more incredulous. So she stopped and said, “Something is messing with time. Possibly the bear.”

“And what’s that got to do with Bob Dylan?” Yaz watched as the Doctor scanned the prone biker once again.

“Okay, we’ve got time,” said the Doctor. “Bob Dylan is one of the greatest artists, greatest *poets* of not just his generation. But of all time. Think Shakespeare. Picasso. The Chuckle Brothers. That’s not even a joke.”

“I mean, I’ve heard of him but... really?” Yaz was more concerned about a dying man, than whether he was some kind of rock star.

“Remember Martin Luther King?” Yaz hit back with a ‘well of course’ face. “Shortly before Dr King delivered his ‘I have a dream’ speech at the March on Washington, Dylan performed, ‘Only A Pawn in Their Game’. A rallying cry for justice for oppressed people. He inspired the Beatles to up their songwriting game. He invented the pop video, kind of. He won a Nobel Prize for literature. And he punched Rupert Everett in the face in the film, *Hearts of Fire*. Classic.”

“Oh, so I suppose he’s one of your historical pals like Charles Dickens and HG Wells?”

“No, I’ve never met him,” the Doctor looked coyish. “Until today. If this counts as a meeting.”

“You’re such a fan but you’ve never met Bob Dylan?” This was a new thing, thought Yaz.

“You can’t just meet Bob Dylan.” The Doctor, for once, was deadly serious. “What would you say to Bob Dylan? You’d sound like a babbling idiot. I mean, I’ve got a lot of questions: Why did you leave Blind Willie McTell off *Infidels*? And Foot of Pride, why did you leave that off *Infidels*? Tell Me?”

“I don’t know, I don’t even know what *Infidels* is!”

“It’s an album he’ll release in 1983. Tell Me is another brilliant song he inexplicably left off. This is what we’ve got to save, his future! Even if he doesn’t always get it right. If Dylan dies here, the whole of human history will change.” At that second, Yaz and the Doctor were nearly knocked off their feet by a vast gust of wind.

“He has no future,” came a roar. Yaz and the Doctor turned to face the huge figure with dark brown fur and a fearsome dished face, set with deep black eyes. The bear had returned.

“Hi bear,” said the Doctor. “Clever bear, learning to talk. Disappearing and appearing at



will. Hang on. Are you actually a bear?”

Yaz was constantly amazed at how flippant the Doctor became when faced with imminent death. “What’s going on here?”

“I’m really glad I get to say this, just once. The answer, my friend...”

“... Is blowing in the wind. Yes, I know that one. They made us sing it at school!”

The Doctor was impressed. “Quite right too. Every schoolgirl needs to learn a philosophical folk song about peace, war, and freedom, with a melody adapted from an old African-American spiritual.”

“He didn’t even write the tune!” Yaz gave an apologetic glance down at the unconscious motorcyclists.

“Great artists steal, Yaz. Love and theft,” the Doctor smiled at her own joke. “It wasn’t just any wind, it was a time wind.”

“Um, remember me?” The bear had been observing the exchange with more than a little incredulity. She was more used to people screaming with fear and begging for their souls to be saved. These two were different.

“Yes, I was getting to you, bear.” The Doctor took a breath. “There are a few powerful entities that can cause a time wind and alter the course of history. None of them are bears. So, I’m guessing...” The Doctor’s mind raced... “Catskill mountains have a legend. Which, as Yaz and I know, usually mean an explanation for aliens. But you’re old. Ancient. Been here a long time?”

“I claimed this wilderness before there were roads, and motorised vehicles,” the bear’s voice was primeval and full of infinite sorrow. “Before the human race hunted without care, for sport not food; the people here had respect for the land.

“This forest teemed with bears, panthers, and deer. The humans feared and adored me. And that gave me power. I appeared to them as a bear, but I had charge of the doors of day and night. I could open and shut them at the proper hour. I put up the new moons in the skies, and cut up the old ones into stars.”

“And you still have enough power to wreak havoc by conjuring a time wind,” the Doctor noted that the bear was breathing deeply and uncomfortably. There was more than one dying entity in the forest.

“Why pick on him? Do you know how important this human is? I mean they’re all important. But he will inspire millions, *billions* in the future. All the songs he will never write: Jokerman, Tangled Up In Blue, All Along the Watchtower, Wiggle Wiggle!” She turns to Yaz, “Love that one, ‘Wiggle, wiggle, wiggle like a bowl of soup!’”



Yaz was unimpressed. “I thought you said he was a poet?”

“Well, more of a song and dance man,” replied the Doctor. “Only, he’s the greatest song and dance man in the universe!”

Struggling for breath, the bear spoke angrily. “He’s a human. Who thinks, like all the rest, he can pollute my forest with his poisonous fumes and my silence with a mechanical roar!”

“Manitou. If I’ve guessed right, and that’s who you are,” replied the Doctor. “Give me him back. Just for one song. Then you can decide if he should carry on.”

The bear, Manitou – the spirit of the mountains – lumbered towards the body of the motorcyclist. Raising his huge paws, another gust of wind raised the singer to his feet.

“You’ll need this!” The Doctor passed the battered acoustic guitar to the biker. “Sorry it’s not electric. But we don’t need to start all that again right now.” The Doctor turned to Yaz.

“Lucky I brought it, I was going to busk along at Woodstock with the Incredible String Band.”

“The who?” replied Yaz.

“Tried that last time. Pete Townsend wouldn’t let me.” The Doctor turned back to the biker, now revived, if a little confused. “Go on, give us a song. Do Every Grain of Sand! No, you haven’t written that one yet. How about Lay Down Your Weary Tune! I know you don’t usually do requests, but this angry spirit bear is waiting.”

Finding his fingers on the fretboard, the biker began to strum and pick, eventually landing on D Major then C Major... he started singing, “Lay down your weary tune, lay down...”

The voice and guitar intertwined to conjure a picture of the universe personified in song. Five visionary verses and choruses, flashing: the morning breeze like a bugle, the ocean wild like an organ, clouds unbound by laws, water smooth like a hymn, and the winds listening to the best. The bear wept.

Once the singer stopped, a final wind blew. The bear disappeared, and the biker lay down once again. The Doctor’s sonic lasted one more scan.

“He’ll be fine,” she told Yaz, who was also in tears. The Doctor wiped away her own. They could hear a car coming up the road; help was at hand. The Doctor picked up the guitar and they headed back up the path to the TARDIS.

“When he wakes up, he’ll be changed,” the Doctor explained to Yaz. “This is a big moment for Dylan. He’ll become a different person. A new chapter. A new morning. A new mask. And not for the last time.” The Doctor sighed. She knew – only too well – how that felt.

**[You can enjoy a playlist of accompanying songs, specially curated by Peter Shaw, on Spotify now!](#)**

# Exclusive Interview: Chris Achilléos

Jonathan Appleton.



Earlier in December 2021, the legendary Target cover artist, Chris Achilléos passed away. The outpouring of love for his work was both astounding and unsurprising. His illustrations on iconic covers like *Doctor Who and the Zarbi*, *Doctor Who and the Ice Warriors*, *The Three Doctors*, and so many more enticed fans of all generations into buying novelisations, inspiring them to read, to draw, to embrace *Doctor Who* in all its forms — and so even started them on a journey that continues today.

It's an astonishing legacy. And in 2016, Achilléos worked on more Target covers. Jonathan Appleton spoke to Chris about these, and about his older work. Now

seems like the perfect time to revisit that interview...

**DWC:** How do you feel about the new covers? Was it exciting to go back and do some new work on *Doctor Who*?

**Chris:** First of all it was very surprising after all these years to get a call like that. I used to get calls from the BBC for the audio CDs; I've done quite a lot of those so at first I thought it was about that. They told me they were re-publishing some titles and also they wanted to commission new ones. I thought 'really?!' [Laughs]

**How did it feel to do new work?**

Well, it's not that I haven't done one since



the Seventies, I have been doing others. For instance, SFX magazine commissioned me to do some covers a couple of years ago – I did a new one for *The Green Death* and one for *Blink*. And I've done a few private commissions once so it was not difficult for me to do these three new ones.

**That style of having the Doctor in black and white and different characters from the story in colour – there's something about that that works really well for *Doctor Who*; it's very unusual – very distinctive, I always thought.**

Well, I always saw them as graphics rather than paintings. They were very small book covers and you had to do something very impactful to grab attention and that worked very well. But it wasn't always the Doctor's face in black and white on them, I did some colour ones to try and move on a little bit rather than doing the same theme all the time. I took a chance and did different things, like using the work 'Kklak!', or even leaving the Doctor's head off altogether, stuff like that to make it interesting. It was not always appreciated!

**That one you mention – *The Dinosaur Invasion* – it shows you must have loved your comics...**

Oh yeah, if you know anything about me you know how much I was influenced by comics.

**It's such a great action image. Were the publishers not very keen on you using that word 'Kklak!' on the cover?**

No they were not! I always submitted the

work to the art director but then later on I used to go straight to Tandem Books which was Target – I always knew them as Tandem because I used to do lots of other work for them. They were under the same label; they were just in different rooms. I used to take the *Doctor Who* covers in there and sort of unveil them. It was always 'Wow, it's great Chris!' but on that occasion there was silence, then 'What's this "Kklak!"?' I said 'What do you mean? It's part of the design', I thought kids would love it.

**That's one of the most memorable ones!**

It's not my favourite cover but it's the one that people talk about the most. There were some problems with that, they wanted me to take it out but I refused to do so. I can't remember exactly what happened but I got away with it! Then they got all the fans letters coming in from people saying they loved it and they realised I was right. Later, when I left the Doctor's head off some covers, they asked, 'Where's the





Doctor?’ I said he didn’t fit in, like on *The Ice Warriors*, that’s my favourite design now. I’ve moved on: it used to be *Genesis of the Daleks*; now I prefer that because it’s such a perfect design. I could not bring myself to ruin a perfect design just so I could show the Doctor’s head.

**So when you were planning the images, was it more or less up to you what you included and then the publisher would give their views after; is that how it would work?**

I got no briefing at all. I did so many over the years. The first ones were the ones where we worked out the style and the content of the covers. I did *Doctor Who and the Zarbi* and there was no reference material for that – in those days it was just two or three black and white photos, if you could use anything you were lucky. I would get a synopsis and read through that, I was used to doing book covers so I would copy the action. I did a rough image with some

real ants but they came back and said ‘No, you have got the wrong idea, Chris – the BBC want the real characters, the real models to be shown,’ and of course my reaction was ‘Why didn’t you tell me this?’ It happened a lot when I was freelance, you would get the wrong brief or there would be no brief, or they would change their minds. At first I was pretty annoyed about it but I went and got some reference photos and I realised that was the way to





go.

They've picked some nice ones for these reissues. The *Genesis* one is there – that always seemed quite an unusual one, almost photographic, particularly the Dalek and the Doctor.

Yeah, like I say the *Genesis* cover used to be my favourite. I just enjoyed doing that one very much. It had a Davros in the middle; it felt like a very good design, it was a nice one to look at. And the way I did the Doctor, not using the dots, in a water-colour kind of way, with the Dalek at the back... it was a very satisfying design. We'd changed the format by then so the pictures would go to the top behind the logo.

**And we've got *The Web of Fear* as well, with the web going right up behind the logo as you mention – that's a really striking image.**

Yes, I did a few Patrick Troughton ones and I really loved those.



The thing I remember from buying the books when I was younger is that you didn't have videos then and if you'd never seen the story the cover really told you what the story was about – it was the only thing you had to tell you what the images were in the story.



Exactly, you had to encapsulate the whole story in the picture on the cover. It's not an easy thing to do, and that's what I try very hard to achieve on any book cover, not just *Doctor Who*, and also stay faithful to the author's description of things – the characters, whatever was portrayed. But also you have to bear in mind that this was not editorial illustration where you have a captive audience and they want to look at the details. This is a miniature poster to attract the attention of people passing by so you have to make it very attractive and punchy, and make it stand out from the rest and that's what I was good at.

**Some of your designs will be in the new exhibition [held at the Cartoon Museum in April and May 2016] – will you go along to have a look yourself?**

Yeah, why not? It wouldn't be complete without me! [Laughs.] It'll be nice to see

my work; some of it's in other people's possession now.

**So you've sold some of the originals?**

Yes, in the Eighties. The Eighties was like the dark ages and nobody wanted the artwork. I was going through a bad spell and needed to earn some money so a lot of them went for very little. You can't keep these things forever. I still have a lot of my work here, I have a few new *Doctor Who*'s like the ones I did for SFX and the three new ones I just did. The three new ones are going to be at the exhibition and the older ones will also be coming from various collectors.

**Finally, *Doctor Who* is just one thing you've done among lots of other things – there's all your fantasy work, the film posters, you did the *Star Trek* books – how do you feel about your *Doctor Who* work now?**

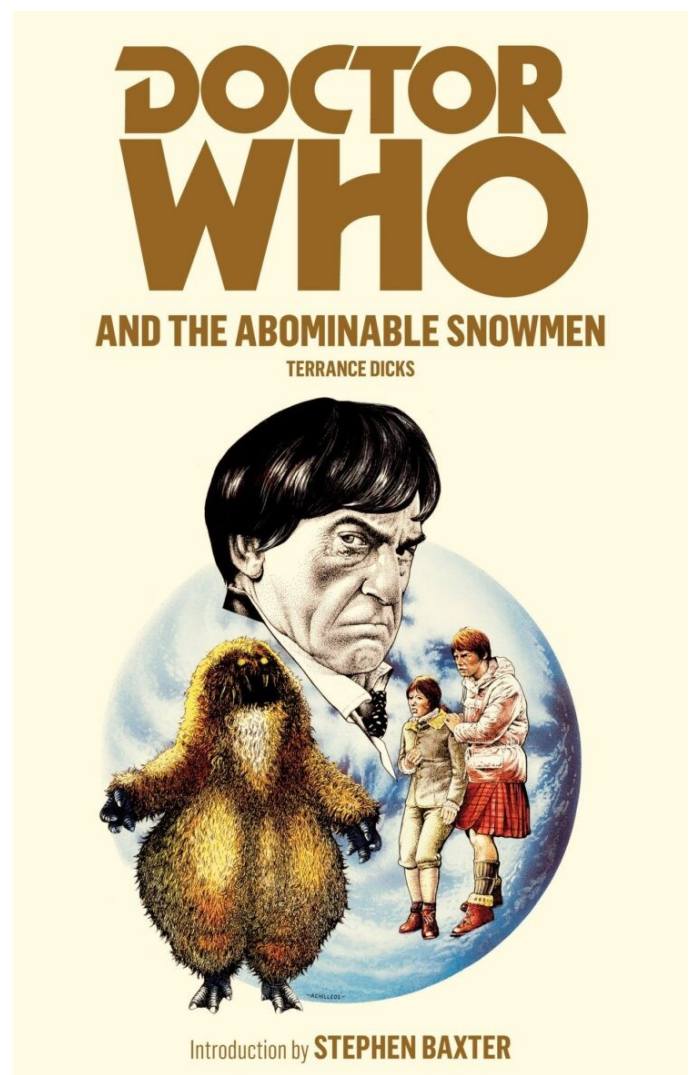
At the beginning, I was quite happy to be doing them. The demand was so great and they were selling so well. I had to do one every month. A *Doctor Who* cover would take me a whole week to do while a fantasy piece would take me two to four weeks; I used to put a lot into them. I began to think it was too many and I couldn't do them all so they got Peter Brookes to do some which didn't go down very well, I was told. But I continued to do them, I was happy to do them, it was steady work and I enjoyed doing them until something happened which came between the publisher and myself and it had to end. Just as well –

I was more into the fantasy thing my then. But now they're great fun to do. I've been doing conventions for many years and I get people coming up asking 'Why aren't you doing more covers Chris? Why aren't you doing the DVDs?' like it was my fault that I wasn't doing them! My answer is always 'Well write to the BBC or to the publishers and tell them that'. We'll see how they go, I'm hoping they'll ask me to do some more.

**Chris Achilléos passed away aged 74. He leaves behind a wife, two daughters, and two grandsons.**

**Our thoughts go to his family and friends.**

**He will be missed by everyone at the DWC, and indeed across the whole *Doctor Who* community.**





# Reviewed: Flux — The Halloween Apocalypse

Simon Smith.



The advent of this particular series of *Doctor Who* has been an interesting one to follow and experience. In a time where the fanbase has arguably never been so divided, the announcement that Russell T. Davies will be returning to run the show he once brought back to life has provided a certain level of calm and unity. When it relates to the current series however one could be forgiven for thinking that this is perhaps one of the lowest stakes in the show's long history for fans as a direct result. For example, we are no longer worried about ratings failures. Its cancellation is out of the question for now without regard to how this series performs. We know this isn't the end for this particular Doctor either, or in fact any of the companions. They're all confirmed for

three specials next year.

The knowledge that Russell is returning has had an impact on the perception of the long-term narrative health of the series too. Whatever RTD eventually brings to the show, the perception of the damage which this era may or may not have done has been very much dampened to all those who were concerned by Series 12's conclusion, as they believe that Davies will just retcon any damage done. Finally, this series suffers from what all third series of *Doctor Who* these days do, in that by the time we get the final of the now all but mandated three series an actor will do, most opinions are steadfast, whether loved it or hated. I wasn't as worried as I was going into Series 12, because I liked it, and

I'm sure others were far less optimistic than they would have dared to be before Series 12, because they really didn't.

Having said all of that, the publicity this year has been very good. They may well have left it too late as some have said but the two weeks or so before *The Halloween Apocalypse* had given us lots to chew on, an excellent trailer, some good interviews by many of the cast and crew, interesting new cast and character reveals and enough to begin to speculate, without really having a clue. A perfect balance, and something which both this and other eras have struggled with one way or the other. I'll conclude my preamble by saying that personally I was positive and excited to see what this first episode would bring to us going into it.

What struck me almost immediately while watching the episode we were greeted with was exactly how much there was to undress. We experienced many disparate scenes and met many characters at a break-neck pace, and I was left feeling that we were experiencing something much larger in scale compared to previous years. Long form storytelling has often been considered Chris Chibnall's best style, as the incredibly popular *Broadchurch* which got him the job attests, and my early impression of this story is that it will follow that pattern. Despite the vast display of ideas thrown at us, I never felt that the pacing was off and in fact I felt we somehow got to know the players much better here than we have in the previous years of this era during standalone episodes. This can only bode well as we get to know them even better in the coming

weeks.

The episode begins with a breathless action sequence which is, to put it mildly, absolutely ridiculous. We find the Doctor and Yaz in a situation straight out of a 1980s James Bond film, in deep trouble and no way to escape. Aside from the killer sharks all the hallmarks are here. The villain telling you his plan and leaving before he knows it's worked, the acid water below them, and the timer-based device ready to plunge them into it. Chibnall uses this scene to catch us up with what's been going on. It's a little wordy in places but it gets a lot out of the way for later and it was a fun action sequence to cold open us into the episode itself before the real story began.

The remainder of the episode takes itself much more seriously. We start in 1820 and meet Joseph Williamson, a real-life tobacco merchant and philanthropist best known for a series of excavations which to this day we have no real answer to the motivation of. He provided work for many in the Liverpool area but was widely questioned by his contemporaries over the purpose of the work and as the digging stopped after he died, we may never know if there ever was one. With a bio like that its more of a wonder that Doctor Who hasn't done this story already and even before the episode dropped speculation was rife that we may get a fun answer to the question of his work in this series. This week we received a short scene which neatly established much of that and, already knowing that new companion Dan Lewis is also of Merseyside origin, how important Liverpool will be to



this story overall.

A short 201 years later, we meet the aforementioned Dan and if he didn't immediately enter your heart with that speech about Liverpool, you're of sterner stuff than I am. With Dan we quickly get something that's been severely lacking from Chibnall's *Doctor Who*. An unassailable criticism of the show as it has been, is that we just don't *know* the companions in the way that we were used to under previous regimes. It can be argued that we knew Donna, Rose, Martha, Amy, and Bill for example by the time their first episode had concluded, while it can also be argued that we still didn't really know Ryan before he left. The same cannot be said for Dan Lewis.

