



COORDINATOR FROM THE DEATH ZONE

by Paul Winter

Welcome to our second Celestial Toyroom Annual and another addition to our library of downloadable magazines—with a hard copy to follow.

We are often asked if we have considered making CT electronic instead of, or as well as a print edition. The answer is 'yes we have' and the follow up answer is 'no we don't plan to'. But as print media becomes more of a niche within fandom, this method of delivering content opens up more opportunities for us, such as this one.

I hope you enjoy our Annual. You can also download our e-magazine Cosmic Masque free-of-charge via our website as well as some examples of DWAS publications from years gone by. If you are not a DWAS member, I hope you will consider joining us and supporting Celestial Toyroom itself in print format.

Onto the Annual itself. At over 100 pages it is a bit of a bumper read covering as it does all of the Twelfth Doctor era and Peter Capaidi's other appearances in Doctor Who (and Torchwood) on television. Regardless of what you think of the way the show has progressed the since events of 'Deep Breath' (which I still have happy memories of watching in a packed cinema in Dublin back in 2014) I am guessing you will have approved of the Doctor himself. Peter Capaldi does seem to have been universally popular amongst fans.

Many people have helped to make this Annual a reality. The most thanks belong of course to the contributors themselves and there are lots of you. Others spent their time proofing and editing the content (special thanks to Allan Lear and Ian Wheeler) and Andy Hackett has again answered the call and provided a number of pieces of artwork. Finally, Barry Ward helped me to paste the final product together. It is longer than we anticipated, but hey, what's not to like about that?

I am not sure what the Chibnell—Whittaker era will bring for Doctor Who but I think we can be sure it is going to be quite different to what we have become used to. That arrives in the autumn of 2018. In the meantime, please enjoy this annual, Cosmic Masque, Celestial Toyroom and all we have to offer

Paul

CELESTIAL TOYROOM ANNUAL 2018

Doctor Who Appreciation Society

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THE ERA

Joshua Stevens

Peter Capaldi's Doctor is the first that I have witnessed from beginning to end as a Doctor Who fan, Matt Smith's will always be my Doctor, but number 12. because that's the number he's going to have to be, has provided me with an altogether new fan experience. The announcement in June 2013 of Smith's departure. Doctor Who Live revealing Capaldi's casting, my first 'live' regeneration - which broke from the established twenty-first century tradition in its delayed face-swap - and the beginning of a new series starring a new Doctor were all new experiences for me. So how did I cope with the death of my Doctor and the arrival of another, with another personality, another face, and another actor's take on the part?



First came denial. In early months of 2014, before Capaldi had had a full episode in the leading role, whilst the prospect of something new was exciting, the Doctor was still, in my head, Matt Smith's incarnation. When Series 8 did eventually arrive, I enjoyed the episodes and Capaldi's portrayal of the Time Lord, but, deep down, I still felt he was simply 'Peter Capaldi', an actor playing the part. 'The Doctor' still had the face of Matt Smith.

Now it gets a bit more interesting. Whilst the 'loss' of Matt Smith was disappointing, a regeneration is very different to the death or departure a regular. However, I would say that my next annovance stage was and overanalysis. That is, over-analysis of Matt Smith's final series and how it felt like we'd missed out on something. The Pond Era was what we needed back, and Series 7 part two, with its widelyagreed downturn in quality, was something I regretted existing at all. In other words. Matt Smith's 2013 series could have been so much better, but now he was gone forever!

To remedy this disappointment, I rewatched the Smith era up to *The Angels Take Manhattan* in a viewing marathon which must have taken around eight months, filling the space between *The Time of the Doctor* and *Deep Breath*. Although this was a great indulgence, I'm not sure it helped me adjust to the Doctor now having a new face.

August arrived, and I went to the cinema to watch the Series 8 opener. A decent episode, and surprise cameo from Matt Smith, helped ease the transition. And, over the course of the series, I realised: the show was still on

our televisions and could still produce fantastic stories. Series 8 gave us *Listen*, *Mummy on the Orient Express* and *Flatline*, three fantastic stories that demonstrated to fans that the programme could still be great without the Fleventh.



Now, let's be honest, it has taken me until Series 10 to fully accept the Twelfth Doctor as being 'the Doctor', rather than just Peter Capaldi sitting in a TARDIS. But in that time, there has formed and evolved what will surely be a classic of a Doctor. In the rebooted series' era, David Tennant may have been popular with the masses, and Smith with many Troughton fans, but Capaldi has something that's totally unique, and totally Doctor-ish, that could very well secure him a place as definitive new-series Doctor amonast fans.

Twelve is like the grandfather figure of Hartnell with Troughton's bounciness, Petwee's guardian-ness (making up a few nesses here), Tom Baker's Doctorness, Davison's honour, Colin Baker's (earlier) brashness, and McCoy's eccentricity and Scottish-ness. A classic Doctor for a whole new generation.

I've adjusted to the change of Doctor, but it's now the end once again, and I

can't quite believe how quickly Capaldi's era has passed.



But it's far from being all over, from where I am in the timestreams. I'm writing this the day after the broadcast of what I would say is one of the highlights of Capaldi's era, The Eaters of Light - a triumphant return for Rona Munro, and a historical story which proves that this 'type' deserves a more high-profile place in the series. So, at the moment, I have absolutely no idea how this extraordinary Doctor is going to meet his end, but The Doctor Falls as a title doesn't sound too good to me. I hope, dear reader, that the episode was not too traumatic for you, and that it was a fitting conclusion to the final series of outings for Capaldi's incarnation of the Time Lord. So what will come next, for the Twelfth Doctor's final ever episode this Christmas? I have a feeling Steven Moffat's not going to leave quietly, so we could be in for something very different.

Despite Capaldi's era seeming to have passed in a flash, a lot has happened during his time. How has the world responded to Capaldi as the Doctor? Since *Deep Breath*, the Scots have voted to remain part of one union (did the departing Scottish Doctor play a part in this?) and the UK voted to leave another. We've had not one but two UK general elections, which each surprised us for different reasons. Oh, and Trump

happened, but "I wouldn't vote for him, he's orange".

The departure of one Doctor means, of course, the arrival of another. We'll have to wait and see who Chris Chibnall picks – or maybe you already know? – so I won't speculate. All I will say it this: whilst all 12 or 13 Doctors we've had so far have been spot-on casting decisions, I'm not sure I'll be able to accept the next Doctor if we get yet another white, male actor. It's time for change.

You can find me on Twitter @joshuanstevens and, for those of you who enjoy the historical Doctor Who stories, check out medium.com/purehistorical for essays, opinion pieces and features on that very subject.



FIRES OF POMPEI

Steve Hatcher

Looking back from a distance of some nine years it is easy to come to the conclusion that the significance that has come to be ascribed to the second episode of Series Four of the revived Doctor Who is a product of the attention that has fallen upon two casting decisions, as a result of other later decisions. The appearance in the cast of a future companion in a fairly minor role and a future Doctor in a major guest role has inevitably overshadowed much about the episode. However, even setting that aside, I am struggling to think if there have been very many more significant episodes of twenty-first century Doctor Who than the mini masterpiece that is The Fires of Pompeii.

The setting of the story, in the doomed southern Italian city on the day before it was buried under six metres of volcanic pumice and ash by the eruption of nearby Vesuvius - Volcano Day, in August 79 c.e. - has invited comparison to the similarly set and entitled The Fires of Vulcan, one of the best loved of the Big Finish audio adventures. Both have their fans and their detractors and both have their strengths and weaknesses. There really isn't an answer to the question, 'which is the better?' You pays your money and you takes your choice. Both boast a strong script performed by actors at the top of their game, both went a long way to rehabilitate the reputation of companion actors, both of whom were better known for something other than straight acting and both of whom had in the past failed to convince many fans that they were an asset to the show. Just as

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Bonnie Langford shone in the audio release, Catherine Tate absolutely nailed the role of Donna Noble in *The Fires of Pompeii*.

Following her return to the series, now as a fully fledged companion, in the Series 4 opener. Partners in Crime. this is Donna's second adventure with the Doctor and her first proper trip in the TARDIS (although the episode was swapped in transmission order late in the day, with *Planet of the Ood*, which was thought to be too dark a story to occupy so early a slot in the series). It marks an absolutely crucial transition point for Donna, who goes from a point where many fans' reaction to Tate's casting was one of dismay, to setting off in the direction which would lead, even now, to many fans naming her as their favourite New Series companion. Donna revels in having travelled in Time and seeks out new experiences.



Of course, as any one would, she initially argues with the Doctor when she discovers that he intends to leave Pompeii to its fate, but she is clever enough to see the logic of his argument and empathetic enough to volunteer to share in his guilt, placing her hand on his to push the lever that will sentence so many to death. She is still Donna though, still human, and it is she that convinces the Doctor to go back and save someone, anyone, Caecilius' family. Donna emerges here as everything a companion should be, brave, resourceful and intelligent - the person who brings humanity to the Doctor's actions.

In response to Donna, the Doctor changes too. The smugness of Series Two is now long gone, but so too is the insouciant cruelty with which he treated Martha in Series Three, not to mention the dreadful messianic tendencies that we saw at the end of that series. This Tenth Doctor is how we remember him best, the adventurer and explorer, with a thirst for knowledge and a determination to fight evil wherever he encounters it, but not at the expense of the moral compass that Donna gives him.

One of the things that mark this story out as being of major significance, is that this is the episode, which answers a question which has long troubled those of us who think too hard about these sort of things. How is it that when he is in Earth's past, the Doctor can never change history, yet on alien planets or in Earth's present or future, all bets are off? Surely all moments in time are someone's history. Here the answer is given, there are 'Fixed Points in Time', which may not be changed; then there are all the other points which can be altered. Pompeii on this day is a

Fixed Point. This idea is one that has continued to be used throughout subsequent stories and has become a major point of series lore, on which many subsequent plots have depended.

Back in 2008, the major point of interest about the casting rather depended on whether or not you happened to be talking to a dved in the wool fan or to a general viewer. To the fan, the appearance of Tracey Childs as Metella, was probably the most significant feature. Childs, probably most famous to the general public for playing Lynne Howard in 80s boardroom and boats drama Howard's Way, first played alternate timeline Nazi Doctor Elizabeth Klein in the 2001 Big Finish Seventh Doctor play Colditz (which also featured some bloke called Tennant). She would return to the role in 2010, with Klein going on to become, the Doctor's companion. To the non fan, attention would have fallen on three of the guest cast. We have the consummate TV villain, Phil Davis - later wonderful in the first episode of Sherlock and the final series of Being Human (as the Devil) - playing soothsayer and agent of the Pyroviles Lucius Petrus Dextrus. Drop the Dead Donkev's Sallv Smedlev. Wicks, is unrecognisable as the stoneclad high priestess. Then there is comedian and impressionist Phil Cornwell, then at the height of his fame, continuing the tradition set in the 1980s of high profile comedians taking small roles in Doctor Who. Here he is a market stall holder.

The rest of the cast are by no means outshone by the glitter of these star names. In particular we have excellent performances by the two children of Metella and Caecilius, François Pandolfo as Quintus and especially Fran-

cesca Fowler as Evelina, the girl who is terrified by her developing powers as a soothsayer and is the object of a tug of war between Lucius acting for the Pyroviles, and the Sybilline Sisterhood.

A word about the Pyroviles, the computer generated Fire Aliens, which provide the 'monster' element to the plot. In honesty the least said about them. probably the better, these top-heavy personality vacuums are the major weakness of the episode. Apart from the fact that we probably see too much of them, what do they think they are doing by effectively leaving a massive self-destruct switch for the Doctor to press and then to put it in an escape capsule, to ensure he gets away afterwards? Terribly silly! Furthermore, I have spent an age over the last nine years, adjusting, leaning and standing up my constantly falling Pyrovile action figure. If I hadn't seen enough of them by the end of the episode, I have now. And so to those two extraordinarily coincidental bits of future TARDIS crew casting.



In all honesty, future Eleventh Doctor companion Amy Pond actress Karen Gillan makes very little impact in *The*

Fires of Pompeii, her face covered in full ritual make-up, in a small role as a member of the Sybilline Sisterhood. It's not quite a case of 'blink and you may miss her', but at this point her days of stardom are ahead of her.

Of course our editor would not have asked me to write about this story were it not for the fact that Caecilius is played by one Peter Duggan Capaldi, then best known as foul-mouthed, bullying spin-doctor Malcolm Tucker in the wonderful political comedy, The Thick Of It. Capaldi's first role in Doctor Who, some five and a half years before he would assume the role of the Twelfth Doctor, is a very different one to that in which he is now more familiar to us. Caecilius provides much of the comic relief in the story. He is a quiet man, struggling to get his way with his strong willed wife and to control his independent minded children. The scene in which the family react to an Earth tremor by leaping to prevent their valuables from being damaged is very funny and very Capaldi - and apparently based upon a scene from Disney's Mary Poppins. Later, we see Caecilius reduced to terror, as anyone would be, by the eruption, clutching his family to him in a vain effort to save them, calling on the Doctor to help. This is a great performance by Capaldi. The comedy is forgotten now as he makes us feel for this man's plight and join Donna in willing the Doctor to save him.

Despite its weaknesses, *The Fires of Pompeii* is a superb example of a stand -alone Doctor Who story. A straightforward, clear plot; a well-known historical setting; heroes, villains and monsters; a superb cast; overseas filming (in Rome) for the first time since the

1980s, making the whole thing look wonderful; and a great script by a good writer with an excellent pedigree, who really got Doctor Who. It really is a shame that James Moran has not yet returned to write for the series. In a year when a former Doctor has been driven off Twitter by intemperate reactions to misquoted comments about a Doctor Who story issue (the casting of a woman to play the 13th Doctor); it is worth remembering that one of the reasons why we haven't had more from James Moran lies perhaps in his experience of fans. Moran would return to the Who Universe in 2009, to co-write Episode 3 of Torchwood: Children of Earth. Such was the abuse he received over social media, from fans angry at the killing off of lanto Jones (although



that actually occurred in Episode 4, written by John Fay), that he withdrew from contact with fandom and has not returned to write for either series.

Some things never change.

GRILDREN OF EARTH

lan Wheeler

Perhaps the most important way you can judge the success or otherwise of a piece of television drama or entertainment is to ask, "How did it make me Think back to programmes you've watched over the years and ask yourself that question. Watching Bruce Forsyth's Generation Game might have made you feel warm and happy. piece of harrowing television drama such as The Life and Loves of a She-Devil may have made you feel chilled and disturbed. And I'm sure that many classic episodes of Doctor Who, particularly those with memorable cliffhangers such as Earthshock part one or the first instalment of Remembrance of the Daleks, made you feel excited and thrilled.

When *Torchwood* started on TV, all those years ago, I must admit that it often didn't make me feel very much at



all. I was distinctly unmoved by the first episode and felt that it didn't seem to be achieving very much other than trying a bit too hard to be adult. As the first couple of series went on, the odd episode grabbed my attention but on the whole I felt that the series was not as good as its parent programme and I doubted that I was going to be a long-term *Torchwood* fan. It just seemed a little surplus to requirements and didn't really add much to my appreciation of *Doctor Who*. Then along came the third season.

The announcement that series three would only consist of five episodes, stripped across a week, was a decision that surprised many. It seemed like an incredibly short run, a single story, and gave the impression that the BBC were losing faith in the series. In fact, it was to prove to be a master stroke which would result in one of the best and most talked about pieces of landmark television in many a year.

I remember talking on the phone to DWAS Coordinator Paul Winter after a couple of episodes of Children of Earth had been transmitted (yes, people used to talk on telephones in those days, I know that might seem hard to believe). Neither Paul nor I had been particular Torchwood enthusiasts up until that point but we realised that something exciting was happening. This fiveparter was becoming compulsive viewing. Rather than being bored or disinterested, we found that we were being pulled back to the television on each successive night, desperate to know what was going to happen next.

So how did this piece of television make me feel? Quite simply, it made

me feel unsettled, enthralled and scared.

The thing about *Doctor Who* is that often the alien threat can seem a little bit too distant and unreal. That is the nature of science-fiction and fantasy. Strange goings-on on Varos or Mars are never going to seem as real as a punch-up in the Queen Vic on *Eastenders* or Saturday night in A and E on *Casualty*. But this *Torchwood* story was different. The threat felt very real indeed. Scarily real. And I'm not just talking about the aliens, the 456. I'm talking about the establishment – the politicians and the civil servants and the way they deal with the alien menace.



The story begins with a terrifying premise. We are not being invaded by the aliens, we are helping them. them access to our kids because the children produce a chemical which makes them feel good - a drug effectively. Granted, the humans have little choice but to cooperate, but that does not make the deal seem any less grub-That first scene of by or immoral. schoolchildren being taken by bus to be given to the aliens is quite alarming, most especially when the viewer discovers later that Captain Jack himself was involved. It's a concept which I suspect would have been too harrow-



ing to have been featured in an episode of *Doctor Who* itself.

Later we see the politicians scheme and connive as they try to find the best way to deal with the position. The way in which they discuss using school league tables to decide which children to hand over is frankly terrifying and makes you ponder whether that is in fact what would happen should such an awful series of events ever occur. And the way in which our Torchwood heroes, seen as being outsiders rather than part of the establishment, are considered to be expendable is all very unsettling. So in many ways it is the humans who are the villains here. Prime Minster Brian Green representing the worst of humanity as he tries to shirk responsibility for his actions. At least this is balanced by others, Lois and ultimately Bridget, who are seen as trying to do the right thing.

The aliens themselves are also scary. It's the fact that we never fully see them through the swirling gases of their survival tank that makes them all the more terrifying. Many people who saw the excellent recent science-fiction film *Arrival* commented on how similar the aliens in that film were to those depicted in *Children of Earth*.

Amongst all that stuff about the government and the aliens, there are some wonderfully human stories interwoven into the action here. Gwen having to deal with being pregnant at the most inopportune of moments (telling Rhys the news in the back of a wagon of potatoes - how wonderfully British). Jack's daughter dealing with the fact that she is getting ever older and he apparently isn't. Clem trying to come to terms both with his past and with events in the present. And Johnny, partner of lanto's sister Rhiannon, winding lanto up about having a relationship with another man - all beautifully pitched and done with great humour. And there's so much at stake here. Not just to humanity as a whole but to individuals. Jack has to make a decision which ultimately results in the demise of his grandson. This is heavy stuff.



And at the centre of it all we have John Frobisher, played by that wonderful actor and Doctor-to-be Peter Capaldi. Even if he'd never gone on to be cast as the Doctor, his performance in this story would have cemented his position as a hugely important contributor to the *Doctor Who* universe. Frobisher is neither a villain nor a hero. He is a downtrodden civil servant, forced to carry the can for unscrupulous politicians. In

some respects he acts honourably and in others he does not. This is a man who is unappreciated, taken for granted and made to put his neck on the line so that Green's reputation can remain unscathed.

Capaldi's performance is a delight. It is multi-layered, giving us a rounded portrayal of both Frobisher the civil servant and Frobisher the man. Frobisher is ultimately a tragic figure. Squeezed in to an unwinnable situation, he is ultimately forced to make the grimmest of decisions. Unable to take the appalling option of handing over his children to the 456, he is left with only one option — he and his family must die.

All in all, *Children of Earth* makes for difficult viewing at times. And it ends with a sense of finality seldom seen in *Doctor Who* or *Torchwood*: Jack is gone, Gwen pregnant, lanto's dead. How can the story continue? But continue it does...



Inside the TARDIS, from eleven to twelve Into a Time Lord's story we further delve The transformation now starts to begin But the essence of the man remains deep within The secret of such terrific change Is held inside a Gallifreyan's stage Two beating hearts and a new kidney The 'Time of the Doctor' was when you would be With Clara beside you on all your adventures Some proved a challenge; some too mad to mention A rock star's entrance with wailing quitars Meeting your match in Mayor Me/Ashildr Chipping away through centuries of stone Persistent in nature, killing time, all alone Getting tied up in knots; the ultimate contortions Facing solitary challenges of epic proportions Dining with River at the Darillion Towers Defeating the Daleks with all of your powers A field full of hands force the ultimate decision Then your pay in the future by Davros' derision Not always getting it oh so right But never, ever giving up the fight Clara gives strength whenever it's needed Also wisdom and knowledge; she's a natural leader Trap Street trickery hidden in plain sight Ashildr again takes up the twelfth Time Lord's plight Confessional dial banishes him far away Where Zygons and Angels terrorise another day Bill and Nardole then took up the task Of being companions, the ultimate ask A Time for Heroes, a time for you A Time for revealing who's the ultimate Who Puddles with girls chasing Bill round the universe Victorian monsters under frozen Thames, adverse You gave it your all, a professor's view Whilst protecting the Vault from secrets anew So farewell Doctor, we must say goodbye It's time for a new chameleon to fly A dozen transformations have now set you free Ange Chan But the Time Lord lives on, always saving the galaxy ©2017

DEEP BREATH

Christine Grit

It was the 23rd of August 2014, and for the second time in my life, I was going to enjoy the broadcast of a *Doctor Who* episode with a bunch of fellow fans. The first time had been to celebrate the 50th anniversary episode, but there were actually more of us this evening than there had been for that epic and celebratory adventure.



It was to be Peter Capaldi's debut as the Doctor (not counting his eyebrows in *The Day of the Doctor* and his short introduction as the newly regenerated Doctor during the Christmas special in 2013), and I was very much looking forward to it. Not just because of the sharing of the experience with others, but because I had quite high expectations regarding the way he would be The Doctor. Let's face it, after lover boy Doctor David Tennant, and awkward Doctor Matt Smith, I truly was in for a more mature, but also more complex, character.

I wasn't disappointed. To my great relief Peter's first outing as the Doctor showed him to be quite a different person altogether to the 'young ones'. And complex, incredibly complex. Add to that this great trio of characters from

Victorian times, the Paternoster Gang, and a Clara who no longer had to be 'the impossible girl' but a character in her own right, and a great evening of television was assured. Furthermore, the broadcast had some uncomfortable truths to tell as well, which to me is always a bonus. Whether it's about a big concept like the stupidity and destructiveness of war, or - as in this case - a smaller issue like our silly occupation with outward appearances and the nasty practice of ageism, I always enjoy it when Doctor Who is not just entertainment (although it certainly is that too) but has a bit of a moral message as well.

The story contained some nice little nods to the past as well. From Madame Vastra exclaiming "Here we go again, regarding the regeneration which was a small but lovely tribute to that all-time favourite character the Brig, to Clara not liking the redecoration of the TAR-DIS later on, and lots of others in between, there was a lot to love for oldtimers among the fans. Also, the Doctor's confusion after the regeneration always a part of a regeneration but so much better and longer played out in this particular story - made me recall the first outing of another Peter albeit with a lot less shouting in it by the Doctor!



The Paternoster Gang was on fine form as well, especially Madame Vastra and Strax. I realise some people don't really like the comedic take on a Sontaran which Strax represents, but I always enjoy it. Admittedly, it does make the Sontarans somewhat less threatening as an alien race, but to be honest Strax has been the odd one out since his introduction as a nurse in A Good Man Goes to War, so I suspect that when we see the Sontarans again for real they'll still be pretty frightening. In this particular outing Strax is just superb, and he really made me laugh. Madame Vastra was her usual dignified self, but her veil scene was a great piece of drama. This scene won't easily be forgotten. It really impressed me, both as a



lesson that outward appearance says absolutely nothing about the inner person and in the way it was played out. Clara also did a good job in coming to accept that her former buddy had turned into a completely different man. Not just in the fact that he looked older, but also in his totally different way of approaching events and mysteries. She was really very naive about what regeneration encompasses. Despite her having asked the Time Lords to grant the Doctor a series of new incarnations in the Christmas Special, the occurrence in practice turned out to be very

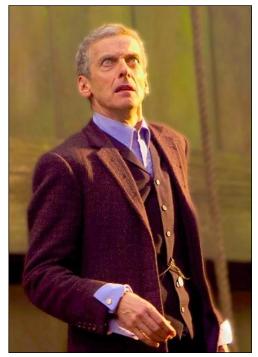
different to how she envisaged it. It was great that *Deep Breath* was a bit longer than regular *Doctor Who* episodes, making it possible to have some extra breathing space (pun intended) to work on the relationship and getting her to be more understanding. Also, to me at least, it was rather pleasing to see some real character development of Clara's persona, someone whom I had thought to be rather bland before.

And the Doctor himself? Besides putting forward a totally different Doctor from what had recently gone before, he managed to show exactly the kind of complexity I like in a character. Not really likeable at first, even if you take his post-regeneration confusion into account, but still that 'never Cruel or Cowardly' character we've all grown to love through the years. Mind you, he did seem to be a bit cruel when he seemingly left Clara behind, while there was some cowardice present as well during the episode. But as with Colin's Doctor, another one of those I really liked a lot because of his arrogance. pomposity and sheer complexity, eventually he was courageous in standing up to the Half- Face man and actually ensuring this character could never menace the Human Race again. Imagine just pouring yourself a glass of Whisky (?) as if you're totally relaxed, while scaring another to death. That scene was just fantastic! And I do like the eventual ambiguity...did the Doctor push him or did he jump?

Finally, I thought the episode was an original way of introducing a new Doctor, if only because of the idea of introducing an absolute stranger within a group of already well-established comrades. True, this was also done in "The Christmas Invasion" with Rose and her

mother, but in that particular story there was much less space for the development of the relationship between the Doctor and the Companion (well, in my view anyway). There was also space to set up an intriguing overall arc with the introduction of Missy at the end. At that time, I had no inkling who Michelle Gomez was supposed to be, despite the pretty obvious title of 'Missy'. A very satisfying conclusion with just a titbit of mystery.

To come back to the shared watch... did my fellow Doctor Who fans agree with my enthusiasm? I have to confess they did not. Some of them were a bit bored (can you imagine?), others didn't 'get' the veil scene, while the rest had wished for a greater part for the dinosaur. However, we all agreed that Peter Capaldi had nailed the part, even if he hadn't actually turned into a particularly nice man. The Doctor doesn't have to be nice. As long as he can be trusted to



INTO THE DALEK

Dan Barratt

If there's one fault I can level at 'new Doctor Who' it is the series' apparently endless obsession with the character of the Doctor. It sometimes feels that. one too many times, we have been invited to pore over his loneliness, his guilt, his morality, his dress sense, his 'oncoming storminess' and his frankly rather baffling pining for a normal existence rather than focussing on the story at hand. But if ever there was any justification for a deeper exploration of the character then this was surely it. After one outing with this unfamiliar dour Scotsman, we are just itching to know what kind of person inhabits that darkly expressive, frowning face. When we left the Doctor in Deep Breath on that Glasgow street, he was imploring Clara - and us - to move on from the boyish charm of his previous incarnation and to 'see me' instead. In his second story, Phil Ford and Steven Moffat's Into the Dalek, it seems the Doctor is equally keen to know more about himself too.

Twelve's era of Doctor Who, for me, felt quite different to anything that had gone before. The series went through something of a transformation, reinvigorated both by a new, cinematic approach and the introduction of very much darker material. Much in the same way as Philip Hinchcliffe had capitalised on the films of Hammer in the 1970s, so the new series began steadily to pay homage to other influences: One of Our Dinosaurs is Missing, The Mummy, Robin Hood, Superman, heist movies and the Viking sa-Moffat was also something of a self-proclaimed fan of the 1960s Dalek



movies and there is a definite sensibility of these films pervading this era of Doctor Who. Peter Capaldi's performance is, at times, incredibly evocative not only of Jon Pertwee's Third Doctor but also of Peter Cushing's cinematic creation. Dr. John Who. There are echoes also of the Dalek City set from Dr. Who and the Daleks in the story Journey to the Centre of the TARDIS as well as season nine's The Magician's Apprentice and The Witch's Familiar. The premise of Into the Dalek calls back to the classic 1966 Richard Fleisher film. Fantastic Voyage (something the series had already borrowed from for the 1977 Tom Baker serial, The Invisible Enemy). But the use of it here is an interesting one, as it not only allows the viewer to explore the most infamous of the show's protagonists from a new angle, it also allows Ford and Moffat to conquer the tricky task of portraying the Dalek creature in a unique way. As someone with a little experience of the inside of a BBC Dalek, I can most definitely state that the fictional interior is both more splendid and, dare I say it, more comfortable than the real thing!

Back in 2013 there was a certain amount of trepidation in both the show's audience and the press about the casting of Peter Capaldi, about what a much more austere and, alright let's say it, older actor might make of the role. Viewers who had not yet had the opportunity to experience Capaldi as anything other than The Thick Of It's Malcolm foul-mouthed party whip, Tucker, might have been a little perplexed as to the decision. Contrasts have always been essential to the show's longevity, of course, and Doctor Who's headliner, Steven Moffat, knew exactly the new direction he wanted to take. We, the show's fans, had simply to hold on to our sofa cushions and brace ourselves for a radically different and much darker reimagining of the Doctor and the series. If Deep Breath had hinted just a little at the change in tone and characterisation that was to come, then Into the Dalek would prove

to be an altogether much bleaker chapter in the Twelfth Doctor's first season. The Doctor saves Journey Blue, a young rebel fighter, who is under attack from a Dalek battle cruiser. Returning her to her ship, the Aristotle, he is taken to a single Dalek that is being held captive after being found floating injured in space. The Dalek appears to be 'good', declaring the Dalek race is evil and must be destroyed. It needs their help in order to repair its damaged internal systems and, together with Clara and a small group of soldiers, the Doctor is miniaturised and placed inside the Dalek.

It is very telling that our miniaturised crew are introduced *Into the Dalek* - whom the Doctor later christens 'Rusty' - through the creature's eye. This is a story peppered with allusions to eyes and seeing: from the close-up on Danny Pink's single tear in the Coal Hill School classroom, to the Dalek antibodies peppering the screen mimicking design on Clara's blouse, to the Kaled

mutant's proportionally gigantic single eye. Even the images of the exploding star, the maguffin at the centre of the piece, resemble a vast opening eye. Many writers through the ages have described the eyes as the 'windows of the soul' (this is often attributed to William Shakespeare but there are many others) so the eye is chosen as the most direct route to enter and journey to the creature at its centre.

The journey in Into the Dalek is a metaphorical one. The Doctor expresses his desire to unlock the creature's soul but it is his own soul he is trying to unlock. When the Doctor is confronting the creature - "Here we are, eye to eye!" - we feel it is really himself he is confronting, and if we look back to the closing scenes of Deep Breath it is clear that we were meant to expect this level of soul-searching. As the Doctor holds up a silver tray to reflect the image of the Half-Face Man, the protagonist at the centre of the story, it throws up a reflection of himself which, from



his own line of sight, seems to replace the creature's own face. As a 'postregeneration' story it's a clear reference to *The Power of the Daleks* but it's also there to suggest that the Doctor's moral separation from his foes might not be as distinct as he would like to think.

At the opening of story, the Doctor's personal journey has already begun when he asks Clara the question, "Am I a good man?" It is a moment of extraordinary directness and power; rarely have we ever seen the Doctor so sincere and vulnerable. Stripped of all the distractions that usually surround him, Clara has a moment to look deep into his eyes but is unclear just exactly what she finds there. Is she confused or disturbed by what she sees? Somewhat at a loss to know how to answer, she falters in her response, "I... I don't know." This new Doctor is a haunted man, a man troubled by the darkness that lurks within himself. When the Doctor talks of how his simple desire to escape his own people and travel the stars changed when he first encountered the Daleks on Skaro, he is not simply talking about his discovery of their evil hatred but of his own. It is this, the Doctor's inner hatred of the Daleks, which 'Rusty' ultimately harnesses to destroy his own kind. As the story draws to a close he tells the Doctor incisively: "I am not a good Dalek. You are a good Dalek!"

If the Doctor is troubled over his morality then it is not without cause. Later in the series we will see him horribly misjudge Clara's boyfriend and teaching colleague, Danny Pink, in the cruellest of ways because of his past life as a soldier. Here we see him sentencing Ross, a military crew member, to death

simply to save the rest of the party. The Doctor throws something to the man who is surrounded by Dalek antibodies and tells him to swallow it. When Ross asks the Doctor what it is, he simply replies "trust me". Once Ross swallows the device, the antibodies attack and vaporize him. It is a deplorable act made even more distasteful by the Doctor's curt explanation: "He was dead anyway."

The moment is a deeply troubling one and calls everything we ever thought we knew about the character into guestion. It isn't as easily dismissed by the audience as it is by the writers and the final scenes of the Doctor on board the TARDIS, almost coquettishly showing off his newly chosen attire, do not really paper over the cracks - and neither should they. Capaldi, on the other hand, is given a vast panoply of emotions to cover in the story and does so with consummate judgement and care, so much so that we just about cope with this huge contradiction of ethics. It is perhaps tempting to think of this lack of morality in the character as a kind of post-modern embellishment; a departure from the straightforward 'rightness' of, say Patrick Troughton, Jon Pertwee or Peter Davison's Doctors. But perhaps it is not all that new. One only need look at the very first Doctor Who serial to find a Doctor willing to stone a man to death in order to ensure he and his companions escape the Tribe of Gum. The series is littered with examples of callousness in the character: take Tom Baker in The Seeds of Doom or, frankly, almost any Colin Baker story you wish. The morality question is something that has lain at the very core of the series since its earliest days. In the denouement of Deep Breath, the

death of the Half-Face Man is ambiguous and is followed by the Doctor gazing enigmatically directly into the camera lens. Whilst it is unclear whether the Doctor has pushed him from the escape capsule or not, in *Into the Dalek* the killing actually happens in plain sight. The Doctor coolly decides to sentence a man to death in order to allow the rest of them to live.

It is not made entirely clear but perhaps the Doctor feels that he can redeem himself when, in a kind of Genesis of the Daleks reversal, he declares, "I will turn one Dalek! I will turn them all! I will save the future!" He believes that, by allowing 'Rusty' to re-experience its once cathartic vision of beauty, he can once again reawaken the goodness in its soul. But the statement is ambiguous. Is it a grasp for redemption or a moment of egotism? Do we trust this new Doctor's motivations? Do we even believe this to be his intention? He has just killed a man and quipped about his death. Ultimately, it is Clara and not the Doctor that bestows upon 'Rusty' the memory of its 'divine vision', the image of the birth of a star, when she enters the Dalek's cortex vault and reboots the creature's memories. Conversely, it is the Doctor's hard-wired hatred of the Daleks that sets 'Rustv' on its course of destruction.

We know, of course, from the very start that the Doctor's aim – to produce a 'good' Dalek – is a fool's errand. When first the miniaturised party enter the Dalek, the Doctor points out the creature's electronic inhibitors, the horrible machinery within the casing that amplifies everything that is aggressive and suppresses everything that is not. The only time it experiences a single moment of beauty it considers it a defect,

a weakness, and seeks a cure. The creature is deliberately conditioned only for hatred and aggression and cannot therefore achieve any form of selfactualisation, be it ethical or otherwise. As the philosopher Aristotle (after whom Journey Blue's ship has been named) teaches us: the pursuit of moral virtue, choosing to live one's life doing what is 'right', ultimately leads us towards a state of 'human flourishing'. So, the Dalek race is left with nothing more than pointless aggression. Like us, however, the Doctor has a choice. But his actions in this episode loom large over the rest of the narrative and it is not so easy for us to move on from Ross's death. Up until now it has seemed inconceivable for the character to switch, in the blink of an eye, from a vulnerable friend to a cold-hearted mur-It is clear, from this point on, that we can no longer trust in what we think we know about the show or the Doctor. As the story closes, Clara suddenly finds an answer to the Doctor's question, "Am I a good man?" "I don't know," she says, "But you try to be." We, on the other hand, are now not so sure.



ROBOT OF SHERWOOD

Elliot Chapman

At roughly the same time I would be making my debut as Ben Jackson Version 2 for Big Finish, the television incarnation of *Doctor Who* was about to get its twelfth official Doctor, in the form of Peter Capaldi.

I had not watched the series in some time but the interest surrounding a new Doctor, plus the added investment I now had in all things *Who* since joining the family, via Big Finish, meant I was very keen to see where it would go with its new lead.

I must confess to being thrilled at Capaldi's casting, as I had thought he had terrific potential to play the role, especially after I recalled his turn as Rory McHoan in the television adaptation of lan Banks' *The Crow Road* – if *Casanova* could be said to be David Tennant's unofficial audition piece for Ten, then Uncle Rory would be my vote as Capaldi's proto-Doctor.

What I found very interesting and laudable about *Deep Breath* and *Into the Dalek* were how the show had shifted its tone and pace to accommodate a new Doctor. The longer scenes and the reduction of the more, shall we say, "Whedon-esque" approach to dialogue and characterisation certainly appealed to me, and I very much appreciated the slow, disquieting quality of Capaldi's debut – a story that was full of implications. And what a coup that it had been directed by the brilliant Ben Wheatley!

Into the Dalek had intrigued me too, although I confess I was a little unsettled by the approach to Capaldi's Doc-



tor at this point. While the remote, ruthlessly pragmatic and slightly sinister take on the role was the one William Hartnell first introduced in the earliest days of the programme, it didn't take long before the more magical, endearing and delightful "bumbler" emerged from the gruffer exterior, which Hartnell played so beautifully. There had been an attempt to upend our expectations with Colin Baker, whose passion, energy and arch asides helped eschew the return of the difficult and contentious traits from the earliest days of the series, and we could at least blame that on a misfired regeneration process. However, it did divide audiences and Colin spent much of his time trying to make up for the first impressions created by the unstable Six, even playing against his lines in his second season. But with Into the Dalek, I couldn't really understand why the Twelfth Doctor was behaving this way - there seemed to be no obvious catalyst I was aware of, except perhaps to link him to Capaldi's infamous Malcolm Tucker from The Thick of It in some way.

Certainly, it must have been tempting to imagine a no-nonsense Doctor in the Tucker mode (bar the expletives!) but whether that was really worth pursuing was something I was unsure about. Yes, Into the Dalek was a superb piece of television but the Doctor's anxieties over being a "good man" and the handwringing that emerged with the sly accusations from the Dalek itself struck me as a potential cul-de-sac for the character and the series to get stuck in. But then came Robot of Sherwood and Mark Gatiss' delightful presentation of the Twelfth Doctor as a positive, amusing and magical figure with a just little bit of the sharpness we had seen earlier – something not a million miles from William Hartnell mid-way through his first season and beyond, or Jon Pertwee at the beginning of his run. And indeed, from the moment he revealed a spoon from his coat pocket to defend himself against an impossible Robin Hood, I felt the depiction of the Twelfth Doctor had caught up with the inspirational casting decision – everything synched!

It would be perhaps be fair to say that my particular taste in Doctor Who is that of a series that embraces its camper side; by this I don't mean the rather un-nuanced way camp can be used by hetero-normative culture in some things, but in the fashion that it is aware of itself as a text and uses that awareness to interrogate what it does and what it's for with a tremendous sense of joy - something I would argue can be found in serials such as The Macra Terror (my favourite from the era I had recently researched), or Carnival of Monsters, or The Sunmakers (all of



which I loved), rather more than the grounded, straight-ahead The Seeds of Doom, or Earthshock, or The Mind of Evil, which - beyond some admiration their technical for and aesthetic achievements, especially considering the series' low budget - left me rather cold. And the wonderful thing about Robot of Sherwood was that it was treating Robin Hood as a text and, by extension. Doctor Who as well - it was plunging us into a narrative construction akin to Dennis Spooner's Rome, or Robert Holmes' Victorian London places that revel in being stories. And I would be lying if there wasn't the instant appeal of it being, superficially at least, not unlike The Androids of Tara, which I would discover later and absolutely adore.

I applaud Gatiss for presenting us with the glossy silver screen version of Robin Hood from the era of Errol Flynn and having the audacity to say - this is authentic. Moreover, I love how he puts two folk heroes (and the Doctor has become just that after fifty-plus years of adventuring) in the same narrative space and has the sparks fly. But, best of all, it's Capaldi's triumph over the part he was born to play. Gatiss gets a great handle on the "Am I a good man. Clara?" character thread that runs through Series 8 because Robin is there to frustrate him (this is two niche heroes in the same space) but also help him navigate through the issue. not a hero" Twelve "I'm insists "Perhaps others will be heroes in our name." Robin assures him. And there's much to consider here...

The thing is, I actually don't believe the Doctor is a hero either. I appreciate the version of the Doctor that's an insatia-



bly curious drop-out from his own societv: who scrapes by because he knows that the privilege of time travel comes with making an ethical stand and being a social actor at times. And he's always less appealing to me when he's powerful, God-like or talked about in awed whispers than when he's a hobo that turns up, gets scared, overcomes the dangers and helps people out by thinking round the problem. But Robin is right to say that others can make a hero out of all that - it's not up to the Doctor because we are only that which the greatest number of people believe us to be. And, frankly, we view the Doctor as a hero when - paradoxically - he's at his finest when he's not trying to be superman but when he's confronting a danger that frightens him silly but he does it anyway.

As I interpret it, Robin is schooling the Doctor in giving up the angst and enjoying the wonderful absurdity of their extraordinary lives. Gattis makes this Robin the welcome mouthpiece for those versions of heroes that did it for fun (the James Bond of the late Sir Roger Moore is an obvious example)

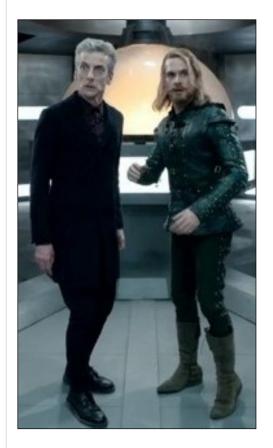
and made us feel good in an era when pain and inner turmoil and interiority are default for so many, formerly escapist, characters. Now, there is something worthwhile in probing a character - even a glorified plot device like the Doctor. Frankly, I find the way it was done in the Christopher Eccleston series downright beautiful. But there's also a time to throw out the angst and enjoy yourself again and it seems alltoo appropriate from this, the most nostalgic of writers, to take an hour of new Doctor Who to breezily unpack this and offer the possibility of a way out of the New Seriousness that dominates so many of our much beloved screen characters these days, from Bond to Batman and beyond.

Of course, no one actually takes up the gauntlet Gattis throws down right away...but aren't we getting more of a flavour of that now, in Capaldi's final series, where the gadabout Doctor is more visible and the angst-ridden hand wringer is less noticeable?

Of course, it would be remiss not to mention that the series awareness of itself as a text is something that Steven Moffat has been willing to explore, perhaps most overtly in the recent *Extremis* episode. It's a serious world out there and the Doctor cannot take any of it on – that's a given; *Extremis* makes the point well – the Doctor is a character in a constructed story...but he can send a message to the rest of us. Or, as Robin says, "Perhaps others will be heroes in our name."

And this won't come from squaring up to would-be tyrants like the Sheriff of Nottingham or taking down murderous alien robots, but in embracing the ethos of the Doctor and Robin – solidarity with the underdog, bravery even when you're terrified, belief in a fairer world and making a contribution – however small – to increasing the scope of our empathy. This is why the Doctor matters – he's not a nihilist, he always sees value in people and he's unafraid about the notion that we can be better. In Robots of Sherwood that really comes to the fore.

As Peter Capaldi leaves us, I like to think that the seeds of this definitive version of the Twelfth Doctor that has really emerged in his final series can be found in *Robot of Sherwood* – a story with far more going on than its lighter surface story might suggest.





(Listen) Do you want to know a secret? Do you promise not to tell...?



Every so often *Doctor Who* has the unerring ability to re-kindle within me the kind of thrills that first attracted me to the programme at an (arguably too) young age: that unnerving sense of terror and expectation that makes you desperate to both watch and not watch what happens next. *Listen* was one such episode; at the time I recall thinking that it was the strongest example of that kind of unnerving audience manipulation that I'd seen since the series had returned.

Our eldest boy was becoming a toddler at the time. He liked watching Who with us and I remember turning to my wife during Listen and saying we definitely wouldn't be letting him watch this one (a conversation I think my parents should probably have had instead of sitting toddler me in front of The Seeds of Doom years before, for example). Revisiting the episode a couple of years down the line my thoughts remain the same - the whole something under the bed scenario is the stuff of pure nightmare and there's no way I'd be prepared to submit my (now) four year old to that. But as adults we loved it.

However, the expertly-crafted terror aside, I found the rest of the episode content to be very unsatisfactory and at times utterly cringe-inducing.

Listen is an episode of extremes: on the one hand Stephen Moffat has (yet again) pinpointed a common psychological terror and played it back to us in a way that makes it all the more terrifying. On the other hand, we have this business with Danny Pink and Clara that just comes across as bizarre and all too often desperately painful to watch.

The programme was walking a difficult line at the time, which was clear to me as a viewer. I always consider myself to be a viewer when watching episodes for the first time and the fan gene only kicks in on subsequent viewings. It had recruited a regular cast of undisputed talent, but Capaldi was taking the Colin Baker route of being difficult for the casual audience to warm to at times, and Jenna Coleman's Clara, who should be the audience's access route to the drama, was playing her own games and being generally smug and conceited. That leaves us, the viewer, with Danny Pink. Samuel Anderson is another fine actor with a good pedigree, but our access to Danny as a character is diluted through the Doctor and Clara; what we want, what we need is more Danny and full access to him - the wider narrative seen or told through his eyes. But we never get that, so we never quite 'get' Danny. Danny Pink was the perfect vehicle for us to 'discover' Peter Capaldi's brusque Scots curmudgeon in full flow; he was the perfect vehicle for us to realise Clara's journey of discovery as she reconsidered her relationship with the



Doctor and her life in general. But Danny is only ever a supporting character; the audience gaze is never allowed through his eyes.

At no point through to the end of Series 8 did I ever 'buy' Danny and Clara's relationship; we were told a lot but never shown very much and, for me, what we were told didn't match what we were That's not a criticism of the shown. actors, I think it comes down to the production. But it's a major factor here in Listen, where for Clara and Danny the narrative depends on us, the viewers, buying into this blossoming relationship. Those first date restaurant scenes could have been very funny or charming, but instead they are the most cringeworthy moments in the show since the milkshake bar in Dragonfire. There is one exception - an all too brief moment of Clara and Danny laughing, genuinely laughing, together at the table; it is a gorgeous, utterly natural moment - but unfortunately the scripted drama around it is terribly stilted and never engaging.

That said, there are also wonderful things about this episode – as with any *Who*. Peter Capaldi, for a start, is magnificent; he's been different things almost each week so far, and here he's a questing lunatic. He's not badtempered or unnecessarily curt here, he's just driven – and, like a dog who's

after a particularly awkward bone, he won't let anything stand in his way, even to the point of not paying adequate consideration as to how he's trying to achieve his aim. For me, though, Capaldi shows in Listen that out of all his predecessors in the role it is Peter Cushing's film portraval that he is channelling most: he's cranked the dial up to eleven, discarded the soft centres and run with it hell for leather. Body language, movement, (hair!) and a wildness behind the eyes are all there from Cushing's Dr Who as if he was in a dark Gothic Hammer instead of the briahtly-lit family-orientated Amicus productions. Add to this the endless depths of Capaldi's own skill and you have pretty much a faultless performance that continues to breathe fresh life and contrast to the part. And Capaldi's performance here is instrumental in creating the atmosphere of terror that regularly threatens to send even the heartiest of us scurrying behind the sofa.

The scary moments are expertly crafted and stage-managed. There is a synergy of design and direction so the episode as a whole looks and sounds gorgeous – but as 'must-see TV' this is something I'd come to expect from recent seasons as a given; it would be more noteworthy if the episode *didn't* look and sound gorgeous, and wasn't expertly performed.



Is it a problem that Clara can travel back through the Doctor's timeline to his childhood, to effectively become the seed that plants the idea of the unseen unknown in his psyche and create a temporal paradox? We'd already seen in Night of The Doctor that she had travelled throughout his timeline to counteract the effect of the Great Intelligence so for me this wasn't a point of contention, and it didn't concern me that it gave her a kind of pivotal role or power within the series - although I was aware that it did become a bone of contention amongst some fans. However, it does feed back into her being less of an audience identification figure and this is when we need Danny more, but unfortunately we don't get him. With Rose we had Mickey to identify through; when Amy got too smug or comfortable we turned to Rory. Here we're desperate to grab Danny, but he's only dangled in our peripheries and forever out of reach.

As I see it *Listen* set out to do two things: to create some truly unnerving moments of unknown fear, and to light the candle of Clara and Danny for the audience as a through-story for the remainder of the season. It achieved the first of these admirably, but in my view it failed at the second and continued to fail right through to the season conclusion that warranted no tears, because the seed here had fallen on fallow ground.





Ian McCann

I am sick and tired of writing about how good Peter Capaldi has been in *Doctor Who*.

Seriously.

If he could start flubbing lines or halfarsing it, I would be most appreciative. The search for fresh ways to say "He was superb," is legitimate. Nevertheless, I shall endeavour to soldier on this well-worn path for another 812 words...

Time Heist is in a rather awkward spot. A new Doctor's first series is always going to be a ground for experimentation into his characterisation. Also, by this point in Series 8 we're tightening up what exactly this incarnation will be like. On top of that we have this pointless 'Am I a Good Man?' character arc which adds an element of darkness (and quite frankly confusion) to the proceedings. Yet through all of that muddy water Peter Capaldi delivers such a stunning performance as the Doctor. In fact, that's probably one of the most consistent elements of his time on the No matter the quality of the script (as I'm sure the author of the essay on In the Forest of the Night will tell you) Peter brings such a level of energy to the role.

A lot of Capaldi's performance is conveyed just by his appearance. His face is creased as much as his hair is greying. Then there's his magnificent Roman nose with eyes that dare you to look away knowing full well that you couldn't if you tried. While his look does have a severity to it here, his eye-



brows give away all the secrets. He's always compelling whether he's taking charge ("It's my special power") or in the background chewing the scenery. It's an inevitable analogy and one that I've tried to escape from using for quite some time, but there's really no doubt about it: Series 8 Capaldi does have a whiff of Malcolm Tucker (from The Thick of It) about him. Perhaps it's the anti-social behavior and the uncertainty with how he's going to react to situations but lines like "shutetty up up" don't help either. It's not a bad thing, it's just how this incarnation was written in Series 8 and PCap (my affectionate rap gangsta nickname for him) deftly plays the part.

This story in particular shows off quite a few facets of the character. Here we see Capaldi smoothly switching between the leader, the action man and orator. Sometimes, he's all three. It's a sight to behold. Not to criticize any other actors who have taken on the role, but simply put, Peter Capaldi is one of

the best that has ever taken on the series' lead.

As for the episode itself? I think it's rather fun. As a major fan of heist/ caper films, this is right up my alley. We have a diverse ensemble, a seemingly impossible task, and a villain just itching to be outdone. All of these elements work together so beautifully. Clara looks smashing in her suit and tie; ready to take on alien invasions and smash the patriarchy. The supporting cast is game as well. Keeley Hawes as Madame Karabraxos and her clones is clearly having a blast. Jonathan Bailey and Pippa Bennett-Warner are also fun additions to the ensemble. Their characters Psi and Saibra are perhaps two of the neatest side characters to be introduced in some time and I would love to see their return to the show. Perhaps even as companions? The Teller species is visually exciting and you do feel sympathy for the creature (which is a much harder sell for most aliens than you think). Douglas Mackinnon's direction gives this a sleek, smooth feel. You can tell he has a real love for the films this is trying to emulate. Hell, it feels and looks like a very special episode of *Hustle* at times.

Fans of twentieth century *Who* will be delighted at how many times the cast run down the exact same corridor. Of course, since this is 2014 we have different lighting to indicate that it's not the same set. Nifty, but old school. *Time Heist* also has the Doctor acting very much like his seventh incarnation. The Twelfth Doctor's playing the role of schemer and grand mastermind of the whole story.

In fact, if there was one scene I'd particularly pick out that emphasizes Capaldi's excellence it would be the grand denouement in Madame Karabraxos' private vault. He bounces off the room like a man half his age. He uses every part of his body to get his points across. No one ever mentions this about him ever, but he really, really knows how to act with his hands.

As an actor myself, I can tell you that it's quite difficult to figure out what to do with them. As the Doctor, Capaldi uses them frequently and in the most unusual ways. You could almost say it's his most alien feature. There's not much he can't do. It's been a treat and a privilege to watch him these past three years.

Whenever you see him on screen, have no doubt that he is 100% the Doctor and you're watching *Doctor Who*. What more could you ask for? I love it, and I'm going to miss him.

THE CARETAKER

Ann Worral

The Caretaker... a title surely meant to raise an ironic eyebrow as the Doctor did anything but in this episode. And alongside his callous over-confidence. there were a few other things that had the potential to set viewers' teeth on edge. The depiction of the school was comic strip stuff - more Bash Street than Ofsted- rated - with Danny and Clara displaying a cavalier attitude to their responsibilities that contrasted unfavourably with the principled concern for Susan that Barbara and Ian demonstrated in the very first episode of the show. The monster weapon and its danger, although presented as huge, were in appearance and action rather underwhelming - reminiscent of my old mother careering about in her electric wheelchair in a bike helmet (not, I hasten to add, that she ever wore a helmet - but she didn't half career). There was a feeling too that the writers were just a little too pleased with the comic sparring they created between the principals - I wouldn't have minded less of the quick-fire repartee and a deeper look at some of the issues the sparring threw up. All of which raises the question: why I am writing in praise of the episode?



Paradoxically, the concerns that I have when I think about *The Caretaker*



largely disappear when I watch it. Its frantic pace rushes me along and in the main, it is acted well (I have some reservations about the portrayal of Danny), and I find it an enjoyable romp, with some genuine laughs.

Let's get my remaining doubts out of the way first. As a former teacher I was mildly incensed by Clara's Pride and Prejudice lesson. Why teach it in such a boring way? Spend less time cavorting in time and space and more on preparation, Clara. The Doctor seemed to me throughout to be unnecessarily unhinged: why would he assume that he and Clara were the same age? Why did he make all those odd remarks about her appearance? Yes they established him as a) alien and b) not interested in her romantically which I welcomed but they also suggested that he'd forgotten his two thousandodd year history with humans. Writers trying a bit too hard to redefine the couple's interpersonal dynamics, or so I felt. The Doctor's needling of Danny Pink teetered close to bullying, in keeping with the first Doctor's open contempt of humans, but if I had been in Clara's position and he had denigrated the man I loved to that extent. I'd have punched him on the nose despite the fantastic travel opportunities he offered. And why does the Doctor hypnotise Atif to believe he has "a flying car and three wives" as well as the flu? It's funny but there is no logical reason for him to do so. It is only believable if we accept the Doctor is mad and there's no evidence from his past incarnations that he is: eccentric, whimsical, yes...but mad? I don't see it.