We spend important time with him before he's introduced to the Doctor's world to know who he is and what he's about. John Bishop delivers an earnest and enthusiastic performance that lets him directly into your heart. Dan, who we know from the preview clip earlier this year is a plasterer by trade, is struggling for money and yet dedicates time to other people rather than looking after himself. He volunteers at his local food bank but is too proud to take from it himself despite his fridge and

cupboards being bare. He's a proud Scouser and Liverpool fan and along with the beautiful spanning shots of the city we receive and a few lines of dialogue from the Doctor (Liverpool? Anfield! Klopp era! Classic!) the show has really delivered a love letter to the city this week.

We also learn Dan is hopeless in love (with another winning performance, this time from Nadia Albina as Diane) and doesn't have time for grifters. All of this we know about him before he even sees an alien. It's a whole other level, a major step up for Chibnall in that regard, and it helps the rest of the episode immeasurably when you actually care about what's happening to him. Considering Bishop is a stand-up comic in his day job its no surprise that he's also very funny and gets many of the best laughs this week.

Karvanista is in the very opening scene though few will have anticipated what we had in store for us from him at that point. From the moment he carves through Dan's back door and removes his helmet the performance and character are nothing but a delight and exactly the sort of alien the show needs to be creating. He's funny, interesting, and layered with what looks like a well-developed back story and culture (all whilst looking like a dog: bonus) and I hope we see a lot more of him over the next few episodes. In fact, with the design and delivery as excellent as it is, I wouldn't mind the Lupari becoming a recurrent species. Karvanista also contains a key to the deeper mystery on the Doctor's mind about her past and he along with the other members of *The Division* certainly



have me intrigued where the show is heading with this. Also, does Karvanista in helmet not look a bit like the Kassavin in Series 12? Let the alternate universe speculation begin now.

Early on we are introduced to who appears to be this series *big bad*, to steal a line from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and we follow his progress throughout the episode. From the credits and a blink and you'll miss it namedrop in his first scene, we know his name is Swarm. There were lots of theories about who or what Swarm could have been after Chris Chibnall dropped the word at Comic Con. Was it going to be a combination of Sontarans, Weeping Angels, Ravagers and the Master?

Turns out, no: it's this guy. He certainly looks the part of a principal villain and how you feel about his place and gravitas will likely initially hinge on how you feel about *The Timeless Child* arc.

He is an adversary from the Doctor's past, from the time before they wiped her memory, who claims to have battled her through many ages. He starts off imprisoned, where we're told he's been since the dawn of time, on the site of the 'Burnished Rage battleground' where he was, we can speculate, presumably defeated by The Doctor. We have some fun sci-fi tropes at play here with his senior jailer (again of *The Division*) briefing her junior on what not to do before immediately doing it herself, which leads neatly to her untimely demise. To counter the heroic levels of cheese in this scene we do have some great special effects and costuming and a decidedly gruesome



death for 18.25 on a Sunday. It is Halloween after all and *Doctor Who* should be at least a bit scary for its primary Intended audience.

Swarm appears to be a parasite of sorts (and don't write off his ability not being potentially linked to regeneration in some way) and returns himself to his prime by absorbing their energy or lifeforce. Swarm is played by two different actors here and *Old Swarm* (as he's described in the credits) was the one teased in the short teaser a few months ago who many misdiagnosed as a Sontaran. The *younger Swarm*, who we saw more prominently in the trailer, is the one we spend most of our time with. He comes across (for lack of better description) as part Master, part Joker, part Lord Voldemort, part David Bowie and part Paul Bettany while looking quite a lot like The Red Skull. Sam Spurrell is clearly having the time of his life here and he pulls it off with the time he's given in this episode. He may well go onto be the best thing about this six-episode run and I honestly hope so. I enjoyed what I saw from him this week, but time will tell. His companion Azure was similarly creepy and charismatic in the limited screen time she

received and could be interesting and dangerous. I wonder how Neil Gaiman feels about no longer creating the most *Gaiman-esque* ever villains in *Doctor Who*.

The core TARDIS team of The Doctor and Yaz have proven a lot of people right this week. It's a win and a loss for Chibnall in that they are great to watch and both have lots to do but on the other hand it makes you question why it hasn't always been this way. Having the time to fully establish Dan while still giving The Doctor and Yaz a more interesting dynamic than they've had in the last two years may just be another win for longform storytelling but whatever it is, it's very welcome and I'm pleased to see it. Yaz shows that she's come on some way since we last saw her and is now more able (which she always had potential of, albeit it



more tell than show most of the time), but also continues to doubt both herself and The Doctor, which is true and fair to her backstory. The Doctor continues to lie and hide things from Yaz, which we can speculate may prove to be the undoing of the two in the long run. I personally find the idea of *Thasmin* a little hard to see, despite indication in one way in *The Haunting of Villa Diodatti* and I find it even harder following this episode. The Doctor appears far too preoccupied to consider a new romance though if done well I've no quarms

with it if I'm proven wrong.

The Doctor's scenes with Karvanista and Swarm were much more *Doctor* than we're used to from her which was a joy to see. I'm hoping this becomes her defining series and that we get much more of the same before all is said and done. The TARDIS doesn't look well this year. Cloister bells, slime, moving doors and fungus style rot do not bode well for her. Let's hope Russell gets her contract locked in early.

Along the way we also met a few other interesting faces. We meet Claire from the future/past – who uses the interesting turn of phrase 'taking the long way home' (we've heard something very similar to that before somewhere – too similar to be a coincidence perhaps?), knows about the Weeping Angels and is thankfully able to talk newer audiences through how they operate. We meet Vinder on *Outpost Rose* (nice touch) who witnesses the start of the Flux. We meet our new Sontarans who seem to be a nice mix of old and new and we spot our first Weeping Angel who immediately gets to work. I won't say too much more about them all here because we will certainly know and see much more of them over the next few weeks, but I enjoyed what I saw of them. We also get some cool call backs to classic and new Who, with mentions or displays of Nitro-9, Scottish Doctors, Sontaran tongues, the previously mentioned *Outpost Rose* and my personal favourite: 'Nice to meet you Dan. Run for your life!'

The direction from Jamie Magnus Stone here was crisp, entertaining, and coherent and kept the show moving exactly as it needed to. This is a particularly impressive

feat in post-covid settings and with such a lot to introduce. The stage design was also excellent, and we didn't miss those international location filming days too much this episode. Special effects were great, even if the opening sequence didn't quite pull it off to the level we've grown to expect. The remainder of the episode more than made up for it. Chris Chibnall's writing was the very best we've seen from him. I'm not going to pretend it was never clunky, but it was certainly diminished or better hidden here and there was a lot to enjoy. The performances of the actors were all superb. The music or mix has come under some criticism in some quarters. Watching on my basic setup with no true sound system but decently sized television, I didn't once notice any problems hearing either dialogue or music and truly enjoyed my experience with Segum Akinola's mix, but feel I should acknowledge that some

people did report problems.

Overall, I felt we were given an excellent episode of *Doctor Who*. The joyous nature of the programme and the sheer amount of fresh and positive ideas within this episode make it more than worth a watch for those sceptical. Many will raise the same criticisms that were raised during last series' *Fugitive of the Judoon* and *The Haunting of Villa Diodati*, that it is much easier to ask entertaining questions than it is to provide entertaining answers. That remains absolutely true. Unlike those episodes however this is a decisive part one to a singular story. Its job is to ask the questions. We would be ill-served to not be left with more questions than we entered with. Can the rest of the series let us down? Of course. But *The Halloween Apocalypse* delivered on the hype of the trailer, its title, and media attention and I'm very pleased about that.





# Reviewed: Flux — War of the Sontarans

Jonathan Appleton.



It's Part Two of *Flux* (aka *Doctor Who* Series 13) and, although the pace doesn't slow down after last week's frantic opener, it is at least becoming a little clearer as to what's going on. Time, having being held in check by mysterious guardians the Mouri, has been disrupted and is beginning to run wild. The Sontarans have taken advantage of the chaos to seize the Earth, make war throughout history, and ride horses. This season's big bads, Swarm and Azure, are also seizing the moment, though their plan has yet to be revealed.

Casual viewers may well have felt a good deal of sympathy with Mary Seacole's on-the-nose comment that "I don't understand any of this" and, whilst it certainly marks a departure from recent years

to have an over-arching story played out over several weeks, I can't help feeling that the production team are struggling to find a consistent tone.

*War of the Sontarans* certainly opens with an arresting image, with the Doctor haunted by a weird rickety house in the sky. There's no time to dwell on that though, as the regulars find themselves on a Crimean War battlefield and, thanks to Mary Seacole, it quickly emerges that it's not Russian troops that the British are up against.

Sara Powell does a good job in conveying Mary's courage, resourcefulness, and commitment to helping the wounded, and it's nice to see *Doctor Who* playing its part in raising awareness of a historical figure

who has only recently begun to receive the credit she deserves.

But it's an enduring problem with these celebrity historical episodes that once the monsters turn up, they become just another guest character caught up in events. And shouldn't the Doctor have felt just a bit guilty at getting Mary to keep watch on the Sontaran encampment when there are patients to treat?

I probably wasn't alone in hoping that, having watched with a pained expression as the Sontarans increasingly became comedy characters in *Doctor Who*, this reappearance would see a return to the ruthless warriors of their earliest stories. But, with the honourable exception of a grim dockside execution scene, it wasn't to be and instead it was bad shooting, frying pans, and an inability to stagger their rest breaks that saw them defeated. Ah well, maybe next time...

Swarm and Azure are proving to be effective villains, genuinely creepy and unsettling, even if the 'evil from the dawn of time' stuff doesn't feel terribly original. They seemed more camp in this episode (and not just because of the shoulder pads) but stayed the right side of that, and how wonderful to have a proper 'how will they get out of that?' cliffhanger in modern *Doctor Who*, even if the Next Time trailer did rather rob that of tension.

Aside from Mary, other guest characters fared less well. Vinder has yet to make an impression (though we did learn he's "shamed, disgraced, and rejected") and leaves me feeling that he's filling a Captain Jack-sized gap this series. *Doctor Who* has had plenty of arrogant military

dunderheads over the years and Lieutenant General Logan doesn't really add anything new to the stereotype. Talking of which, Dan's parents felt like the kind of full-on, TV trope scousers I thought had been left behind when the BBC stopped making *Bread*.

I will give an honourable mention, however, to Nigel Richard Lambert, voice of the Priest Triangles, who with those prissy tones was surely channelling the wonderful Peter Tuddenham, voice of Orac and other computers in *Blakes 7*.

Jodie Whittaker continues to give her utmost to the role, though her enthusiastic youth group leader vibe doesn't suit everyone. She can't be blamed when the script zig zags like it does here, calling for her to be horrified at a battlefield massacre in one scene, then forgetting all about it the next.

I'm not sure if this issue of tone is any more stark than with previous seasons. It's an odd mix of noisy Marvel epic, slapstick kids' show, *Doctor Who Weekly* comic strip, and Scooby Doo cartoon. One moment it's mass death and disintegrations at the hands of alien war criminals; the next it's big shaggy dogs and comic aliens who can be put out of action with a wok.

But maybe the answer is just to go with it, sit back and try to enjoy the ride. There are plenty of questions still to be answered and I'm certainly intrigued to see where *Flux* takes us next (although if I have my concerns about what new *Who* has done with the Sontarans, don't get me *started* on the Cybermen) – and is that a new coat for the Doctor, or has she just turned the old one inside out?



# Who Is Mary Seacole?

**Jordan Shortman.**

In *War of the Sontarans*, we're introduced to a wonderful lady named Mary Seacole.

While for some that name isn't well known, for others Mary Seacole is just as important as the other famous nurse of the Crimean War, Florence Nightingale.

Born in Jamaica on the 23rd November 1805, Seacole was born a 'Free Person'. This meant that, although Jamaica was owned by the British and many of its inhabitants were cruelly being sold as slaves around the world, Seacole and her mother were spared this cruel and unjustifiable life because her father was a member of the English army.

Although being born a 'free person', her family wasn't afforded many of the same rights as others. Mary's mother was also a nurse and this is where Seacole's love for medicine and helping others came from. Her mother also ran a lodging house, called Blundell Hall, and was highly regarded in Kingston, Jamaica's Capital. While running Blundell, she would teach Mary all about traditional medicine.

Mary would then take what she had learnt and practice on her dolls, the family pets, and on herself.

"It was very natural that I should inherit her tastes; and so, I had from early youth a yearning for medical knowledge and practice which never deserted me," she recalled in her autobiography. "And I was very young when I began to make use of the little knowledge I had acquired from watching my mother, upon great sufferer –

my doll... and whatever disease was most prevalent in Kingston, be sure my poor doll soon contracted it."

As Mary grew up, she would visit London for extended periods of time, either staying with family or with friends and while she experienced some racist comments (Mary just ignored), her friends were quite hot tempered. She describes some incidents would "get quite eventful", especially when there weren't policemen around.

Mary loved to travel and saw a lot of the Caribbean and England before eventually getting married to Edwin Horatio Hamilton Seacole on 10th November 1836. Sadly, this marriage wouldn't last long as Edwin became ill and passed away in 1844, which was followed closely by the death of her beloved mother. Both these tragedies absolutely devastated Mary and she threw herself into working in the field of medicine



where she felt the safest.

In 1850, an outbreak of Cholera hit Kingston and she stepped out to nurse all those afflicted. Then, a year later, another outbreak of Cholera hit the town of Cruces. She managed to deal with the outbreak, with a mixture of her own medicines including mustard and mercury chloride to help ease suffering while she caught a mild case of the illness. She would also help ease an outbreak of Yellow Fever in Kingston in 1853.

When Blundell Hall burned down, she would oversee a new hall, simply named New Blundell Hall being built, which she converted into a hospital for soldiers in the nearby British Army. Seacole never had any children, so it's believed that the maternal feelings she nurtured with the soldiers who stayed at her hospital is what eventually drove her to help in the Crimean War.

When that war began in October 1853, Mary quickly stepped up to help, travelling to England to offer her services, but she was refused, despite having letters of recommendation from many high ranking senior officials of the time. She was told

that all the nursing positions had already been filled and that she wouldn't be chosen even if a position became available. She ignored the racist connotations from some officials, though she would later bring them up on their refusals and actions; instead, she funded her own trip to Crimea with her friend, Thomas Day. There, they would open The British Hotel, a hotel and store for the soldiers, situated just two miles from where the British Coalition was stationed.

The British Coalition was made up of soldiers from England, France, and the Kingdom of Sardinia, fighting against the Ottoman Empire. As far as we know, no actual Sontarans were involved in the fighting, though given how the Sontarans are a war mongering species, it's surprising *Doctor Who* has never involved them in a proper war in the past!

The Seventh Doctor, Ace, and Hex *did* meet The Lady With The Lamp in the Big Finish audio adventure, *The Angel of Scutari*. Nightingale and Seacole did actually know each other and Seacole found herself being put up for a night's rest on her way to the Crimean Front in Nightingale's hospital, which was found a long way from the front.

Mary would very often travel to the front treating any wounded soldiers she found along the way, including those from the Ottoman Empire. Even though they were technically the enemy, you'd be hard pressed to find anyone who wouldn't help anyone on a battlefield when they were seriously injured if they could (especially abiding under the Hippocratic Oath). It was this kindness that would earn her the name Mother Seacole.

The only wound she sustained would be a dislocated thumb when she had to throw





herself from her horse onto the ground when gunfire flew overhead!

As well as earning the name Mother Seacole, Mary would visit the battlefield in bright colours so that the soldiers, on both sides, would know she was there, to tend to their wounds if she was able. After the war ended in 1856, Mary was one of the last to leave the battlefields, but she sadly returned to Britain, almost destitute having spent almost all of her money on supplies for her hospital. Many newspapers, though, were filled with kind messages and well wishes from many of those she had helped to save and nursed back to health.

Mary wasn't just a nurse: she was also a business woman and attempted to open a canteen in the UK, though lack of funds and interest meant that it didn't happen, despite many similar business ventures having been successful for her in Jamaica. When she was able, she attended many celebratory dinners for soldiers of the Crimea, one of which saw both her and Florence Nightingale needing bodyguards to hold back the crowds of those wishing to express their thanks. Imagine having over 2000 people clamouring for your attention. I think I'd be more afraid of that many people than of the Sontarans!

Luckily, those she had helped or had admired her came to her aid once her financial situation became public knowledge, including soldiers, generals, and members of the Royal Family. In 1857, a fundraising gala took place over four days to raise money for her; over **80,000 people** were in attendance. That same year she published her autobiography, *The Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole in Many Lands* — it was to become a huge success and bestseller (though she skillfully omitted the involvement of a certain time-

travelling Doctor).

Mary Seacole passed away in May 1881 at her home in London; the cause of death was listed as Apoplexy, then thought to be the rupturing of an internal organ, now known as a stroke. Her story was largely forgotten back then, mainly due to politics and social outlook of the time — until 1980 when her involvement and account of her time in Crimea was rediscovered. And just like then, people still argue that she was a copy of Nightingale, or stole some of her ideas, while others argue the opposite.

But why can't they both be held in high regard and rewarded for their successes? They saved hundreds of lives in wartime, so they both deserve to be remembered for their accomplishments.

Her legacy is certainly a complicated one for many historians or budding amateurs. While I certainly think she more than deserves to be recognised, it still took until 2016 for a statue to be built and unveiled of her at the St. Thomas' Hospital on London's Southbank. Her grave was rediscovered in 1973 and a re-consecration was held the same year. Her grave is now looked after by the Mary Seacole Memorial Association. She has been better remembered in Jamaica where many buildings and initiatives have been named after her.

Sadly, thanks to the weight of history, the social outlook of Victorian England and even modern times, and the world's focus on Florence Nightingale, Mary Seacole could be consigned to history once again. That would be a shame, as I would argue that she is just as important as *The Lady With the Lamp*. Maybe she should be remembered as *The Lady With A Heart*?

# Reviewed: Flux — Once, Upon Time

Simon Danes.



Those who are generous enough to read my sporadic ravings may have noticed that I am not exactly deeply enamoured of the current era of *Doctor Who*. I don't hate it; I don't think it's any good but my emotional reaction to it is probably indifference more than anything else. I don't lie awake at night nursing my loathing and rehearsing horrid things to say about it.

That said, I wish it were better. As has been said before by other commentators, a key problem in *Who* these days is the quality of the regulars' performances. Alas, that includes the central performance. Jodie Whittaker just doesn't convince as the Doctor – or doesn't convince me, at any rate.

We were lucky enough to have Peter Davison at the last Bedford *Who* Charity

Con. Peter was asked whether, for an actor, playing an alien was different from playing a human. Not really, he said. The biggest difference was that it was easier to play a human because you could build up the character from what you knew about them: who their parents were, where they went to school, what influenced and interested them, and so on. By comparison, he said, very little information like that was available when you tried to build up the character of the Doctor. You had to play the lines as best you could and give as good a performance as you can. Similarly, Colin Baker hinted at one of our earlier cons that the Doctor's perspectives were different from our own. Colin gave the example that the Doctor probably didn't find his enormous age much of a problem; 900 years probably felt like being middle aged to him.

An actor has to inhabit a role. She or he has to give very serious consideration to the question: what would it actually be like to be this person? If I really were them, what would I feel, what would motivate me, what would make me angry, passionate, happy? What did I really feel strongly about? How did I feel about the people I met, and the people I'm close to? Was I bothered, or did my feelings run deep?

For the actor playing the Doctor, you'd also have to give very serious consideration to what it would make you feel like to have lived for an immensely long time; to be immeasurably more intelligent than the people around you; to be motivated, as Barry Letts said, by a "strongly moral" core.