All that said, I did enjoy this episode and particularly the fact that it pitched itself so well for family viewing. Its narrative was straightforward so young viewers could follow it easily; it had just enough of a scare factor to make it interesting to older kids and a school setting (shades of Grange Hill) to give them (and older viewers) a cultural reference point if they were unfamiliar with the show, as well as some youngsters with whom to identify; there were good jokes for the adults, foreshadowing for Facing the Raven in the relationship dynamic between the Doctor and Clara and a dilemma for Clara that many would identify with....the need to pursue her own destiny while simultaneously committing to a relationship. It's a shame that Danny Pink was shown tolerating Clara's obvious lies for so



long without challenging them as it made him appear rather needy whereas, in the end, he emerged as more heroic than either the Doctor or Clara and the true caretaker for her. impressions count however and the decency he displayed was less impressive than it should have been because his introduction presented him as ineffectual. Similarly, his easy acceptance of Clara's need to travel with the Doctor (and to exclude him from the 'wonders' she experienced) was a little too gratuitous - we hadn't got to know him, or seen any evidence of a deep relationship between him and Clara that might have enabled us to accept this outstanding act of understanding without Nevertheless, it was nice question. that he could embrace her for what she was, warts and all...even if it was less clear what she was bringing to the relationship.

Although the banter between Clara and the Doctor could have seemed a little unrelenting, in production it was delivered at such speed and with such finely judged timing to be genuinely funny. I laughed out loud at the Doctor's, "I'm a caretaker now. Look, I've got a brush," and was also amused by his frantic, "Am I green?" as he faced the Skovox The repeated reference to Blitzer. 'spillage' (as well as the choice of the word) was pleasing. If the Doctor's contempt for humans sometimes seemed a bit forced (it did not always seem to spring from circumstances or when it did, it was confused by his attraction to the thing he was condemning - as when he appeared to dismiss Courtney and then invited her for a jolly in the TARDIS), Peter Capaldi delivered those disparaging remarks with a lightness of comic touch that meant they didn't grate.



The heart of the story was the confrontation between Danny and the Doctor a fascinating exchange but one that didn't quite mesh with the overall tone of the episode. Danny compared the Doctor to a general, ruthlessly exposing Clara to danger for his own purposes and pushing her to act beyond her capabilities. Yet Clara had always been presented to us as the equal of the Time Lord, more than capable of making her own choices. To believe Danny we had to believe that the Doctor viewed Clara as cannon-fodder and not a companion. He certainly put her in danger during the final confrontation with the Blitzer and only Danny's intervention saved her, but if the concept of 'companion' means anything in the series, it is surely that the person so designated recognises and accepts the dangers inherent in the role because they trust that the Doctor defends what is right in their universe and for this reason they are happy to face them? The suggestion that the Doctor and Clara had got this wrong - that neither had truly faced the danger posed to Clara in their adventures - was an uncomfortable one: the more so because it was raised during an episode with, for the most part, a cartoonish sense of daring-do and humour. Danny's view... one that Face the Raven ratifies... seemed to have been grafted onto an episode ill-equipped to bear the weight of such a serious accusation, for the purpose of establishing a brick in the story arc that would culminate in Clara's death. Of course that sense of discomfort and foreboding may be just what the writers intended to leave us with but I for one could have accepted it better if I had been allowed to develop some kind of allegiance towards Danny first.

There was, I recognise, a subtle point being made here, and, as I've pointed out Danny was certainly intended to be the true hero of the story – less charismatic than the Doctor but more worthy of Clara's love - but, despite Samuel Anderson's best efforts, his portrayal when balanced against the totally engaging performance of Peter Capaldi left me totally on the Doctor's side, dismissing Danny's concerns as wimpish over-cautiousness. But again, maybe I was intended to do that so that later, Clara's death would have a greater shock value.

Despite my quibbles with the relationship dynamics in the episode, I was full of admiration for the way the core story was constructed. It was a joy to watch something so coherently plotted, every element plausible, motivations believable, with some pleasing misdirection and a faux, wrong-footing climax.

There was the anticipation set up by the Doctor going under 'deep cover' as the caretaker at Coal Hill School as to what the alien danger would involve. The presence of the Blitzer was sparingly but convincingly explained by a reference to artron energy which it is well established is the energy source that powers the TARDIS. There was a plausible reason for the school boys' presence outside Totter's Yard and for the Community Policeman's encounter with the Blitzer (as well as a fanpleasing reference). And just as it seemed as if the story was all about the relationship between Danny, Clara and the Doctor, Danny unwittingly sabotaged the latter's clever solution to the alien menace so it could return with an even greater threat.

It was an expertly directed episode too, briskly taking us along with the story, quickly cutting between scenes to establish plot and relationship points without lengthy exposition and offering some atmospherically creepy settings.

Care taken with the plot and delivery of the story (if you'll pardon the feeble pun) – not a given in New Who so all the more welcome, and a cracking, mercurial performance from Peter Capaldi.



KILL THE MOON

Andrew Hunt

It's Capaldi's Genesis of the Daleks, that's what it is. Only it isn't the Doctor being forced to make a decision, and it isn't the Daleks who will be wiped out. It's Clara (and Courtney and Lundvik, but let's face it, it's Clara) who has to decide and it's an ickle alien space baby giant dragon thing which may or may not wipe out the Earth. It's the space chicken or it's the whole of humanity. Maybe it's Capaldi's Let's Kill Hitler? (In the loosest possible way and bearing in mind that I haven't watched that nearly as much as Genesis or Kill the Moon so I don't really remember whether there was any such dilemma.) And in this case we have no idea what the outcome will be of the decision Clara is forced to make. Does the Doctor know? By the end of the episode we don't know what he knew and neither does Clara. She has to make the decision because the Doctor has decided that she has reached a point when she can play on her own, and he leaves her to it in a state of considerable ignorance. She knows a lot less than he did when he had the chance to avert the creation of the Daleks. And when he had to make a choice, let's face it, he flunked it, wimped out. 'Do I have that right?' Pah!

So Clara stages a referendum. It's a referendum where the one expert that she could ask has removed himself from the room. In these heady 'postfact' days we don't trust experts and it doesn't look like we can trust the Doctor. But, on the plus side, it's an advisory referendum and Clara chooses to ignore the wishes of humanity – or at least those who live on the parts of the

Earth that are currently experiencing night-time and have access to a light switch, and those who are actually present in the room with her and actually live in this time period.

In fact, it's slightly astonishing that this was broadcast just after the Scottish referendum and long before the insanity and lies of the EU referendum.

So, on a beautifully-realised, harshly black and white moon, the Doctor and Clara are required to bring some wonderful shades of orange to some black or white decision making. Lundvik sees no shades of grey, just a stark choice between saving the world or dooming it to a rain of moon fragments. In this future history mankind has given up the race for space, has turned in on itself and become insular, inwards looking. A bit like Brexit Britain. Enjoy your snap election.

I think I'd better go back to beautiful visuals...

The moon looks amazing. The spider bacteria are great. Clara running in slo-mo down a corridor...who could ask for more? Maybe a bit of drama, a bit of character development...

Clara challenges the Doctor at the end of the episode. 'Did you know?' she asks him. He gave her a decision to make and it was too big a decision. She thought she knew him, thought he would always act in the best interests of humanity and the world. That he would always act in her best interests. The Doctor thinks he has been doing that. He's been helping Clara to come to a point where she can do these things herself. But she didn't want it.

Not like that. It's all fun and games until somebody loses an eye. Or inadvertently makes a mistake because the responsible ancient alien goes off and leaves the kids playing on their own.

'You walk our Earth, Doctor, you breathe our air. You make us your friend, and that is your moon too. And you can damn well help us when we need it.'

The Doctor thinks he was helping. The Doctor thinks a lot of things. But, just now, he thinks without understanding.

Give it a year or two (maybe longer in the Doctor's terms) and an older and wiser Doctor will take his role as a friend of the Earth more seriously and will ask his companion what she wants him to do. Save the Whale? Or allow humans to progress by piggybacking on another species' suffering? Clara's actions in *Kill the Moon* set humanity on its way to the stars, but they also set the Doctor on his own path of discovery, a road to emotional responsibility.

Choices. Growing up is having to make hard decisions. Like whether to keep loving a TV show that you probably should've given up on years ago.

Kill the Moon is a fabulous episode which presents me with the traditional choice that has long troubled Doctor Who fans. Do you allow the giant oyster and the plot holes to distract from the sheer brilliance that is Genesis of the Daleks? Do you allow the stupid unicellular spider-bacteria in Kill the Moon to take anything away from the beauty, the comedy, the maturity, the immaturity and the sheer relish with which Peter Capaldi says, 'The moon's an egg'?

It's a great moment.



MUMMY ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS

lan Wheelei

Producer Philip Hinchcliffe and Script Editor Robert Holmes did a very clever thing when they took over the reins of making Doctor Who in the mid-70s. They chose to base a lot of their storylines on classic movies, specifically (but not exclusively) those made by Hammer Films in the 50s and 60s. Hence we got to see stories which featured or parodied such memorable creations as Frankenstein and the Mummy as well as alien pods, a creepy hand and a Jack the Ripper-type killer. It was a rich source from which to draw ideas and was to result in storylines that were frightening, exciting and just a little bit controversial.

Mummy on the Orient Express continued the tradition of being influenced by the Hammer films but also threw in a healthy dose of Agatha Christie for inspiration as well. To combine the horror of Hammer with the style and intrigue of a Christie drama could only be a winning formula, and the resulting episode was to prove to be scary and unsettling with the chills of Hammer but the visual appeal of *Poirot* or *Miss Marple*!

So, what is it about this story that I find so appealing? Well, firstly, Peter Capaldi himself is brilliant. For one thing, he looks great. Have you noticed how Peter's hair, like Tom Baker's, looks different in every story he is in? It's amazing hair. It can be quite short or it can be wonderfully bushy! Here, it's somewhere in the middle and looks ter-

rific. And the clothes he wears in this story look amazing – am I the only one that thinks the hoodie he wears in some stories is just a little bit on the scruffy side? That's not the case here – he's wonderfully stylish.

In terms of his actual performance, the role played by the Doctor in the story is as much a homage to the works of Agatha Christie as the setting and the visuals. Here the Time Lord plays the part of a Christie-esque detective, piecing together the facts and clues of a mystery, and he's very much a Poirottype figure. This is Capaldi at the top of his game. It's been a constant frustration to me that the success of Capaldi's Doctor has been downplayed by some fans because they don't like some of his stories. In terms of performance, I think he is arguably the best of the new generation of Doctors, managing to be both 'old school' but also bringing new subtleties to the role. I'm a Capaldi fan!

Then there's Jenna Coleman as Clara. When the full history of Doctor Who is finally told, I'm confident Clara will be regarded as one of the greatest companions. From her early beginnings as school teacher to her heartwrenching departure and resurrection, her character's development has been a pleasure to watch. This story is a turning point for her as she comes to realise that she can never hate the Doctor even though he sometimes takes her into dangerous situations. Here she builds up a good rapport with Daisy Beaumont as Maisie and at the end of the story, Clara ignores Danny's pleas and is determined to continue travelling with the Doctor. Like Rose nothing will come between Clara and her Time Lord.



Another character who (sort of) plays the role of a companion in this story is Frank Skinner as Perkins. It was nice to see Frank in the programme after he'd lobbied so hard to be in it and he creates a warm, memorable character who is arguably a prototype for Matt's Lucas's Nardole. He would have been a loyal friend for the Doctor and I'm rather disappointed that he didn't take up the chance to step on board the TARDIS on a permanent basis.

In terms of the rest of the cast, it's nice to see the return of Janet Henfrey, who had previously played Miss Hardaker in Sylvester McCoy's 1989 story *The Curse of Fenric*. Other cast members such as David Bamber and Christopher Villiers all give robust performances and really do look as though they are in a genuine Agatha Christie drama.

As far as the look and design of this story goes, the whole thing is a visual treat and the blending of Agatha Christie-era costumes and settings with more modern technology works wonderfully. The design team is on top form here and you can imagine that this was a story that they all relished working on.

At the heart of it all is a concept which is ingenious, unsettling and genuinely scary. Writer Jamie Mathieson took one of the classic movie monsters and

came up with a brilliant reason and justification for its existence. The idea of the Mummy being a modified stealth soldier is clever and well thought-out. And it's a nice touch that the Mummy kills people 66 seconds after appearing – it's wonderfully reminiscent of the Emperor's Order 66 in Star Wars Episode 3: Revenge of the Sith.

Director Paul Wilmshurst ran with this brilliant script and managed to wring every possible thrill, chill and scare from the concept. It's just a pity that the story wasn't a little bit longer, as there's easily enough good material here to justify a running time of an hour.

Dan Martin, a columnist for The Guardian, said of this story "At last, a proper new scary monster to get us behind the sofa". I think that's the key to its success - it's old school Who with the pace and production values of modern television drama and all the key ingredients seem to come together. Some modern-day Who episodes can occasionally seem a little shallow and a triumph of style over substance, but that's not something you can say about In years to come, I think this one. Mummy on the Orient Express will be seen as being up there with the best of them. A very solid eight out of ten.





Dan McGrath

Peter Capaldi is undeniably a superb Doctor. However, it's fair to say that his portrayal has had some interesting turns and his first season is a little uneven.

Flatline, as well as being my favourite episode of Capaldi's initial run, also represents a number of firsts for Series Eight that will have an impact on future storylines. It is also a turning point for the entire era.

For one thing, it's the very first episode of the series that you can come to cold, with no prior knowledge of what's been occurring before. Yes, there are subtle arc-driving undertones, ones that will reward the regular viewer, but you don't need to know about a recent regeneration, or about the agonizing over whether or not our hero is a good man.

For once the fractured relationship between the Doctor and Clara is not the thrust of the story. Adjusted to the Doctors regeneration, and with a new understanding of the full implications of travelling that forced them apart previously, Clara has chosen her path. We now have a more traditional status quo of two friends travelling together. Subrecurring themes seauently plotlines involving additional characters are also downplayed and do not clash with the narrative. Danny Pink can be viewed as a concerned boyfriend, not an antagonist standing in the way of adventure. Missy becomes an intriguing glimpse of future peril, not The regular viewer is a distraction. thrilled but not to the detriment of the plot or casual fan.

First seasons are always tough, as the new incumbent finds their feet and begins to find the direction they wish to take the role, and every era has *that* moment where the lead moves from being 'the new guy' and becomes the Doctor that they will be for the rest of the time in the show. Examples? Think of the immortal, performance-deciding moment, "But why do you want to blow up the world'?" in *The*



Underwater Menace Part Two, where the light enters Patrick Troughton's eyes, all thoughts of silly hats and accents are almost instantaneously banished and the Cosmic Hobo is born.

Flatline (as well as being stunningly brilliant) offers up that chance to the Twelfth Doctor. He finally settles into himself, and more importantly, his relationship with Clara hits a turning point, as her descent into darkness completes, and her lies and manipulation are exposed. The apprentice becomes the master, and the Doctor is confronted with the full implications of his actions. It's a script that Capaldi can finally get his teeth into, and fly.

Lavish praise upon Jamie 'The God' Matheson. (Yes that is indeed a phrase that I used to his face. He intensely embarrassed but looked thanked me for the kind words about his work, then days later went on to take the DWM award for best writer, so I was vindicated all round!) Combined with Mummy on the Orient Express, this new writer blasts onto the scene and the Capaldi era has never looked back, rehiring him each year.

He did what seemed impossible. He made *Doctor Who* good again! Like a Steven Moffat for the Moffat era – he crafted a pair of breathtaking standalone scripts whilst carrying the ongoing arc forward – and didn't make it intrusive in an RTD kind of way. His scripts feel like classic *Who* stories with modern twists.

Flatline is essentially a base under siege story – claustrophobic with its protagonists trapped – while still being a contemporary urban thriller. Plus, it's



not your classic London setting – but Bristol, a great city traditionally underused by the classic show (in fact, I'd wager that this is actually this fine city's first TV appearance in *Who*) but one that would soon play an important role in the Doctor's life.

It opens with a genuinely spooky precredits scene, and then ramps the tension up with a slow burn of tiny visual clues as to what is happening combined with stunning visual effects. The flattening of the victims and the twodimensional assaults against our heroes are a joy to behold. Also, there can be no bigger satisfaction than piecing together the mystery at the same time as the protagonists, or joy as the viewer works it out before the cast. For instance, there is a palpable spinetingling you can gain when you realize the desert scene in house number one is skin (which I'll confess I got when I saw the venous system subtly placed in the background of house number two). As a whole, it's what Horror of Fana Rock wanted to achieve in the 70s, but the production values have now caught up with the concept.

The script is also jam-packed with brilliant concepts or hints at the future. At

this point in the series, the Doctor has been intermittently travelling on his own, away from our eyes, but here, for once, we see him for vast sections of the plot totally on his own. We get the insight into how he thinks, how he processes information and comes to solutions. It's the seed for what will eventually become the 'Mind Palace' scenes that are so vital in the following series. extended monologues therein show the full extent of Capladi's talents. We see moments of laugh out loud comedy - with the best tiny TAR-DIS since Logopolis, to the inspiring hermit crab escape scene. Coupled with dramatic musing and contemplation, through to the pain of defeat, Flatline, by showcasing the brilliance of our lead, sets the groundwork for things like a Doctor Single Hander - a concept that previously would have seemed certifiable.

Clara 'becoming the Doctor' is a theme that will be heavily revisited in both Series Eight and Nine's finales, but it is here that she gets her first turn at leading like he would, in the wake of his forced absence. Within this, Rigsy shines as a superb stand-alone character and exhibits all the right qualities as Clara's pseudo companion. You are left crying out for him to join the crew – again foreshadowing what will occur when he inevitably does return.

Conceptually the central storyline is also one of the finest the series has ever concocted. A beautiful dalliance with perception, and the idea of actual dimensions (and not the often-used realities). What is the nature of communication? Is the situation a huge misunderstanding?

The Boneless are arguably the most 'alien' entity in the entire run, and conceptually we hadn't 'seen' a dimension-traversing entity in years. The nearest we had ever come before was in the New Adventure *Lucifer Rising*.

Yes – their actions are deplorable to us, and eventually lead to a rousing and long overdue 'I am the Doctor' speech from Capaldi – further cementing his future performance – but in a final kick we are left with the question: who was the real villain? The Doctor is certainly left questioning what he has done, and the audience is faced with an intriguing aside from Missy about Clara's future, but, actually, the deliciously understated Christopher Fairbank, the cream of a superb guest cast, in his final remarks shows us the true darkness of the human race itself.

Flatline is almost flawless. I saw *almost* as there will always be one thing that slightly mars it for me. Back in 2014, I spent a week working with one of the guest cast. Shortly after we had parted company, that month's DWM landed on my doormat, announcing on page 4 this artist's forthcoming appearance. They hadn't mentioned it at all – the swine! - so that's an autograph my collection is sorely missing, and I'll forever hanker for.



IN THE FOREST OF THE NIGHT

Jolyon Tuck

"Has he even been CRB checked?"

It's not a question I ever expected to hear in Doctor Who. For decades our hero has taken teenagers through time and space and nobody has really stopped to question how sensible that is. Given that he got the job as caretaker at Coal Hill School, there's the potential that a check was made of the Disclosure and Barring Service, but it's more likely that the Doctor just flashed his psychic paper to confirm his clean history. Try not to dwell on this too much; in an episode where the mantra is to fear a little less and trust more, there are obviously situations where trusting less is the right way to go.

At a point in the series where Danny Pink is understandably wary of the Doctor, this episode surrounds them both with children, and offers Clara as the viewpoint character to be impressed by how both men care about the young.

Right from the pre-credit sequence we could be watching any ITV crime drama, in beautiful green scenery as the little girl runs through the wood, troubled by something, lost, chased. Then, welcomed into the TARDIS, we immediately know that she's safe, and the Doctor launches into an explanation of how his ship is bigger on the inside. He treats Maebh with a level of respect that matches his previous meetings with Rupert Pink and Courtney Woods. He's not talking to them like they're adults, but he isn't quite talking down to them either.

There's a tone that the series hits for the Doctor dealing with children that sits comfortably at two extremes. On the one hand, he barely acknowledges they're individuals, asking Maebh, "You, have you got a name at all?"



When he learns it, he later repeats it at every child, not able to recognise that she isn't present in the group.

On the other hand, he is ready to learn from Maebh, listening to her as she speculates at how the trees communicate with each other without a phone. She says "I haven't phoned home and I know my mum is worried about me". Capaldi's face in reaction to the words of the children makes every word seem vital in his working it out. He is equally annoyed that the other adults don't listen to the children, instead medicating to block the voices.

We're shown youngsters that are called 'Gifted and Talented,' and it may be surprising for some viewers that these children speak with such awareness of each other's conditions, whether it be ADHD, nut allergies or a note for a fear of the dark – we're a long way from the corridor of Coal Hill School in 1963. It's through Clara that we're told that they are "furious, fearful and tongue-tied, they're all superpowers if you use them properly".

In truth, here Danny and Clara are the closest they will ever get to being lan and Barbara of *An Unearthly Child*, in an episode that even includes little flashbacks of children behaving badly in their classes, reminiscent of our 60s heroes recalling Susan's behaviour in class.

In the way that Ian Chesterton was a man you could trust, so here is Danny Pink, looking out over London, wanting to get the children home to their parents, saving them from a tiger, keeping the group together and not getting into an argument with either Clara or the Doctor in front of the kids. The way that Clara looks at him in this episode, time and again, is enough to remind anyone of the importance of a capable, respectful, calm male role model in a child's life.

Whilst every fanboy (and girl) may dream of being whisked off through time and space with the Doctor, I wonder if the series has ever been quite as romantic as Danny telling Clara, "I don't want to see more things, I want to see the things that are in front of me more clearly". That's right, everyone, stop looking for the next adventure and value the life you've got. This episode is the latest in the 21st century version of 'something for the dads'. Where the 70s offered a woman in a leather leotard, recent years have been repeating the importance of parents in the life of a child.

Danny being shown in such a positive light doesn't detract from the Doctor. This episode offers Capaldi's Doctor at his most alien. There's still a lot of fun to be had in references to popular culture, "Even my incredibly long life is too short for *Les Miserables*," but when he starts talking about fairy tales, with



trails of breadcrumbs and forests as mankind's nightmare, this is the dark Doctor worth watching.

Clara may want to investigate the bigger picture, but she is reminded not to run away from her responsibilities. The importance of not running away is a theme hammered home to us in the form of Maebh's sister, the runaway that returns. By the time the Doctor is confronting a lot of tiny lights that have a sinister booming voice, Capaldi has played out one of the most ridiculous scenes visually and sold it to us completely. Love it or hate it, he was talking to the spirit of the trees and he looked like he meant it.

"I AM DOCTOR IDIOT!" is the shout from Capaldi, as his Doctor realises that the best way to beat the crisis is to do nothing. Any fans of *The Mark of the Rani* spent the whole episode yelling, "The trees won't hurt you!" at their screens. But this is one of those episodes that requires nothing from the TARDIS crew but to sit back and watch events unfold – but don't let that upset you, because this isn't about the trees.

This Doctor may not be CRB-checked, but as he says, "I'm a Time Lord, not a child minder". This episode is an example of Capaldi's great work with children throughout his time on the show, but here he also sits comfortably next to Samuel Anderson as demonstrating the best of men as role models. These are valuable images and lessons for Doctor Who to give. Maybe the educational remit is alive and well, after all. Try not to dwell on this too much; in an episode where the mantra is to fear a little less and trust more, there are obviously situations where trusting more is clearly the right way to go.

DARK WATER / DEATH IN HEAVEN

David Cromarty

On Friday 31st October 2014, the day before *Dark Water* received its premiere on BBC One, Steven Moffat's *Blink* was voted the scariest ever episode of *Doctor Who* in a *Radio Times* poll. More than once, Moffat himself has put this down to the fact that the Doctor's absence is in itself frightening, but in *Dark Water* we get something more frightening – a Doctor who has no control over the situation.

Whether it's Clara's betrayal, the matter of Missy's identity, or the sudden appearance of the Cybermen, the Doctor is constantly on the back foot. The crowds outside St Paul's Cathedral ignore his pleas for them to run away. Even Doctor Chang's joke about swimming pools leaves him baffled. He needs Osgood and UNIT to turn up and rescue him from the episode's cliff-hanger. This continues in the story's second episode, where it's left up to the Brigadier to rescue Kate and deal with Missy, while Danny rescues Clara



and leads the army of Cybermen to burn the clouds and stop the rain. The Doctor is largely baffled and powerless – resorting in his frustration to insults ("Why? Was he an idiot?") and childish threats ("Could you just hurry up please, or I'll hit you with my shoe"). The direction even lampshades this, as the Doctor walks through a door with a familiar symbol on it, observing "I feel like I'm missing something obvious".

In any other show, this might be a criticism, but childishness has always been one of the Doctor's defining features – "What's wrong with being childish? I like being childish." "There's no point in being grown up if you can't be childish sometimes." – and it helps to keep him relatable. It's not easy to relate to a thousand-plus year old alien who has the kind of powers he does.

And while the Doctor is kept offbalance and unable to play his traditional role in the story, Clara steps forward and not only takes on this role but (in a move that made a certain section of fandom furious) actually claims his identity. It's a wonderful bluff on the part of Steven Moffat, and the decision



to have Coleman's eyes replacing Capaldi's in the title sequence is a master-stroke. Much as I'm an old-fashioned fan who dislikes the idea of a female Doctor, the quality of Coleman's performance here is a pretty convincing argument that it could work.

Speaking of quality performances, the whole story is full of them — Jemma Redgrave, Michelle Gomez and Chris Addison deserve particular praise in a strong cast. But despite brilliant performances elsewhere, it's Peter Capaldi who truly shines above all others. By turns furious, hurt, baffled, frightened and humbled, he gives a masterclass. The Doctor may spend most of the story all at sea, but Capaldi is utterly in control of his performance and never puts a foot wrong.

Steven Moffat's script is similarly disciplined, ranking among the best in the series' history. It takes a huge amount of ambition to juggle the Cybermen, UNIT, the Master, the resolution of Clara and Danny's relationship and a fairly detailed analysis of the Doctor's morals in a single story. But to do all that, add a spectacular action sequence where flying Cybermen attack a UNIT plane, throw in continuity references for the fans - the Brigadier, the woman in the shop - and still examine how grief affects us or what happens when we lie to each other - that takes real skill

So, with all that in its favour, why is it so hated by a significant minority of fans? First of all, it's one of the darkest *Doctor Who* stories ever – certainly on television – and that's not going to be to every fan's taste. The idea that the dead feel pain is particularly horrific,

and goes to the limits of what is acceptable in a series like *Doctor Who* – without exceeding those limits, in my view.

The Doctor's morality is seriously challenged - if you see the Doctor as a straightforward hero, you might have issues with the climactic scene which strongly suggests otherwise, particularly as he raises a weapon and is seemingly prepared to kill the Master in cold blood. Though, of course, he is prevented by the Brigadier...which brings us to the main point of contention. Death in Heaven reveals that Brigadier Alistair Gordon Lethbridge-Stewart, one of the most beloved characters in the series' history, has been raised from the dead as a Cyberman. Like many fans, my initial reaction to this was not

favourable. It doesn't seem right that the Brigadier should end up that way. And yet, if this hadn't have happened, his daughter would have been killed by Missy. It is impossible to believe that he would prefer that. In the context of the story, it's a happy ending. But as we are reminded over and over again, happy endings don't come without a Danny can save the child he price. killed, but he has to give up his life. The Doctor and Clara both survive and get to keep their hands clean - but their desire for the other to be happy keeps them apart, both forced to deal with their loss alone.

Doctor Who shouldn't go to these extremes all the time, but it would be a much lesser series if it didn't do so occasionally.













THOUGH IT'S HARD TO BE RESPONSIBLE FOR SOMEONE WITHOUT THEIR COOPERATION AND CONSENT...



THOUGH HE DID FIND GALLIFREY (NOT THAT IT IMPROVED HIS
MOOD)! AND CLARA, WELL, CLARA FOUND HER OWN WAY.









SOMETIMES, HE TROD ON THIN ICE. BUT BILL, NARPOLE AND THE DOCTOR STOPPED PYRAMID SCHEMES, HELPED MAKE PEACE AND SAVED US ALL FROM THE DARKNESS BEYOND...



WITH WORLD ENOUGH AND TIME THEY FINALLY MET THEIR MATCH IN THE NEW MONDASIAN CYBERNEN. THOUGH MISSY WAS ALMOST MATCHMAKING WITH HERFHIMSELF. IT WAS THE FALL OF THE DOCTOR, AT LAST.



ALL-IN-ALL, PETER CAPALDI'S DOCTOR SHOWED US IT'S NOT ABOUT WINNING, IT'S NOT ABOUT HATE OR BLANE. IT'S ABOUT DOING THE RIGHT THING, BECAUSE IT'S PECENT. BECAUSE IT'S JUST KIND.



LAST CHRISTMAS

Steve Hatcher

Last Christmas, the 12th Doctor's first Christmas Special, originally intended as Clara's last episode, an intriguing exploration of how we perceive the difference between the real world and the world of dreams and indeed asking whether there is any such thing as reality at all.

It really is the best of all the Doctor Who Christmas episodes, is it not - but not just that? Boasting outstanding performances from Peter Capaldi, who at last finds the 12th Doctor within him; from Jenna Coleman who is finally freed from all of the "Impossible Girl" and Danny Pink complications, which had so weighed the character down: from Nick Frost, who rivals Edmund Gwenn and Richard Attenborough as the best Santa ever; and from the entire ensemble cast, all of whom bring an ironic truth to their dream world roles, Last Christmas is the strongest Peter Capaldi episode to date (I write immediately before watching The Pilot) and one of the best Doctor Who stories of them all.

It's a thought that occurs to most people at some time or another – usually during those exploratory teenage years. It can come during a quiet moment,



sitting alone lost in thought or waking in the middle of the night; or it can present itself when one is surrounded by the animated chatter of family and friends. One feels suddenly, terrifyingly alone and begins to wonder, "What if I am imagining all of this? What if I am, even at this moment, in a dream?" Then comes the even more chilling thought, "Perhaps I have just woken up. Perhaps everything that I think has happened to me up to this point, all my memories, knowledge and experiences are the dream. Perhaps everyone I know is a figment of my imagination. Who indeed am I? Am I the person I think I am, or perhaps that is all part of the dream?"

For anyone with an imagination and an ability to look beyond the obvious, it's a moment of mind-blowing revelation, which can transform forever how one looks at ones life and everything and everyone in it. Emphatically, it is a thought that is best avoided exploring too deeply, for that way lies madness. Nevertheless the realisation that our brains are capable of constructing and sustaining alternative realities of such complexity and detail as to be indistinguishable from real life is an important one for each of us.

The question, "How do we know that we are not dreaming?" is one that has inspired some of the greatest moments in science-fiction and fantasy film and television.

In John Landis' 1981 horror classic *An American Werewolf in London*, David (played by David Naughton) recovering in hospital from the attack which has killed his friend Jack and, although he does not yet know it, turned him into a

werewolf, appears to awaken from a series of increasingly bizarre dreams within dreams, featuring his dead friend, some Nazis and Jenny Agguter (but then, who hasn't had that dream?). Probably the best remembered and most highly regarded episode of Star Trek: The Next Generation, the Hugo award winning The Inner Light (1992), sees Captain Jean-Luc Picard rendered unconscious by an alien probe. In his dream state, while minutes pass for the Enterprise crew, Picard lives a full forty years of life as the scientist Kamin, a member of a long extinct species, inhabiting a doomed world. The episode ends on a wistful note, with Picard, restored to his crewmates but alone once more in his cabin, playing the flute that he mastered during his virtual life as Kamin, contemplating the loss of his very real dream home and family and knowing that he now has the responsibility of keeping their memory alive. If anyone has not seen this masterpiece of science-fiction television. please do watch it. It remains immensely powerful even after 25 years.

Another 'best ever' episode, Dwarf's Back to Reality (1992) has the crew apparently killed, but then awakening to discover that for the last four years, they have been playing the Red Dwarf Total Immersion Game. The personas of Lister, Rimmer, Kryten and Cat are all constructs of the game. In reality they are each the antithesis of everything that they would want to be. They are on the point of committing group suicide, when ship's computer Holly manages to get through to them. It is this reality which is the dream, an illusion caused by a toxic attack from the deadly Despair Squid.

The apotheosis of this little sub genre is probably the Wachowski's 1999 classic *The Matrix* (let us not talk of the sequels), in which Keanu Reeves' Neo discovers that all of humanity is trapped in a dream reality, known as the Matrix, which is controlled by a mysterious machine intelligence.

The idea returned to British television in spectacular fashion with *Life on Mars*



(2006-2007) and its successor series Ashes to Ashes (2008-2010), in which the opening monologue of the parent series sets out the dilemma faced by trapped-in-the-past cops Sam Tyler and Alex Drake, "Am I mad, in a coma, or back in time?" Throughout five series the mystery was maintained; is Sam and then Alex in a coma-induced dreamstate, or are their experiences, including Gene Hunt and the other people they meet in the 'past' real in some way? It is finally and disappointingly revealed in the finale of Ashes to Ashes that the world of 1970s and 1980s cop shows is a sort of limbo, where the restless souls of dead police officers go to work out their issues while waiting for admission to paradise. The US version of Life on Mars ambles its shoddy way to an even more bizarre and frankly silly conclusion, with Sam Tyler waking from his 1970s dream adventures to find he has been in suspended animation on a deep space mission to search for life - a 'gene hunt', if you will.

Last Christmas is definitively Doctor Who's most explicit exploration of the dreams within dreams sub-genre, but it is by no means the first time that the series has used the idea.

1968's *The Mind Robber* begins with the Doctor's companions being lured



out of the TARDIS by visions of their homes. The TARDIS is destroyed and the three travellers find themselves in the Land of Fiction, wherein they encounter a whole host of fictional allies and adversaries, before finally meeting and apparently bettering the Master of the Land of Fiction. The story ends with the Doctor waking up from deep sleep in his armchair, back on the TARDIS, having escaped from the land of makebelieve - or perhaps he was never there at all and the whole thing was a dream. Alternatively, perhaps the Doctor, Jamie and Zoë only believe that they have escaped, whereas in reality they are still trapped and all subsequent Doctor Who stories are mere dreams. Or perhaps again, the First Doctor never regenerated and he, Steven and Dodo are still prisoners of the Celestial Tovmaker: or perhaps the Doctor having escaped from both of those dreascapes, survives to regenerate into the Third and then Fourth Doctors, only to become trapped in the Matrix (the Time Lord one) at the conclusion of The Deadly Assassin, where he still remains; or perhaps it is the Sixth Doctor who remains trapped there after The Trial of a Time Lord. Can we be sure?

Twenty-first century Doctor Who had, of course already delved into this territory, with the splendid Series 7 story, *Amy's Choice*, in which Amy Pond must choose between two alternative realities offered to her, domestic life with Rory or adventure with the Doctor. Whichever she decides is unreal will die. Of course, Amy eventually works out that neither alternative is real and that she is in danger of falling into a trap set by the Dream Lord, an evil incarnation of the darker parts of the

Doctor's own psyche. By choosing 'none of the above', she and the Doctor are able to defeat the Dream Lord.

So, the ideas and concepts presented in *Last Christmas* are far from new, but it is the depth and intricacy of the plot which make it so special. After the episode, nothing we have seen can be absolutely guaranteed as having been real. We are left wondering.

Series 8 of Doctor Who had enjoyed some very high points - Listen, Flatline, Mummy on the Orient Express: and some relatively low ones - Kill the Moon, In the Forest of the Night; but it had, for the most part been an enjoyable ride. Nonetheless, brilliant though Peter Capaldi had been, the feeling persisted that he and Steven Moffat hadn't yet quite got the 12th Doctor right. He was still far too grumpy and at times almost unlikeable. Last Christmas was for me, the point where things came together for Capaldi, with the change in his character coming onscreen as a natural development, rather than out of the blue between series. It was a development that had been foreshadowed in Series 9, most particularly in that moment in Dark Water, when the Doctor responds to Clara's betrayal of him with utter forgiveness, "Do you think that I care for you so little that betraying me would make a difference?" This is a beautiful and defining moment for Capaldi's Doctor, however the series ended in more lies and deception, albeit for noble reasons, as both the Doctor and Clara provide the other with a reason to leave them. Now in Last Christmas. we see them re-unite, resolve their remaining differences and decide to

continue travelling in a spirit of friendship.

In advance of Christmas, the signs had not been particularly good. Since around 2006, I had developed a pretty relaxed and tolerant attitude to the Christmas Specials. Certainly during the Russell T. Davies era I had come to realise that these festive treats were designed to be mass-market television, not really aimed at us fans, but rather at the widest possible family audience on a Christmas Day, including those family members too far gone with slumber or intoxication to take in the subtler intricacies of regular Doctor Who plotting. I had learned to smile indulgently at these seasonal fun fests and to take my pleasure in the habitually enormous viewing figures that would result. Things had changed somewhat since Steve Moffat had taken over, with A Christmas Carol and The Snowmen bringing an intelligent sci-fi edge to the Yuletide froth. However, The Time of the Doctor had seemed to be a call back to those earlier, less weighty Specials, and now we were promised... Santa! It seemed like another move backwards towards RTD flim-flam was on the cards. Of course, there was nothing to worry about. Even on Christmas Day, Santa could only appear in the rational, scientific Doctor Who universe (even when overlaid by Moffat's fairytale sensibilities) as a character in a dream. In fact, here he is in a dream, within a dream, within a dream, in a plot so complex and intelligent as to take no Christmas Day prisoners.

The false ending, in which Clara is revealed to be an elderly lady, years after she last saw the Doctor, coming to the end of a rich, happy and fulfilled life is

both heart-warming and heartbreaking, with Jenna Coleman giving an extraordinary performance which shines through the latex, as the older Clara. How superb this would have been, had it served as the real conclusion to Clara's story, but the revelation that this is yet another level of dreaming and that a second chance for the Doctor and Clara is possible, is the perfect ending to the episode and the perfect lead-in to more adventures.

But then again, where do dreams end? As our heroes head off, we discover on the windowsill, Santa's signature gift, a tangerine. Perhaps, just perhaps the big man in scarlet is still around and this is yet another level of dreaming. Maybe none of Series 9 including Clara's ultimate fate is real after all. Perhaps it was the Dream Crabs rather than the Rayen that did for her.

A final thought, during the summer and autumn of 2005 I began to wonder. Doctor Who had returned triumphantly

after 15 and a half years and was now the nation's favourite TV show. The shops were full of Doctor Who merchandise - toys, stationery, clothing, books, magazines, the lot. For the first time since I was a child, it was cool to be a Who fan. On top of that, the England cricket team, my other obsession since childhood, had regained the much-prized Ashes from a previously unbeatable Australia after a gap of 18 years. Life was, strange, wonderful and brightly-coloured, as if in a dream. It occurred to me, perhaps I was indeed dreaming, maybe lying in a coma somewhere. In many ways that was a more credible scenario, than all of this wonder being real life. A year before Sam Tyler, I asked myself a similar question. "Am I mad, in a coma, or is Doctor Who cool?" Who knows? Perhaps we are all dreaming, even now twelve years later. Who knows where dreams begin and end?



THE MAGICIAN'S APPRENTICE / THE WITCH'S FAMILIAR

Tony Fyler

BOOM!

That's the sound of Series 9 opening.

An almost operatic battlefield, and then you realise what's wrong with it – the mix of technologies – and the first time you see it, you get the tingle up your spine. They wouldn't have. They couldn't have! Would this Production Team have had the *nerve* to take us back to the time when we saw a war eat a society backwards, to Tom Baker fresh from his regeneration, to Sarah-Jane and Harry?

You see a child, running through the battlefield, and a soldier trying to help him, only to be sucked under the earth by what is not only a play on words, but a thoroughly creepy visual to boot — a field of hand mines. The kid is doomed if he moves, another tragic casualty on another ghastly battlefield. And then there it comes — the sign of hope, the sonic screwdriver, flying through the air to land at his feet. And there's the Twelfth Doctor, coming to the rescue but so different already — the hair wil-



der, the smile wider, the clothes looser, the ability to speak in whole, encouraging sentences somehow picked up from somewhere. Capaldi's Doctor is already massively different in the precredits sequence to The Magician's Apprentice to the tight-bound verbal slap in the face of his Series 8 persona, like someone's unlaced the corset of his Scottish Presbyterianism a few notches, and it suits him so much it actually gives you hope - hope that there's more to the Capaldi Doctor than the Grumpy Granddad. Hope of something broader and more complex, like he showed in Deep Breath. Hope that now he's got the question of whether he's a good man off his chest, he might be wonderful, able to have some fun in the universe of time and space.

And then the child says his name.

The child tells us the name of the boy who isn't going to die today, and his name is Davros.



And there it is, sinking like a soufflé of death and horror all over Capaldi's Twelfth Doctor's face – the knowledge that the universe won't give him a break. The echo of Tom Baker's philosophical question haunting him and us immediately – if someone pointed out a

child to you and told you the child would grow up to be a ruthless dictator who killed millions...could you then kill that child? The Production Team not only went there, they're proposing to answer us that question, this uniquely dark Doctor choosing, it seems, not to own the name, to run away from an innocent in need, to throw the morality and the legend of the Doctor into question.

Welcome to Series 9. And that's still only the pre-credit sequence of Episode 1!

If you're looking for watchwords for *The Magician's Apprentice* and *The Witch's Familiar*, there are two you can't avoid – 'Epic' on the one hand, and 'Renaissance' on the other. The story is epic in almost everything it does: the size of the issues at stake, from what defines the Doctor, to who or what made Davros the scared, embittered

man who would go on to create the Daleks, to the nature of friendship, with Missy, Clara and even Davros himself claiming some sort of friendly relationship with the Doctor; the philosophical questions it raises, from the rights and wrongs of pre-emptive punishment, to the power and weakness of compassion; and the simple screen-sizzling oomph of its imagery and speeches, from Missy and her snipers to the regeneration of Skaro, to the proper assemblage of Daleks from all ages, to oh yes, the Twelfth Doctor riding a tank, wearing shades and playing an electric guitar. Whatever you actually think of the episodes, you can't get away from their epic scope and ambition.

In terms of the Renaissance, the word actually means looking backward to go forward, and that's the heartbeat of the story. We go back to the Kaled war, to Skaro, to the Fourth Doctor's conun-





drum, and we experience the first real in-depth conversation the Doctor and Davros have had since *Genesis of the Daleks* (Big Finish not included) – the meeting of minds, the clash of philosophies, but now, with a much older Doctor and a Davros who's finally realised he does not control the Daleks, it's a clash between exhausted veterans of the biggest war they've ever known, and there's a dark, sad pathos to their discussions that's never been there before. Davros even makes a joke at which the Doctor finds himself able to laugh.

Besides the key relationship with Davros, there's the Renaissance of Missy, after her completely barking turn throughout Series 8. Here, Gomez is more controlled in her madness, her power, her viciousness and fun, while going beyond the exhausted strop of Death in Heaven and proving herself an old-style Master in the best tradi-

tions, actually showing her friendship for the Doctor while still hating him for what he is. Going backwards to pull the relationship forward into new places, new complexities.

The story dips back into elements of the New Series too – the Shadow Proclamation pop their heads up again, as do the only-recently-seen Sisterhood of Karn. And oh look, there's the Maldovarium. All of it weaves the past into the present, and through the creation of characters like Colony Sarff, helps create a world in which the Doctor is ashamed – not a good man, not a bad man, but one who thought he'd worked out how to be the Doctor after a rocky start, only to have the fallacy of his lesson brought home to him by a confrontation with a young boy on a battlefield.

Yes, by all means, there are some issues with *The Magician's Apprenticel The Witch's Familiar*. There's the

slightly unfortunate renaissance too of The Curse of the Fatal Death, the resonance of Daleks and sewers, and the inescapable idea of what is actually coming up the pipes to throttle the Daleks to death. There's the idea that Davros, rather than having no natural eyes left as has always been implied, has just been keeping a set of perfectly good peepers shut all these years, and most of all, there's the over-clever 'I knew what you were doing and I let you do it' ending from the Doctor, which some would say negates all the sturm und drang along the way.

Yes, The Magician's Apprentice/The Witch's Familiar sets its sights impossibly high, and there are issues along the way, but the remarkable thing is that it actually achieves most of the goals it sets for itself - it's probably the best Davros story since Michael Wisher's original, Julian Bleach really earning the chair, which his turn as the Dalek's pet in The Stolen Earth/Journey's End didn't really allow him to do. It brings a new purpose and vivacity to Missy, after swanning about in the background for all of Series 8 only to emerge with a lacklustre plan at series-end. It kicks off what would be an almost perfect run of stories with a real epic bang, and Holy Mother of All the Time Lords, just look at Capaldi's performance. From the sudden agonies of disgust when he realises who he was going to save, to the positively Tenth Doctor overcompensation cool of the tank-shadesguitar conjunction, to the dark playfulness of 'Anyone for dodgems?' to the doubt about 'being' the Doctor and the endless compassion, even for Davros, all the way through to the way to save his own soul and his best friend's life. bringing us all the way back to the

Fourth Doctor's decision - even though what he does will let the Daleks go on to their destiny, their creation, and even though that will destroy millions of lives, to prove he really is that same man to himself, and that he'll do whatever's necessary to save Clara Oswald, he goes back to the battlefield, saves the young Davros, and teaches him the loophole of mercy. Stirring, thematically enormous stuff, and Capaldi blowing a lot of stories out of the water simply by sheer force of personality, putting The Magician's Apprentice/The Witch's Familiar way up there in the rankings of the Twelfth Doctor's - and New Who's top stories.

If the story of Series 9 is the Twelfth Doctor knowing what he is, but learning how to be it in the wider universe, balancing a duty of care against the reckless, rule-breaking punk-rock streak he knows is in him, and fears might just be contagious, *The Magician's Apprentice* and *The Witch's Familiar* catapults us light-years from where we left the Capaldi incarnation at the end of Series 8, so that he's ready for that more complex, less entirely black-and-white journey into his own hearts, and into the universe of time, space, compassion, rage, atonement and above all...mercy.



UNDER THE LAKE / BEFORE THE FLOOD

Matt Dale

Where should one begin when reviewing these episodes?

Well, that's rather the point now, isn't it? For a story that begins in the middle, moves back to the start (while simultaneously communicating with the middle) before the start catches up with the end, *Under the Lake/Before the Flood* structures itself like a Chinese Puzzle Box. Or, indeed, a certain well-known scene from *Red Dwarf*. One could well ask of the layout of this episode: "so what is it?"

While writer Toby Whithouse does an excellent job using time travel to create a foundation, it is ultimately just that: the foundation. The characters are what bring this piece to life, demonstrating in a very believable way the fear, excitement, fun and anger at the world the Doctor has introduced them to. *Doctor*

Who doesn't always hit the mark in this regard, but here Whithouse and a talented group of guest performers do so admirably.

Morven Christie's excitable O'Donnell and Arsher Ali's more wary Bennett mirror each other extremely well, each displaying elements that any new comgo through. While panion should O'Donnell's positivity perhaps reflects a lot of companions that have been before (providing some redundancy in Clara's presence), in Bennett we see some of the more down-to-earth qualities we haven't really seen since lan and Barbara, and which Pearl Mackie's Bill would bring the following season. Sophie Stone and Zaqi Ismail, meanwhile, make an effective double-act. each showing both strength and vulnerability in equal measure (the former primarily in the form of her disability). The two feel like such a natural fit throughout that, even without any direct hints of romantic interest in the script, the conclusion there feels natural, welcome and not at all surprising. The fact that Lunn's declaration is signed af-



fords us the additional benefit of being able to focus on the performances in Stone's and Ismail's faces, which enables it hit home even harder.

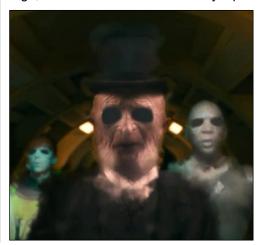
And in an episode well-known for casting Doctor Who's first deaf actress, we ironically benefit from three of the most unique and memorable voices around today: Famously gravelly Peter 'Darth Maul' Serafinowicz giving it his all as the main voice of the Fisher King, ably supported by the unearthly screams of Slipknot frontman Corey Taylor. Now, who are we kidding here? Taylor's casting is a pure gimmick - the sound is nothing Serafinowicz couldn't do himself with the aid of some digital manipulation - but what a fun gimmick... albeit it's hard to imagine a ratings boost via hardened Slipknot fans sitting down with a cup of tea to enjoy Before the Flood just to keep their sensitive ears listening out for their hero. As a bonus, with apparently no sense of irony whatsoever, Colin McFarlane (booming, terrifying voice of ITV gameshow The Cube), dies before he gets the chance to demand "sounds easy, doesn't it?" and spends the next 90 minutes mouthing silently. Insanely genius casting of one of this decade's top vocal talents.

Perhaps the most memorable "star" of the show may be the twist at the end. The Bootstrap Paradox is one well known to sci-fi aficionados, but often unpopular with those who like their plotlines to have a clear and simple resolution (many of whom probably switched off part-way through the Moffat era anyway). Like trying to visualise infinity, time travel paradoxes can generally only be understood after several drinks, accompanied with a know-

ing nod and an "aaaah" shortly before passing out. Personally, I'm not a fan. Frankly, if future-Matt had travelled back in time to warn past-Matt that the resolution to this story hinged on it, past-Matt might never have watched it, leading future-Matt to never have existed in the first place to warn past-Matt to perhaps give it a miss, and present-Matt would have wound up watching it, so it all would have been OK.

Where was I?

Ah, paradoxes. In this case, Whithouse deftly glosses over the twist, using it to provide a "wibbly wibbly timey wimey" conclusion, and an excuse for some wonderful fourth-wall breaking work from Capaldi, all moving too fast to really question it too much. Paradoxes are, for many, frustrating things, but we don't dwell on it enough here to draw attention to it. It's fun and humorous. and before we know it the end credits are rolling. On the topic of that tocamera work from our lead, it's interesting to note that this hasn't been attempted within the confines of a regular episode since Hartnell gave a famous Christmas message all those years ago; at the end of a celebratory epi-



sode on a day where the viewing family may be a touch tipsy, this was a bit of fun. Here, placed at the top of the episode, it's a bold move which frankly most of Peter's predecessors would have failed to pull off. Bravo, Mr C, for making this seem so completely natural. Your guitar-playing talents never go amiss either.

Another element not dwelled on for long but hugely memorable, is the comic moment with the emotional cue cards. Giving Capaldi the chance to display the Doctor's alien-ness in a way that's rarely happened post-2005 (see *Thin Ice* for another big New Series moment, again with the latest incarnation, where Bill is introduced to the Doctor's otherworldliness via a shouting match about the latter's seemingly cold reaction to death), it's funny, adorable, and provides some cute DocClara interplay that's often missing from this season

For me, these two episodes make me feel simultaneously safe and terrified. The terror is obvious: Not only the ghosts themselves, but the repeated

words they silently utter. They play on our fears of being unable to communicate clearly (in particular when faced with an antagonist); for those of us that aren't deaf, Cass is also a constant reminder of this. Certainly one of the more imaginative, yet also simple, enemies this season. So why safe? Quite because of the number of familiar tropes Whithouse pulls upon when weaving this tale ... Characters watching earlier versions of themselves remind us of Father's Day (not to mention the film that did it best of all: Back to the Future Part II), the Fisher King gets to rasp a "Time... Lord!" in keeping with some of the best and cheesiest classic series villains, and the story as a whole is in its Troughtonesque element one of the basiest-under-segiest of the Moffat era. This is far more than just boxticking though, as the familiar elements add up to something much greater than the sum of its parts. Terrifying, yet safe in its recognisability, Under the Lakel Before the Flood becomes an instant classic...

Which just leaves one question: Who really wrote this review?



THE GIRL WHO DIED / THE WOMAN WHO LIVED

Jon Arnold

It's half past four on a normal working day. One of those quiet times in the office, the welcome lull between the blind panic of frenzied activity that comes along every couple of months. The phone goes, and the display tells me it's my wife. Can I get out of work pretty sharply she asks? Only you know that place behind where you work where they've filmed Doctor Who a few times before? They're filming it there today. She's picked up our son from school and is heading over there anyway. Thanks to the delight of flexi time, I'm logged off and bolting for the door in thirty seconds flat. The fanboy gene remains as strong as ever.

It's a twenty minute walk around the perimeter of the grounds of Tredegar House to get to the house itself, without the aid of a TARDIS I'm there in fifteen. right on cue to meet my family. My son's a fizzing bundle of energy - the Doctor is in that building! He might get to actually meet the Doctor himself! All the fizz and energy of a seven year old fan is on full display. If he were any more excited he'd probably take off. As it is he settles for a lot of running around. In hindsight, it's a slightly bad idea. We pass the usual paraphernalia of a location shoot in front of the house. the trucks loaded with lights and wires with some crew tending to the tech and others buzzing back and forth between the trucks and the interior shoot we can't possibly see. We meet a friendly security guard — yes, he says, they're due to break soon, and Peter's a generous man with his limited break time. The guard's an invaluable resource in keeping my son amused, holding conversations about the greatness of Christopher Eccleston's year and David Tennant's first few seasons. Nonetheless, while we're waiting for the Doctor there's trees to be scrambled up and wide open spaces to be run around in.