I'm afraid I think this is where Jodie Whittaker fails. I don't think she conveys any sense to the audience that the Doctor is intellectually far superior to any human being, or that she is motivated by compassion, or that she genuinely cares deeply about other people. I've never felt there was any real depth to the characterisation; it's a superficial performance, without depth. It's neither multi-layered nor multi-faceted. The one characteristic she conveys is that the Doctor is eccentric; in her playing of it, the eccentricity of the Doctor is foregrounded so much, without being balanced or offset by anything else, that the character has become a rather silly, irritating oddball, and not much else. It could even be said that she isn't even playing a person; she's playing a characteristic. There is certainly no sense that the Doctor is a massive personality, capable of dominating those around her or him, but (usually) holding back because there is also a desire not to swamp or crush others. The Thirteenth

Doctor isn't even particularly kindly: while she's capable of gushing, she has no real empathy. She wasn't exactly sympathetic to Graham, after all.

Getting more pretentious now: if you take a character like Hamlet, there are a number of different ways of playing him. I'm not sure how many actors I've seen (or heard) in the part; probably more than 20. Some of the most successful are those who push the characterisation beyond what you'd normally expect. (Mark Rylance did that in the Nineties at the RSC.) But there are parameters which you can't go beyond. You can't make Hamlet into an action hero or a dummy or a lightweight; that's just not who he is. So it seems to me that the more successful Doctors are those who very much bring their own take to the character: who push it, but who don't go beyond the boundaries. (The Doctor can be very funny but he's not a comedy character; he can be brusque but he's not deliberately cruel; he can be odd but he's not a nutcase. And so on.)

My own view is that Jodie Whittaker just doesn't really get who the Doctor is. Her performance goes beyond the character's parameters because the Doctor – at least, as established by her predecessors – is not that sort of person at all. I don't look at Jodie Whittaker and immediately recognise that, yes, that's the Doctor. The Doctor she plays has diminished both in depth and in stature. She's just too different. The Doctor is just not like that.

This is, of course, a personal view. I may be wrong. I genuinely would like to enjoy Chibnall-*Who* and I wish it could see in it the qualities that are so apparent to other viewers.

Okay. Enough of the general points. What



about this episode?

Oh dear. Oh deary dear. Chibnall by numbers, really. In fact, it was so archetypally Chibnellian that there isn't a great deal to be said about it that you couldn't say of much of his other work. So: here's a long scene that has you scratching your head. Cut to another long scene that has you scratching your head. And then another one. And another. This goes on for 40 minutes. Characters stand around info-dumping to each other without actually telling you what on earth is going on. *Blam blam blam pow zoosh bang*. Introduction of new character and then of another new character. One of them was played by Barbara Flynn – love her – who used to be compulsory casting in all the classic lit adaptations in the '70s and '80s and who was, of course, in *A Very Peculiar Practice*. Who was she playing? Don't know. Oh, there's Jo Martin's Doctor/ a Weeping Angel/ that space doggie/ some Cybermen/ some CGI Daleks/ some blue whizzy things that reminded me of the bats in *State of Decay*.

It all looks very nice. Good style, guys. Where's the substance? Stuff happened, but I'm not sure what it was. Last week, we actually had a storyline. Not so this week. The Flux was treading water and we took a break from the season arc. Instead of a story, we looked at some things and they looked very nice. Perhaps all will be made clear. Or perhaps not.

Yes, there were some good bits. As usual with Chibnellism, they're not developed. One shot of a Cyberman was a direct copy of a shot in *The Invasion*, so I liked that. Swarm and Azure are well acted. Swarm is a cross between Sutekh and Sharaz Jek but is undeveloped, so he's nothing like as interesting as either. He is just a very bad



baddie, marginally better than that dull bloke who collected teeth. Dan's good. As with Graham, I think he's probably singled out because he's the best of the regulars; compare him with Bill, or Donna, or Sarah, and he's just not in the same league. He's a massive improvement on Ryan, but he's decent; he's not one of the greats. (Incidentally, doesn't he have shiny white teeth? How did Dan afford that kind of dental work, eh? I think we should be told.)

(As an aside, I note that the Mighty Mallet of Message has been mercifully muted this season — we've been spared the now customary fatuous exhortations to abandon our moral degeneracy. Maybe Chibnall has come to appreciate that smashing people over the head with self-righteous platitudes just irritated them?)

Not good. Not good at all. I even started to doze off at one point – sorry, it's been a busy week. Barry Norman used to say that dozing during a film was a legitimate form of criticism. (Don't worry: I didn't actually fall into the arms of Morbus. Morpheus. I had to keep awake because I had a review to write.) *Once, Upon Time* is notable for the use of a comma in the title of an episode of *Doctor Who*. It wasn't notable for much else. Not an episode I shall watch again, I fear.

But then, that's just what I think.

# Reviewed: Flux — Village of the Angels

Joe Siegler.



Before I get into this episode, I wanted to point out that going into it, we're now in the second half the series/story. I was hoping that we would start getting more explanations and less "What the heck is that about?" stuff. Also, this is the big Weeping Angels episode. While the Angels are pretty beloved, beyond their first two stories, they've been kind of "eh.." Going into *Village of the Angels*, I was hoping we'd get more of them like their early stuff, and not the lesser appearances they became known for in their most recent appearances before this episode. Now, about the new one here...

"The Angel has the TARDIS..."

I thought that was a great way to leave off the episode before this. It was a great cliffhanger. In fact, most of the cliffhangers

from this season have been great, but they haven't always had great payoffs (like the payoff from *The Halloween Apocalypse* being mostly ignored in *War of the Sontarans*).

Starting off right away, I thought this had a good creepy atmosphere. It might have helped that I started watching it around midnight with no lights on and nobody awake in the house but me! As the various scenes with the Angels happened, I felt they were handled well. I think the overall Angel atmosphere was helped by the fact that the scenes were dark. Segun Akinola gave the Angels their own theme as such – and I really liked that. It popped up several times, and I thought fit the overall vibe. A dark setting, Weeping Angels, creepy music: it just all came together for the right atmosphere to make it work. I think the

setting served the Angels better than some other settings they were placed in in the past (a hotel, New York City, etc).

I do like the fact that the story was circular, taking place in the past and the present. In the original *Blink* story, there was a part of it that took place in the past, but it was less in your face. This seemed more plot driven in the past — more “timey wimey” if you will. For example, stories in the past with Angels, the big fear is they zap you to the past, and the implication is you can live out your life there. But this time, the Angels were in the past where they were sending people to as well. So once you realised they were in the past as well, I thought “uh -oh, a new wrinkle — not safe there, either”. This played out in a big way when we got to the little girl who was being searched for twice: there as a little girl, and also 60+ years later at the same time. There was a scene where the 1901 and the 1967 versions of the same place were together at once. My wife picked up the old woman being the young girl early on; I did not. This was not a single straightforward story. But then *Blink* wasn’t either — and I loved that about that story, too. One of the new bits here was the “Flaming Angel” (my name). When it happened, it was a great “Oh cr\*p, that’s new” moment that just worked.

As usual, the story looked amazing. Say what you will about the Chibnall/Whittaker era of *Doctor Who*, but it has never looked as good as it has now. A lot of this story was dark, but even that atmosphere looked good. But the lighter stuff had a

great look to it. I was especially taken in by the visual effect of the town just “ending” in space.

The story has a bit of the old style feel of *Doctor Who*, i.e. the “base under siege” — the house belonging to Professor Jericho is the “base” here. He was conducting experiments on Claire, who was sent here from the Weeping Angel sequence back in the first episode. The Doctor, Claire, and Jericho are trapped in the basement of his house, trying to avoid being taken over by Weeping Angels. The Angels eventually took over and forced them out of the basement there. It resulted in a scene that I really enjoyed. The Doctor, Claire, and the professor were trying to escape down a tunnel with several Angels closing in on them. This scene was one of my favourites with Jodie Whittaker. Much as been made of her acting in *Doctor Who*, and I think this episode in particular (and that scene specifically) was some of her best stuff. I really loved what she did here.

Before I get to one of the big bits of the narrative here, I wanted to touch on a few smaller points that I jotted down when I watched the episode. Just small things I liked for one reason or another:

- The Psychic Paper makes a reappearance. Something I’m surprised wasn’t used more since its introduction with Christopher Eccleston’s Ninth Doctor.
- Loved the callbacks to some other Angel stories besides *Blink*. The “sand in the eye” that happened to Amy happened here, and the bit about “That which holds the image of an angel becomes itself an angel” was nicely used, too.
- Jericho was a well constructed character. We got a bit of background,



he wasn't a blank slate, and I loved how he wasn't affected by all the weirdness going on around him. He has a great background (psychic investigation), a past that led to him being "loveless, childless, and hiding in academia for fear of the real world". He also is quite emphatic in his beliefs. Could be a very strong character to be used in a future something — Torchwood rebooted, perhaps?

- We finally got to see Passenger do his thing. He was coupled with Azure in a scene where they capture a bunch of natives from the planet Puzano where Bel has landed to look for Vinder.
- Second Doctor throwback: Jodie's Doctor saying "When I say run... RUN."
- Third Doctor throwback: Jodie's Doctor saying "when I reverse the polarity of the neutron flow".
- *The Three Doctors* callback: the Thirteenth Doctor using "contact" as the action word to set off the mental link between her and Claire similar to what Doctors One, Two, and Three did.
- This was the first *Doctor Who* episode ever (that I can recall) that had a mid credit scene. I don't think they've ever started the credits before, then stopped them and had another scene. That's new.
- The actor who played Professor Eustacius Jericho, Kevin McNally, was in *Doctor Who* before. He was Hugo Lang in the Sixth Doctor's first story, *The Twin Dilemma*.

Enough of that small stuff; on to the big part of the story.

A rogue Weeping Angel had embedded itself in Claire's mind, and was hiding there. The Angel had summoned the

Doctor via external forces, and needed her help. The Doctor found this via the psychic link she created between herself and Claire when she was able to talk to the Angel. The Weeping Angels in this episode are a tactical squad working for none other than the Division. The Division reminds me of what used to be called "The Celestial Intervention Agency" in classic *Doctor Who* — both of them akin to *Star Trek's* Section 31. The Angel tries to strike a deal with the Doctor, saying it can give the Doctor back all her memories that were taken. It's something that definitely



intrigues the Doctor but before they can complete the deal, the Doctor is brought out of the mind-link to deal with real world Angels. But the tantalizing spectre of information missing from the Doctor's mind is a big juicy carrot; one I wonder if we'll revisit. Surely it won't be left in this one scene.

I have a theory about that. It might be controversial, but... When Chibnall did the Timeless Child reveal last year, it dug very heavily into the old fan myth of the "Morbius Doctors" existing before William Hartnell. I wonder if we're moving towards another reveal like that. My working theory here is that all of this stuff from the past with Azure and Swarm, the Fugitive Doctor, etc., all happened in between Patrick Troughton and Jon Pertwee. We got the



War Doctor (John Hurt) in between Paul McGann and Christopher Eccleston since we never saw them regenerate. Well, we never saw Troughton regenerate into Pertwee either. It wouldn't shock me at all if all of this Division/ Angel/ Fugitive Doctor stuff would play into the old "Season 6B" theory that's been floating around for ages. We've had a few hints about it (when Swarm mentions "you don't remember any of this, do you?"), and it would explain a lot of the hints we've gotten already about the Fugitive Doctor and not remembering things. If the Time Lords took the Second Doctor into the Division, and then something happened that forced him to regenerate into the Fugitive Doctor, it could work. Especially if the Fugitive Doctor had to be forcibly regenerated into Pertwee and having the Doctor's mind wiped of all the Season 6B stuff. Depending on how it's pulled off, I could get behind that.

There are some other small bits I skipped over — like Bel's and Vinder's visit to the planet Puzano looking for each other — but this was a pretty minor part of the story, as was the appearance of Azure. Also Gerald and Jean, who were pretty much just there to be cannon fodder for the Angels.

But the ending of the episode? The Doctor turning into a Weeping Angel herself after

being betrayed by Claire's Angel? That scene was quite epic, and when I first reacted to it after the episode was over, I said, "Okay, that ending was bad@ss".

I REALLY REALLY loved this episode. As much as I loved the Sontaran episode a few weeks ago, I enjoyed this far more. I didn't see the change to an Angel for Whittaker coming, so when it started happening, I was like "oh boy, this will be fun!" Gallifrey One is coming up soon; I wonder how many Whittaker Angels we will see cosplayed!

A couple of minor nitpicks...

Did anyone else have difficulty hearing things? In the opening sequence when Claire was talking in a different language, I had a hard time understanding; I had to use subtitles. Same thing for the scene where the Doctor has to eject the Angel from the TARDIS by rebooting it. The sound mix felt off there, I had a very hard time understanding that.

Yaz and Dan were pretty sidelined. I mean they had some stuff to do — it's not like they were twiddling their thumbs for the whole hour — but they were effectively replaced as companions for the Doctor by Claire and Jericho.

I freakin' loved this episode. It looked great, it sounded great, I loved the acting, the atmosphere — just bloody all of it. The couple of minor plot problems didn't affect me at all. I thought Jodie Whittaker's acting was some of, if not *the* best she's done in her entire time as *Doctor Who*. If we had been getting this level of story her first two series, she might not be leaving.

Absolute 10/10 here.

# The Real Weeping Angels: What Inspired the Doctor Who Monsters?

**Simon Danes.**

No, I'm not trying to say that the Weeping Angels exist. Well, I am, sort of. There are weeping angels (with no initial capital letters) – but these are not to be confused with the Silent Assassins from *Doctor Who*. These lower case weeping angels are pieces of statuary which can be found in some churchyards in the UK; it was these which inspired Steven Moffat to wonder what would happen if they moved when you weren't looking at them. When my kids were at primary school in the next village to ours, there was a churchyard next door to the school and it had a weeping angel in it, to the delight and terror of the tinies. It loomed over them during playtime. No doubt they hoped that it would jump on some of the fiercer teachers and eat them.

So. Real weeping angels are statues. They had their heyday during the Victorian and Edwardian period; after the death of Edward VII in 1910, they fell out of fashion, though you can still buy them from some suppliers of decorations for graves (and, of course, This Planet Earth will sell you some splendid Weeping Angel statues to put in your garden to scare the neighbours).

Some interesting bits of social history come into play here. Yes, they are interesting. Who dares to say otherwise?

It does seem that they were much more common in Anglican than in Catholic churchyards. We can speculate as to why. While there was a rediscovery in the Church of England of its Catholic heritage

during the Victorian period, this wasn't universal and many Anglicans just weren't buying it: they maintained that Anglicans were Protestants, not reformed Catholics, and any manifestations of Catholicism were deemed deeply suspect. Needless to say, statues for memorials of the dead were expensive, so they were only available to the well-off: to the middle classes and the aristocracy. No weeping angels for paupers, O dear me no. Well-off Catholics tended to go for large stone crucifixes (note for pedants like me: a crucifix is a cross with a statue of Christ on it; a plain cross is just called a cross). These were considered a bit suspect by lots of Anglicans – not because they didn't believe in the crucifixion but because they were just a bit too "Romish". So, as they wanted nice statues but were a bit squeamish about crucifixes, they hit on a substitute: figures of angels who looked pretty sad. (Actually, some of them look more like they've got toothache than in mourning. Depends how good the sculptor was.)

And yes, these statues really were called weeping angels.

They were female, too. This is actually a bit odd. All the angels in the New Testament are male (or at least masculine); they're given the pronoun "he" and the definite article for them is in its masculine form. "Angel" is related to the Greek verb





“angelo” – “I announce” or “I deliver a message”: they were considered to be messengers from God. But there didn’t seem to be any female ones. So why the change?

It’s not really clear. Victorian and Edwardian Anglicans knew their Bible, so they’d have noticed the change; presumably, it just didn’t bother them. It does seem possible, though, to link it to the attitudes at the time to the sexes. Angels were women, and women were angels. (Yes, I know the logic doesn’t work: if  $a = b$ , it doesn’t always follow that  $b = a$ . Just bear with me.)

In an age of stiff upper lips, repressed emotions and daft ideas about the unshakeable resolve and firm character (dammit sir!) of the Englishman, it would have been socially unacceptable to have a male statue expressing grief. Easier for men, who weren’t allowed to show “unmanly” emotions, to project them onto a female figure. Women were the nice ones, who were caring and nurturing; men pretended they hadn’t got any time for that sort of gammon because they had an Empire to run, damn me, cur: leave the feelings to the ladies, sir.

You can then link this to the Victorian idea, expressed by John Ruskin, of women as the angels of the house. (Don’t puke. It’s now my fault people used to think like that.) There’s a ghastly poem by some bloke called Coventry Patmore entitled (guess what?) *The Angel in the House*. It was published in parts between 1854 and 1862 and it’s interminable. I skimmed it when I was reading up for this article. Here is a typical extract (you may need your sick bag again):

“Man must be pleased; but him to please/  
Is woman’s pleasure...”

Stop heaving. Old man Patmore goes on for another hundred or so pages like this.

Anyway, the point I’m getting at is that, as well as being religious artefacts, weeping angels expressed a Victorian and Edwardian view of women. Not a view universally held, but a prevalent view nonetheless. The statues weren’t just of angels; they were an idealised depiction of the female, and of female virtue and compassion – or what was seen as such. Some of the less good weeping angels were



particularly sentimental and woebegone and look like manifestations of Dickens' soppiest teenage heroines.

That said, some of them also seem to have been intended to be mildly titillating. Not exactly erotica, but not prudery either. Women in religious art had often been depicted as peculiarly sexless; even as recently as the 1990s, there was a controversy at Ely Cathedral over David Wynne's newly commissioned statue of Mary, because her body looked more like a normal woman's than people were used to. It's all fairly innocuous, but the weeping angel statues gave the artist a chance to depict the female form more realistically; the drapery is pretty close to the body, revealing the shape rather than hiding it. No doubt some Victorians were outraged by this. Even so, the statues aren't quite as prudish as some Victoriana.

And then weeping angels fell out of fashion after Edward VII's death in 1910. Why?

I think it probably has something to do with the 'angels are women, so women are angels' idea. Female emancipation in the UK has its roots much further back than 1910; the novels of Anthony Trollope are

full of stronger (and much more powerful) women characters than you'd find in Dickens, Trollope's older contemporary. Even so, the sentimental view of women and of women's roles became progressively more difficult to maintain. The Great War started only four years after Edward's death; the military effort would not have been possible without women working in the munitions factories. At the end of the war, women had the vote (if they were over 30, admittedly). This isn't a full survey of the rise of feminism, of course, and it's so short, it's fatuous, but as social attitudes changed, so did depictions of women in art. Weeping angels expressed and reflected an attitude to women that was no longer fashionable or even tenable. Stonemasons stopped making them.

A pity, really. But at least most of them have been left alone to guard our churchyards. It's worth a ramble through your nearest churchyard to see if you can spot one.

But if you do, keep your eyes fixed on it. Walk backwards until it's out of sight. Then it won't get you. If you're lucky.

Don't blink.



# Reviewed: Flux — Survivors of the Flux

Peter Shaw.



We are engineered to root for the underdog: think about all the films about sport, adventure, music and war. We are cheering for the little person or group to triumph against the odds. And there are always bumps along the journey, small victories, big setbacks, but in the final chapter we are praying for it all to go well...

For me, that's been the story of *Flux*, both on screen and off screen. It seemed to me the announcement of Russell T Davies coming back as showrunner was rushed through. I suspect the BBC issued a press release before the news was leaked. It would be an odd choice to drop that bombshell about what's to come in 2023 just as the Doctor is about to face 'her most epic adventure yet', and all the pre-publicity it needed.

But it did do *Flux* a favour. It took the pressure off. This was not going to be a make-or-break season. Jodie Whittaker won't be the last TV Doctor before an inevitable revival in a decade-or-more. *Doctor Who* will return for its 60th anniversary with the promise of 'seasons to come'. Whatever you think of RTD (love him and his work, personally), just that assurance was great for Chibnall and his team. Sure, it felt a bit like 'we're bringing back the most successful showrunner' (bit of a slap-in-the-current-team), and I am not sure what will happen after RTD2.

But now, it seemed, we could all sit back and enjoy *Flux*. It promised to play to Chibnall's strength as a writer. His most successful non-*Doctor Who* work in *Broadchurch* was long-form drama and 9



to 10 million viewers each season (growing with each one) seemed to put him at the top-flight of TV dramatists.