As is the case with so much filming things do not run to schedule – we got here around five and the cast and crew are over an hour late for their well-earned break. The crew start filing out - unfamiliar but vital faces in getting the show to our screen – and my son begins to get excited, running in circles then almost vibrating on the spot. At last the man himself emerges, a slight weariness to his stride. The security guard calls him over. And this is the magic of Doctor Who: the weariness vanishes and he's all energetic charm.

In short, the experience is what I imagine it must have been like when I saw all those photos of Tom's excitingly mad eyes and smile wider than the Grand Canyon and wished I'd been old enough to be around for it. After all these years Peter Capaldi still seems one of us, just one of us who got his dream role. The smile is as big and wonderful as Tom's and he's genuinely fascinated by what a seven year old has to say to him about how much he loves Doctor Who. He laughs at a joke about 'Dalek bread' as if it's the first time anyone's thought of it, he happily fetches a pen and postcard to give my son a memento. And, before the other children also waiting can meet the Doctor, he poses for a couple of photos. I'm still not quite sure my son believes it: looking at the man in the anorak beside him as if he can't quite believe he's there. It's the sort of moment that turns childhood adoration into lifetime love.

There's no time for my wife and I to grab a photo - others are waiting and Capaldi must need some rest after a long day's filming after all. But that doesn't matter. I'm grown up (well, nearly), I've had my heroes a long time. Of course I'd have loved a photo with the Doctor, feeling like a seven year old all over again. Today though, it's far more important to give my son the full dose of the magic of Doctor Who. My generation of fans might be the past and present of fandom, but my son's generation is the future. If there's one thing Doctor Who tells us, it's to take care of the future. It's what it did to children in the 60s. 70s and 80s that secured its return in the twenty-first century. It's what it's doing to the minds of children now that'll hopefully see it outlast us all. And right now, it's couldn't have a better ambassador, someone who throws himself into the wider responsibilities of the role as enthusiastically as anyone has since the 1970s.

Of course, we watch and try to work out which story he was filming when we met him. Process of elimination tells us it's The Woman Who Lived, the second part of Ashildr's introduction. The first part's a suitably amusing comedy topped off with one of my favourite single shots since Vincent and the Doctor let us see the world through Van Gogh's eyes. It's the second part which delights though - Cath Tregenna musing on immortality much as she did in Torchwood, bringing some sublime imagery (Ashildr's memory books) and a beautifully unlikely Whoish solution to the week's pressing problem. Our memories shape us, but how much are we the sum of our memories? How much does our past matter? Perhaps, just perhaps, the memory of the day he met the Doctor and the jot the Doctor took in meeting him will shape my son for the better. Whatever Ashildr says, perhaps there are some memories you can't forget.

And for all that, thank you Peter.



THE ZYGON INVASION / THE ZYGON INVERSION

David Geldard

The Zygon Invasion/Inversion, is for my money, the defining story of the Peter Capaldi era (although, for the sake of fairness, I should point out that as I write this, only one episode from Season 10 has aired). It incorporates everything I think Doctor Who should be.

I have been a fan of the programme since I was four and the Doctor and Leela came up against the Rutan in the lighthouse at Fang Rock. As I sat watching *The Zygon Invasion* in my forties, it still feels like the same programme but at the same time it is very much a modern day drama with a lot to say about the world we now live in.

Doctor Who has always had a social conscience and many stories have mirrored real-life events and situations. Of course, this goes right back to the 1960s and the William Hartnell era. The Daleks were very much based on the Nazis and at the time that second story was broadcast, World War II had been less than twenty years previously. The Dalek Invasion of Earth (1964) showed the Daleks in charge of a labour camp in Bedfordshire, a scene that perhaps tapped into our deepest fears of what could've been.

Further stories in the 'Classic series' held a mirror up to then-current social/political issues – The Curse of Peladon (the EEC), The Green Death (environmental issues), Warriors of the Deep (the Cold War), Vengeance on

Varos (video nasties) and I'm sure many more...

Like 1975's Terror of the Zygons, I think it's fair to say The Zygon Invasion/ Inversion draws a lot of influence from the 1956 film Invasion of the Bodysnatchers. With its plot of alien invaders making duplicates of people that emerge from pods, the film was released at the height of Cold War/ communist paranoia and was said to be a commentary on the 'Reds under the bed' fears and the perils of ignoring McCarthyism.

The Zygon Invasion/Inversion tackles many modern-day fears surrounding refugees, terrorism and radicalisation. Not bad for something which is often dismissed as "just a kids' programme".



The Zygons were an iconic design, pure nightmare fuel, and when the classic series ended in 1989 there was a sense of injustice that they had only ever had one outing. It says a lot that the current design doesn't differ much from the 1975 originals; they are a classic monster.

Capaldi shines in this story from the lightweight moments such as playing 'Amazing Grace' alone in the TARDIS on his electric guitar, referring to himself as 'Dr Disco' and admitting to Clara Oswald and U.N.I.T. that he 'once snogged a Zygon'. Ultimately though, the high point of the story is his antiwar speech. It's a speech that is delivered with such sincerity, such eloquence and such emotion that it truly is Peter Capaldi's finest Doctor Who moment and one of the greatest moments in Doctor Who ever.

There, tucked away in a piece of Saturday night entertainment is a speech you want every world leader and every child on Earth to hear. It's a real testament to Peter Capaldi that when he

delivers that speech it makes your hairs stand on end and your eyes fill up. He really brings Peter Harness's wonderful script to life. Peter Capaldi won a BAFTA for his portrayal of the sweary Malcom Tucker in *The Thick of It*. It is somewhat of a travesty that he wasn't nominated for this performance.

A special mention must also go to Ingrid Oliver for her portrayal of Osgood in this story. If Rose Tyler represented the 'everyperson', Osgood represents the *Doctor Who* fan. Adorned in her Tom Baker scarf, her Sylvester McCoy jumper or Matt Smith bowtie, Osgood is intelligent, quirky and above all dedicated to the Doctor. She would've been great companion material but I hope we will see her, along with Kate Stewart, as a mainstay of U.N.I.T for years to come.

Whatever the rest of the Capaldi era brings, this is a true *Doctor Who* classic and Peter Capaldi certainly has been a great Doctor. I will be sad to see him go.



SLEEP NO MORE

Elton Townend Jones

It's beginning to feel like a long time since Steven Moffat's first golden season, and much seems to have come loose since the ioie de vivre of The Eleventh Hour or Vampires of Venice. The dialogue's become self-aware and showy - juvenile - and everyone's making fast with unrealistic guips. starts with Amy's weekly attempts at staying on top of 'sassy' (a mutation of yesterday's 'feisty') then contaminates the entire cast until we now no longer hear real characters in real - stressful -Now, we hear the leaksituations. through voices of middle-aged men hunched over laptops, trying to top their last witty line (always good on paper); middle-aged men who need a firm editor to tell them 'no' and point out the dampened drama, the diluted product. On the increasingly unenjoyable journey towards Clara (with such exceptions as A Christmas Carol, The Power of Three, and The Girl Who Waited) Amy begins to look like the most amazing drag act ever conceived by a shy but brilliant writer from Paisley. When Clara arrives, unintentional non-reality settles with a distracting thud. quips are the dialogue now and the plots are the lexical panic-vomit of a man whose ever-increasing workload has tattered his self-confidence, forcing his insecurities to overcompensate. Ideas are developed and abandoned, incomplete; implicit promises to attentive viewers are ignored. Plots begin to think themselves intriguing and clever, though the adults who've seen other television and movies or read the odd book or comic know otherwise. But, as the other adults who enjoy being in the 'cleverness' club for a change often tell

them, it's not for adults anyway. This sugar-rush drama – still the best kid's show on the box, then – is beautiful to look at but hard to love.

Then comes Capaldi, the great new hope, replacing probably the most fascinating yet poorly served actor to ever play the Doctor. Deep Breath, however, is the strongest debut of any incarnation, yet what follows is a season of 1985-style varying quality. There's the sublime (Listen, The Caretaker, Flatline) but there's also much drivel (robots in Sherwood, forests enveloping London, that moon egg, mummies in space, a tasteless finale - despite Missy being brilliant - and the 'meh' Last Christmas with its wasted poignant departure for Jenna Coleman). next, Series 9, opens with an almost excellent Davros story, sadly undermined by its sugar-richness. quipped to the max and devoid of restraint. What follows is weaker still: Viking Girl stories, tedious and forced with a guest actor incapable of effectively delivering the material (yet another redundant variation on the River Song format; itself destined never to be adequately utilised); the dull, undeservedly smug Lake story; the worthy but crass Zygon two-parter (lauded for its one good moment); and an appalling mess with a Lion King...

But then comes fresh air – and from an unexpected source: Mark Gatiss (who has offered diminishing returns since his much-overlooked moment of genuine terror in the pre-titles of *The Unquiet Dead*). Yes, *Heaven Sent* will soon get everyone's attention, but its lofty status won't be quite so magnificent to those who crack what's going on before the titles even roll, solid though it is

(thanks to a fabulous lead performance and a Beethoven-filching score). And around it sit the amateurish *Face the Raven* and the superfluous *Hell Bent*, spoiling it, undermining it.

The true gem of Series 9, hiding away under rags and garments of previous eras and conjuring the essential atmosphere of Doctor Who is Gatiss' Sleep No More. Immediately subverting the usual form - no title sequence (and, astoundingly, no end credits) - telling the story through a thoroughly unreliable narrator, it dares to pare down previous excesses. When the Doctor and Clara wander into the middle of the narrative, their dialogue is immediately more like that of real people in a real situation. Free of their endless quipping, it's like being with the Doctor and Sarah, say, rather than Chandler Bing and, well, Chandler Bing. And the story isn't theirs - it's not about them for a change, or the overblown, top-heavy legend of them. It's about Doctor Who that series we used to watch about a bloke and his mate having adventures in space and time. It's also a beautifully made episode; possibly superior in production terms to any other this season. Everything sings: the directorial style, the camera-work (chaotic and disorientating), set design (especially the sleep pods) and effects (amazing, yet unfussy), sound design...

Stand-out visuals include the holograms - not just the singers, but the information hologram (amusingly holding another hologram on its palm) and stunning Neptune as viewed from the station window. The whole production is confident, smart and slick with an understated brilliance that doesn't scream 'look at me' for a change; the story - and its audience - are afforded time and room to breathe. The jokes work, the details are exquisite and everything is precise, scary and funny without bludgeoning the viewer into loving it. Similarly, the Doctor's not bragging, left, right and centre and is actually placed at a narrative disadvantage: incidental, not focal,

The adventure itself, is pure old-fashioned *Who*: a scary re-



interpretation of The New Adventures, played for keeps, with a tangible 'real world' ambience often missing in recent episodes. With its black and white sequences and echoes of radiophonic and library music in Murray Gold's score (particularly in the larder sequence), this base-under-siege tale is, for my money, the best Troughton story ever made. So the 'sleep' monsters are bizarre, but like a lot of naff ideas in Doctor Who (robot yetis whose guns shoot webs, say) they're not the purpose of this instalment. The central monstrous idea is potentially very real: that a time will come when the leisure. pleasure and necessity of sleep will be taken from us by corporate and personal greed; 'an inconvenience to be bartered away' (making this episode very much a piece with the later, equally excellent. Oxvaen). Deliciously. though. mad scientist Rasmussen (Reece Sheersmith, looking like he's wandered in from the Graham Williams era) finally confesses that the sleep infection is a phantom distraction from the true threat - an electronic signal





that will, when transmitted, affect all who watch Rasmussen's testimony: the episode itself. Though no narrative participant sees it, the suggestion lingers that the *Doctor Who* viewer has been infected. It's no *Blink*, but then episodes like that are few and far between; and it's for kids, remember?

It may seem astounding that the Doctor simply leaves (as he arrived) in the middle of the action, flustered and confused by Rasmussen's lies, but he destroys the grav shields of the station, crashing it, before heading for Triton to scupper Rasmussen's plans. that's all we're allowed to see, because we're being told a story by a different medium than usual (prompting us to wonder, 'What kind of dust usually transmits Doctor Who to us?'). story remains elusive, like a modern day Warriors' Gate or Ghost Light, leaving us wanting, but not dissatisfied, and the final visual representation that 'sandman' Rasmussen hasn't been what he claimed to be is one of the most well-executed and chilling moments in *Doctor Who*'s history.

Sleep No More may appear pedestrian when placed against the convoluted spaghetti of its parent season, but it's easily the most re-watchable episode; a place you go, not something you simply

watch. Tying itself to nothing but its own narrative, it's entirely independent – an utterly faultless piece of *Doctor Who*, for the first time in a while. And Capaldi is brilliant in it.

Recently, Doctor Who seemed to undergo a depression or a crisis of selfconfidence. Steven Moffat has confessed that his overwhelming schedule sent him to a dark and difficult place, but at time of writing, Series 10 has begun and the crisis seems to have abated. The show has its sincerity and wonder back, having seemingly discarded the defensive pretence that made it appear smug. Which is good, we're going to need that in our own dark times. Doctor Who's now back to telling stories that can be watched in isolation not as an arc, episodes that keep the viewer's attention without drawing it to the mechanisms and methods utilised in making it. By not persistently yelling 'Look - I'm clever and spectacular' (which only ever invites criticism) stories like Sleep No More allow us to get on with noticing Doctor Who's brilliance for ourselves.



FACE THE RAVEN

Grant Bull

'Face the Raven' is arguably more about the companion than the Doctor and on this basis the story should really belong to Clara and in some ways it does but it's the realism of the Doctor that fully allows it to.

Emotion is realism, as we travel through our day to day lives, we flit between so many different feelings; from the good to the bad. Why do we watch television? To escape those emotions? Certainly sometimes that is the case. I personally have lost myself in many an episode of Doctor Who when I have felt down, it's a comfort blanket to me, a passage into a different world, a safe world protected by the Doctor. Yet sometimes we watch television to share emotions. To feel a characters joy can bring broad smiles to our faces whilst pain or sorrow can make tears flow

It has to be said that Doctor Who since its revival in 2005 has played heavily on our emotions. Though the 'Classic' era did have its moments it wasn't at the forefront like it is now. Is it overplayed in the new series? Perhaps at times, perhaps a drama every week isn't always required but that is modern television for you.

Let's rewind to Adric's death in 'Earthshock'. A major moment in Who history, the death of a companion and the closing titles played out in silence over a shot of Adric's shattered badge. Powerful or not? Each person has an opinion on this and many differ. What I would argue is the dramatics of this moment should have hit us before,

through the Doctor. Now I'm not criticising the performance of Peter Davison for one moment but instead the fact that the script should have brought about the depth of the situation we were observing.

Let's bring it forward to 'Face the Raven' and the death of Clara Oswold. When we reach the Doctor's realisation of the Clara's actions and the position it leaves her in what we see from Peter Capaldi is raw emotion. Anger, frustration and sorrow all thrashed together at the impending loss of a companion, a friend and ultimately someone who trusted him when he whisked her away in his blue box. Those feelings remain too; Clara is not forgotten and he carries that guilt, that burden for episodes to come. That's realism.

Peter Capaldi has always been a wonderful actor, he has a face and a demeanour that you know can change on the flip of a coin. As the Doctor he has portrayed that better than others and I would argue the best. His ability to be able to switch between emotions is startlingly honest. Happiness to sorry, passive to angry, confident to weak. We all have these moments when we feel a certain way and events make us feel different at a quick pace.

Going back to my opening point about this episode belonging to Clara; like Adric there was a mixed reaction to her character and indeed to her death. However no matter what was felt by who is cannot be argued that the emotional rollercoaster we watch the Doctor go through does not make us feel for his lose. Like I say this episode is about Clara but it ends up belonging to Peter Capaldi.

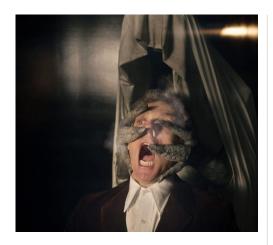
GEAVEN SENT

Allan Lear

Being showrunner of *Doctor Who* is like being England manager (even if you are Scottish). It doesn't matter who you are, what you do or what your track record is like, the very fact of being in the job means that certain people are going to hate you. Steven Moffat knows that from his time in the head job: running *Who* means you face endless flak from huge numbers of people who believe they could do better despite having no experience in the field.

It's true that Moffat had set himself an impossibly high bar with his Tenth Doctor episode *Blink*, and I for one definitely have my problems with certain aspects of his time in charge of the series as a whole. But I will defend Moffat, volubly and at the drop of a hat, because throughout his tenure as the head honcho of *Who* he has steadfastly and determinedly stuck to the proposition that just because *Doctor Who* is a family show does not mean it has be pabulum.





In the face of much whinging from tabloid newspaper "journalists", nonscience-fiction fans and other sorts of people who didn't pay attention in school, Moffat continually refused to dumb down his idea of the show in order to make it more palatable to fatuous mediocrities. Instead, coming to the end of Capaldi's second series and building to a cliffhanger, Moffat risked the wrath of all the dunderheads on Earth by writing *Heaven Sent*, an episode so unashamedly highbrow that Jeremy Paxman might deign to sit next to it in a green room.

Unusually for Who, critical reaction to Heaven Sent was unmixed. Critics loved it and were ungrudging with their praise for its audacity, its depth and its sweep, its humanity and its proud cleverness. According to Wikipedia, Heaven Sent retains the highest critical appreciation level of any episode of Doctor Who at all, ever, full stop. Its combination of devastatingly raw emotion and unrepentant complexity make it both demanding and compelling, a difficult, powerful, all-encompassing text unlike anything else you will find in a primetime television slot and which demonstrates superbly why people who

follow *Who* are better than everybody else.

Series Nine, the Twelfth Doctor's second series, is notable already as the point where the Peter Capaldi stopped holding back and started pouring thespian energy straight out of the vortex down the barrel of the camera. Others in this very annual will have talked about his wonderful onscreen chemistry with Julian Bleach in The Witch's Familiar and his moving monologue about the follies of war in the Zygon two-parter. I've spoken before about the increased range he shows in Last Christmas and the showing of joy for the first time on Father Christmas' sledge. But Heaven Sent is when Capaldi gets to do it all, all on his own, without other actors around hindering him or slowing him down.

In Heaven Sent Capaldi demonstrates without peradventure why he was cast as the Doctor. The one quality a Doctor needs above all others is charisma. and that goes quadruple when the episode is almost totally void of any other speaking characters. Capaldi is magnetic throughout, and as he runs the gamut of emotions from ambivalence to zeal - taking in despair, elation, fury and so much else besides - he never puts a foot wrong. This is why, when he was announced as the Twelfth Doctor, those of us already familiar with his work were punching the air: because we knew that, given a solid enough script, this is what he could do for the show

It works in the series arc, as well. Coming as it does right after *Face the Raven* and Clara Oswald's apparent and/or genuine death, the loneliness of

the Doctor and his grief underscore the loss of a companion in a way that has never been seen since the legendary silent credits for Adric, and it isn't Heaven Sent's fault that the showrunner goes on to undermine this by bringing Clara back for a silly and dramatically unsatisfying series denouement (see above re: problems with Moffat). For those of us who were already sick to a gory death of her, this episode also came as a welcome break; and with the advent of the box set, we can skip the disappointingly lightweight Hell Bent completely and pretend Series Nine went out on this Himalayan high.

As I write, we are two episodes into Series Ten and already the whimpering from the encephalitically subnormal has begun. Smile - Frank Cottrell Bovce's second and superior contribution to the Twelfth Doctor's run - is apparently already under fire for being too abstruse and complicated plotwise for the man on the Clapham omnibus to contain within his frail mentality. Let me be clear about this: it isn't. It's perhaps a little information-dense for people who find it hard to BLOODY WELL PAY ATTENTION, but it isn't convoluted or overly-complex in any way. And I just hope, for their own sake, that the people who struggled with it never get anywhere near Heaven Sent, because the BBC can hardly afford to be linked to dozens of slack-jawed hominids being found dead at home with their meagre brains exploded out of their ears.

Have I written nothing of substance? Is this article nothing but intellectual snobbery thinly disguised as televisual criticism? Well, that is because I have just rewatched *Heaven Sent*, and I have nothing to add. I could cascade superlatives on it until the sun falls into the sea, and still have contributed not a thing to the episode itself. It's a Cyclopean achievement of television, the sort of bold, inimitable production that inspires screenwriters to devote *just another year* to plodding through the bureaucracy and hackery-compromise in the hope of getting that one shining script to screen in anything like as pure and untrammelled a form as this.

I said before that Heaven Sent is a demanding text, and it is; it's the TV equivalent of a difficult book. But, like a difficult book, it rewards the effort you put into understanding it, and it sends you away thinking. Famously, in British law the test for obscenity is whether a piece of art has "a tendency to deprave and corrupt" its audience - i.e. whether you will actually be a worse person for having absorbed it. I honestly think that HS is that rarest of all things, a television show which will expand your horizons and stretch your imagination, and send you away, miraculously and wonderfully, a better person for having seen it





Paul Driscoll

The richness and intensity of Peter Capaldi's performance in the unique single-hander Heaven Sent will almost certainly make it the most lauded episode of the entire Twelfth Doctor's era. The Doctor's recurrent nightmare is generally regarded as The Empire Strikes Back of the series nine three part finale, sandwiched as it is between Face the Raven and Hell Bent. Hyped up in advance because of its novel lack of supporting characters, right from the get-go it was overshadowing the dramatic return of Gallifrey in Hell Bent; an episode which for many was something of a let-down. The established wisdom seems to be that the pattern of series nine, with the much heralded return of the two-parter (albeit in quite a different form), was strong opening episode followed by disappointing conclusion.

There is however, an argument to be had that this divisive final episode deserves much better praise than it currently receives. As brilliant as Capaldi is at commanding the stage all to himself in Heaven Sent, there is a limit to



what can be achieved in isolation. The real payoff, for both the actor and the audience comes when we see the consequences of that four and a half billion years of hell. How will the experience affect the Doctor now that he has finally returned to Gallifrey, and will it have changed him for better or worse? Those were some of the key questions arising from that jaw dropping moment when the Doctor finally broke out of the confession dial and we realised he was standing on Gallifreyan sand.

Talk about going back home the long way around. I repeat - four and a half billion years?! It's hardly what the Eleventh Doctor had in mind when he uttered those game-changing words at the end of The Day of the Doctor. Steven Moffat promised that the 50th anniversary special would be as much a looking forward as a looking back. It was supposed to set into motion a new raison d'etre for the Doctor, one that would keep the show fresh and hopefully alive for another 50 years or more. Few then would have expected that after only two more series, the Doctor would have already reached his final destination.

If Hell Bent is viewed as the culmination, not only of the post Day of the Doctor arc, but of the whole revived series with its guilt ridden, post timewar last of the Time Lords, then it is bound to disappoint. True, there are some great additions to the mythos of Gallifrey — most notably the Time Wraiths and the Cloisters underneath the Capitol (even if it does play out as a shameless parade of Doctor Who villains, just as we'd come to expect with a Moffat finale). More subtly, Moffat

scratches at the surface of the class divide between the Shobogans and the Time Lords, and the Doctor's liminal place between the two. That said, despite such innovations and the Doctor's fist pumping "now get off my planet" to Rassilon, the fate of the Doctor's home planet is ancillary to the plot and leaves more questions than answers. That's because this episode was never really about finding Gallifrey. Hell Bent is a tale of the lost not the found, the broken not the healed, and the beginning not the end. For the Doctor is grieving, hurting and completely averse to endings.

It's another example of a favourite Steven Moffat question, just what is it that makes the Doctor the Doctor? And in that respect it's no different to The Name of the Doctor or Death in Heaven. But it is retold here in its rawest, most consequence heavy form as Moffat dares to ask 'when does the Doctor stop being the Doctor, and what would happen if he did ever break his vows?' In Clara's debut episode, The Snowmen, the Doctor is passively resisting his calling, hiding away in his





TARDIS in the clouds. But by the end of their adventures together, all thanks to the often forgotten machinations of Missy, now he is actively betraying his promises.

Even in his most twisted state, as the man bred for war on Karn, according to Time Lord legend the Doctor never used a weapon. It is deliberately flagged up here by the firing squad. But we have already been tricked into assuming the Doctor's pacifism. When asked to drop his weapons – what is it that the Doctor is holding? A spoon (c.f. Robots of Sherwood). Rassilon then points out that the Doctor's weapon of choice is words. It is the Doctor's stoic silence that frightens him the most, and makes the viewers equally anxious about what he is up to.

Clara voices our concerns by observing that she preferred him when he was wearing his red velvet jacket, because it was more 'doctory'. Viewed in this context, it is surely widely off the mark to suggest that the episode is the pinnacle of the so-called Clara heavy arc. This is more about him than it is her. In fact Clara calls it at the end when she writes: "run you clever boy and be the Doctor," in place of the egocentric "run you clever boy and remember (me)".

The most extraordinary thing about Hell Bent is not the General regenerating into a black woman, nor even Clara cheating death (sort of) by stealing a TARDIS and flying off with Me. The most shocking aspect of both incidents should be that the Doctor caused them to happen. What is even more astonishing is that Hell Bent takes us up close and personal into the Doctor's psyche. For the first time in 52 years we were allowed to peer into his world through an unfrosted window. In short. the Doctor of Hell Bent became the most human and the most relatable he had ever been.

True to form, Moffat misdirects the viewers throughout Hell Bent, no more so than when it comes to the biggest

question of all - who or what is the hybrid. The ambiguity is clear from the start when the Doctor announces it that the hybrid is 'me.' Is he referring to himself or to Ashildr? It is further complicated by the Time Lord's assumption that it is a Time Lord/Dalek half-breed, especially since that possibility was thrown up independently in the series opener, The Magician's Apprentice/The Witch's Familiar. It is an opportunity for Moffat to once again tease us with a good old Doctor Who chestnut (just as he did with the Doctor's name and the Doctor's wife). In the ill-fated 1996 TV Movie the Doctor is half-human on his mother's side, and here it is brought up again, only to become an unanswered irrelevancy. "Does it matter?" says the Doctor, echoing an oft heard real world comment whenever the debate resurfaces about the canonical status of the line.

Whatever side of the fence you sit on with regards to the Doctor's ontological status, what matters here is that the Doctor shares at least one fundamental human flaw: the inability to let go. It is



the Achilles heel of growing too close to another person, someone whose loss threatens your own existence. The Doctor's actions to an outsider might seem like he is playing out an obsession, but they are born of an overprotective streak. He calls it his duty of care, showing how far he has come. Is this the same man who once said that '(Clara) cares so I don't have to' (Into the Dalek)? It is tainted love that drives his reckless and ultimately futile mission to bring Clara back from the dead. The hybrid as it turns out is the fatal attraction of the Doctor and Clara, not because either of them is special in their own right, but because together they form a unique chemistry.

Bemoaning Clara's resurrection as another example of Steven Moffat's inability to let a character stay dead, spectacularly misses the point. Clara Oswald might have saved his life count-

less times when she was splintered into fragments across his timeline, but ultimately she is not good for the Doctor. They both know that one of them has to forget the other. And this time it has to be him. Should those memories ever recur there would be a risk that he might stop being the Doctor again.

The tragedy is not that the Doctor has no knowledge of Clara, but that he can only tell of their adventures as if they had no personal impact on him, as if they were made up stories. The closest he can get to her now is through a song - an impression, a feeling. As if to make that emptiness all the more poignant, Clara's TARDIS takes the form of the American diner, reminding him not of her, but of Amy and Rory. It was a deliberate self-denial on Clara's part - the last time she would ever save the Doctor. The ending he didn't want, but the one he needed the most.





THE RUSBANDS OF RIVER SONG

Kevin Farrell

The Husbands of River Song would be the last episode before the series took its longest hiatus (366-days) since its comeback in 2005, so it is somewhat fitting that the story gave us a retrospective look back at one of the integral arcs of the Moffat era with a nostalgic conclusion (one would currently assume) to the Doctor and River's time -twisted relationship. Any fears that the tale would be overly self-indulgent were soon washed away though, as we saw Alex Kingston burst back into our lives with her bombastic portrayal of this much-loved archaeologist. Indeed, for the first forty minutes or so we were treated to a fun-fuelled comedy romp, which was just the thing to wake us from our post-Christmas-dinner slumber.

The plentiful supply of references to adventures past were sprinkled with just the right balance to satiate the appetite of fans who might have been closely mapping out the non-linear marriage of the two headliners on their very own flowchart, while never risking the alienation of the plentiful supply of more casual viewers that each festive episode attracts. The story also managed to find an interesting new angle to the relationship: not just with the fact that this would be the third Doctor with whom we'd see River flirting but also because for the first two-thirds of the episode, River was completely in the dark as to the Doctor's identity; a pleasing, symmetrical role-reversal from the first time we met River in the Library

with Tennant's Doctor. It was the Doctor's post-Clara grumpiness that set the tone for the early minutes of the episode when even the TARDIS was trying to force a bit of Christmas cheer upon the Time Lord but as we progressed, it was hats off (or reindeer antlers off?) for Capaldi's portrayal of a man coming through the cycle of grief and finally being able to enjoy adventuring again that was sublime.

The story began with our first ever meeting with Nardole, who was in the employ of River. He was seen wandering around a remarkably twee human colony in the far future and searching for a pre-arranged meeting with a surgeon. One case of mistaken identity later and the he and the Doctor found themselves at the site of a crashed flving saucer with the Doctor meeting the main protagonists of the show: firstly, River herself and, secondly, the cyborg King Hydroflax who - the Doctor was pretty shocked to learn - was currently River's husband. These early, sweeping brushstrokes of character and setting painted the canvas upon which the story would unfold, and all three of the characters we got to meet before the snowy titles rolled were clearly playing it for comedy purposes.





The main thrust of the plot was soon revealed: the universe's most expensive diamond had become stuck inside the head of Greg Davies's permanently angry monarch and River had a plan to extricate it, make her escape and sell it to the highest bidder. As with all the best-laid plans in Doctor Who, it all deviated off track pretty rapidly. Not least when Hydroflax himself overheard River explaining these initial details to the man she still thought was just the surgeon she had hired. Hydroflax, for reasons best known to himself, decided to remove his head from his massive cybernetic body for safe keeping, while instructing his remaining hulking frame to kill the Doctor and River. The inclusion of British comedy big guns, Davies as well as Matt Lucas, is probably a further indication that we shouldn't be over-thinking the on-screen shenanigans but instead just enjoy for the lighthearted seasonal fun-fest it needed to be. For his part, Greg Davies clearly revelled in the challenge of acting with nothing but his head on show, creating a comical set of facial contortions throughout his performance, fitting for a leader barely holding himself, figuratively and literally, together.

Having grabbed the now defenceless head and inelegantly stuffed it into a holdall, River and the Doctor were teleported out of the spaceship, leaving poor old Nardole at the mercy of the cyborg body looking for a new head. While we must assume that no-one at the time either watching or working on the show knew that Matt Lucas would come back to reprise the role for an entire series, we do get the opportunity to see the foundational elements of his character being developed on-screen. It is further testament to the care put into that character development that we can see one-off characters like this one, and much like Donna Noble previously, so seamlessly be brought back

into the series as regulars. Nardole's bumbling, grumbling butler figure is very easy to enjoy and the banter between him and Capaldi's slightly irritated Doctor, such as when he was telling him to uncross his arms out of respect during the first meeting with Hydroflax, is quite charming and a little taster for what would come during series 10.

We then discover that the help at the other end of the teleport, much to the Doctor's bemusement, was also one of the eponymous 'husbands' in the form of Ramone. There seems to have been a big chunk of story about Phillip Rhys's character that was missing from THORS; no sooner had we met him and he'd delivered River and her companion back to the TARDIS, than he became yet another slice of new head fodder for the increasingly vicious big, red baddie. It felt like we should've seen or heard a little more of him and how he came to be such a part of River's life but the pace was too fast to dwell on such matters. It felt like this

could have been the perfect moment for the reveal to River that this curmudgeonly old surgeon was in fact yet another incarnation of yet another of her husbands. However, that would have initially denied us the joyful moment when Twelve got to act like a new companion upon entering his trusted, dimensionally transcendental old time machine for the first time...or. more accurately, acting how he thought a new companion should act. quently, it would have denied us the brilliantly subversive reveal later in the restaurant the cruise on liner, "Harmony and Redemption". In order to get to this spaceship, curiously reminiscent of the Titanic from another Christmas Special, Voyage of the Damned, the cyborg body of Hydroflax, now complete with interchangeable Nardole and Ramone heads, managed to get onboard the TARDIS and enable both the TARDIS's departure and the next part of River's plan to be enacted.



After the Police Box had arrived aboard the space-faring vessel we got to meet a couple more fabulously realised characters as the high-octane adventuring careered towards its conclusion. First up was the ship's insectoid maître d', the fawning, overly effusive Flemming, who showed the Doctor and River to their table for the meeting with the contact who'd be buying the diamond from River. And second, we got to meet that contact himself, Scratch, the properly terrifying representative of the Shoal of the Winter Harmony, a species who we would get to know much better in the following Christmas Special, but who here revealed themselves to be worshippers of none other than King Hydroflax himself, meaning that the diamond's location deep within the brain of the very monarch that they were trying to honour by procuring it was going to prove tricky for everyone. while, Flemming had been tricked into unlocking the deadlock-sealed baggage hold into which the multi-headed Hydroflax cyborg had been secured and so, before long, everyone had been brought together for the final showdown.

In this tense scene, Hydroflax's body destroyed its own head to reveal the diamond and Flemming betrayed River by advising all present that she could be used as bait to attract the legendary Doctor, whose head would be Hydroflax's, erm, crowning glory. It was at this juncture that River gave a rousing Doctor-esque speech stating how her love for him was not reciprocated and how it would be beneath him to place himself in harm's way just for her. As she caught the gaze of the man standing beside her, the scales fell from her eyes and the Doctor, with a twinkle in

his eye clearly relished uttering River's very own catchphrase back at her: "Hello, Sweetie". It was a genuinely gorgeous moment that marked the point in the story when it was about to switch gear into a more poignant slice of melancholy to mark the end of this unique relationship. However, that was not before the couple made their escape once more in a frantic sequence that saw our two heroes finally get back to the Ship, moments before the "Harmony and Redemption" crashed into the planet Darillium.

The name, Darillium, was one we've heard before and we discover here that it is to be the location of River and the Doctor's final night together. The Doctor seems to have been trying to avoid it for quite some time, knowing that the diary was full and their time was coming to an end. He gave her a gift of the sonic screwdriver that we first saw way back in their first adventure, which neatly tied a bow around the River Song storyline. Peter Capaldi gave a tour de force in this adventure, portraying a roller-coaster of emotions that were fitting for both Twelve's post-Clara recovery, and the for the emotional investment that predecessor Matt Smith gave to the relationship with River, thus making The Husbands of River Song a fitting finale for this era of the series.

Of course, it's not a hundred percent certain to say that we will never see her again; we've learnt never to say never within the realm of *Doctor Who* before, but the final moment where the onscreen message "And they lived happily ever after" got corrected to simply "And they lived happily" felt like a satisfying denouement.

THE RETURN OF DOCTOR MYSTERIO

Christopher Stone

I've never been much of a fan of the *Superman* films. The character himself is a little too omnipotent for my liking. Superman, without having the shortcomings of heroes such as Spider-Man or Iron Man, lacks the vulnerability necessary to engage. These fundamental issues always seem to lead to a contrived plot, some ridiculous excuse for getting out the Kryptonite and then reaching a denouement which is often quite unsatisfactory.

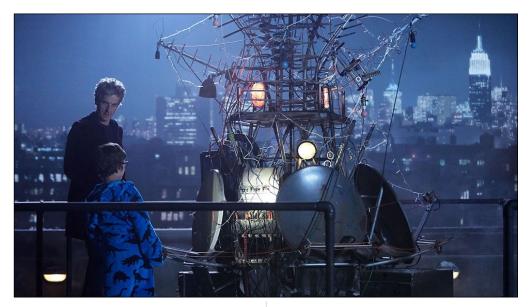
The very first *Superman* film is a great example of this. An engaging opening degenerates into a disjointed middle and a farcical closing twenty minutes. At the point where Lex Luthor wins, Superman just zooms off into space. Bizarrely then the hero flies so fast around the world, at such a speed, to force it to rotate in the opposite direc-

tion. Instead of this causing tidal waves and natural disasters equal to or worse than those achieved by the villain, this causes time to flow backwards. I often wonder if the idea of the temporal orbit for the *Doctor Who TV Movie* was stolen from this. Anyway, this give Superman the opportunity to save the day (again) and bring the movie to a conclusion in a very unsatisfactory way.

Despite these brutal criticisms, the film is not without merits. The performance of the leads is great, with Margot Kidder probably being the definitive Lois Lane and Reeve certainly being a wonderful Superman. The highlight for me is when these two are together and the rooftop dating scene stands out from the rest of the film. It is no surprise then, that when Moffat decided to do a superhero *Doctor Who* tale, he decided to rework this encounter and make this the centrepiece of the episode.

The Return of Doctor Mysterio hits the mark from the very beginning with com-





ic strip roots in evidence from the opening shot. Starting with comic boxes merging into the story, the origin of the Ghost is dealt with at the beginning in a lovely and substantial pre-credit sequence.

So many nods are made to the superhero genre in the opening minutes. The Doctor's entry is almost straight out of Spider-Man, Grant's glasses echo those of Clark Kent and his love of comics turns out to be the reason for his creation. There are also nods aplenty to the past: the Doctor being mistaken for Geoff (or Santa Claus as he prefers to be called) and the set up connecting with the loss of Amy and Rory.

After the pre-credit hors d'ouevres, we then fly into the opening credits which gives us the pastiche title (echoing the spoof superhero film *The Return of Captain Invincible*). Then, we are launched into the main meal of sushi – and the tone is perfect. It is not only the Doctor who is enjoying this dinner

date but the viewer. The dialogue sparkles and, although he has his detractors, the use of Nardole is like the dash of salt and pepper to enhance the flavouring.

The Harmony Shoals building, naturally resembling the Daily Planet Headquarters, had everything that anyone ever needed in a restaurant – or for some evil aliens wanting to conquer the planet. It had excellent cleaning staff and a little boy's room which was the envy of half of New York. It was a good job they didn't serve food though. A room containing miscellaneous brains in jars would never have past the required hygiene standards.

Although the split head was a nice sequence, it was probably the first missed opportunity with this episode and, tonally, felt a little out of place. It is only a short intermission though before, once again, we are being fed near Michelin Star quality.



After a confrontation in the building with diagonal-face (aka Dr Sims), we know almost everything necessary to work out what Harmony Shoals are intending just fifteen minutes in. Dr Sims himself is an adequate villain, not flashy, just workmanlike. In fact, the alien threat is just a diversion to allow Moffat to tell the story of Grant and Lucy.

Back at the apartment, there is an intermission before the meat of the story is delivered. (And maybe Moffat has a sly dig at himself when Capaldi manages to quote Peter Parker's Uncle Ben: "With great power comes great responsibility.")

Before we get there, it has be to be said that there are some great characters in the episode, but none is better than Mr Huffle. Possibly he/it is the greatest character in the history of the series. His acting is flawless and his articulation is near perfection. And, never forget that Mr Huffle feels pain. Mention must also be made that Moffat has always been able to write comedy beautifully and the scenes with 'the Ghost' flying off to deal with emergencies are wonderfully executed. ("You're kind of wet"/"I prefer mild-mannered.")

However, it is not until the phone scene with stylised comic book boxes leads us to the focus of the episode. The picnic on roof where the ham is carved and the goose is cooked.

As mentioned in the introduction, Moffat works wonders on this format and one that maybe some Hollywood



writers should take note of. It is often the fault of many 'comic book' based films that characterisation, humour and audience engagement is omitted for bangs and flashes which have little merit. Destruction is put in the forefront instead of entertainment. This story breaks the mould, showing that superhero doesn't need to beat the villain with flames or fireworks.

The gravy on this feast, which brings flavour and subtlety to the show, is Capaldi's performance. Gone is the harsh and unempathetic Twelve from his early tenure. This is a relaxed character, played with lightness of touch.

Contrasting the portrayal here to that in *Deep Breath* is astounding. Capaldi is clearly playing the same character, but in a much more relaxed and mellow way. The showiness has vanished and instead, we are left with a much more understated and subtle grasp.

Returning to the Mr Huffle scene, imagine how another Doctor could play this

as convincingly. It should be preposterous, but it doesn't play like that. Much credit has to be given to Peter, who judges it perfectly.

It is interesting, to me at least, that Nardole gets to be the grown-up and this leaves Peter's Doctor to be the child again. This actually mirrors the path of the first Doctor who becomes more childlike and less 'formal' as his journey proceeds. Nardole gets much stick, but without him the universe would be an infinitely duller place.





Moffat too gets stick, some of which is fair and some unfair. However, in this episode he shows he hasn't lost his lightness of touch and writing skill.

Two particular moments stand out:

- The moment the Doctor makes Grant promise not to use his powers again and the comparisons with the promise of nonintervention that Time Lords make.
- When Lucy starts defending Grant during the date with the Ghost. It really is a lovely piece of writing; from the removal of the mask and, upon saying that Grant doesn't lie, its replacement.

Here are some of the other great quotes from the episode which are worth mentioning.

"I'm the nanny."

"Oh - it's the smile"

"I know you miss her, but why can't you write a poem?"

"You know – I think I prefer you in your superhero costume [Lucy puts on Grant's glasses]"

Upon a re-watch just before I wrote this I couldn't help but notice how beautifully the episode looked and how stylish the direction was. It seemed good enough to be one of the comic books I used to read on a Saturday morning.

In conclusion, every good superhero needs a sidekick and Nardole doesn't really fulfil that criteria; so it is Mr Huffle that becomes the companion, the companion of Doctor Mysterio.

I'm nostalgic for Christmas Pudding now, so while I pour on the cream I can sum this episode up with these six words: "Everything ends and that's always sad."

And it was sad that something so good ended much too soon.



THE PILOT

Tony Fyler

After the events of Series 9, and particularly the parting from Clara, it would be difficult not to have some sort of soft reboot of the *Doctor Who* franchise to start Series 10. But how well does *The Pilot* work?

There's a degree to which it does exactly what it has to do – and that's a thing we've seen *Doctor Who* do plenty of times before, most especially since 2005. It focuses on the newcomer, the new element in the Doctor's life, the one who brings a change of pace or perspective, and it proves, to him as well as to us, why they deserve the ride of their lives.

There are fans who say that nothing happened in the first fifteen minutes of *The Pilot*.

They're missing the point.

Firstly, plenty happens in that first fifteen minutes - we get two classic Who mysteries: a vault so big and impressive it's making the Doctor stick around to try and crack it or protect it or both, and a puddle that's impossible, and wrong, and shows you something that isn't there. That gives you your major and minor premise for the series and the episode - what the hell is in the vault, and what the hell is that puddle? But more than that, the first fifteen minutes do crucial work. Doctor Who's been off the air for a long time, bar Christmas specials. We need to catch up with the Doctor as he is now, because never has a Doctor evolved his nature more comprehensively over two series than the Capaldi incarnation from Grandpa Grumpy in Series 8 to Grandpa Cool in Series 9. We need to take a few minutes to understand who he is at the start of Series 10, and as with Rose, and Martha, and Donna, we need to get a handle on the character of Bill, her unique way of looking at and thinking about the world, to understand how their worlds are going to collide.





That's what happens in the first fifteen minutes of *The Pilot*.

Capaldi's Doctor has evolved again after spending at least seven decades teaching at a university in Bristol - now he does academic theories of wonder, but the TARDIS is 'out of order,' leading him also to give lectures on the rationality of fear and staying put. He's almost become the thing he originally ran away from. He's almost a model Time Lord. Certainly, his exposure to humanity has mellowed the snarling rebel - now he does smiling and banter. But something about Bill Potts, the student who isn't one, calls out to him. rings a bell, wakes him up. When she doesn't understand something, smiles. That resonates with him, but he 'can't' go travelling in time and He's made a promise - to whom, we're left to wonder. But Capaldi starts his third and final series in the TARDIS on a strong note, in control of every moment, every nuance, giving a performance that makes you appreciate his skills, while feeling like he's in a completely natural place for his Doctor to be.

And then along comes Bill.

Even before you notice Capaldi on top of his game, you notice Bill. Bill Potts

could have been an omni-companion. In his last year as showrunner, Steven Moffat could have coasted along with a 'What's that, Doctor?' Classic-model companion. But there's an impressive degree of characterisation depth in the writing of Bill Potts over the course of The Pilot. The degree to which she's played for realism by Peal Mackie isn't really surprising - we assumed she'd want to embody the character with realistic depth - but it does reassure that newcomer Mackie is not about to coast as a companion either. In the tradition of Rose, Martha and Donna, The Pilot spends the majority of its time showing us who the next companion in the Doctor's life is, how she thinks, what drives her forward, and in particular the unique angle on the universe she has that could be of use to the Doctor. Mackie plays Potts as someone who's had, and has, challenges in her life, and who's been left somewhat starved of affection and needy in love, but someone who smiles when she doesn't understand something - that's a rarity in our day and age, that willingness to see things from another side, to learn, to explore, and it seems particularly helpful to a Twelfth Doctor who's been here, quietly trying to crack the vault, for seven decades. Through the Pertwee UNIT years, through Tennant's flirtation with the Powell Estate. through worldwide Cyber-attack and



Daleks bringing planets to the sky, there he's been. Teaching. And yet it's Bill Potts, chip-doler who smiles when she doesn't understand something, that appears to make him break his promise not to travel, and he seems to do it without thinking, getting her pictures of her long-dead mum, seemingly on a whim and a kindness, to make her life better because after seventy years, he's learned what comfort there is in pictures of those he's lost.

There's something in her that makes him want to teach her specially, to heal her specially, to be a doctor and a professor both to her – all while still trying to work out the vault and keep it safe from any miscreant forces that come trying to crack it open.

The 'villain' of the piece in The Pilot is underdeveloped, and no mistake though arguably so were the Judoon in Smith and Jones, the Racnoss in The Runaway Bride, and the Atraxi in The Eleventh Hour. You have to make a choice of where your focus is going to be in a companion's first story, and it's always wiser to err on the side of their character than the wild and crazy alien threats. Get the companion's arc right and there'll be time for crazy alien threats later. Get it wrong and no-one will care about the threats, because they won't care about the companion (Did you really give a toss when Danny Pink got Cyberized?). So the metamorphic puddle of extreme persistence is a tokenistic threat that exists just to push Bill into the Doctor's world, and is ultimately an allegory for taking the time to not immediately run away from things that scare you. But it's still an important teacher of lessons, in that at the end, it's not the Doctor who finds

the answer to its extreme persistence, it's Bill, and while both Nardole and the Doctor, with their greater experience of a threatening universe, are begging her not to touch the puddle, Bill intuitively reaches out, does the right thing, and sets the pilot free. She earns her memories, and her place on the TARDIS.

It's also Bill who calls the Doctor on his behaviour when he's ready to sacrifice the best memories of her life in a heartbeat, just to keep his precious vault safe. 'Just imagine what it would feel like if someone did that to you.' And so, despite his promise, the Doctor becomes the Doctor once more, willing to show Bill Potts the universe - because 'What the hell?'

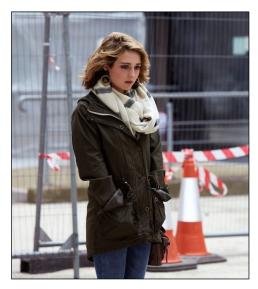
The Pilot is not by any means a perfect episode of Doctor Who - in years to come, you'll have to be having a sensitive day to immediately decide to rewatch it over some of the more actionpacked episodes, and even actionpacked series-openers. And let's not kid ourselves - quite apart from the overt touches like the pot full of various sonics and the slightly icky, obvious use of Clara's theme at a crucial moment, you can play a hell of a game of Previous Episode Bingo with The Pilot: the Doctor 'doing a Chronotis' in a university (Shada), water-aliens (The Waters of Mars), mimicking (Midnight), someone who wants to leave being subsumed into a ship as its pilot (more or less all of The Lodger), the Doctor interfering with history just to be kind (A Christmas Carol and so many more), big mysterious alien doohickey (The Pandorica Opens), the Doctor showing off to wow his new friend (almost every story, but particularly The Rings of Akhaten), the large box fitting inside

the small box (*The Robots of Death*), the freakin' Movellans (*Destiny of the Daleks*), shuttle pod scorch marks (*Remembrance of the Daleks*) and so on. If you focus on everything that's recycled, re-hashed or re-used, you could be hard-pressed to find what's new and exciting about *The Pilot*. But that's easy. You just need to re-focus your eyes.

There.

See her? That's Bill Potts. The Doctor's new friend.

And suddenly an old show is brand spanking new all over again, new eyes encountering the universe, and letting our oldest friend see it through that fresh perspective once more, bringing the best and brightest performance out of Peter Capaldi as the Doctor. That's what's new, and that's what's wonderful, about *The Pilot*. It's a do-over, a gentle reboot, a start-again point, while lightly carrying over fifty years of story along with it.





"I'm happy...hope you're happy too." David Bowie

The moment I switched off the telly I knew *Smile* was the Peter Capaldi adventure I wanted to write about. I was less certain about why. This was a bread and butter episode, neither the gourmet treat nor the ambitious but ultimately inedible melange I'd come to expect from *New Who* after Christopher Eccleston left it. You could even argue that its buttery coating was spread a little thin- too much exposition....too much wandering about...

My head recognised all this...my heart just sang with joy. This was my sort of *Who*.

How to explain that reaction? Joy is a personal emotion, so difficult to condense into reasons. You feel it as you feel a phrase of music. You taste it in a piece of freshly baked bread. Such a neat, such a tidy episode: it slipped down like a smoothie...only the occasional lump and each of those tiny.

Well, enough with the metaphors. To speak plainly, I enjoyed the fact that in *Smile*, the focus was more on the relationship between the Doctor and his new companion than the action. I appreciated the subtle narrative parallels which both ramped up the tension and hinted at unfinished business. I loved the nail-on-the-head precision of the acting. I immersed myself in the designer's vision of the future, a world with all the perfection of a summer's day, the robotic murmurations that would unintentionally blast it and the

dark, messy, human store room beneath its automated white surfaces. I delighted in the little things I learned about the Tardis and I was humbled to discover afterwards that although I style myself a long term *Dr Who* fan (I watched the first broadcast episode for Heaven's sake) there are swathes of Doctor Adventures that I have not seen at all or seen once and instantly forgotten and many of the episode's nods to other eras had passed me by.

"The truth is of course that there is no journey. We are all arriving and departing at the same time." David Bowie

The point of departure for this episode was a prologue that hooked me straight away. The narrative parallels between the Doctor's reaction to Nardole and Kezzia's to Goodthing had me worried



straightaway- those emojibots were not going to be fobbed off with a lie and an order to make tea- and because Kezzia's death was so unexpected and shocking it enabled me to put to one side my knowledge that whatever danger the Doctor and Bill faced, they would of course survive it. I noted that the Doctor called Nardole "Mum" and that Goodthing reported that "Mum" was dead - something I'd think about later. Bill's "seatbelt" comments made me laugh and I enjoyed learning that it is the Tardis that chooses the destination for the Doctor, taking him to that "still point between where you want to go and where you need to be." It made me wonder whether each journey the Doctor undertakes in this series will be chosen for him to serve both as departure from his promise to guard the vault and an arrival at some acceptance of that task, especially as it is no secret that this is the last he will undertake in his present guise.

"There's a terror in knowing what the world will be." David Bowie

Oh boy was there terror. Those dry bones rattling to the floor...the changing face of the Emojibot and the anticipation of the danger it signalled ...the small boy, lost in a garden manured by his mother's flesh about to cry and the vulture-like swoop of the Vardis as they registered his distress. Edge of the seat stuff for me and my granddaughter. Something in it too about our contemporary world, the leap from "now" to "then" not a leap at all but a short hop as the remnants of humanity attempted to settle in their new world having destroyed ours, as their communicating systems, the cute emojibots, reduced complex emotions to a few stylised expressions- both un-preachy reminders of the dangers inherent in today's way of life

But there was hope too. The colonists' possessions reflected Earth's bountiful, diverse culture and history and there was no segregation of humans along racial lines in this future. Steadfast's readiness with a gun was troubling but at least he was prepared to listen and Praiseworthy and the Emojibot were able to connect with each other which boded well. Most of all Bill's delight at being taught by the Doctor and her wonderful concern for humanities' fate sent a clear message: it is curiosity. knowledge and caring that offer us the best chance of a happy future. What an excellent, accessible role model she is proving to be.

"It's only forever. Not long at all." David Bowie

The BBC used to show interlude films between programmes back in the fifties, the most famous one being the Potter's wheel. It was mesmerising watching someone doing something really well. Viewing Peter Capaldi and Pearl Mackie's effortless portrayal of their characters' growing relationship contained the same sort of pleasure. So many grace notes from Capaldi, hinting at something hidden, at the weight of years and responsibility the Doctor carries and the happiness he snatches from sharing time and space with a youngster who sees the world unsentimentally but who remains untarnished by cynicism. Such ability from Pearl to express so naturally an astonishing range of emotions. They may only have a year together but I think these two will become my forever favourite pairing.

"Tomorrow belongs to those that can see it coming." David Bowie



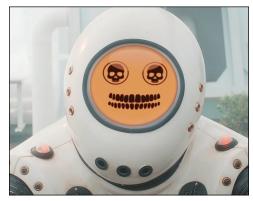
I can't of course...see what's coming I mean... but I have lots of theories: Steadfast will return as a future companion; the vault contains all the negative emotions that created the War Doctor or their antidote; it houses the Master, Gallifrey, Cybermen; Nardole is a programmed watchdog (another Vardi) who will at some point turn on the Doctor or Bill to prevent the Doctor from breaking his promise; the Doctor knows that if he succeeds in opening the vault, he will die.

Those of you that can identify the "Easter eggs" in the episode and understand better than I do the way the current guardians of the series think, will read this politely and no doubt smile at my naïveté but it is important to me that a show gives me moments to speculate about - it makes me keen to watch further episodes to see if any of my guesses are on target and even if they prove widely off the mark there is a thrill when I discover why the clues were there and how they've been resolved.