I know this era has many fans, and I have often enjoyed the freshness and several stories in particular... But for me it has been much harder work than under RTD and Moffat. Chris Chibnall just doesn't seem to elicit that edge-of-the-seat, sometimes jaw-dropping excitement that his predecessors managed (more regularly and consistently). But we have had some highlights, and Chibnall's determination to make sure diversity and inclusion not only on-screen but off it as well in his choice of writers, directors, and other creatives, should be lauded.

I approached *Flux* after seeing the love expressed for the McCoy Season 24 box set earlier this year, and watching the behind-the-scenes extras and interviews with the actors and crew. Now, we all know 24 is a season that many consider was the time that *Who* hit rock bottom. But more than 20-years later we're kind of forgiving of it. It's not on TV, we are not challenged in the playground about how bad it is and have to defend it, or forced to shamefully agree. We can just enjoy it for what it is, and it isn't quite as bad as we remember. And, from the Blu-ray extras, we know that no one set out to make bad TV; in fact, they had a ball making it and thought it was pretty good. It also paved the way for Ace and the Doctor in Seasons 25 and 26, something I – and many others – consider a very late comeback for the original run.

And I have been watching and willing *Flux* to do the same. But it's been a bit

of a roller-coaster ride. By that I don't mean, edge-of-the seat thrills-all-the-way. More like one of those cranky old roller-coasters where there's moments of genuine excitement, and other bits where you are being slowly cranked up to a height, staring out into the adventure park, wondering whether the two-hour queue was worth it.

I don't want to go in details of what I thought of every episode but – for me – the first was interesting and compelling (if a little convoluted), the second had fun and adventure but seemed a little inconsequential, the third was a lot of exposition, too much talking and not enough drama – but it was intriguing and showed there's more to *Flux* that meets the eye. Then last week, *Village of the Angels*, was a blinder. Okay, it seemed to be a jumble of *Blink*, *Hide*, *Time of the Angels*/*Flesh And Stone* – but at least it rehashed all the best bits. And was scary, fun, and more coherent in a solid *Doctor Who* way.

Now we land at *Flux: Survivors of the Flux*. And I've read plenty of reviews that basically tell you the plot points while tossing in a few thoughts and opinions. Well, if you haven't guessed by now, I am not going to do that. But I am going to tell you this...

I've watched it twice. Once with my wife who's not as big a fan as me, but watched *Who* as a child and has loved (mostly) the new series. We arrived home late in the evening on Sunday, so we dispatched the kids to bed with the promise that they could watch the next day. Then my wife and I watched it together. She fell asleep towards the end, which is more about a tiring day and a bit of a cold than a comment on the episode.

Next day, we watched it together as a fami-

ly, us two joined by my son (10) and daughter (7). My son has watched all of new *Who* up to this point, my daughter all of Jodie's time and Eccleston and David Tennant's first season. We generally only have to pause watching an episode if someone needs the loo, more snacks, or has spilled milk (the kids, not us).

was (had to look that one up for clarity). And because my wife was asleep for the last bit of the first viewing, it was mostly left to me. I was out of my depth, frankly.

This is not to suggest that in the RTD and Moffat eras there were not complicated stories and arcs. But, by and large, the kids



But we had to pause *Survivors of the Flux* about five times when the kids started talking over it, asking questions. At which point we had to explain just about everything that was going on as far as we could work out: who was Prentis/ Grand Serpent and why was he on Earth in 1958 (no idea), what was he doing at UNIT and why that mattered (struggled with that one, honestly), why Yaz, Dan, and Jericho were crossing the world at surprising speed (considering rapid air transport was not possible) all in 1904. Oh, and who was Tecteun and why did it matter who Tecteun

understood emotionally and instinctively what was happening because they loved the characters, the emotion, the humour, the thrills and scares that built to a big coherent experience. There were points of all of these in *Survivors of the Flux* – not quite enough scares and thrills – but it felt like lots of bits, lots of sets, lots of talking, lots of backstory and continuity. I don't entirely know what I think about the Timeless Child revelations in terms of pulling the rug under established *Doctor*

Who history, but if it had been done within a series of well constructed stories and felt like it had consequences, people would have accepted and maybe even loved it.

I'm frustrated, you will probably have noticed. I've seen Jodie on stage and in other TV and film performances and she is quite brilliant, and she's the best she's ever been in *Flux*. I hope this story will put a full-stop on a few things about the Doctor's origins and just give her some rip-roaring stories in the next three specials.



Yaz is also the best she's ever been in this six-parter, this episode in particular. She looks commanding and comfortable in her Edwardian garb and jaunty hat. Dan comes across as a likeable everyman and supercharges not-quite-so-funny lines into proper belly laughs. I love Kevin McNally as Professor Jericho — can we keep him?

In her few small scenes, Jemma Redgrave gave Kate Stewart some *Line Of Duty*-level intensity, when much else felt like junior TV antics. And Craig Parkinson is the best *Doctor Who* villain we should have had. Imagine him given free reign as the Grand Serpent in a proper adventure, not an unmemorable series of bump-offs. And I don't believe a Colonel Blimp-like bumbling dimwit was tasked with (and succeeded in)

creating UNIT.

Last week, as a family, we all stood up from the sofa in disbelief when the Doctor was turned into a Weeping Angel. What will happen now, we thought? Will she stride across time and space in a new evil form, but inside, desperate to escape? Would her companions even recognise her? They certainly can't come near as she won't send them back in time; they will simply die. What did we get? The Doctor emerged seconds later in human form, perfectly fine. That was a stunning idea wasted. And it can never happen again.

I wanted to be more positive about this. And I hope — please, *please* — that this all comes together for *The Vanquishers*. I want Chibnall the underdog to come out on top. But there's a lot to get through: Sontarans, Daleks, and Cybermen; UNIT, Kate, and the Grand Serpent; Yaz and her adventure crew; Vinder (remember him?), Bel, and their baby (what's the gestation period for this sprog? Why doesn't she have a bump?); Swarm, Azure, and Passenger; Dan and Diane; the memory-containing fob-watch, the Timeless Child business, Tecteun (if returning) and the Division; Karvanista and the fate of the earth and our universe; that Joseph Williamson and the tunnels business. All in an hour.

My pause button will break, my wife will be asleep, and I'll have to explain everything for weeks in post-it notes, charts, and diagrams. But I don't quite know or care enough.

I want some thrilling adventures that kind of make sense, that don't have too much going on (but too little substance). I want *Paradise Towers* on Blu-ray. Pity me!



# Reviewed: Flux — The Vanquishers

James Baldock.



My family and I are big fans of *The Goes Wrong Show*. A TV spin-off from long-running West End hit *The Play That Goes Wrong*, each week sees the Cornley Polytechnic Drama Society tackle a new work, ‘live’ on the Beeb, only to be hindered by mis-sized sets, exploding props, and actors who don’t seem to understand the concept of stage directions. It’s rip-roaring family entertainment, ridiculous and physics-defying, and occasionally very touching, but it’s the opening episode of series 2 I wanted to discuss: tired of the group’s continual failings, the bombastic Robert (Matt Berry meets Brian Blessed) stages a successful coup and then directs a period drama called ‘Summer Once Again’, insisting on perfection throughout. When the opening scene inevitably falls apart, Robert stops

the action and asks for a reset: this happens over and over and by the time we actually finish it, most of the show’s running time has already elapsed and the actors have no choice but to frantically hurry through the rest of the play. Scenery flies in and out in an instant, dialogue is rushed or omitted entirely, and seasons change in a flurry of falling leaves and fake snow until the curtain falls on the breathless and deeply unhappy troupe.

The last time we saw the Doctor, things didn’t look good — but sometimes, particularly when your back’s against the wall, you have to cut a corner or two. *The Vanquishers* has a lot of loose ends to tie up, and it manages by cheating, as well as a certain amount of economisation. After an abrupt and somewhat disappointing conclusion to last week’s cliffhanger (the

Doctor evades certain death at the hands of Swarm by diving out of the way), we're back at invasion central: Yaz and Dan and Jericho are cornered by marauding Sontarans, Kate Stewart's left UNIT in the hands of the Grand Serpent, and the Doomsday Clock has ticked another second closer to the heat death of the universe. So much to resolve, and so little time.

The only solution to such a conundrum, of course, would be if the Doctor could be in three places at once. And this week, for the express purposes of plot, that's exactly where she is: split assunder between three different locales, phasing in and out as per the story's needs, usually at the most inconvenient of moments. It plays rather like the *Star Trek: TNG* finale, *All Good Things...*, in which Picard has to navigate both his past and (imagined) future in order to deal with a spatial anomaly and get Q off his back. So while Doctor The First is gallivanting round a Sontaran base with Karvanista and Bel, Doctor The Second is reunited with Yaz and Dan, where they deal with the threat of alien invasion and the imminent destruction of the universe by bribing a Sontaran with chocolate. It's quite as ridiculous as it sounds: there is no reason for its presence other than the fact that it's funny (to varying degrees; Moffat really handled this stuff rather better) and the sight of a wide-eyed Dan Starkey goggling over a bar of Dairy Milk is destined to be memed to death, which was presumably exactly what Chibnall wanted. There are probably worse ways to be mark your place in *Doctor Who's* history. If you're going down, at least go down

fighting.

Meanwhile, Doctor The Third is stuck at Division Centre, with a disinterested Ood and a couple of psychopathic killers for company. At least, we assume they're psychopathic. To be honest, my entire assessment of Swarm and Azure is built on assumptions. They're merciless guardians of entropy from a period we glimpsed only in flashback and only when there were dozens of other stories going on at the same time. Chibnall gives us enough to join the dots — just — but at the risk of mixing metaphors, the picture that results isn't so much a bucket and spade as it is a Rorschach inkblot, or the fuzzy scribble that hounded Rose in *Fear Her*. Oh, there's an enjoyable conversation between Azure and the Doctor — Whittaker at her most intense, sparring with a smirking villainess who thinks that all life is futile and deserves to be snuffed out (as I recall, Judge Death aspired to a similar philosophy, though he had more impressive teeth). But this is a meagre banquet, a scrap of development here and there, a sliver of empathy amidst the gloating. Both Azure and her brother retire from this mortal coil (disintegrated by the demigod they have supposedly resurrected) no further fleshed out than the bronzed skeletal bodies they've inhabited since episode one: all sneer, no substance. We don't really know what they're up to, or why, and we don't particularly care either.

At least it looks pretty. You might accuse *Doctor Who* of being top heavy when it comes to CGI, but it seems churlish to complain when we're being granted the spectacular vistas we'd arguably been denied during the scaled down stories we witnessed in Series 11 and 12. Dalek fleets explode in dazzling panorama. Sontaran fleets loom over Rio de Janeiro and Paris



(we know it's Paris, of course, because you can see the bloody Eiffel Tower). And the Doctor wanders through a black and white flashback of her own childhood, as the mysterious floating house drifts in and out of existence with a wave of Swarm's gloved hand — he and Azure providing the only pigmentation in an otherwise drab monochrome, like the girl in *Schindler's List*, or the video for 'Wonderwall'. Ironic, seeing as they themselves are so utterly bereft of colour.

The discussion we had in *Survivors of the Flux* — concerning past lives and forgotten history — becomes a McGuffin of sorts for the Doctor, or perhaps an obstacle. There simply isn't time to actually delve that far, not when there are so many other plot strands to resolve. Tecteun is given only the most cursory of mentions; this has now become about stopping the Flux. Learning

about the past, we are assured, is a distraction, and when the whole thing is dangled quite literally in front of the Doctor's nose in the shape of a fob watch she wisely elects to hide it in the dimensionless depths of the TARDIS, safe from herself and future showrunners, "unless I really ask for it". The implication, surely, is that we're moving on, at the very least until New Year's Day, although I suspect that fans will not let it rest that easy.

But while Swarm destroys and rebuilds the floating house, you can't help but feel mildly disappointed that the Doctor never enters it. Oh, there's nothing wrong with a bit of mystery; nor are we necessarily done with this story arc, the question of what's behind that rotting wooden door merely postponed, rather than shoved back into Pandora's box right before it's thrown into





the sun. There's no reason we couldn't go back — all the same, having come this far, why couldn't we have ventured a little farther? Seen the experiments in the cabinets; cast our eyes over a series of bizarre objects; glimpsed a dozen unknown figures who may or may not have been prior incarnations, like the screen in Morbius's lab? (Question: is it Division? Or



The Division? Because the definite article seems to have gone walkabout this year, and it's not down the back of the sofa, because I've looked.)

Whittaker herself is affable and watchable, whether she's giggling on a torture rack or flirting with herself (often in the same scene). Time and again she's shown herself to be an expert at the frivolous remark — “What this ship really needs,” she mutters, faced with someone else she doesn't know, “is lanyards” — but while she possesses Tennant's facetious light-heartedness, we don't really delve much beyond that, save a couple of brooding remarks and (god save us) an *actual tear* during a final not-quite conversation with Yaz. There is none of the fire that lit her during *The Haunting of Villa Diodati* — it's mostly down to the script, but you wish she'd reacted to the genocide of the Lupari with a little more emotion. Even a dual appearance as the personification of Time, dour-mouthed and serious and sporting a different coat, is largely wasted.

The companions have their own journeys this week: Dan's takes him to the TARDIS (by way of the museum we saw him exploring in *The Halloween Apocalypse*); Vinder and Bel wander straight into each other's arms, electing to wander the cosmos with Karvanista. It's all a bit *Guardians of the Galaxy*, without the tree — although Bel still hasn't had that baby, and it's been in there for years, so who knows what she's actually growing? As for Karvanista, the bushy sidekick is given the nearest thing we get to character development, angrily declaring his backstory with the Doctor off limits (reliving the memory, it turns out, will literally kill him) but giving us hints that the pair were closer than we'd realised. “There was a time I'd do anything for you,” he glowers from the neon haze of a Sontaran prison cell. “But you left me.”

It is Jericho who is granted a hero's death, bowing out in a literal blaze of glory after proving rather too trigger-happy defending Claire from an oncoming Sontaran patrol. It was inevitable: Kevin McNally does a good line in indignant pomp, and you find yourself nodding and smiling as he introduces himself as ‘Scourge of Scoundrels’, before noting — just before he's incinerated by the blast — that it would have been a brilliant title for his



autobiography. My children were upset, but that's all part of the fun. It's not proper *Doctor Who* unless you lose a supporting character you actually like. (No, Adric doesn't count.)

And yet it feels rushed. This, you sense, is what happens when you film an ambitious storyline in the height of a pandemic. There is enough material here to fill a series of 10 episodes, possibly more if they stretched out the camerawork. Instead, we're plagued with enough jump cuts to make the cafe scene in *Bohemian Rhapsody* look like a Ken Loach film. I'm not asking for pages of dialogue; I'm just asking for the chance to pause for breath.

Because when McNally died on that ship, you really feel he ought to have had a little more time. When Bel and Vinder collapsed into that embrace, they needed another minute or two — enough time, at least, for Vinder to process the fact that he was going to be a father. And if the not-quite relationship between Dan and Diane deserved a little more closure than a bit of mumbling about restaurant bookings; or if nothing else a little more than a single wistful stare. *Flux* manages, at the very least, to give a decent send-off to the Grand Serpent, who is fittingly exiled (by Vinder and Kate) to an isolated rock in deep space, where he can have the rule of authority he always craved, in complete solitude. Be careful what you wish for.

There is a sense of frustration about it, because *Flux* feels like the series Chibnall always wanted to make: grandiose, world-changing, and with a sense of finality, a set of water cooler moments to rival Tennant diving through the hatch of an open spacecraft, Eccleston's defiant "I'm coming to get you," or Capaldi's four

billion year wall punch. Certainly there have been scenes and segments that we'll be talking about for some time: the Angel freeze-up at the end of part four, the heist on Atropos, the literal destruction of the entire cosmos at the end of the first installment. Even the Sontaran in the corner shop, although not every word said about it will be praiseworthy.

But it's hard not to feel a little cheated, just as the programme itself cheats in order to (more or less) finish its narrative on time. There is nothing untoward about the bending of physics or the narrative trick used to get the Doctor back into the universe in order to save it, except that it feels rushed, hastily implemented, skirted around in order to Get The Story Done. And it is for this reason that *The Vanquishers* epitomises, on many levels, everything that's been both good and bad about this year. It's fun and bold and often exciting; these are all good things, and to be treasured, because we don't have enough good things these days. But it's like wolfing a McDonalds on your way back to the train station — you feel like you've experienced something hot and mildly satisfying, but you can't really tell what it was. There is a sense of things being unfinished, of time being wasted, of opportunity squandered. For all its good qualities, it is hard not to view *Flux* as a breakneck scramble for the finish line, an ensemble of confused players rushing through the final act before the credits roll, yanked up at speed with the same indecipherable intensity as the drama that preceded them.



# “Who’s Your Friend?”: Which Flux Character Are You?

**Bar Nash-Williams.**



Are you flummoxed by The Flux, or are you flush with the facts?

Or, like the Doctor, are you in three minds about it all?

Try our fun-filled time-filler to find your Flux-Buddy – are you Fam, Friend or Foe?

*(If you want to play, just keep track of how many of each letter you choose)*

## 1. Why were there so many characters?

A) Because Chibnall is so good at creating them, or using ones someone else created. I miss Ryan!

B) They were all important to different parts of the plot, and it would be a shame to discard any of them; a bit like Journey’s

*End.*

C) They were originally invented for lots of different stories, and got squished under the *Flux* umbrella. They don’t quite fit, even when split up to compete their missions.

D) So they could stand around while the Doctor uses them all like Greg House uses his trainees – to bounce off and occasionally pick up their ideas, while technobabbling at herself.

E) Because Chibnall doesn’t know when to stop. I could make a suggestion.

## 2. Vinder to Diane: ‘Why have they kept you if everyone else is gone?’



B) She may have been insignificant to them but she matters to us; she's a lovely character, it shows she's clever, and it gives us (along with Dan) more reason to want to see her again.

D) The 'in-story' reason that she's insignificant is lazy writing as a contrast to the storytelling reason; partly they wanted to, like they wanted to re-unite Vinder and Bel. And partly without SOMEONE to talk to, Vinder would have to learn all that himself and waste loads of time showing the audience, or talk infodump aloud to himself.

C) Due to Covid's constantly changing situation and regulations, they had to use limited pool of actors. It could have been any prisoner gone to ground used to pass on his experience when Vinder needed it. But then they'd have picked up yet another stray!

E) Because she fulfils Chibnall's overriding agenda to use diverse and minority actors.

A) Maybe they were keeping her as hostage or bait. We don't need to question all the little details that got lost in the final cut.

### **3. Why did Jericho have to die?**

E) Because Chibnall thinks old white guys are the past and must be seen to be wiped out with all the other monsters.

C) Because it's hard for viewers to feel the loss of 7 million Lupari they never met, but can feel for one character they've got to know and like. Shame it had to be the classiest actor though. Note the look on McNally's face as comedy Sontaran recites infodump; he looks round, assesses situation, shows emotion.

D) Because it was another trope to throw in for emotional effect without much consequence.

B) Because old white guys can still be stalwart, honourable, chivalrous, and courageous to their very last breath, not just a plot device or comic relief. Making his death as much accident as heroic sacrifice - but accepted with equanimity - completed his personal story well.

A) Because a life well-lived should go out fighting on the winning side not moulder away in a basement somewhere reminiscing about past glory.

### **4. Who were Swarm and Azure and what happened to them?**

B) Two of the best-acted villains for ages, all confident charm and salacious slow-burn menace. Plus great costumes. Consumed by the 'Saviour' they foolishly served.

D) A lot of talk but not much action, their apparently limitless power easily defeated by dodging out of the way. Wasted potential.

A) They were marvellous minions of Time, created to free it from the Mouri but destroyed when they were defeated by the Doctor's superior mind.

E) Examples of Chibnall's imagination, a lot of bluster and showy style but empty on perfunctory examination. Azure called it 'ascension' - I'd call it being unceremoniously disposed of when he got bored with them.