"Don't you love the Oxford Dictionary? When I first read it, I thought it was a really, really long poem about everything." David Bowie

For some of you Smile may have seemed about as exciting as reading





the Oxford Dictionary. Not an unjust criticism. Its central conceit of robots becoming sentient and unwittingly turning on their former masters is, as even a non- expert like myself can recognise, a common Sci Fi trope; the Doctor's solution to it amusing but hardly original. Its pacing was stop and go. The ending was rushed; no time was given to debating the morality of wiping the memories of an emerging species without their consent, something which would have added another layer to the story.

However, to me Smile was poetry. The narrative simplicity that others will censure, was for me its strength: it took us into our future, rooted that future in problems we are creating today and left us with a sense of hope, lightly and without pretension. Its pacing was perfect for family watching: the slow moments of discovery giving respite from those bursts of slashing horror. For me the relentlessly intense pace of season nine was one of its draw backs: meticulous plotting abandoned in its favour and many episodes requiring several rewatches until they spoke clearly. Smile provided a satisfying experience at first watch and didn't leave me with jangling nerves or an irritable sense that perhaps the narrative I'd

followed didn't quite join up. Yet it was not a bland episode. The blighting and the redemptive power of grief pervaded the action, both an end and the start of something new, preparing me gently for the forthcoming loss of a favourite Doctor. It looked absolutely gorgeous too and saw Peter Capaldi at the top of his game, funny, brave, a romantic figure even when running like "a penguin with its arse on fire." And in Bill, he has a companion whose instant likability has not been equalled since Sarah Jane stepped into the Tardis.

Best of all, *Smile* made my grand-daughter a fan. She watched it curled up on the sofa with me, hiding under my arm when it got scary. Her verdict? She loved the story, she loved Bill and the Doctor and she loved the robots, though they did make her jump a bit.

Does all that make me happy?

You bet it does!



THIN IGE

Steve Hatcher

It's possible that Regency England may well have cropped up somewhere before in the various universes of *Doctor Who* – if it has, then I cannot remember. It's a period that until 2017's *Thin Ice* had remained unvisited by television *Who*, which is a little odd, given the plethora of TV adaptations of the works of Jane Austen and the like that have been so popular over the last twenty years.

Having decided to set the story in that period, specifically in 1814, then an Austenesque setting of a country vicarage or a vast estate; or alternatively the Napoleonic Wars — specifically that year's century-defining Battle of Waterloo, might well have sprung to mind. But no, Sarah Dollard, presumably guided by Steven Moffat and the *Who* production team had a stroke of genius and set this story on the frozen River Thames, during the final Frost Fair of 1814.

So an unusual historical setting – 1814; a solid geographical setting – London; a historical incident – the last Frost Fair; a science-fiction twist – one whopping big fish; a sprinkle of politics – a critique of capitalism with a dash of racism. All the ingredients are in place and what emerges is something quite beautiful.

There is something particularly appealing about those *Doctor Who* historical stories, in which the Doctor and his companion get out of their usual costume or dress style and don period clothes – think Rose's dresses in *The Unquiet Dead* or *The Idiot's Lantern*, or



the Eleventh Doctor's Victorian kit in The Snowmen for example. Thin Ice certainly doesn't disappoint on that score, the whole thing looks just beautiful, with costume designer Hayley Nebauer and slightly mad genius production designer Michael Pickwoad producing wonderful work. Just look at that first scene, when the TARDIS doors open to be greeted by an elephant making its way through the mist of the wonderful Frost Fair set (another historically accurate detail, by the way); or the Doctor and Bill's Jules Verne-style diving suits. These are among the best images produced in modern Doctor Who.

But this is no mere fashion show – and stunning visuals don't always make a good episode – witness *In The Forest of the Night*. Oh, I know that plenty of people like that one, but really...? Well, that's a discussion for another time.

I would suggest that the four elements that make up a good Doctor Who tele-

vision episode/story are: a great setting; striking visuals; memorable characters and above all a strong plot. If you have all of those, you have the makings of a classic; having three of them gives you a good solid entry in the cannon; if you are down to two or even one, you are in trouble.

I think we have established that Thin Ice has the first two elements of these four covered. The weak link is probably to be found in the characters. This episode is very much about the Doctor and Bill - their developing relationship and Bill's increasing assurance as a companion and a time traveller. This is, after all, her first journey into the Earth's past. Like Rose before her (The Unquiet Dead), we focus on her (beautifully costumed) foot, venturing out into the snow of a time long past. We see that she is no ingénue - she knows that a person of colour will be faced with inevitable problems in this time period, when "slavery is still totally

a thing." She is worried too that any actions she might take may have repercussions on subsequent history – "ripples in time." The Doctor teases her about this, with his warnings about the terrible fate of 'Pete'.

We see her wonderment and delight in what she is doing - which soon turn to disgust, despair and anger as she is confronted by the less pleasant pects of her new time-travelling life and in particular by the limits of what she and the Doctor can achieve. Of course, she has to face this most starkly when the child Spider is taken below the ice and killed - a rare, if not unprecedented event in Doctor Who. Bill is horrified that the Doctor can do nothing to save him, but also by the speed with which her friend 'moves on', claiming disingenuously, "I never had the time for the luxury of outrage."

The focus on the Doctor and Bill does not leave a lot of room for other strong characters. In contrast to the aforementioned equivalent Eccleston episode The Unquiet Dead, which introduced us to Charles Dickens, Gwyneth and the undertaker Sneed - all strong and memorable characters: Thin Ice features... well, no-one very memorable really. Yes, we have a bunch of entirely Dodger/Oliver unremarkable Artful Twist-a-likes in the street urchins, not one of whom really rises above being a plot device or set decoration - a character-free zone there. That just leaves us with our chief villain of the week, Lord Sutcliffe (and a few anonymous henchmen and heavies). Nicholas Burns, who plays Sutcliffe is a good actor, who was excellent as the title character in the cult comedy Nathan Barley a few years back. In truth

though, he isn't given much to work with here. Sutcliffe is a remarkably uninteresting baddie, who is unlikely to feature highly in any poll for villain of the year any time soon. The Doctor and Bill assume he must be an alien - at least we are spared that - he is a British venture capitalist of the get-richquick era of the industrial revolution. who regards the working classes as tools by which he enriches himself. As with Breathe later in the Series, we have a critique of the capitalist system and the way in which it turns people into objects and makes money from them. It's not that subtle.

Of course as a nasty capitalist (no really, they are very nasty), Sutcliffe is the only character we meet who treats Bill with the racism that we might expect to be standard in this slave-owning era—and which Bill predicted. "Who let this creature in here? On your feet girl, in the presence of your betters," is his reaction to her, leading the Doctor to thump him one. Well yes, alright. That's all very *in character*, I suppose for a



man of Sutcliffe's era and class – and he is the villain, after all. But again, it's just not very subtle.

How much more interesting it might have been, if one of the *nice* characters had come out with some racist remark, or subtly indicated some underlying racist attitude. A comparison can be drawn with Paul Cornell's wonderful Tenth Doctor story *Human Nature/The Family of Blood*, set in 1913, in which the Doctor's companion Martha does indeed face racism from some of the more unpleasant characters, notably Baines and Hutchinson; but also from the otherwise very sympathetic Joan Redfern.

Racism was absolutely systemic in the England of 1814 – the wealth of the nation was based upon colonial imperialism as well as upon overt slavery. These were crimes that all levels of society were implicated in and were justified by an all-pervading world view that saw the White Man (and Woman) as inherently superior to all other races. To treat this issue as a shortcut to tell us that Sutcliffe is a villain, while everyone else is lovely, all-inclusive and multi-cultural, cheapens it. It just isn't good enough.

Thank goodness the plot is strong and simple enough, that put together with the interesting setting and memorable visuals, it allows us to enjoy the episode, despite the weak characters.

Sutcliffe's plot involves luring people on to the frozen Thames, in order to feed them to the giant creature below, which he has enslaved, which in turn excretes a new and incredibly combustible fuel, which he then sells. Eugh! Poo merchant! The Doctor and Bill save the day, essentially by getting everyone off the ice, blowing it up and releasing the big fishy thingy. A resolution worthy of the most *subtle* of Pertwee era, 'lets have a big explosion' endings.

Of course there are a number of plot holes. It is never explained how Sutcliffe found out about the Giant Fish Monster (played by Big Bad Barry off of Ben and Holly's Little Kingdom - or have I got that wrong?); neither do we find out how he captured it and chained it in place under the ice; nor how he discovered that he could burn its poo. There are things about this relationship that remain unsaid. But none of that really matters, the fish - like Sutcliffe himself - is little more than a plot device, somewhat reminiscent of The Star Whale in Series Five's The Beast Below - another creature enslaved to the service of mankind, that the Doctor's companion has to choose to free.

Before clearing off to convince Nardole that he has never been away, the Doctor alters a legal document to ensure that the street urchins inherit Sutcliffe's fortune. I can't see the aristocratic class of the time allowing that one to pass but at least it means that Bill doesn't have to feel quilty that she isn't able to help them out of their poverty and we get a happy ending - before the tacked -on one of Nardole talking to the mystery inhabitant of The Vault, (I wonder who that could be.) So that's all good! So, great setting, wonderful visuals, straightforward plot, characters that are a bit rubbish and some lovely development of Bill and her relationship with the Doctor. In summary not quite a great episode, but a pivotal one in Series 10 and one in which there is a very great deal to enjoy.

KNOCK KNOCK

Jon Arnold

It's actually fairly remarkable that it's taken over fifty years for someone to be inspired to write a story by the oldest Doctor Who joke of all: I like to imagine that the first delivery of it was, at the latest, within five minutes of the end of the first episode's transmission. After all, the world could have done with a good joke given what happened the day before An Unearthly Child went out.

So who's there this time? Doctor Who obviously, and his best mate Bill but also a fair few of her mates and well, it's only David Suchet! One of those actors you boggle hasn't already been in the series. Of course, being the big guest star and with a lot of Bill's friends about he's going to be the main villain of the week. In the same way Tom used to need either someone with equal and opposite presence or an inexorable alien race to so much as

break a sweat, to take on a Doctor with Capaldi's presence you need someone of similar ability to challenge this Doctor. Think Michelle Gomez, Julian Bleach, Donald Sumpter or even Zygon Jenna Coleman. Suchet is precisely the sort of actor you need to ensure a small stakes story such as this doesn't fail thanks to the Doctor overpowering the threat of the week.

Knock Knock is a classic case of Doctor Who looking to the horror genre for inspiration and then making it just palatable enough for a Saturday night teatime audience. Mike Bartlett crosses two basic horror styles - the haunted house and the slasher movie - and adds a dose of Doctor Who's trademark compassion to produce something that has echoes of past stories but manages to be not quite anything like them. The show's obvious ancestor is Ghost Light, which neatly inverts the usual scenario by having the house haunt the companion, but whereas that serial is a dense morass of allusions. plots and counterplots Knock Knock is



relatively straightforward. Much of the story is spent building mood and tension - we see (well, hear) one of the lodgers picked off before the opening credits roll and from then on it's a matter of how many of Bill's friends accompany him into whatever terrible fate the house has in store for them. Given most films have the time and space to build relationships between the characters it's remarkable how well the story establishes Bill's friends in such a short space of time, giving them character traits and just enough backstory to make us care about them being picked off. It's a shame that Harry isn't explicitly Harry Sullivan's grandson as explicitly stated in the original script, but such touches are the first thing to be lost to the pressure of 45 minutes of story.

It's a beautifully designed story too, from the obvious touches such as Suchet's costume to the sound design. You can see why the BBC provided a binaural recording to emphasize the

atmosphere the creaks and groans of the house helped bring to the story. It's just the sort of gimmick the horror film makers of the 50s would try to draw crowds in. There's some genuinely nightmarish imagery in here with swarming insects and people trapped in walls. And at the heart of it is Suchet managing to be sinister and threatening without ever having to resort to cheap theatrics. Being a series that's essentially melodrama crossed with fantastical adventure it's no mean feat to achieve a great villainous presence without looking for scenery to chew.

Suchet's ability is also critical in carrying off the ending. The Landlord is in keeping with Steven Moffat's emphasis on not having megalomaniacs or booable pantomime bad guys – think also of the ship in The Pilot, the Vardy obeying their programming and the capitalist Lord Sutcliffe from this season alone. He's motivated by essentially still being a little boy wanting to save his mother.



Put the ending, where the mother he's worked hard to keep alive all these years essentially asks to die, in lesser hands and it might well be unbearably mawkish. For many it may still be a little too sugary for their tastes. Suchet though is quite brilliant at becoming the little boy trapped in an aging body again. With him and a sublime performance from Mariah Gale under prosthetics though, it works. The nature of horror films means survival is all, an implacable threat is undermined by understanding motivations. **Perhaps** that desire to be proper drama and a good horror story will hold Knock Knock from being regarded as a classic story, the Landlord being less sinister when you know his all-too-human motivations but Suchet and Gale make it a satisfying climax rather than something which shrinks the story to one human under intense strain getting things wrong.

And what of the Doctor in all this? Let's put it this way, his role is what it is in virtually all Doctor Who stories: figure out what the hell's going on and sort things out. That's the easy bit which virtually every Doctor's done more times than they care to count. What's great here is that this season continues to prove Capaldi's found a very comfortable way to play the Doctor this season: essentially the essence of an older, slightly more knowing version of Matt Smith's incarnation. He needs Bill as a link to humanity and helps her in every little way he can (using the TAR-DIS as a removals service). In his mind's eye he's the cool guy with the guitar and shades who can relate to the music the kids are listening to these days and even name drop what he thinks is cool. Of course, a Quincy Jones reference is probably lost on

Little Mix fans. And in resolving the story and making sure everyone's safe at the end there's the unconfined compassion that he wasn't sure he had after his regeneration, the compassion that will cost him dearly a week later. In case we missed it, in case we doubted him even after that speech in The Zygon Inversion and the purgatory of Heaven Sent, he's not only a good man, he's the best of men. And because we've got an unashamedly heroic Doctor again, because we've got the man playing him has a greater range than any other who's played the role (barring perhaps the late great John Hurt) Knock Knock is part of the strongest season of Doctor Who in a very long time. It's safe to have nightmares again, because the Doctor's there to save us.

Who's there.





Allan Lear

If there's an era of *Doctor Who* that holds the title of 'undisputed Golden Age', then it's the mid-Seventies, when the triumvirate of Baker-Hinchcliffe-Holmes produced a string of classic episodes that still stand up strongly today.

One of the methods this threesome used to produce their shows was to steal freely from whatever cultural touchstones they had encountered that month. It's well-known, for instance, that Robots of Death was originally inspired by some Asimov that Philip Hinchcliffe had been reading. One of their most fecund sources of inspiration was the Gothic horror output of film companies like Hammer and Amicus the latter of whom, of course, had produced the Peter Cushing Doctor Who films of the early sixties. That sensibility was parlayed into such classic serials as The Talons of Weng-Chiang which still frequently grace fans' Top Ten Ever lists on an annual basis.

The same method is clearly lurking in the background of *Oxygen*. The preponderance of zombie fiction over the last decade is something hard to ignore and, in the same way that the Marvel cinematic universe and its rivals have led to *Doctor Mysterio*, *28 Days Later* and its descendants have manifested themselves in Mathieson's spacebased killer suit caper.

This is an episode that pushes the edge of what you can do with family television. The zombies look properly scary, and the freestanding corpse in the suit that our intrepid trio encounter is a genuinely creepy thing, made even more so by the realism of Bill's freaked-out reaction to it. It's an episode which helped mark out Pearl Mackie as a serious asset to the Series Ten, a stature into which she only grew as the series progressed. Bill's discomfort, her fear, her near-death experience – these all use the notion of the companion as



audience reference point to maximise our sympathy and extract the optimum scare value from the script.

Normally the horror in Doctor Who is leavened by the presence of the Doctor himself, whose calm competence and invulnerable insouciance reassure the audience that no real harm can possibly befall. However, with the Twelfth Doctor, what real-world doctors call the "mask of professional omniscience" has slipped not infrequently over the last few series. In consequence, we're not saturated with reassurance as we were in the days of Tom Baker's cheekyfaced invincibility. Capaldi's Doctor is emotionally susceptible in a way that the Fourth Doctor never was, and that shows right from the start of the episode in a way that shakes the viewer's confidence in him - and that's before a simple space walk goes all to hell...

Peter Capaldi does a lot of speechifying in Oxygen. It's quite common in his run as the Doctor that a lot of speechifying happens, and it's hard to think that this can have been his own idea. since, as an actor, he's very generous about sharing screen time - it's impossible to consider that the companions to, for example, Jon Pertwee would have got to be as funny as Nardole or as emotionally potent as Bill without the star of the show getting to obtrude a little more. It seems more likely that the writers have taken a look at what Capaldi can do with their words and got carried away with the possibilities.

So Doctor Twelve launches into killer speeches about dying well and capitalism and any other topic that comes to mind, and Peter Capaldi delivers them excellently, and undercuts them with

punchlines when the occasion requires, and does all the other things that you expect him to do in those situations. And he's very good, he really is. But it's not the great speechifying that sticks in the mind once the episode is over. It's all the smaller stuff that he does, all the vulnerability and the uncertainty, the sense of not quite being in control that he brings throughout the episode. And most of all, it's going blind.

We've seen actors going blind before, and the result is almost always terrible. Lots of staring fixedly and lots of stilted body language that comes from trying not to look at someone they know full well they can see. Possibly the worst example of all time is the original Sarah from The Toxic Avenger, whose entire repertoire of blind acting consisting of looking up and to her left at all times whatever happens. One of the most successful is Eliza Dushku in Dollhouse, and the secret of her success was putting in opaque contact lenses so she was actually blind throughout rehearsal.

Capaldi's acting is superb, because he doesn't do very much at all. It's a wonderfully subtle performance, consisting principally as it does of his normal Doctor performance just fractionally slowed down. He doesn't tiptoe and bumble around the place, he just...lacks confidence in his movements. It's a great way of underscoring this Doctor's emotional vulnerability, which he equally tries to hide. Notice how, in a nice bit of scripting, the Doctor's blindness coincides with an increase in his use of sarcasm, as though he's trying to cover for the physical disability with additional personal spikiness.



The Doctor's emotional state thus neatly mirrored by his physical state, and with him using his defensive jokiness to cover both, he nevertheless goes on to save the day against an undead menace and defeat capitalism singlehandedly, which is something even Stalin couldn't claim to have done. It's a victory all the more effective for the victor's obvious fallibility, and one that suits the particular character of the Twelfth Doctor down to the ground. Without the pretty extreme horror of earlier the victory wouldn't be as sweet and the Doctor's overcoming of the odds wouldn't be as affecting. But it all takes its toll and this whole escapade will come back to haunt the Doctor and his companions - just as, we can be pretty sure, that standing corpse in the malfunctioning spacesuit came back to haunt a few kids' nightmares in the evenings that followed the broadcast.

That's a pretty good summary for the Doctor as a character. That's what he does when he enters your life: first he scares you, then he saves you. Then, of course, he abandons you, and it's episodes like *Oxygen* which make it so very sad that Capaldi is abandoning us this Christmas.

EXTREMS

Brendan Jones

At the end of 2015, the Doctor Who festival came to Australia, bringing special guests Sylvester McCoy, Ingrid Oliver, Peter Capaldi and Steven Moffat. The latter three made up the main panel of the day (although you try to stop Sylv running on stage to give P-Cap a great big cuddle).

One woman, during the question and answer session, got up to ask Steven Moffat a question, the essential gist of which was, "Why do you always have to put in a stupid Moffaty idea like the sonic sunglasses into otherwise decent scripts?" The auditorium gasped. Peter Capaldi looked to the floor. Ingrid looked to Steven, who shifted in his chair, lolling his head back slightly.

I'm not a huge fan of Steven Moffat's vision of *Doctor Who*. Many of the individual stories are good, but the overarching plots leave much to be desired for me. This was not the case for the most recent series, however. The success of Series 10 hinges on the character development of the Doctor, Bill, Nardole and Missy. Having established the relationships between the first three over the first half of the season, *Extremis* throws Missy into the mix here, and her presence will be felt throughout this trilogy of stories.

Capaldi's soliloquy in the teaser shows a strong character in crisis, unsure of how to proceed. The Doctor's blindness, a result of his saving Bill the previous week, is perhaps the series' gutsiest move since Donna's mind wipe; that it is not just solved at the end of the episode but hangs like a shadow over this story and the next injects a welcome feeling of uncertainty into the series. Capaldi's performance therefore not only shows the Doctor's typical confidence, but also a degree of caution and reserve. There's an ambiguity to Peter's performance here. The Doc-



tor's refusal to tell Bill about his blindness isn't a matter of pride or self-pity; instead, the Doctor wants to spare her any feeling of responsibility over his condition. And yet, the Doctor chooses to involve Bill in his trip to the Vatican because of his trust in her and his belief in her intelligence. He truly does not hold Bill responsible for his blindness. Nardole's presence is essential (or, at the very least, Nardole won't allow the Doctor to push him away), but Bill is there because the Doctor chooses to involve her.

Of course, we discover as the story goes on that these people are not the real Doctor, Bill or Nardole. They are advanced simulations, unaware of their true nature. That doesn't stop them acting in identical ways to their real world counterparts – has the Doctor's lying ever been more obvious than when he sends Bill and Nardole after the dead priest? Capaldi, as the Doctor, possesses a sardonic, dark charm, as when he assures Bill he won't read the Veritas without her and chats coquettishly with the Monks.

Steven Moffat's head rolled forward, and he smiled that tight, controlled smile of his. "Madam, you are entirely welcome to dislike my writing, but I think you've missed the point of the Sonic Sunglasses. The Doctor is the smartest man in the room. In any room. But he has no idea what cool is. He thinks he does, sure. That's why he's always saying he's cool! And you know who else does that? Film stars, wearing sunglasses on the red carpet at 8.30pm, wearing bloody sunglasses! But I'll tell you what else..."

This episode also builds on the wonderful rapport between Pearl Mackie and Matt Lucas. This season sees an interesting inversion of the companion roles, with the male companion's life defined by the Doctor, while the female companion has her own life which she lambasts the Doctor for interrupting. Both Bill and Nardole are fiercely loyal to the Doctor, however, following his instructions when the chips are down rather than arguing blindly. Bill's bemused respect for Nardole in the library is not only a fine comedy moment, but reminds us of his connection with the Doctor - despite the fact that he tries in vain to keep his employer in line, we're left in no doubt as to who is the boss.

This gives us time to visit the Doctor and Missy a thousand years ago. Peter and Michelle Gomez are achingly beautiful in these scenes, as the Doctor presides over Missy's execution. The Doctor barely speaks in this extended flashback, but Capaldi carries it all on his face. Gomez convinces just enough in her desire to become good, and the priests' fear of the Doctor's reputation helps us to avoid any long, shouty speeches. Don't get me wrong – Peter does those brilliantly as well – but these quiet scenes sell his al-

ienness, and his humanity, far better with few words.

"...every little boy and girl watching at home at some point wants to be the Doctor. So Mum or Dad buy them the sonic screwdriver for Christmas. But now, that kid doesn't have to wait 'til Christmas now. That kid just has to grab Mum's old sunglasses."

This brings us to the ending. Our heroes realise that they are in a simula-Nardole lays down his life to prove it, fulfilling the function of the Veritas in killing off any subroutines who realise that they are a computer program while simultaneously allowing him the free will of that decision. The Doctor and Bill, however, resolve to fight. reasoning through why someone would create this simulation. They are not the Doctor and Bill, and the Earth is about to be invaded - what can they do? The Doctor can't even save Bill as she is decompiled by a Monk. As we discovered in Oxygen, part of the Doctor's purpose is to save his companions. If he can't save Bill, what hope does he have of really being the Doctor, and not iust a pale shadow?

The Shadow Doctor's email realisation is more than it appears on the surface. The realisation that he can get the message out brings the reeling Doctor back up to full strength, standing against the monsters. He hasn't lost Bill or Nardole - they're safely on Earth. If he's not real, then his passing is meaningless - unless he can make some good out of it. Just like the Monks designed this simulation to know how to take over Earth, the Shadow Doctor sends the simulation to his real self to use against the monsters. Even when he's not really the Doctor, he does what the Doctor would do. We can do this too - by acting for what we believe is right and good, even in extre-None of us have TARDISes or mis. sonic screwdrivers, but we can stand against insidious forces in our own ways. We can protest, write letters to our MPs, start petitions, and switch our accounts from fossil fuels. This is so important because -

"You don't need to buy anything to be the Doctor. You just use what you have to hand." Steven reached clumsily into his pocket, extracted his ray bans, and perched them on his nose. "And I think that's pretty cool."



THE PYRAMID AT THE END OF THE WORLD

Brendan Jones

I am, it may surprise you to know, a rather shy person. Once I get talking to someone, I'm perfectly fine, but it's actually the starting that's the problem. Hence, I adore and massively respect Bill in the opening scenes of this episode as she tells Penny everything the Doctor has told her about the Monks' simulation.

How often, when we first meet someone, do we want to immediately find out how much they know about *Doctor Who?* I mean, realistically, if they know nothing, how rewarding is this conversation going to be? I was already pretty drawn in when I first met my boyfriend, but then he noticed my Colin Baker wallpaper on my phone. He was astounded – how did I know who the 'crap Doctor' was?

He's come around a bit since, but back to my point: Bill is us, telling Penny

how wonderful and stupid the Doctor is. She does exactly what we want to do on a first date. Interestingly, Penny's reaction to the Secretary General is far milder than Sim-Penny's reaction to the Pope. Is this because Bill has been preparing her for this strangeness, telling her the truth? It's a lesson for us all – be proud of your near-complete Dapol action figure collection and the 100+ Doctor Who podcasts you've produced – someone who likes you doesn't care about your weirdness (and they might even like it).

As Bill picks up on throughout the story, the Doctor is acting weirdly as well, still keeping his blindness a secret from her. The previous episode sees the Doctor retain his power to resist despair even when he is not really himself, but this episode slowly strips him of that power. The Monks shut down his 'line in the sand' speech they are saviours, not conquerors. The Secretary General and assembled military leaders all go against his advice to consent to the Monks. Finally, as he works towards preventing the outbreak of the deadly bacterium, he is undone by his lie about his sight, unable to open the door. As he impotently



forbids Bill to save him, she goes ahead and does it anyway. Capaldi's desperation through an escalating set of people not listening to him is brilliantly played. He doesn't rant and throw insults at people – he never asked for the job as President but seeks to do his best for the planet in any case.

What is even more fascinating is the purity of Bill's consent. Her ordering the Doctor to get her Planet back from the Monks seems to be an indication that her consent was not pure – it was a strategy to save the Doctor's life. But is it possible that, for just that moment, Bill really didn't care about anything else in the world except the Doctor's life? Capaldi and Mackie continue to be electric together, even when they are not in the same room.

Throughout most of this episode, the Doctor, Bill and Nardole are witnesses to the events around them, with the Doctor and Bill only taking direct action in the closing minutes of the episode. This echoes the Doctor's demands for the Monks to clarify what consent entails in exchange for this help – the Doctor and Bill wait for all the facts before they act. This is why Bill goes against the Doctor's wishes – based on the facts, her consent to the Monks is the only way to keep him alive.