C) An entertaining enough plot device for taunting the Doctor and us fans with the Timeless Child arc. She rejected their temptation, as she should. Their plot was not as strong as their performance.

### **5. Who/what was the Grand Serpent all about?**

D) A rather wasted good actor with not much to do but ooze poisonous urbanity and menace the goodies, for the panto

audience to boo at but no reason to be involved at all.

B) A really fun villain with a plan, which we never really got to understand. Revenge? Survival? World Domination? Maybe he'll be back, who knows? That glance over his shoulder as he entered door 7 suggests so. Good foil versus the Doctor and Kate

C) Chibnall teasing us that he might be the Master, with his doomed alliances, snake form, and style choices.\* Had some good moments, but a hurried, too easy demise. 'They must rate you very highly – for now.' (Segun Akinola's gorgeous score for him as he slides into view behind the Sontarans).

E) A patent Chibnal plot device to be used for explaining why UNIT went underground (a problem he created in the first place) then discarded without a thought.

A) A brilliant character villain, with obvious elements of present-day dictators and power-grabbers, inevitably defeated by the underdog and resistance.

\* (Did anyone else look at his staff with a snake wound round it, and think 'common symbol of a *doctor*...'?)

## 6. What progress did the Doctor make through this story?

A) She didn't need to; we always knew she was going to sort it all out as she's the Doctor.

C) Jodie was much better, especially versus the baddies, ignoring Azure's bluster, the look on her face showing the Doctor knowing her tormentor was bonkers and ready to fall. Sassy under torture like the Eighth Doctor, but no idea why the Grand Serpent just stood there and let her talk, much as her gaggle of companions did.

B) She's got control over the lure of her past memories, and chosen to start again.

Akinola's almost quoting Gold under that hide-the-fobwatch sequence implies she's got as much memory as she needs. She's fixed her relationship with Yas, maybe having learned from what Karvanista told her. She's progressed as a person.

E) None at all; she's right back where she started, knowing nothing, but weakened by the flux. Which at least means she'll be gone soon.

D) She's gained a little authority and control, lost some of the scattergun infodump routines, but still spent most of the time reacting to stronger, more dangerous characters – like Time cloaked as herself. She has little time to make up lost ground.



## 7. What did they run out of?

E) Ideas – used *Blake's 7* Gan's limiter on Karvanista, *Hunger Games* zones in Passenger, *Star Trek The Next Generation* plot, comic book designed characters; we could go on. But can't be bothered.

C) Time. Eight or even 10 episodes with more 'show' and less 'tell' would have worked better. We could have learnt more about some characters arcs, and got to know others – like Williamson – better, and tied up more loose ends.

D) Money. How wonderful a new interior TARDIS set would have been after the flux ate it. Then conveniently forgot it had.

B) Extras. Covid meant their giant crowds were socially distanced, and each actor had to cover a lot of roles (Dan Starkey) or plot points. At least in small groups we got to know most of the people a bit better.

A) Screen space. Seriously; this would have looked *awesome* on IMAX.

### 8. What's the most important thing about comedy?

C) Balance. It could have been too heavy without some comic touches, but some misfired. Some laugh-out-loud lines and mostly convincing delivery, but other parts too slow and unfunny breaking up the action, or using time that could have been better spent.

D) Timing: Dan's line, "be nice or you won't get a biscuit" was funny, but the audience knew Karvanista had just been told ALL his Lupari race had been wiped out. Chibnall REALLY needs a script editor.

A) Visual gags. Like the reference to the Third Doctor, famous for drinking tea without lifting the cup. The Doctor gratefully accepted the refreshment offered by the Ood but didn't appear to touch it. Camp walks, farce running around tunnels, and cartoon expressions are fun too.

B) Delivery. The actors made their funny lines work, and seemed to enjoy themselves, and each others' delivery. If you like something about the character you remember the line more.

E) Taste. Sontar Huh? Corner shops, manufacturers of cheap chocolate, and Bob Holmes should be suing Chibnall.

**9. What explanation can you give for Anti-matter, (The) Division, the quadruple genocide (don't forget the Lupari), The Magic Faraway Tree under Liverpool, the un-mended Flux-ravaged universe, Karvanista knowing how to remote stun**

**intruders but no other Lupar doing it, Claire's Angel, the Village's safe return to normal space in '67, and all the other unanswered questions?**

A) They are like the fobwatch: only evil characters want to open up a pandora's box like that.

E) Incompetence? Boredom? Insipient dementia? Who cares?

B) They draw in characters like Williamson, add depth and motivation to others, and leave us lots to talk about or other writers to follow up.

D) Over-promising and under-delivering. Like other leaders I could think of, convinced of their own brilliance and unchecked by any opposition.

C) Tom's 'Have I The Right' speech is so iconic, we tend to forget that the Doctor has been willing to wipe out 'every last stinking' Dalek/ Cyberman/ Gallifreyan/ Skaran. But preferred 'another way.' Without 'magic' portals to other worlds sci-fi wouldn't exist. Chibnall is probably leaving no more holes than his predecessors, but they're all more obvious and raggedy.

### 10. Which quotation best sums up your response to *Flux*?

B) "I think you might be getting the hang of this!" (Yas to Dan)

D) "You are not, and yet you are." (Ood to Doctor)

C) "Oh, there's too many questions!" (The Doctor)

E) "I do not have time for your delusional witterings." (Stenk to Grand Serpent)

A) "What an awfully big adventure." (Jericho)

**TALLIED UP YOUR MARKS? TURN THE PAGE TO LEARN WHICH CHARACTER YOU ARE!**



## So: Which Character Are You...?

### If you answered mostly A

You have total faith in your Leader and follow him without question, even when his plan to finish everything with a cataclysmic showdown is fallible and full of holes. You are willing to sell your soul for cheap confectionary which gives you a sugar rush but has no nutritional value.

You are Commander Shallo and probably need to recharge.

### If you answered mostly B

You have lots of love for the good characters and are happy to be carried along for the exciting ride, even if you can't see the whole thing without someone you trust explaining it to you. You are content to go on with the adventure in the company of anyone of like mind.

You are Tigmi and we wish you a long and happy life.

### If you answered mostly C

You have been estranged from Doctor Who for some time, clinging to old recordings for comfort, but have finally been reunited with the Doctor. You have mostly enjoyed the adventure and people you've met, though you've had some ups and downs. You are at home in the TARDIS once more, but not everything is forgiven and you still have questions.

You are Yas and your journey is not yet complete.

### If you answered mostly D

You have valiantly and heroically stuck it out through most of the Flux, and despite great effort and personal pain have remained polite and gentlemanly to the end. Nevertheless, you find yourself on one side of an impenetrable barrier with Chibnall, Jodie, and the Fam on the other

side.

You are ~~Simon-Danes~~ Professor Eustacious Jericho and we never want to lose you.

### If you answered mostly E

You are urbane, superior, and used to being in charge, and can't see the point of anything that doesn't match your personal criteria. You enjoy imposing your will on others and set off an ego-klaxon whenever you open your mouth. You are left alone on a rock staring bleakly into the void, and stalking the comments sections of fansites.

You are the Grand Serpent and could probably use a hot chocolate. Or therapy.

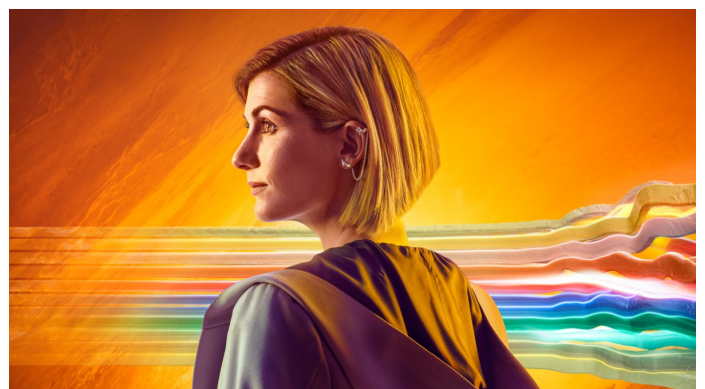
### None of the above

You have long experience of the Doctor, and are here because you care, and people like you, but you have been given little to engage with and feel unable to contribute very much. You have had interesting encounters with a few characters, but spent too much time wandering round in the dark waiting for something to turn up.

You are Kate Stewart and we live in hope that something better will turn up for you, soon.

Or better still, make up your own buddy-link. We've time to fill till New Year.

Extra points for knowing which companion said the title of this quiz, and in which story.



# The Tsuranga Illusion

**Andrew Hsieh.**



— A sequel to *The Tsuranga Conundrum* —

*“May the saints of all the stars and constellations bring you hope as they guide you out of the dark and into the light on this voyage and the next, and all the journeys still to come. For now and evermore.”*

— said the voices.

And then, it suddenly ended. Everything went to whiteness. Nothing. As though it had never happened.

Her eyes slowly opened. She was lying on her side, against the surface of a spacecraft which nearly pierced her cheek.

“Doc?” Graham nudged her on the shoulder. “Doc, are you awake?”

“Wait...” the Doctor moaned, as Ryan and Yaz helped her to her feet. She was clutching her sonic screwdriver, slowly waking up to the blurry view of Seffilun 27. “I had this wild dream about us being rescued by some hospital ship. Can’t really remember what happened.”

“Neither can I,” said Ryan, pausing for a moment to think. “Didn’t we all share the same dream?”

Yaz and Graham nodded. They were just as confused as the others, with the former asking, “And what was it you said about your mother, Ryan?”

He could remember the exact words he told Yaz in that dream, “Washing up in the kitchen. Massive heart attack. Just... just out on the floor.”

“I’m so sorry,” said Yaz, shaking her head.

Graham closed his eyes for a moment, knowing the trauma his grandson had to experience at such a young age.

“C’mon, gang. Let’s get out of this rotten mess.” The Doctor couldn’t be bothered to pick up the broken metal detectors, so she decided to take the detonated sonic mine instead. They were already making their journey back to the TARDIS. It took miles to walk all the way from where they were knocked out, trampling on random piles of junk.

“How long have we been here, Doc?”

“Four days,” she checked the readings on her sonic screwdriver.

“You’re having a laugh,” Graham scoffed. “Four days unconscious without food and drink? It felt real when we were hospitalised... and I was a midwife.”

“Oh my days, Graham!” Ryan rolled his eyes. “Don’t make me picture that humiliating nightmare.”

“Lucky that the pair of you had to deal with it, while the Doctor and I stopped the Pting,” said Yaz. “You know, the one who eats inorganic materials?”

“You mean that baby Slitheen thing that ate my sonic?” The Doctor stifled a laugh while she unlocked the TARDIS doors. “Well, it was a cute little critter after all. And the next time I meet a Pting, I’ll nickname it Tiny and turn Seffilun 27 into an all-you-can-eat buffet.”

As they entered the blue police box, the Doctor placed the sonic mine on the console and checked the scanner for analysis. She couldn’t recognise the symbols, but the only thing she was able to identify was the letter ‘D’ surrounded by two large ovals.

“Whoever planted that sonic mine was testing us... or me. Nothing to do with the Pting, but that’s another story.”

“So,” Yaz began, “where to next?”

“We could check out some Christmas markets across Europe. Somewhere more peaceful, for a change. Shall we?”

The others nodded, and off they went back in time.



# A Doctor Who Fan Looks at Star Trek

**Simon Danes.**

I like *Star Trek*.

I do. I wouldn't call myself a fan because I don't have the same emotional investment in it as I do with *Doctor Who*. It doesn't irk me when it's off-air or when its latest incarnation is cancelled; I don't desire to know everything about it; I wouldn't be interested in going to *Trek* conventions. I just enjoy it. It's good.

I've just been re-watching all of the original series – the one with Kirk, Spock and McCoy – on Netflix. It's been lovingly remastered and the '60s effects (which were still good) have been replaced with CGI ones, though they've been sensitively done and don't grate by looking massively too advanced for the time it was made. I've seen the episodes before, many times: the BBC used to show them repeatedly in the school holidays when I was a child, though they banned four episodes until the '90s (all for being too violent for a family audience. This was no great loss: three of them were mediocre anyway and one should have been banned on artistic grounds because it was truly dreadful.)

Here, then is an appreciation of *Star Trek* from the viewpoint of a *Doctor Who* fan.

This isn't meant to be triumphalist: I appreciate lots of readers will know much more about *Trek* than I do, and I apologise if I ever appear to be sneering at *Trek* or at fans, because I'm not trying to diss either.

Inevitably, an appreciation is going to look at things warts and all, but I can fully understand that there's a converse position: there will be *Trek* fans who like *Doctor Who* but who consider it inferior to *Star Trek*, and they'll have good reasons for doing so.

Even so, I hope that this, written from an inevitably biased viewpoint, may throw some light on *Trek* and reflect some back onto *Who* itself, as there's a contrast between the two series: they're often seen as rivals, after all, even though they're actually very different.

As you know, *Star Trek* has been going for almost as long as *Doctor Who*. As with *Doctor Who*, there have been gaps in its production; longer ones in the case of *Trek* than for *Who*. At the time of writing, there have been 754 episodes of *Trek*, as opposed to 851 for *Who*. (It depends how you count them, and the figure for *Trek* also includes the animated series, which I suppose you have to include as it's considered canonical.)

*The Cage*, the pilot episode starring Jeffrey Hunter, was made in November to December 1964: the same time as the BBC were broadcasting *The Dalek Invasion of Earth*. The first series premiered in the US on 8th September 1966, two days before part one of *The Smugglers*. The final episode of season three was *Turnabout*

*Intruder*, first shown on 3rd June 1969, the same week as part eight of *The War Games*.

Most of The Original Series (TOS), then, was contemporary with Troughton's run of *Doctor Who*.

I'm going to concentrate on TOS, mainly because this task would be impossibly long otherwise, but also because I prefer it to the others. Not quite the same as saying it's better: there's a strong case for saying The Next Generation (TNG) is actually the best incarnation of *Trek*; it's just that I like the original version better and have a strong affection for it.

The first thing to say is that it's very good. It's very uneven: *Trek* has its own *Horns of Nimons* and *Tsuranga Conundrums*; more of them in the third and final series than in the other two. Its best episodes are excellent. The majority of those are in the first season, when a number of science fiction short story writers were invited to contribute scripts.

Nimoy and Kelley are genuinely superb throughout. And although he's the least good of the three leads, Shatner is still good. It's become the generally accepted view that he grotesquely overacts and is a dreadful old ham; actually, when you rewatch his performance, you realise this judgement is a cliché and actually rather unfair. He does overact (well, *Who* isn't free from overacting either) but, even so, this is comparatively rare: it becomes more common as the series progresses (and admittedly it can be risible). The habit of

putting in. Full stops. In. His sentences. At random. Doesn't really start. Until towards the end of series one. It's irritating and a good director should have picked him up on this – and yet, in fairness, it's a habit that Peter Capaldi also used and which was copied occasionally by Jenna Coleman, so one shouldn't cast nasturtiums.

For the most part, Kirk is a believable and well-realised character; he's the least interesting of the three principals, admittedly, but he's also much better than the bland and dull Christopher Pike of the pilot. (Anson Mount, who plays Pike in *Discovery*, rescues the character: his Pike is much better than Jeffrey Hunter's.) *Trek* would have been much worse had they gone for a different cast: Shatner, Nimoy, and Kelley carry the show with great professionalism.

(Did you know that Kelley was offered Spock before Nimoy was, and that he turned it down?)

The most obvious difference between *Who* and *Trek* is that one's an ensemble piece and the other isn't. *Doctor Who* is always about the Doctor; *Star Trek* is not always about the Captain. The Doctor is in a tradition of fictional British heroes like Sherlock Holmes, Falstaff, Rumpole, Number Six, and, to some extent, Quatermass: the outsider, the maverick, the individual, the person who refuses to conform and whose relationship with society in general is at best uneasy. Pertwee's Doctor was arguably the least conformist, though it's a caricature to say

he was a conservative (and/ or Conservative) grandee. He initially fitted in with UNIT because he had to; it was only later that he realised he liked being with the Brig and his fellows, and even then, he longed to be off on his travels. It's also true to say that the companions, plus recurring characters like UNIT and the Paternoster Gang, disqualify *Doctor Who* from being a series with a solo lead, but the Doctor still dominates and other recurring characters are very much secondary figures – at least, until the Jodie Whittaker series arguably made the Doctor much more a member of an ensemble than a protagonist.



*Trek's* set-up – and this isn't to imply it's therefore inferior – is more conformist. Although there are occasional exceptions, the Enterprise crew conform to the society of the Federation and are committed ambassadors of its ethos. Gene Roddenberry was passionate about his idea that *Star Trek* should show the best of humanity and demonstrate the best of what was possible for human beings: a world where our baser instincts were mastered and we had overcome conflict. This included tailoring the uniforms of the

Enterprise crew without pockets, much to the irritation of the cast; Roddenberry reasoned we would have no desire for individual possessions in the future. The cast did desire their original possessions, however, and the bridge set was littered with their fags, hankies, keys, and wallets, hidden out of shot.

Roddenberry hated the uniforms of the films from *The Wrath of Khan* onwards because they committed the unforgivable sin: they had pockets.

The theme's much more muted in TOS than it became in the early, Roddenberry-helmed series of *The Next Generation*; it didn't work there because the characters became so bland and noble and wise and mature and goody-goody that they also became very, very dull.

Roddenberry thought human beings were perfectible. This was also the view of a 4th Century Christian philosopher called Pelagius, who was roundly trashed for talking rubbish by St Augustine. Whether one calls it original sin or the id, there seems to be an inherent darkness in humankind that can be subdued but never entirely eliminated. Roddenberry was also an atheist who strove to promulgate atheism in his writing. The excellent *Babylon 5* is superficially similar to *Star Trek* but, by contrast, was much less optimistic in its view of human perfectibility and its characters are therefore much more recognisable as real people. B5's showrunner J Michael Straczynski was also an atheist, but he



recognised that both atheism and religion would endure; there's even a Benedictine monastery on his space station. *Doctor Who*, very wisely, is almost entirely silent on the question of the truth or otherwise of religion; it's not a good idea to alienate large chunks of your audience, and people dislike being told what to think by a science fiction programme, whatever their views. The anti-religious message of *Trek* is, again, much more muted in TOS than in TNG; indeed, *Who Mourns for Adonais?* and *Bread and Circuses* are explicitly Christian. But a pro-Christian message goes down the same way as an atheistic one: badly. Science fiction shouldn't preach; it should tell stories.

The involvement of the programmes' creators is another huge difference between *Trek* and *Who*. Sydney Newman was content to hand control of his baby over to others to develop; Roddenberry was absolutely not. He was sidelined from the third series of TOS and from the *Trek* films, much to his chagrin, and he continued to bombard the producers with memoranda and unsolicited advice. He could be litigious. He hated *Star Trek V* so much that he declared it wasn't canon. Roddenberry's work could be excellent, as some of his screenplays show (*The Menagerie*, for example) but his judgement was frequently poor: he could be as heavy handed as Chris Chibnall in smashing the viewer over the head with his Message. (*The Omega Glory* – the one where the planet's inhabitants cherish a copy of the American Constitution – is breathtakingly

awful. Roddenberry thought it was superb.) Alas, the producers of the films found him a nuisance and ignored him as much as they dared.

TOS also gave us the best-looking spaceship in any science fiction programme or film. The Enterprise is a stunning piece of work; it looks better in TOS, too, than it did in the films or in *Discovery*. (I think that's because designers can't resist the tendency to fiddle with something that looked near-perfect anyway; adding detail and changing the colour detracted from the simplicity of the ship's original design. The Daleks look best in *The Dead Planet*, too.) The bridge set is effective, if dated; again, the later versions necessarily have to update it: you couldn't use that set now. But it's lost something in the reworking for the films and in the later starships. (You can say the same about the Hartnell TARDIS set vs its later tweakings.)

Something else that struck me on my recent re-viewing was how little the other characters have to do. With a few exceptions, Sulu, Chekhov, and Uhura are pretty much in the background; they only have a few lines when they appear; their characters don't really take off until the films.

(That is, ignoring *The Slow Motion Picture*, which served none of the cast well. Roddenberry was allowed free reign for this and he went massively OTT, indulging himself and his Vision to a ridiculous extent. It is a pompous and deeply dull movie, with none of the subtlety of the best television episodes. He drove the



director to distraction by constant rewrites, which also called for more and more long and boring effects sequences, pushing the film massively over-budget. Roddenberry was not asked back for the subsequent films. Incidentally, Orson Welles did the voiceover for the cinema trailer.)

It's to the credit of George Takei, Walter Koenig (to a lesser extent), and Nichelle Nichols that they're believable people; they could easily have been cardboard. Indeed, My Kyle, the nearly forgotten Englishman on the Enterprise, is in it almost as much as Sulu and Chekhov. Scotty is effectively the fourth lead and James Doohan is splendid. Doohan was a war-hero, too: he landed in France on D-Day and later became an accomplished radio actor. The producers took full

advantage of this: many of the computers and aliens in TOS are actually voiced by Doohan and sound nothing like Mr Scott.

The contentious stuff now. Why do I think *Doctor Who* is better than *Star Trek*?

In part, I'd argue it's because it's more imaginative. It's probably unfair, but you could say that *Star Trek* is basically a series about the crew of an aircraft carrier or a submarine, updated and set in space. As a result, it's more recognisable as something from our world – and I appreciate that this may be precisely why *Trek* fans prefer their own series to *Who*: it's not as outlandish or (one could say) silly.

Having a non-human protagonist is arguably more interesting, too; the human Dr Who of the Cushing films is far less

compelling than the alien Doctor of the series, especially when you're not absolutely sure what he is going to do next. There are non-humans in *Trek*, of course. But while Nimoy is superb, Spock's character is more limited than the Doctor's; both are alien, but Spock is (usually) more predictable. Even Spock is essentially a conformist; the Doctor is decidedly not. Perhaps this preference for the non-conformist oddball is a consequence of the British psyche, if there is such a thing. The British can have a suspicion of the establishment and an uneasiness with patriotism or conformity, even though we've managed to have two old Etonian prime ministers in the last few years.

The attitude to interfering in other cultures is a, or perhaps *the*, major difference between *Doctor Who* and *Star Trek*.

Starfleet's Prime Directive is Thou Shalt Keep Thy Nose Out of Other People's Cultures, at least if they're not capable of interstellar travel.

The Prime Directive comes to the foreground much more in TNG; it's present in the original series, but is cheerfully ignored much of the time. Something very similar was also the prime directive for the Time Lords and it became clear that it was precisely because of it that the Doctor ran away from their society: because it bored him, because he thought it was morally wrong, because he wanted to get his hands dirty, and because no one was going to tell him what to do. In *Trek* (especially in TNG),

the Prime Directive can become very self-righteous and patronising. TNG can take it to extremes, so that it becomes morally relativist (if a bunch of idiots are killing each other, who are we to interfere and impose our cultural values on others?).

*Who* and *Trek* have totally contrasting approaches to the doctrine of non-interference. And yet both are informed by a strong moral position; both of these positions reflect very different national experiences.

In the Sixties, and especially between 1966 and 1969, American experience was dominated by the Vietnam War and British experience was not. For the UK in the Sixties, Vietnam was important but largely peripheral.

Lyndon B. Johnson wanted Harold Wilson to send British troops to Vietnam; Wilson repeatedly refused. Roddenberry was a passionate opponent of the war; the Prime Directive was in part his attack, through fiction, on the idea that a strong nation should interfere in the affairs of another nation or culture. Roddenberry did not want the stories of the Enterprise to be seen as a parable for American foreign policy. Hence the Prime Directive.

Given the background, you can fully understand where he was coming from. Max Hastings' book *Vietnam* provides a depressing and brilliant history of the conflict, with neither side emerging morally unscathed. While far more Vietnamese were killed than American or allied troops, allied atrocities were also far rarer and on a



much smaller scale than those committed by the Vietnamese communists; moreover, allied troops who committed war crimes were tried and punished and communist troops were not. Hastings shows the whole thing to have been a terrible mess and a tragic waste. It can be fashionable in the UK to be anti-American – not just opposed to individual policies of US governments but to be xenophobically anti-American – and Hastings shows how shallow and wrong such a view is. Perhaps, then, it's not for me to criticise Roddenberry's views; he strongly believed in what he was saying, and used *Star Trek* as a vehicle to express them. The difference in approach of *Who* and *Trek* to the concept of non-interference reflects the different experiences of the British and the Americans to the Vietnam War.

This is getting heavy. Let's look at the baddies.

*Trek* was limited by its budget, as was *Who*, but the latter managed to do much more with it. The big bads of *Trek* are the Klingons. It was originally to have been the Romulans but their ears made them too expensive. The Klingons were easier to do. Roddenberry always wanted the forehead crests for the Klingons, which they had from the first film onwards, but they were too expensive for TOS.

The big bads of *Who* are the Daleks. I think it's not difficult to conclude which are superior in concept and execution. As a child, I was always disappointed that the aliens in *Trek* were nearly always people

with make-up or odd costumes; the Ice Warriors and the Cybermen knock spots of the Andorians.



*Trek* was also far too interested in exploring its own continuity, though again this is much more muted in TOS (and another reason why I prefer it to the later versions). Once the Klingons started sticking Cornish pasties on their foreheads, we had endless explorations of their culture, language, religion, history, and even opera. Contrast with Dalek culture, then. Language: English; religion: none; history: exterminating stuff. But Daleks singing opera would be hilarious.

*Trek* became almost Tolkien-esque in its labyrinthine complexity. This is a matter of taste and clearly people are perfectly entitled to enjoy that and find it fascinating. I think it's dull; it's also why I enjoyed reading and watching *The Lord of the Rings* but don't want to read any more Tolkien; you can have too much of that sort of thing. It reached its nadir in the first episode of *Discovery*, which opened with a long and deeply dull scene entirely in Klingon, which was so boring that I turned the telly off. (I tried *Discovery* again and actually it's good: highly recommended).

Much of *Trek*, then, seemed to become aimed at a particular type of fan who enjoys exploring a fictional universe's continuity (and I wonder how much the general viewers do). *Doctor Who* was more interested in stories for their own sake; continuity could be cheerfully sacrificed to the desire to tell a ripping yarn. It was left to the fans to produce any Tolkien-esque backstories; the series didn't bother. It's much easier to write a history of the Klingons than of the Cybermen; Cyber-continuity is all over the place – and it doesn't matter. We didn't even know who the Doctor was for six years. How the TARDIS works isn't explained and it doesn't need to be. Scientific accuracy is ignored in the interests of telling a good story. Science only features when it's needed for a particular story: hyperspace is a concept in *The Stones of Blood* because it's required for the story; it's then forgotten about and never mentioned again. There's no noise in space in *Doctor Who* except when there is. The Doctor's age goes up and down; Pertwee's Doctor implies he's lived for many thousands of years. Continuity in *Who* is far less important.



There's also the genre. NBC selected the fifth episode, *The Man Trap*, to air first; this irritated Leonard Nimoy and others, who felt it was too much "monster of the week". It's also one of the more horrific episodes and as such, rather unrepresentative. By contrast, *Doctor Who* thrives on "monster of the week" and rejoices in it. Again, this could be a perfectly legitimate reason for preferring *Trek* to *Who*. It also exemplifies the difference in tone. It's a generalisation, but *Star Trek* is basically straight science fiction and *Doctor Who* is basically horror, with science fiction overtones. *Who* aims to terrify; *Trek* doesn't. The tone is completely different and any *Trek / Who* crossover – it's been tried, in the comics – would never really work.

*Trek* is also more limited in that it's set in a particular period. (Well, different periods for different series.) It has all of space to play with; *Who* has all of time and space. Its canvas is larger than *Trek's* and that allows its stories to be more varied; *Who's* concept allows for no limits on its storytelling. One of the reasons I gave up on *Voyager* and *Enterprise* was that I felt they were re-treading old ground: the A plot of an earlier *Trek* episode would be joined to a B plot from another and it was rehashing stuff. *Doctor Who* never recycles old plots and people like Terry Nation were never guilty of this, oh dear me no. (And the TARDIS is better than the *Enterprise* so *ner ner ner*.)

Some of TOS is dated. So's some of its contemporary in Sixties *Who*. Classic *Who* is sometimes gently chided for being sexist:

female companions look decorative, get into scrapes, ask “What are we going to do now, Doctor?” and “Tell me everything that’s going on, Doctor, because I’m really thick, me.” Perhaps more a function of the storytelling than of the sex of their characters; the male companions could be equally dumb. Male companions were generally less decorative, though Ian Chesterton had some amazingly sexy cardies. TOS is more overtly sexist, alas, not just in the costumes for the female characters (some of the alien women’s outfits are so ridiculous as to verge on soft porn), but in Kirk’s habit of snogging them all the time, usually within 10 minutes of first meeting them. Even David Tennant didn’t clock up as many snogs as Jim Kirk. There’s even the notorious bit when Kirk tells Eleanore of Troyius that, as a spoilt brat, he should spank her. As Hartnell would say, “Dear dear dear dear. How very disturbing.” It also seems obligatory to have a punch-up in every single episode; they suggest disputes can be settled with fists, and they’re often badly done, with obvious stunt doubles. Sometimes, as with *The Gamesters of Triskelion*, they fill almost a whole episode and the *biff biff sock pow* action is generally accompanied by horribly blaring incidental music. Punch ups are deeply boring.

It’s also an oddity that, while *Who* is more horrific, it’s also less overtly violent. The Doctor never carries a gun (unless written by Eric Saward); the Enterprise crew are routinely armed and are occasionally trigger-happy. This can make viewers like

me uneasy. Again, perhaps a British thing: even now, British police officers don’t carry guns as a matter of tradition and honour, and the occasional sight of a plod with an automatic rifle at Heathrow Airport just looks very wrong. This observation comes with the usual caveats: it’s an over-generalisation and it isn’t meant in any way to be a negative comment about other countries. Nevertheless, being able to shoot your way out of trouble can make for lazy storytelling – a problem also found in *Who* with K9; and anyway, now that the sonic screwdriver has become a magic wand, you don’t need a gun to overcome most scrapes.

At its best, TOS was excellent. It was very uneven and much of it was not good. Some of the stories that have been characterised as rubbish by received opinion turn out to be much better than expected when you watch them. If you’re not familiar with the original series of *Star Trek*, or indeed even if you are, may I offer my pick of the best episodes?

I think the best of all of them is *The Doomsday Machine*. Very well written, very tense and menacing, an excellent story, and it features a superb performance by William Windom as the crazed Commodore Decker.

This isn’t an exhaustive list, but, also highly recommended:

#### **Season One:**

- *Where No Man Has Gone Before*
- *The Man Trap*
- *Charlie X*



- *Balance of Terror*
- *What Are Little Girls Made of?*
- *The Menagerie*
- *A Taste of Armageddon*
- *Space Seed* (that's the one with Khan in)
- *The Devil in the Dark*
- *The City on the Edge of Forever*

*Mudd's Women* is fun, too. So's *The Squire of Gothos*. I probably like those episodes (plus *The Man Trap*, *What Are Little Girls Made Of?* and *The Devil in the Dark*) because they're the most similar to *Doctor Who*, which makes me very shallow, doesn't it? Without too much rewriting, they'd work well as *Who* stories. What a narrow approach! I'd also argue that the best episodes of *Trek* aren't as good as the best stories of *Who*; even *The Doomsday Machine* isn't a patch on *Genesis of the Daleks* or *The War Games*.

*The Cage* is worth a look: it's clearly work in progress and most of it was re-used in *The Menagerie*, but it's still interesting.

#### Season Two:

- *Metamorphosis*
- *Wolf in the Fold*
- *Mirror, Mirror*
- *The Trouble with Tribbles*
- *The Immunity Syndrome*

#### Season Three:

- *The Paradise Syndrome* (generally panned but I quite like it)

- *The Enterprise Incident* (rather like *Discovery* in tone)
- *Let That Be Your Last Battlefield*
- *All Our Yesterdays*

Roddenberry was sidelined from this season. As previously stated, he could produce both brilliance and trash (cf Russell T Davies?); at this stage of his career, the good stuff outweighed the bad and his loss affected the quality of the final series. Producing duties went to the less talented Fred Freiberger, who later also produced *Space: 1999*. While working on the latter, Freiberger saw a name on a British road sign and thought it so wonderful that he used it for an episode title. This was *The Rules of Luton*.

(I am indebted to my friend Anthony Forth of Bedford Doc Soc for drawing my attention to this glorious fact.)

And finally, most episodes of the original series ended the title sequence with a photo of that bloke from *The Corbomite Maneuver*.

In homage to this, here is a photo of me impersonating him.



**“What a load of Baloks!”**

# Why I Consider Heaven Sent/ Hell Sent as a Two-Parter (Not Standalones)

Andrew Hsieh.



I love two-parters – I really do! They not only expand a regular standard-length episode into an epic, but they also allow more time for the characters and plotting to be developed. But when it comes to the Series 9 stories, there is a significant contrast between their titles and narratives; even for the final pair of episodes *Heaven Sent/ Hell Bent*, which I perceive as a two-parter.

Despite the fact that both halves were written by Steven Moffat and directed by Rachel Talalay, like the Series 8 finale (*Dark Water/Death in Heaven*), this was an opportunity to take the concept into a rather unusual direction for the cast and crew involved, especially Peter Capaldi and

Jenna Coleman.

*Heaven Sent* features only the Doctor as the main protagonist, due to Clara's (shockingly) unexpected death in *Face the Raven*, whilst the second, part *Hell Bent*, on the other hand, deals with multiple consequences on Gallifrey (last seen in *The Day of the Doctor*). Before watching the two-part finale, I was highly optimistic about the contrasting elements between the halves and how they were being produced. Unlike all the other multi-part finales, this one has the most unique narrative structure for bringing a series to a close; and from my point of view, this is – and has always intended to be – the Series 9 two-part finale. Even if you consider them as singular episodes, I would suggest

that you avoid comparing *Hell Bent* with the heavily-rushed and anticlimactic Series 6 finale *The Wedding of River Song* – just not the same.

For many fans (including myself), it was greatly disappointing when DWM decided to ‘officially’ classify them as single episodes, back in 2017. Do they really look like standalones? One may agree, another wouldn’t, or perhaps remain in the grey area of Skaro. The decision came from then editor Tom Spilsbury who was working on the Season Survey for DWM 495: “Controversially (perhaps), we’ve decided not to combine *The Girl Who Died* and *The Woman Who Lived*, or *Face the Raven*, *Heaven Sent*, and *Hell Bent* – as despite their linked nature, the individual styles of each episode meant that we couldn’t really consider them as true multi-parters, and we didn’t want to short change readers by forcing you to give a combined score.”

Sounds strange, doesn’t it? I honestly couldn’t disagree more with his explanation, same for when “Steven Moffat [had] agreed” they should go ahead with such.

DWM is one example of a *Doctor Who* subsidiary that classifies them as two individual episodes; some others (including fansites) would go for the opposite, such as the TARDIS Wiki “officially” referring to them as “stories 260a and 260b”. Even the BBC website confirmed this when they uploaded the shooting scripts onto their blog, despite both halves being shot in two different production blocks:

“*Heaven Sent* and *Hell Bent* were two wildly different episodes. Both unique, bold, and startling, they combined to create a two-part adventure – a hybrid, you might say – that brought Series 9 to an unforgettable finale.”

This may sound ironic too, but I really like the way Steven Moffat left the episode formatting open for debate in DWM 493: “Obviously, *The Magician’s Apprentice* and *The Witch’s Familiar* are the same story. You could make that one movie. And *The Zygon Invasion* and *The Zygon Inversion*. But *Heaven Sent* and *Hell Bent*... maybe *Face the Raven*, too... are they a mini serial? A story split in three, or two? In the end, it doesn’t really matter.”

It is different with both *The Girl Who Died* and *The Woman Who Lived* because not only do they feature Ashildr/Me – who later reappears in *Face the Raven* and *Hell Bent* – as the primary focus, having three different writers (Moffat co-wrote *The Girl Who Died* with Jamie Mathieson – though likely just the ending) contrasting the formatting of each episode, along with *The Woman Who Lived* lacking a ‘Previously’ recap, makes them explicitly appear as singulars; that is what I would consider too. But still, from what I understand, their formatting does differ from what we see in *Heaven Sent/ Hell Bent* where they directly ‘cliffhang’ on the Gallifreyan desert, unlike *Face the Raven* which concludes in another setting.

And speaking of movies, the Series 9 two-part opener was repeated as an exclusively edited feature-length omnibus, on Sunday 27th September 2015. I believe it doesn’t make much difference if



you watch this version or both halves individually, unless you would feel interested in comparing the small edits made between *The Magician's Apprentice*/*The Witch's Familiar* – try not to count the omnibus as a single episode.

Multi-parters run at a minimum of 90 minutes. Some are much longer. If all the other two-parters (including the finale) were to receive such treatment, they would become Netflix-style epics, but far more superior than the compressed standard-length Series 7 “blockbusters”. I strongly wish for *Heaven Sent*/*Hell Bent* to be edited this way because you could then capture the cinematic feel of the unconventional storytelling and the ways it evolved into an extraordinary masterpiece, within two whole hours of bringing Series 9 to an end.

On the same note, I was very disappointed with how they edited the ending of *Heaven Sent*, which you can read from a complaint that I sent to the BBC (at the time, I had perceived *Face the Raven* as the first of a three-parter, at the time of broadcast): “Unlike *Face the Raven* (last week’s episode), along with other two-part finales, I felt that both the use of the ‘Next Time’ trailer for *Hell Bent* and the omission of the ‘To Be Continued’ caption had spoiled the epic cliffhanger ending because this episode is the second of the Series 9 three-part finale, and they should have followed the same method used for *The Zygon Invasion*, in which its ending had an amount of suspense and thrills that avoided spoiling the surprises for *The*

*Zygon Invasion*.”

They clarified: “We contacted the programme makers in order to answer your feedback. They said that they’re sorry you were disappointed by the omission of the TO BE CONTINUED card at the end of this episode, but they felt it was the best dramatic choice not to use it and to go straight into the credits. They never like to tie themselves into strict rules on *Doctor Who* and they often change their approach to best suit an episode.”



Nevertheless, I was relieved that *Hell Bent* started off with a ‘Previously’ recap to show that it indeed connects with the first half, along with *Face the Raven*, because they provide a sense of closure to The Hybrid arc. No one can ignore the story arc of Series 9 – nobody. It’s a clever way to bridge the gap between the earlier episodes and the finale (with its lead-in).

And still, that leaves the door open for the fans to interpret how the two-part finale should be perceived.

I hope when he’s in charge, Russell T Davies does another unconventional two-parter like *Heaven Sent*/*Hell Bent* – delivering surprising narrative structures no one will see coming!

# Exclusive Preview: 100 Objects of Doctor Who

**Philip Bates.**

Come one, come all, to the Museum of *Doctor Who*!

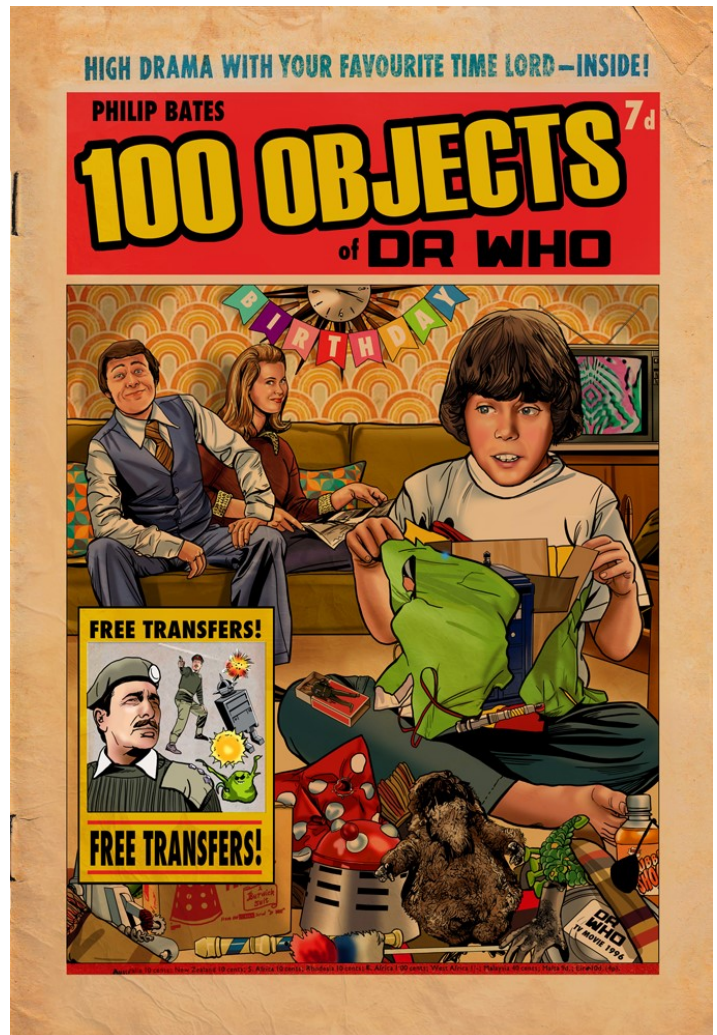
Located on the SS. Shawcraft and touring the Seven Systems, right now!

Are you a fully-grown human adult? I would like to speak to someone in charge, so please direct me to any children in the vicinity. No, no, that's not fair – I was programmed not to judge, for I am a simple advertisement bot, bringing you the best in junk mail.

Yes, it's festival time at the Museum of *Doctor Who*, the (second) Greatest Show in the Galaxy! I have been instructed to manipulate the local spacetime distillation vector to warp your miniscule human brains and induce an hallucinatory state, enabling you to step inside the museum itself, and experience an exclusive sample of all it has to offer. We'll flit between objects from various sections to give you a rounded experience. Also, if we gave too much away, you'd probably not purchase tickets, would you? And that would be disgraceful. The Collector would be most upset at that and probably threaten to disassemble me. We don't want that, do we? What's that? You do? Well I never!

As we enter the Museum, it's important to remember not to hold your breath. Don't be lasagne.

Here we go then...



## 1. St John's Ambulance Sign.

The staff usher you past all the queues. Clearly someone has told them it's your birthday. Well it was back where you came from, but you're in another time zone now, so should you tell them you'll wait with all the others? You check out the queue. There's the Keeper of Traken. Ashildr. Dorian Gray. Captain Wrack. All tutting, looking at their watches, moaning about immortality being a curse.

Nah, let them think it's your birthday. In fairness, you did open presents this morning: a toy Yeti, a handmade scarf, a Dalek playsuit... And now you're here, the

ultimate present – learning about that wanderer in all time and space known as the Doctor.

This first room is meant to be experienced alone. Fog hangs in the air. It's dark, gloomy. You can't see anything apart from exposed brickwork and a sign directing you forwards: Totter's Lane Yard, This Way. You go on cautiously. Where's the first exhibit? There's nothing at the end of the lane. Except...

A spotlight focuses on a blue square, suspended impossibly ahead, in the mist, a few metres away. The corridor feels more intimate as you get closer.

Right at its centre is a circular logo: the St John's Ambulance sign, as seen on the first TARDIS.

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*Doctor Who* debuted on BBC1 on 23rd November 1963 at 5:16pm. Though it only attracted a modest audience of 4.4 million viewers, the following week the BBC repeated this first episode, named *An Unearthly Child*, before the second (*The Cave of Skulls*) due to concerns its initial transmission had been overshadowed by the assassination of President John F. Kennedy on 22nd November. It proved a canny move: around six million tuned in for the repeat and its second episode, and the four-part serial, which concluded on 14th December 1963, averaged six million viewers.

By the end of the second serial, better known as *The Daleks* (or *The Mutants* to

some), *Doctor Who* had crossed the ten million viewers milestone.

But this success belied troubles behind the scenes.

Likely due to the difficulties of realising extreme locations and characters on limited budgets, sci-fi was relatively rare on TV: the first was an adaptation of a Karel Čapek play, *R.U.R. (Rossum's Universal Robots)*, which also coined the term "robots", and aired on 11th February 1938, followed by a live transmission of *The Time Machine*. Other sci-fi dramas included *Quatermass and the Pit, Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and *Out of this World*, a 1962 spin-off of ITV's *Armchair Theatre*.

Nonetheless, a BBC Survey Group cautioned that "SF is not itself a wildly popular branch of fiction – nothing like, for example, detective and thriller fiction. It doesn't appeal much to women and largely finds its public in the technically minded younger groups. SF is a most fruitful and exciting area of exploration – but so far has not shown itself capable of supporting a large population."

And yet *Out of This World* had debuted to some eleven million viewers. Sydney Newman had commissioned it when working at ITV and was adamant that sci-fi was the answer to a gap opened in the BBC's Saturday evening schedule between *Grandstand* and *Juke Box Jury*. Donald Baverstock, BBC1's controller of programmes, instructed Newman (who'd joined as head of drama in December 1962) to find a family-friendly programme



to fill it.

He, in turn, told Donald Wilson, head of the script department, to work on a sci-fi format which could run throughout much of a year. Wilson, with his colleague C.E. Webber and two members of the Survey Group, Alice Frick and John Braydon, came up with a show about a group of intrepid scientists, featuring “The Handsome Young Man Hero”, “The Handsome Well-Dressed Heroine”, and “The Maturer Man” – which Newman subsequently denounced as “corny”. Instead, he focused on “The Maturer Man” with a “Character Twist”, giving him an enigmatic name: the Doctor.

He approached very few to produce the then-unnamed show: Don Taylor, whose feathers had been ruffled by Newman’s restructuring of the drama department, and Shaun Sutton, whose experience in the BBC children’s department meant he could handle such an extensive production. (Sutton would eventually prove pivotal to *Doctor Who*, talking Newman into casting Patrick Troughton as the Second Doctor.) Both turned the position down.

Sydney then recalled a gutsy young production assistant who’d impressed him

at ITV: Verity Lambert, who he put in charge of *Doctor Who*. On Friday 24th June 1963, she arrived at BBC Television Centre as its first female drama producer. Newman later described her appointment as “the best thing I ever did on *Doctor Who*”.

That same month, just five weeks before expected airdate, Assistant Controller (Planning) Television Joanna Spicer raised concerns that no one had been cast in any lead roles. Even more troubling was the lack of scripts! *Doctor Who*’s transmission was subsequently delayed a further eight weeks.

C.E. Webber’s *The Giants* was deemed unsuitable for the programme’s first serial, too, meaning Anthony Coburn’s *An Unearthly Child* would need rewriting to accommodate character and format introductions.

Worse still was the limited room at the allocated Lime Grove Studio D, as well as the old equipment it used. The TARDIS interior set would take up around half the studio space; in the other half, the production team would have to craft all of time and space.

The show’s success is testament to the incredible achievements and dedication of Lambert; directors Waris Hussein, Christopher Barry, and Richard Martin; associate producer Mervyn Pinfield; and script editor David Whitaker; among many others.

Of course, Donald Baverstock had a vested interest in *Doctor Who* too; he was, after



all, the person who approached Sydney Newman to develop a TV show for Saturday teatimes. Still, he kept a keen eye on finances. Each episode had a budget of £2,300, with a further £500 allocated to create the TARDIS interior, and when Baverstock rechecked the numbers, he became concerned that each episode of the first serial would cost over £4,000. He nixed the show, ordering the 13-episode commission down to just four. Fortunately, Lambert and Wilson convinced Baverstock that they could make *Doctor Who* more cost-effective.

Even its pilot episode, recorded a month before full filming for the rest of the serial began, ran into troubles. The practice of making pilot episodes didn't exist in the UK at that time, owing to cost and tight filming schedules.

There were dialogue mistakes. A camera ran into scenery at Totter's Lane. The Doctor was too bad-tempered and was described as being from the forty-ninth century. One of the biggest issues, however, was a technical fault resulting in the TARDIS doors opening and closing at random.

Newman instructed the team to remake the episode, meaning it would miss its expected 16th November 1963 transmission. This pilot wasn't aired publicly until 1991.

Famously, extensive news coverage of the assassination of John F. Kennedy held *Doctor Who* up too, though only by a few seconds, not the hours or days often

quoted. After the disappointing viewing figures of this "delayed" broadcast, thankfully the BBC's considerable guile in replaying *An Unearthly Child* immediately before *The Cave of Skulls* secured the viewers it deserved.

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You don't normally like to touch any exhibits, but this one actively encourages you to. You reach out a hand, palm stretching across the St John's Ambulance Sign. Somehow it's humming. It's... It's alive.

*Vworp! Vworp!*

The materialisation noise to your left beckons you towards a door, through which lies the rest of the *Doctor Who* Museum.

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## 5. A Framed Piece of Wall

Art is subjective, but this is taking it too far.

It's a nice frame and all, but still, the plaque says there should be a poster of *Dr. Who and the Daleks* starring Peter Cushing here. You peer closer. Someone has written "Sorry, we can't afford the copyright" in thick marker.

AARU, Amicus, and BBC TV Productions adapted the first two Dalek serials into movies starring Cushing as Dr. Who in 1965 and 1966 – such was the popularity of the menaces from Skaro.

There were major differences: Cushing's Doctor was a kindly human inventor who had created a time machine in his back garden. His *Tardis* still looked like a police



call box, but its interior resembled a laboratory, particularly messy in his debut movie then a little tidier for *Daleks' Invasion Earth 2150 A.D.* The Doctor travelled with his granddaughter, Susan, played by Roberta Tovey, while Jennie Linden and Roy Castle respectively appeared as Barbara and Ian. For the second film, Cushing and Tovey returned, with Jill Curzon as Louise and Bernard Cribbins as Tom Campbell.

The Daleks, too, were redesigned, fashioned in glorious technicolour, complete with considerable bumper-car bases and projecting CO2 from their gun sticks. These were made by Shawcraft Models for *Dr. Who and the Daleks*, but they were actually first seen in *The Chase*, which borrowed three from the films for

background shots; this meant that, despite not having permission to make action figures related to Cushing's movies, Character Options released a set of these Daleks in 2020, marketed as hailing from "The Jungles of Mechanus".

A third film based on *The Chase* would've finished off the trilogy but was ultimately never made. Most intriguing, though, is the planned radio series, which would've featured Peter's Dr. Who and Roberta's Susan in fifty-two audio episodes. A pilot, *Journey into Time*, written by future *Doctor Who* scribe Malcolm Hulke, was made, sending *Tardis* to the American Revolution. Sadly, the tape was lost and the rest were never recorded.

"It was no surprise to me to learn that the first *Doctor Who* film was in the top twenty



box office hits of 1965, despite the panning the critics gave us,” said Cushing. “That’s why they made the sequel and why they spent [£286,000, compared to *Dr. Who and the Daleks*’ £180,000]. Those films are among my favourites because they brought me popularity with younger children.”

They remain cult classics, and *The Day of the Doctor* would’ve included posters in UNIT’s Black Archive; however, the production team couldn’t afford the copyright fee.

In his Target novelisation of the fiftieth anniversary special, Steven Moffat reinstated the posters, with Kate Stewart telling Clara that the films were made with the Doctor’s consent – in fact, he was such good pals with Peter Cushing, he lent him his waistcoat!

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## 21. A Terrifying Army of Three Daleks.

Everyone knows that even one Dalek can pose a serious threat to all life. Still, the attack on Auderly House in *Day of the Daleks* was a little underwhelming. Pertwee and Manning were especially unimpressed.

Still, you’re a bit nervous about them being here – that is, until you notice a sign saying that these are emptied Daleks, found in the banana groves of Villengard.

Some might’ve taken issue with *Asylum of the Daleks*’ Parliament of the Daleks, but the tinpot despots have always had a hierarchy. It’s hard to define, however, largely owing to the civil wars established

in 1980s *Doctor Who*.

Right at the top should be Davros, creator of the Daleks, but some sects turned against him – after all, they consider Daleks the superior beings, so anything not-Dalek, including Davros, is inferior. These are generally split into two categories: Imperials and Renegades.

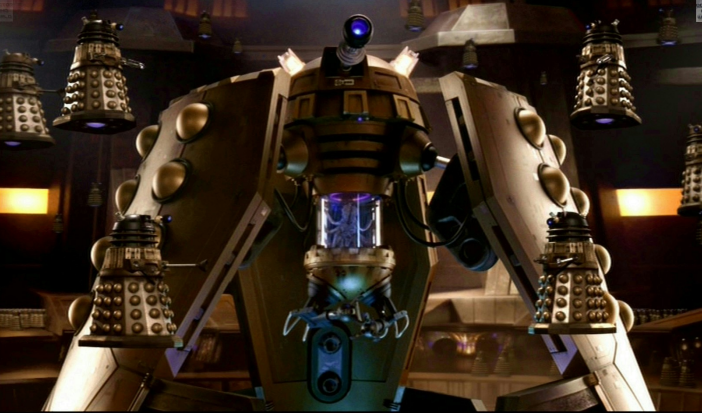
The head honcho, then, is the Dalek Emperor (who Davros pretends to be in *Remembrance of the Daleks*), debuting in *The Evil of the Daleks* and returning for *The Parting of the Ways*.

But what about the Cult of Skaro? The Tenth Doctor describes Dalek Sec, Caan, Jast, and Thay as “a secret order, above and beyond the Emperor himself”. As for who ordered the Cult to think of new ways of killing... we just don’t know. Was it the Emperor? Or an unseen higher-ranking model?

The Dalek Prime Minister in *Asylum* is in charge of the parliament, including the white Dalek Supreme of the Paradigm established in *Victory of the Daleks*. That Paradigm exterminated the “unpure” Ironside models of the Time War, so presumably they consider themselves a lower-rank than the Strategist (blue), Scientist (orange), Eternal (yellow), and likely red Drone Dalek. (We never found out what’s so special about the Eternal; Steven Moffat said he and Mark Gatiss thought it was just a cool name. Gatiss later wrote, “Its exact function is a mystery, but it’s probably something to do with the progenitor device and the continuation of

their race.”)

The Supreme Daleks of *The Dalek Invasion of Earth*; *The Chase*; *Planet of the Daleks*; *The Stolen Earth*; etc., are typically in charge of any Dalek ground units, so obviously hold authority. They’re generally deployed in strategic matters during incursions or dilemmas.



Lesser seen are the tank-like Special Weapons Daleks, one of which appeared in *Remembrance* then cameoed in *Asylum* and *The Magician’s Apprentice/The Witch’s Familiar*. The Reconnaissance Daleks are probably on a level with the Special Weapons Daleks.

Standard Daleks, whatever their colour schemes, come next, and on the bottom rung of the metaphorical ladder (DALEKS HAVE NO NEED FOR LADDERS) are the uncased Kaleds, left to rot in the Skaro sewers.

It is difficult to compare different Daleks, but that’s okay – as far as they’re concerned, any Dalek is superior to other races.

\*\*\*

The Cybermen, on the other hand, have a more defined hierarchy. At the top are the Cyber-Controllers (*The Tomb of the*

*Cybermen*; *Attack of the Cybermen*; *The Age of Steel*), with exposed brains as a common feature, and Cyber-Planners, notably “Mr Clever”, aka the Doctor in *Nightmare in Silver*, although non-humanoid versions appeared in *The Wheel in Space* and *The Invasion*.

Next come the Cyber-Leaders, delineated with black “handles” on their heads, the first of which is seen in *Revenge of the Cybermen*. The standard Cybermen are next down, then the Cybermats (which debuted in *Tomb* then changed look in every subsequent appearance), Cyber-Shades (*The Next Doctor*), and Cybermites (*Nightmare in Silver*).

There are variants, of course, including an all-black Stealth Cyberman, only briefly spotted in *Attack of the Cybermen*; *The Time of the Doctor*’s wooden model; and the Cyberwoman in *Torchwood*.

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## 71. Bubble Shock!

This sickly orange bottle contains an alien lifeform: Bane, the enemy in the first episode of *The Sarah Jane Adventures*, somewhat reminiscent of the Nestene Consciousness.

You’re pleased to see this underrated spin-off represented here: it included some fantastic stories, like *Whatever Happened to Sarah Jane?* and *The Temptation of Sarah Jane Smith*, revisiting the companion’s past; *The Empty Planet*, putting a focus on Smith’s young friends Rani and Clyde; and *The Curse of Clyde Langer*, a study of homelessness.

The 2006/7 festive period is a summation of the extremes of the *Doctor Who* universe.

*The Runaway Bride* was its tentpole, screened on Christmas Day 2006, accessible to all ages with a big-name star, Catherine Tate, joining the TARDIS, ostensibly for one episode.

Meanwhile, on Christmas Eve, *Combat* aired on BBC3. The eleventh episode of *Torchwood* Series 1 was written by Noel Clarke (Mickey Smith in *Doctor Who*), but certainly wasn't targeted at a family audience. Clearly marketed at an 18+ demographic – and not just for its unadulterated use of the Crazy Frog as a ringtone – *Combat* detailed the kidnapping of Weevils, *Torchwood's* trademark creature, which had been introduced in its first episode, *Everything Changes*. These abducted Weevils are used in a fight club, pitching caged humans against the savage beasts for sport and money.

*Torchwood* revelled in adult excesses, its first two series having ample sex scenes, bad language, violence, and a partially converted Cyberwoman in a metal bikini. It found its niche, however, in its third season, *Children of Earth*: a grisly tale, albeit one without the disproportionately dark horror that characterised much of the earlier series, boasting unsettling yet gripping adult themes. The dilemma at its heart was whether governments would sacrifice 10% of the world's children to an alien presence in order to save the rest of the population.

Its fourth series, *Miracle Day* (a joint venture with the American network Starz) attempted to marry *Torchwood's* approaches, delivering one narrative focusing on immortality across ten episodes, integrating the sex and violence from Series 1 and 2.

The problem with *Torchwood* was that the Doctor couldn't make a cameo. His presence would attract younger viewers for which much of the content would've been unsuitable. This didn't stop his companion Martha Jones from appearing in Series 2, but showrunner Russell T Davies was careful not to show her swearing or engaging in situations that were too adult. *Torchwood* Series 1 nonetheless concluded with Captain Jack hearing the TARDIS materialisation noise and running to find it, leading directly into *Utopia*.

This wasn't an issue for *The Sarah Jane Adventures*, which launched on New Year's Day 2007 with *Invasion of the Bane*. Davies similarly used a former companion of the





Doctor's to lead the series, in this case Elisabeth Sladen whose character had accompanied the Third and Fourth Doctors then caught up with the Tenth in *School Reunion*. Though part of CBBC children's TV, SJA's first episode aired on BBC ONE, introducing the concept of Sarah Jane Smith battling aliens from her attic on Bannerman Road, Ealing. The show significantly added to the *Doctor Who* mythos, giving Sarah an adopted son and daughter, Luke and Sky; incorporating well-known *Who* aliens like the Sontarans, Slitheen, and Judoon; and featuring the Tenth and Eleventh Doctors in two serials.

The latter's appearance in *Death of the Doctor* further heralded the return of Katy Manning as Jo Jones née Grant, and the Doctor revealed that, "the last time I was dying, I looked back on all of you [companions]. Every single one. And I was so proud." At the tale's conclusion, Sarah says she's researched other people who she thinks encountered the Doctor: it sounds, for instance, like Liz Shaw is on UNIT's moonbase; Harry's work with vaccines had saved thousands; and Ian and Barbara are married professors at Cambridge and haven't aged a day since the 1960s. She then mentions a woman called Dorothy who'd raised billions for her non-profit A Charitable Earth. Indeed, if Elisabeth Sladen hadn't have passed away in 2011, Ace was due to cameo in the next series of SJA.

Significantly, Nicholas Courtney appeared as Alistair Gordon Lethbridge-Stewart for the final time before his death in 2011, in

*Enemy of the Bane* (2008) – the episode which also introduced the Black Archive, UNIT's repository of dangerous alien artefacts which would play a major part in *The Day of the Doctor*.

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## 96. Kerblam! Man.

Here's a respectable-looking chap, dressed in a sharp suit and dashing hat, with shining blue eyes and a grinning face. It's the Kerblam! Man, and you have a delivery. What goodies lie within the red box he hands you?

\*\*\*

In 2007, David Tennant became the second Doctor, after Tom Baker, to turn on the Blackpool Illuminations. The sky darkened, a vast space thronged with fans, and the air grew chillier by the second. Then Tennant pressed that button and the tower, pleasure beach, and promenade were alive with colour and light. Coupled with the long-running exhibition on the seafront, Blackpool was a popular destination.

If you'd have walked up the road, you'd have seen *Doctor Who* action figures littering shelves. Daleks! Doctors! The Cyber-Controller's Helicopter! Of course, the latter was a fake.

The series is such a massive brand, it's no surprise that it's also a target for fraudsters.

Bootleg items often make little attempt to look real. A cruddy plastic car might be decked with the 2005 logo, a promotional picture of Tennant, and claims of having

“Full Function: Music. Light”.

The Cyber-Controller line of fakes was surprisingly prolific. A walkie-talkie pair, complete with photo of the Slitheen, meant you could communicate with John Lumic directly (presumably). Vehicles emblazoned with a Cyberman had “Bump ‘n’ Go” action, though only delivered “bump”. *Rise of the Cybermen* sets could include a dubious gun that fired foam darts, a torch, a state-of-the-art plastic flip phone, and a perturbed Tenth Doctor doll who looked like that bloke who tried to fight you after you “looked at his woman” at a club in 1998. It promised a “TALKING TARDIS MONEY BOX” and pleasingly displayed a *Remembrance* Dalek on the box.

The dastardly BBC crushed batches of these fakes, but some still made it out to shops.

Then again, you never know what’s going to come out of the BBC. Here are a few officially licensed curios:

- Anti-Dalek Fluid Neutraliser (a water pistol) and Anti-Dalek Neutron Exterminator (a cap gun).
- Fourth Doctor underpants, i.e. blue y-fronts with Tom Baker’s face, the diamond *Doctor Who* logo, and two Daleks – all of them making various statements about what type of person you are.
- Dapol’s Davros, with two arms.
- “Destroyed Cassandra” action figure, consisting of an empty wire frame.

- Branded fish fingers, tying into the Eleventh Doctor’s love of them paired with custard.
- A sonic screwdriver spork.
- The Flesh Goo Pod, a small pot of creamy gunge, with the Doctor’s face and melting appendages floating within.
- Anti-Time Device, a gun-like toy mixing Dalek and Cybermen tech to create... something. It tied into the Cleric Wars app.
- Cubes, made by Rubbertoe Replicas to look like the objects in *The Power of Three* – that is, black, featureless boxes.
- The 2020 B&M *Terror of the Zygons* Action Figure Set includes a moustachioed Mike Yates, billed as a “UNIT trooper”.

“How did you know?”

But the Kerblam! Man has gone. Inside the box lies— **NO NO NO. Wait right there.**

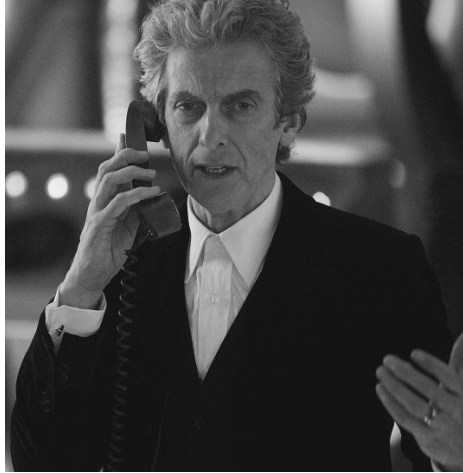
**Sorry folks, but the boss will refuse my holiday leave. I’m off to Penhaxico Two, where the ladies, so I’m told, are very fond of metal.**

**But how will you find out what’s inside the box handed to you by the Kerblam! Man? Well, you’ll just have to get your own copy of [100 Objects of Doctor Who, out now from Candy Jar Books](#), priced £9.99 plus p&p.**

**I know! What a deceitful yet charming publicity strategy. The absolute fiends.**

# Chase The Shadows Away

**James Baldock.**



It was a Wednesday, they were in London, and the quiet hum of the TARDIS engines was just about to be undercut by the sound of a ringing phone.

Clara made it to the console first. It was a game they played, on those rare occasions when someone called. Her relationship with the Doctor had begun with a phone call – come to think of it, so had his relationship with her, although it was a different phone and different planet. At least she thought it was a different planet; in truth, Clara only half-remembered it, and it hadn't actually happened yet. These things were complicated. He had been younger then, a quite different man in every literal sense of the word.

Now he was old and grey and often grumpy. There were days they saved the universe, and then there were days she felt like a glorified public relations officer. All too often, the days matched.

She lifted the receiver, ignoring the Doctor's glare. "Hello?"

Clara blinked. "One second." She handed him the phone. "It's you."

Frowning, the Doctor held out his hand. "Who is it?"

"No, I mean you're the – oh, just take it."

The Doctor lifted the receiver to his ear, and then his eyes widened to an incredulous stare. "How did you get this number? Well, yes, I mean I know it's mine, but – no, you're not supposed to be able to call me! It breaks every rule in the – black hole? What black – never mind, don't tell me, it'll come out in the wash. Her? That was Clara. You know, Clara. You really don't remem— how long's it been?"

He paced back and forth next to the console, free hand darting over his temples. Now it was clawing at his hair. Making a yak-yak gesture, during which he rolled his eyes at Clara. She was goggling, although mostly at the phone cord, which was in serious danger of



getting twisted around his neck.

“You want me to go where? Oh, them. Right. But why?... Seriously?”

Concluding the call, the Doctor dropped the receiver in its cradle, with a little more force than Clara thought was probably necessary. “God, what an insufferable idiot.”

“That was you.”

“Yes, well, I'm my own worst critic. How's your Swedish?”

\* \* \*

At the precise moment the door to the Stockholm studio burst open, Benny Andersson had been trying to do three things. First, he'd been trying to identify the strange *vwrap, vwrap* noise he'd just heard outside. Second, he'd been wondering whether it might be something he could sample and use as an introduction to a song he was working on (an as-yet untitled ditty about a post-apocalyptic wasteland inhabited by sentient snails). And third, his sense of recall was performing a desperate catfish through the rubbish bag that was his subconscious in an attempt to work out precisely where he'd heard it before.

His thought processes were interrupted by the arrival of a silver-haired man who looked to be in his mid-to-late fifties, wearing a purple blazer over a tieless white shirt buttoned to the collar, and the sort of expression that meant business. Benny wasn't sure whether it was the hey-let's-do-another-musical sort of business, or the accountants-with-folders sort. The second was not something he savoured. But this man didn't look much like an accountant; he looked like the world's dourest conjuror.

“Hello, you two,” said the newcomer. “How's business?”

It had taken Benny two-and-a-bit paragraphs to remember he was not alone in the room. He glanced over at Björn, who had been in the middle of constructing a Lego model of the *Big Bang Theory* set. Björn built Lego sets whenever he was blocked. He also liked to pound a toilet brush against the rail of the balcony while singing the Lithuanian national anthem. This was a closely-guarded secret: there was always the possibility of paparazzi intrusion, but so far they'd been lucky.

Benny regarded the stranger with astonishment. “Who are you, and how did you get past security?”

The man was carrying a notebook; he opened it to a specific page and made a tally mark with a ball point pen. “And that's... 37 marks for opener number five,” he said. “That's almost as popular as 'Halt, you're an enemy of the Daleks'.”

Benny was reaching for the phone on his desk when the stranger held up a single finger. Just wait. “Melbourne,” he said. “March 5th, 1977. You were trapped in your hotel room

and curtain was half past eight. The incident with the mutant sponges.” The stranger leaned over the desk and offered a cheery, if slightly sinister grin. “Do you remember?”

Benny's jaw dropped like a plummeting lift. He was too transfixed to glance over at Björn, but suspected he'd experienced the same reaction.

“Doctor?” said the astonished Benny, after a moment.

“In the flesh. How've you been?”

“My god! That must have been... 40 years ago!”

“Well, your maths is still good,” the Doctor mused. “Must be all the fish.”

“You've aged,” said Björn. “In fact your face is completely different. And you've got more... Welsh.”

The Doctor was affronted. “Scottish!”

“Right, right,” said Björn, trying his best to look abashed. “I always get those two muddled.”

“I like the jacket, though,” said Benny. “I never really cared much for those pinstripes.”

“So you remember?”

“How could we forget? We still talk about that night. We even did a song about it. The title track on our last album.”

The Doctor regarded him curiously. “I thought The Visitors was about Russian dissidents?”

“Well, you know. You have to code these things,” said Björn. “No one would have believed the truth.”

“So what brings you here?” said Benny. “So late in the day?”

“Yeah, do you need money?” This was Björn. “Only most of ours is tied up in investments, and – ”

“I need you to make another album,” said the Doctor, simply.

Benny and Björn's jaws dropped almost as far as they had when the Time Lord had announced his identity. The Doctor heard something click in Benny's face, and winced; he'd feel that in the morning.

It was Björn who recovered first. “I'm sorry, what?”

“I need you to record a new album. You and the girls. Well, women. Shouldn't really call them girls. Clara's always lecturing me about that.”

“Clara?”

“My friend. She's gone out sightseeing, but she'd love to meet you both.”

“A new album?” Benny was rubbing his jaw. “Now? After all this – but why?”

“We left that behind a long time ago,” said Björn. “There's a lot of water under that bridge.”

“There's a lot of water under every bridge. That's the purpose of bridges. They let the water move. Give you a sense of where it's going, where it's been. Bridges are brilliant for offering perspective.” The Doctor was walking around the room, gesticulating with his hands in the manner of an animated lecturer. “Unfortunately, they only get you so far. Sometimes you just have to walk off the bridge and go down to the water.”

He was facing them now. “Because it's never too late to start again.”

“But still... why? Why now?”

“Because I've a feeling that in a few years, people are going to really need it. Specifically me. But also everyone else. You disbanded, what, 35 years ago? What have you done since?”

“We wrote an award-winning musical about chess and had cameos in *Mamma Mia*,” replied Björn, somewhat frostily.

“Yes, well. I mean apart from that. Besides, there's another record inside you both. Well, all right, the four of you. You need the four of you, otherwise you'd just be 'BB'.”

Benny regarded him with interest. Then he sighed. “They'll never agree to it.”

“Then convince them. You're good at the emotional stuff. And I refuse to believe – ” And now he was once more pacing the room, rummaging through cabinets, leafing through piles of papers, examining DATs – “that you're not still writing.”

“We-ell...” Benny drew out the syllables like smoke rings. “We did have that one about the computer.”

“Don't Shut Me Down?” Björn scoffed. “That's going nowhere. The tune's not bad, but the lyrics are terrible.”

“Our lyrics were always terrible. In any case, we could tweak it. Make it about something different.”

“Good. Good start.” The Doctor – who was now sitting in a chair opposite Björn's desk – clapped his hands, then put his feet up on the table. “What else?”

Björn tried to ignore the lack of social grace. “There's one about a cat witnessing an argument between an alcoholic woman and her husband.”

“Make it a dog. Dogs have compassion. Cats don't care at all. Plus their claws are annoying.” The Doctor was well into his stride now. “Keep 'em coming.”



“We were playing around with Irish music; that yielded...possibilities. And there's one called Keep An Eye On Dan – ”

“Dan? Who's Dan?”

“We don't know yet.”

“Well, find out.” He jumped up. “I'm not asking for a tour or anything. Just one more album. Go out smiling.”

Despite himself, Benny was grinning now. “You know what?” he said to Björn. “I really think we should.”

“All right,” said Björn, meaning it. “Let's.”

The Doctor grinned. “Trust me, people will love it. Well, probably. The ones that matter.”

“We'd better get to work,” Benny said to Björn. “Find those lead sheets we did a while back.”

“Oh. There's one more thing.” The Doctor was already on his way out, but he'd now turned back, Columbo-style, and was fishing a piece of paper out of his jacket. “When you're done, send a copy to this chap. With a note that says this.”

Nothing about this made any sense to Benny, but that had been the pattern for this afternoon. And as the Doctor hurried out and then hurried back in again with a young, starry-eyed brunette on his arm, Benny sat down at the keyboard and began to play, wondering if this could possibly go anywhere at all.

\* \* \*

Some time later, and in drastically different circumstances, the Doctor stood in the middle of a quaint pastoral scene on a ship where time ran at different speeds depending on where you parked.

It was appropriate, really, given that the passage of his own life was so difficult to measure. How long had it been? Chronologically, a few millennia. Maybe. He didn't know when Mondas had started its drift. For him, it had been just over a thousand, most of it languishing outside Missy's makeshift jail, scribbling lecture notes and occasionally assisting the Templars. That was assuming you didn't count the several billion he had spent punching a wall. He never knew whether he should.

The Doctor stared out at the field and considered its random promises. Before him lay a pleasant rural backdrop, hedge-lined fields rolling away to pastured common land, bordered by forests thick with oak and ash and beech. Somewhere in the lower decks, aided in no uncertain terms by their convenient proximity to an event horizon, the Cybermen were evolving and rebuilding at an unprecedented rate, and it was inevitable that they

would make a repeat appearance – almost certainly in a sleeker costume and carrying a far nastier gun. The Doctor had found he could do many things over the centuries, but even he couldn't stop the passage of time – time, the enemy of us all.

It would likely be a bloodbath.

He'd worry about that later. Right now, he had a point to prove.

Nardole was still sitting outside the farmhouse, face hunched over the laptop, peering at it over the rim of his glasses. Occasionally, he would prod at one of the keys, almost with hesitancy, like a child discovering the corpse of a woodland animal they're not sure is dead. The Doctor wondered if he was actually dealing with the Cyber threat or playing Roblox.

He cleared his throat as he approached, and Nardole looked up. “Ah. There you are, sir.”

“How's it going?”

“There's still some lag on the payload delivery, but I think we can compensate. Hope we can, anyway. Otherwise it'll be short and not very sweet.” The Doctor coughed. Nardole looked at him quizzically: the Doctor interpreted it (correctly) as his what-in-the-love-of-heaven-is-he-gonna-ask-me-now look.

“The, um. The thing. There was a thing I asked you to look after. Some time ago. Had it sent to you. Only I don't know about it until now, which is when I'll ask you to give it to me.”

Nardole's eyes were momentarily blank. Then somewhere inside his head a penny dropped: if you listened carefully, you could almost hear the clang. “Oh, that!” he said. “Yeah, been carrying that around with me for months. Bit random, though. Can't think why you'd want it.”

He fished into his jacket pocket and produced a small flat cardboard sleeve, not quite square. “Had a note attached, said 'Keep it with you and don't tell me.'” The Doctor took the sleeve, staring at the cover artwork: the dark brown of space, a star poking over the edge of an unidentifiable planet.

He found himself nodding in approval, which prompted Nardole to say “I take it that this is somehow important?”

“Depends on your perspective.” The Doctor was reading the back of the case. “Either way, thank you. Particularly for keeping it secret.”

“All part of the service.” Nardole resumed tapping at his laptop. “I mean, it's probably pushed something important out of my head, but never mind.”

The Doctor grinned as he walked away. “Have a look down the back of the sofa. Things have a habit of turning up.”

“Back of the sofa,” Nardole muttered to himself, but there was humour in it.

\* \* \*

The Masters – both of them – were leaning against a stile, watching a cow.

“Do you ever wonder,” the bearded one was saying, “about the Matrix?”

“The one on Gallifrey?” said Missy.

“No, that terrible science fiction film.” The Master shifted his stance; the wood was itching. “I saw it, back when I was running for Prime Minister. And it struck me that if you're going to have some sort of rogue AI conquer the world, you really don't want to use humans for a battery source.”

“Why not?”

“They're impetuous. They don't listen. That's the whole point of the film; people are never happy with what's given to them. Whereas if they'd used a cow – ”

“There'd have been no rebellion.” Missy finished the thought. “The cow wakes up immersed in liquid, it's a bit confused, they plug it back in, it's none the wiser. It just eats grass all day, perfectly content.”

“Plus,” said the Master, “cows are big. You'd need far fewer of them, which makes administration much easier.”

“Yeah. They could call it the Mootrix.”

“Good title,” offered the Master. He turned his attention to the Doctor, whose boots made soft prints in the evening grass. “Oh, it's you. Whatever it is, you can lift it yourself.”

“Actually, no.” The Doctor scratched the side of his nose. “I came back to check something. The conversation we had earlier.”

“That?” the Master sneered. “Why are we revisiting that?”

“Something you said. I asked you about the odds of beating the Cybermen.”

“And?”

“What'd you say?” The Doctor stood, arms folded, biding his time. “I mean your exact words.”

The Master eyed him contemptuously. “I said it was about as likely as an ABBA reunion.”

“Yeah.” The Doctor fished into his pocket, and then placed the CD into the Master's outstretched hand. The Master rolled it over. “So? Some kind of bootl – wait.” He was examining the date. “Why didn't I know about this?”

“They reformed.” The Doctor wore the merest hint of a smile. “New album. Nearly 40 years after the last one. Even managed a tour, of sorts.”



“Did they do that song about the gorilla?” Missy was leaning over the Master's left arm, reading the track list. “I always liked that one.”

The Master glowered at her. “Not helping.” And then, turning back to the Doctor: “This is fake.”

“I'll think you'll find it isn't,” said the Doctor.

“Then why didn't I know about it?”

“Oh, well, you're a busy man. Slash woman,” the Doctor added, acknowledging Missy. “You can't be on top of every temporal anomaly.”

The Master thought this through for a moment, internal cogs whirring in a blaze of tempestuous logic, and then he pointed at the Doctor with an angry finger. “You cheated!”

“That's one way of looking at it,” the Doctor smirked. “Either way, I get to win this one.”

The Master threw the CD to the ground, and then stomped off. The Doctor dropped to a low squat to pick it up, brushing away the flecks of dirt. “Litterbug.”

“So what was that?” asked Missy, who'd decided that if her counterpart wanted a sulk, he was on his own. “Other than a bit of metaphorical tackle waving.”

The Doctor's eyebrows shot up. “You can talk.”

“I can, actually,” said Missy, hand on her hip. “But in all seriousness, you did that by contacting your earlier self, right? How'd you even manage it?”

“It's the black hole,” said the Doctor. “Bends time. Means the phone works. Kind of.”

“And you rang... you.”

“An earlier me. Got him to pop over to Stockholm. Called in a few favours.”

“Then why in God's name didn't you get him to help here?” Missy was incandescent with disbelief. “Bring the TARDIS over? Trigger a meltdown? Be a lifeboat? Anything?”

“Because he never did,” the Doctor explained. “Or rather, I never did. I'd have remembered. We can't cross the timeline, Missy. You know that.”

“So what was the point, then?”

“I don't know. Fun, maybe? It's been sorely lacking round here these past few weeks. Maybe there's nothing actually wrong with spreading a little joy, even if things are rubbish and we're all about to die horribly. And besides...”

He moved just a little closer, and dropped his voice to that low, measured tone he adopted when he wanted to be serious. “I wanted to show him that even when you're certain of the outcome, the universe has a way of surprising you. And that people change, even though they don't always want to.”

For a moment, Missy said nothing. Then she glared at the Doctor. “You think you know me.” And with that, she turned on her heel and stomped off in the direction the Master had taken, in the futile hope that the Doctor hadn't seen her lip trembling.

He watched her go. Wondered if he could have handled the conversation better, and decided that it didn't matter. It isn't about how much water you put on the seeds you plant, he realised. They grow when they're ready. And sometimes you don't get to see.

A snatch of remembered melody drifted into his head. *Can you hear the drums, Fernando...?*

The Doctor walked back across the field. Perhaps Bill was awake.





**Merry Christmas to all,  
And to all, a good-night...!**