This episode is the middle episode of The Monks Trilogy or three-parter (depending on which pre-broadcast interview you read)! As a middle episode of a three-part story, it works well. The threat introduced in the first part is effectively built upon here, and it's wise that the Monks are not used for jump scares in the same way they were in Extremis. They are no longer the ene-

mies in a computer game, but rather a real set of beings bent on lovingly-crafted world domination. They have clearly built a culture around 'saving' dying worlds – which is, in fact, a culture of imposing benevolent dictatorships. What I find most chilling about them is their openness on their dictatorial nature when the Doctor confronts them. They are not shy about their controlling ways – because they are so powerful and present such a bleak alternative that races will accept dominion over death.

In terms of the notions of trilogy – the threat is increased after the first part, which was largely a self-contained story, and we are left with a cliffhanger in which the fate of all three lead characters is left open (Nardole is unconscious, Bill is in the hands of the Monks, and the Doctor waits to see their brave new world). Cleverly, each of these first type episodes present complete, but open ended, stories of their own, so that the next episode can pick up the threads in the world in which we're left.

Finally, a word on the actor who steals the show - Rachael Denning as Erica. She feels like a welcome callback to Gia Kelly, Ruth Ingram and Dr Todd, giving the Doctor a witty scientist to bounce off. She's also a delightfully human character, ribbing Douglas for his drunkenness, and brave enough to work with the Doctor, staying behind to solve the problem while the lab is evacuated. The Doctor asking her what she's doing when this is all over warmed my heart as much as when he grabbed Rose's hand in the basement or told Donna he wanted a mate. was left wanting to see her again next week. Oh well!



Brendan Jones

The Lie of the Land is the final episode of the Monks Trilogy/three-parter, and I will be totally up front with my opinion. I find it a disappointingly damp and desultory ending to a promising concept, which fails to deliver on the promise the villains had presented.

The final part of a trilogy is a time to reveal a big secret. The real masterminds behind the Ghostface Killings. The special bond between Luke and Leia. Harry Osborn discovering Spiderman didn't kill his father. What do we get here instead? The revelation that the Monks influence the world using telepathic suggestion. How many Doctor Who villains have used this type of method? The Master, Rassilon, the Master, every second monster of the Hinchcliffe era, the Master, the Sycorax, the Daleks, the Silence and, of course, the Master again. This is, I mean to say, hardly something new, and if you've got a new monster, you want them to have a new hook

Another piece of downright laziness is that the Monks have turned Earth into a



drab dictatorship, which has provoked resistance which is extreme enough to lead to lightning raids and spotchecking papers. This is a race adept at controlling worlds, so Missy tells us so much so that if they lose one world, they write it off as a bad investment. Are fascistic human tactics really the best that they can come up with? Alternatively, are they just magnifying what humanity might do itself if a small group took over the way the Monks did? This would be an interesting twist - that the Monks are simply extreme reflections of ourselves. It would also tie in with the sentiment from the previous episode of them looking like corpses.

Better yet, why not rebuild Earth as something desirable for humans, in order to pre-emptively quell resistance? Who is going to fight a utopia? This would make sense of the Doctor joining the Monks, as they have brought about peace and prosperity where humanity had failed.

This leads to the most risible part of the episode - Bill's confrontation with the Doctor. This is a scene which exists solely to put the fake regeneration in the trailer. Peter and Pearl are excellent in that scene and, were it not for the fact that we know there are four more episodes in the season, utterly convincing in their performances. However, Bill may not actually shoot the Doctor, but her character is wounded by this scene. Killing the Doctor would do nothing to stop the Monks - they have controlled other planets perfectly well without the Doctor as a figurehead. Bill shoots the Doctor as revenge for his apparent betrayal, in an action which weakens the character to the point that you wonder why the Doctor would spend time with her. It's wildly inconsistent with the way Bill is presented in the rest of the season, and I'm yet to think of a compelling argument as to its inclusion aside from shock value.

I'm also not letting the Doctor off the hook for manipulating Bill into picking up a gun and attempting to shoot him! He's planned it this way, ensuring all his bodyguards, whom he has deprogrammed, have blanks. This is ostensibly a test of Bill's loyalty - but if she was under the Monks' influence, couldn't he have deprogrammed her as well? A stupid, cynical and manipulative plot device; the greatest misstep in what is otherwise a season which ranges from good to superb. This does, however, lead to some wonderful moments from Capaldi: laughing maniacally when crashing into the docks; the triumph and despair of his guessing game with Missy; and the final assault on the Pyramid. Pearl Mackie, like so many companions in the new series, gets to save the world with a 'single most important person' moment, but there is a freshness here. Her solemn goodbye to the Doctor with his desperate protest mirrors the action she took last week to create this world. Matt Lucas' Nardole. mostly comic relief in this episode, plays his silent farewell perfectly. But it's the way that Bill embodies the 'single most important person' motif that is so crucial here- because Bill is not that person. That person is her Mum - or rather the vision of her Mum that Bill has made with a little help from the Doctor. Bill's Mum, like the Monks' version of history, is a fictional version of the truth - a skewed version of histo-Bill has no idea what her voice ry. sounds like, what she was like at parties, or whether she was a morning person or a night owl. All Bill knows is

that she and her Mum share a love which can never be spoiled. They can never argue or fight. Perhaps, then, this is why the Monks can't create a utopia – they can certainly identify love, but they can't seem to employ it. Strange, then, that love is the version of consent they accept from Bill. They reject consent out of fear or strategy, but seem to employ these qualities themselves. Perhaps they can only destroy and, by extension, control qualities which they themselves possess.

The fact that I'm having to speculate about whether that is either high concept sci-fi (with the viewer having to fill in the blanks) or hurried scriptwriting (as exemplified by Capaldi explaining how Bill has saved the world through the art of breathless voiceover).

The big question is – is this a three-part story in the traditional Doctor Who sense, or a trilogy of adventures? I fall on the side of calling it a trilogy - each episode has a largely self-contained plot, joined by the larger arc of the Monks' invasion/salvation. If one were to consider it as one story, the closest analogues would be The Keys of Marinus or The Chase - hardly distin-Despite Capaldi, guished company. Mackie. Lucas and Gomez all being spellbinding, the arc collapses at the end. We have a cerebral first episode, followed by a battle of wits culminating in an inevitable disaster in the second. Unfortunately, many of the thoughtprovoking concepts of the first two episodes are ignored by the third in exchange for a mostly competent, uninspired climax with good characters going out of their minds for a bit and a psychic finale explained in exposition.

EMPRESS OF MARS

Andy Price

The Ice Warriors are back on their home turf, Mars, and with Mark Gatiss at the helm you could rest assured that this wouldn't be just any old jolly to the red planet.

H. G. Wells meets steampunk, meets *Kelly's Heroes*, as team TARDIS come across a motley bunch of Victorian squaddies camped out on Mars in search of riches beyond their wildest dreams.

Having stumbled across a crashed Martin spaceship and its sole surviving crew member in the South African veld, as you do, our plucky Victorian misfits hop on board for a trip to Mars, which they quickly claim for Queen and Country and as part of the British Empire.

What could possibly go wrong?

The language is wonderful. Gatiss seems to have been influenced by the richly poetic lines of Richard Wardlow's *Ripper Street* and the character names – Godsacre, Catchlove, Knibbs, Jackdaw – would do Dickens proud.

Anyway, I digress.

So, the Doctor, Bill and Nardole rock up at NASA HQ just as the latest Mars probe is about to reveal what lines under the Martian polar icecap. As the wall-to-wall TV monitors clear, what should appear but the words "God Save The Queen" spelt out on the dead planet's surface?

Doing what any self-respecting alien adventurers would do, the Doctor and his chums head off to get to the bottom of this interplanetary graffiti.

This is full on *Boys' Own* stuff. The soldiers' rocket is damaged leaving them stranded. They have named their Martian 'manservant' Friday "after *Robinson Crusoe* you know" (what is it about Gattis and iconic villains serving afternoon tea? First it was Daleks in *Victory of the Daleks* and now it's Ice Warriors) and are searching for loot while their Colonel tries to find a way to get them home. And mutiny is afoot.

The arrival of our intrepid heroes results in the discovery of an ancient catacomb and sarcophagus. With the soldiers smelling treasure we don't really need to Doctor to point out just how badly this is all going to go.

And Friday's true intentions become clear. He brought the soldiers to Mars to help find Martian Queen Iraxxa's tomb in order to awaken her and the Ice Warrior hive hidden sleeping below.

And here – like so many other episodes during Moffat's tenure – is where things start to unravel.



Rather than remaining a jolly romp the story tries to become one of a moral dilemma, with the Doctor questioning whose side he should be on. It is, after all, the humans who are the invaders on this occasion, but if he doesn't help them then they will all be killed by the Ice Warriors.

Meanwhile the Ice Warriors, who "build a city out of Mars sand then drench the skies with its blood", spend the rest of the episode philosophising about whether or not they should be killing people (with guns that turn their victims into neatly folded piles of clothing?).

There are high points. Iraxxa's request for Bill's thoughts as they are "both surrounded by noisy males". The wise-cracks about films were good fun and the Ice Warriors were full on lumbering Bernard Bresslaw Ice Warriors, not the Gremlin from Gattis' earlier reimagining in 2013's *Cold War*.

For me, though, *Empress Of Mars* is neither one thing or the other.

Other than a nod to us oldies what was the point of Alpha Centrauri? And Nardole's "kidnapping" by the TARDIS was just bizarre (apparently Matt Lucas hadn't been confirmed as a companion when the script was first commissioned). What a missed opportunity Missy and Nardole as team TARDIS was.

If the intention was to look at how the Doctor's decision-making could be changed by his apparent role reversal it just doesn't deliver. There's none of the morality or politics of *The Zygon Invasion/Inversion* or *The Hungry Earth/Cold Blood*. Other than briefly pointing out this dilemma, the Doctor does what the Doctor does: he tries to keep everyone alive.







Tom Simpson

Rona Munro! When I first saw the name attached to Series Ten. I was thrilled. The idea that the woman who authored the 1989 classic series 'finale' Survival. with its fabulous scope, intelligence and wit was returning to the series, with a story that had the potential to either match or better it left me buzzing with excitement. However. I will be honest: when asked to review this episode. I was a little uneasy, as my memories of watching it the first (and last) time around weren't great. I recalled a story in which, unfortunately, very little happened, and the little that did happen seemed inconsequential. Add to that a willing for it to end, just so the much-anticipated series finale could arrive a little quicker, it was hastily confined to my memory as "just another Who story."

Second time around, I was able to watch it without any of the pressures that come with the live broadcast: no worrying about not liking it, or something interrupting the experience, and certainly none of the overwhelming anticipations I originally had for the subsequent series finale. This time, I am able to watch – and *enjoy* – the episode on its own merits. And quite right, too.

The Eaters of Light boasts some stunning locations, captured expertly by director Charles Palmer. Even though the episode was filmed in Wales, you never doubt for a single moment that you're in the midst of the breathtaking

Scottish countryside. And that is just the pre-title sequence. Fast forward past the opening credits to the TARDIS materialising almost two thousand years earlier, and we are presented with a beautiful, natural landscape.

From the moment the TARDIS crew step onto the scene, the countryside becomes an idyllic backdrop against which my favourite 'modern' crew playfully introduce the reason for their arrival. The script handles this well. What could have been an infodump is presented as a group of friends conversing.

Pearl Mackie does a terrific job of conveying Bill's interest in the Ninth Legion, and her convictions over the mystery of their disappearance. The Doctor, of course, knows better, and is determined to be proven right. It is delightful to watch Bill - a character so full of adventure and intrigue - taking advantage of her travels with the Doctor to investigate and explore the uni-Matt Lucas continues to be wonderful as Nardole. Emerging from the TARDIS in a dressing gown and pyjamas, offering the occasional witty observation, intoned with the right amount of intrigue.

Peter Capaldi is on fine form, as always: delivering The Doctor's explanations in a fun but informative (or should I say relevant) way, which neither patronises nor bores you. At the same time, he also manages to offset some of the arrogance and sarcasm with enough charm that you can't help but smile, and await his next line with glee.

The three of them quickly split up: Bill going off in one direction, and the Doc-



tor and Nardole in another. The latter's partnership is a joy to watch, as they bounce off each other perfectly throughout. A particular highlight is their initial encounter with the crow. Nardole is bemused but quickly accepting of The Doctor's explanation about how the birds can speak our language, but choose not to. Capaldi manages to ground such fantastical dialogue with the right amount of sarcasm that you never quite know whether he's being serious or not.

"Human beings just stopped having intelligent conversations."

Beyond the main TARDIS crew, Rebecca Benson gives an excellent performance as Kar. Strong and authoritative when she first meets the Doctor, and wholly uncertain of these strangers who have just landed in her midst, she's soon able to show off the vulnerable side of her character when the Doctor takes command of the situation. You can believe she has been carrying the weight of this tragic situation on her

shoulders for such a long time, but when the Doctor proves himself to be a trustworthy ally, she is able to let her guard down, and be so *human*. The shift between emotions is made even better by the consistency between it and the gradual and changing circumstances they are faced with. I really found myself caring about Kar. I sympathised for her, and her situation. An excellent example of writing, direction and performance working together seamlessly to create a character you can invest in.

While the Doctor and Nardole are trying to sarcastically subdue the natives, Bill finds herself in the clutches – and soon enough the company – of the remaining members of her beloved, and now not so lost, Ninth Legion. Under siege from a strange alien monster, they take shelter within a cave, and quickly find themselves trapped. The situation leads to an inspiring and fascinating conversation between Bill and the Romans about her sexual orientation. She is surprisingly open about it, con-

sidering her company; but so too are they...even more so than her, it turns out. She ends up accused of being the regressive one, for limiting herself to one gender. This heartening discussion leads them to gain a mutual respect, and allows Bill to take charge, and convince them to face their fears back on the ground.

Through something of a happy coincidence, Bill and her companion's escape takes them direct to the Doctor, Nardole, and the natives. After some confrontations, we're gifted an uplifting scene where the TARDIS translation circuit allows for these two warring groups to communicate with each other for the first time, and The Doctor is able to convince them to join forces and fight the common enemy. Once again, Capaldi delivers on the script with great gusto, roaring, rather succinctly, for them to "GROW THE HELL UP!"

Come the final confrontation with the eater of light, everyone is given a chance to shine. From the Doctor's assertion that he should be the one to sacrifice himself, Bill trying to convince him otherwise, and allowing the two previously opposing factions to decide for themselves, and Nardole bringing both levity and humility to proceedings with his brief conversation with a crow. before helping Bill to protect the Doctor. The guest cast are equally brilliant: the aforementioned Benson as Kar. and Daniel Kerr's Ban standing out as their characters accept their fate, and march bravely into the unknown - along with the jovial musicians, who I hope realised what they were doing!

The final scenes in the TARDIS are tense and intriguing, with both Mackie

and Lucas managing to perfectly convey the very real danger that Missy's apparent freedom presents. The Doctor's use of the now-haunting melody to ground Missy helps to add further depth to her ever-developing character, and is also a neat way of tying the two storylines together.

The Eaters of Light is not without its faults – some of the CGI in the moonlit forest scenes is cartoonish, and I feel more could have been made of that monster – but judged, and, most importantly, enjoyed on its own merits, it offers an intriguing, funny, occasionally moving, and, yes, largely enjoyable story.

I was pleasantly surprised by how much I liked this story the second time around, and how I have been able to find the positive in something which initially passed me by.



WORLD ENOUGH AND TIME

Allan Lear



It's always an interesting piece of pretension when a writer names their episode after a famous quotation. Often it's like a mission statement, against which the success or otherwise of the episode can later be judged - see, for instance, Tooth and Claw, in which Alfred, Lord Tennyson's In Memoriam is filleted (aptly enough) for a quote regarding how the human capacity for love is superior to the brutal facts of natural life; a suitable enough acquisition for a story about how one of the most famously devoted husbands in British history fashioned a wedding gift into a weapon that destroys alien lycanthropes.

On the other hand, sometimes the usage can be quite obscure. Listeners to the Diddly Dum podcast will have heard host Doc Whom explaining the origin of the phrase "world enough and time". It comes from Andrew Marvell's wonderful quasi-romantic poem To His Coy Mistress, the gist of which is that, had the narrator been gifted with immortality, he would happily burble sweet nothings to his girlfriend all day but, time being short and all, he'd rather get his

leg over. At first glance it's a strange choice for a family television show.

Further thought, however, reveals that it is Stephen Moffatt being his usual contrarian self. Rather than using the quote whole as intended, he has fractured it down and dichotomised it to create the central dilemma of our characters. Poor old Bill Potts, who has barely survived having her entire body shot off, is stuck at the bottom of the ship where her time, relative to the Doctor and crew, is a bottomless pool; she has all the time there is, but is permanently confined to the hospital premises by the artificial limitations of the chestbox installed to replace her vaporised heart, lungs, oesophagus, and spine. The Doctor and Nardole, on the other hand, have unlimited freedom of movement but (relatively speaking) only seconds to act before it's too late to do anything. Thus not one of them is blessed with the poetic concatenation of world enough and time.

Does that sound a bit overcomplicated? Well, that's probably because it is. In my appraisal of *Heaven Sent*, also in this issue, I praised Moffat for never backing down from making *Doctor Who* as challenging as he felt it needed to be, in terms of both scares and brains. In this series the grace notes of Capaldi's Doctor, the blackboard and chalk,



come into their pedagogic own in the set-up of his relationship with Bill Potts, and here he is in full professorial flight as he pulls apart his sonic screwdriver to reveal a permanent marker and starts using a nearby console to explicate the dilatative effect of gravity on the passage of time. This is a scene that shows the importance of casting a clever actor to play a clever character: Capaldi breezes through the explanation with consummate ease, giving the impression of absolutely familiarity with the material - which is, after all, some fairly well-known pop science, and probably one of the most accurate pieces of physicsy doubletalk Who has indulged in for a long time. People who cavil about the supposed ability of children to follow what's going on here have forgotten what childhood is like, because this scene tells you everything a child needs to know about the science at work: because of the black hole, time's quicker here than there,

and that must be right because the Doctor says so. If you're an adult who can't follow it, be a grown-up and consult a book on the subject instead of whinging about how children's TV is too hard.

Of course, if Capaldi is exuding confidence in this episode, it's not hard to see why. Acting, like singing, is something that gets easier the better the people around you are, and the cast in this episode is superlative. Mackie has acquitted herself well all series, a young talent who comes across as relaxed and natural in front of camera; Michelle Gomez is supremely biting, her silly introductory scene serving up a completely false expectation for what will become one of the most gripping Gothic horrors since the Hinchliffe/Holmes Matt era: Lucas takes a turn as straight man and shows that for a man who often plays grotesques he has a great feel for when to





underplay; and John Simm is superb. I watched the episode again today and was surprised by how hard he is to spot under the kookie, well-meaning, somewhat Henson's *Labyrinth* creation that is Mr Razor – or, as everyone seems keen to pronounce it, Miss Teresa.

It's a lovely episode, full of wonderfully macabre touches: when Bill realises that the reason the cyborgs stop saying "pain" when you turn the dial, it's not because she's adjusted the medication. it's because she's turned the volume down - that's a genuinely unpleasant moment, a great piece of horror-SF, as is the declaration that her headset will "stop [her] caring" about the pain she's in. What could be a more alien concept than not caring about pain? All animals feel pain, and even plants react to physical stimulus. What a strange creature it would be that felt pain but was not distressed by it.

And why does Moffat allow himself the indulgence of these dark black thoughts in a children's show? Again, it comes down to the fact that he, like his audience, has nothing but total faith in his leading man. Capaldi is an end-

lessly capable actor; his performances are stripped-down mini-masterpieces of show-don't-tell, shorn of gimmickry, just channelling raw emotion from his heart to his face. His ability to bring relatable sentiment to even the most outrageous scripting is one of the reasons he was always an excellent choice for Doctor. even if it has regrettably been a trump card for the last few series more often than would have been desirable. Even when the lines have been errant nonsense, at least Capaldi makes them easy to listen to. Notice also the way he uses the context of the action to change his performance from episode to episode: right from the start here, the Doctor is pallier with Missy, less reserved, as though things are going well and an edge of complacency is creeping in. He reads the pages between the scripts, the same way a fan does.

In the final analysis, that's what makes it such a logical choice that Jodie Whittaker is coming next. Capaldi, the fanturned-Doctor which his hints of Pertwee and his notes of Hartnell, has just played the 'traditional' Doctor to the absolute hilt. Why try to top that when it's far more Doctory to do something completely unexpected?



THE DOCTOR FALLS

Jon Arnold

Where does the story begin?

It begins, as it does for most of us, when we happen to see our first episode, whether it's by the flicker of the cathode ray tube or the boldness and precision of HD. When we happen to catch an episode of this silly, wonderful show and it throws a hook into your imagination and your heart. When it carves out and preserves a corner of your mind that the joy of this show will keep forever filled with the wonder and joy of the best moments of childhood.

In this case it begins in Glasgow of the 1960s, when the show was still fresh and new. When the five year old Peter Dougan Capaldi, along with much of the nation's youth, was entranced by a new and strange televisual fairytale,

the stories of an old magician and his friends careering anywhere and everywhere in time and space and saving people from the cruelties of monsters and the schemes of evil men. It's a story that remains entwined through the remainder of the 1960s and into the 1970s, through the proto-fandom of the original Doctor Who fan club and correspondence with the production team. It diverges around the time of punk, those teenage years when not-quiteadults are trying to be older than they are and often flatly denying their child-Their stories brush together again in 1995, when Capaldi's offered the chance to audition for the TV Movie, but refuses it as his love for the show means he couldn't face the disappointment of not getting the role. And in 2005 both Capaldi and his beloved series strike it big: Doctor Who restored to the heart of Saturday night by Russell T Davies and Capaldi getting the showpiece role his talents had long



deserved: Malcolm Tucker, one of the great comic monsters of the twenty-first century. Capaldi even finally gets to appear in the show itself alongside another Scottish actor playing out his childhood dreams of Doctorhood.

And then, when perhaps you might think that Malcolm Tucker's 18 certificate persona, prior appearances and even age might count against your dream ever coming true you get the call. Do you want your dream to come true? Do you want to spend a few years playing your childhood hero? Of course you do. And, as that little Hartnellesque tug of the lapels upon his announcement showed, he'd never forgotten how and why the show had captured his imagination as a child.

The small tragedy of fulfilling your childhood dream though is that one day you'll have to walk away from it. No matter the joy of the first scene, the grand speeches and wonderful Doctor moments you can bring your time will end with someone new waking up in your clothes and flying off to their own new adventures. It's the nature of the show: the perfectly designed television beast that thrives on changing and evolving, not depending on any one person. Even the most revered writers, actors and directors are only fleeting scenes in a seemingly unending tapestry. In the end every Doctor must fall. And the greater the Doctor the greater the fall - literally in Tom Baker's case.

Make no mistake about it: Capaldi has been one of the great Doctors. Even those who don't like the Steven Moffat's version of the show have acknowledged that Capaldi has been every bit as good as his acting pedigree suggested he

would be. In truth he's almost certainly the actor with the greatest range to play the part, equally adept at talking to Clara about hugging, playing the grown -up when there needs to be one in the room when humans and Zygons aren't getting along, trying to bash through a crystal wall over billions of years or subtly accentuating the comic moments of the likes of Robot of Sherwood. As all good Doctors do, he's held all these preposterous scenarios together and in the toughest way possible: by treating it as an acting role rather than a performance, with his character evolving from something akin to a Gallifreyan Malcolm Tucker to the mad uncle scientistphilosopher he talked about when first taking on the role. Go back and watch any of his episodes and just watch the subtle moments he adds: the gestures and expressions, all the while being incredibly generous to co-stars and quest stars. The loss of this Doctor, the fall will be great indeed.

So how does a Doctor as formidable as this fall? Steven Moffat goes back to the thing he does when he wants to challenge the Doctor most of all: he backs him into a corner and gives him nowhere to run to. It's what he did with Matt Smith's Doctor on Trenzalore. what he did when he put Capaldi's Doctor into the confession dial and what he does again when he needs to challenge this most powerful and authoritative Doctor. No tricks or clever lines can get him out of such situations, he has to make a stand against impossible odds. Like Smith's Doctor the stakes are relatively low: the survival of a small rural community, the Doctor and his friends against a colony of Cybermen who, thanks to the nature of the colony ship, will keep breeding and upgrading until they overcome their challengers. These are, let's be honest, impossible odds. But in doing so actor and writer find two fundamental lessons at the heart of Doctor Who. The first. the big theme of both episodes is the need to change and evolve to survive: each key conversation in these episodes is the Doctor asking his friends Masters) to accept (including the change: Bill physically, Nardole and the Masters philosophically. Ultimately it's this willingness to change which sees Nardole and Bill eventually survive their ordeals and the unwillingness which dooms the Master (the elder Master's decision dooms both selves). It's a lesson he doesn't want to learn for himself though: in the end his need to learn that will fill another episode.

The second lesson is one embodied by both this Doctor and the actor who's played him in real life. A quick google will show you how Capaldi's embraced the role: happily posing for endless selfies and nipping into the Doctor Who Experience unannounced on his days off. His interviews give endless credit to everyone else who's worked on the show and he takes time out to publicly acknowledge things fans have sent him and the artwork for the Titan comic book series. He knows what it is to be a fan and does his best to give his fans the same joy Hartnell once gave him. It's at the heart of what he is as a person: kindness. And the importance of kindness is what defines Moffat's version of Doctor Who and Capaldi's incarnation: the superpower to have two hearts to be able to care twice as much. Ultimately it's what ends up killing him, arguably what kills every Doctor - the sacrifice of their life so that others may live (even if, as here, it may only be for a short time more). The question implicit in Deep Breath and explicit in Into the Dalek ('am I a good man?) may seem ridiculous in the light of what we'd seen over fifty years but it's rarely been more grandly answered than here. Even though it might not save his friends (Bill already converted, Nardole doomed to a life of helping the colony survive, the Master/Missy apparently having rejected him), even though his last stand will be without hope, without witness and without reward he stands to protect the vulnerable. The Doctor Falls is a throughly grim episode suffused with impending doom in that regard. And yet, through the darkness, there's the strand of kindness to redeem everything. That even in the darkest of times we should hold on to kindness and hope. We tell stories to inform and educate: to pass on any lessons we've learned. In a currently volatile world the lesson of the importance of kindness is perhaps more valuable than it's ever been. It's a hell of legacy to leave.





TWICE UPON A TIME

Paul Winter

The Steven Moffat era contains a number of great endings that actually, weren't. There seems to be a resistance to killing characters off without having a joker up the sleeve. Clara stayed too long I think. There were two great opportunities to write her out in a memorable way-at the end of 'Last Christmas' when the Doctor returned to her as an old lady and again, in 'Face the Raven' where her compassion, and her over-confidence, could have led Clara to sacrifice herself in place of Rigsy. She almost did that, but instead came back with one huge golden ticket and her own TARDIS.

Ditto Bill. What a bold step to turn her into a Cyberman, and then die saving the Doctor. But no, she returned as a water girl and then appeared again as a glass person in 'Twice Upon a Time'. And that brings me to the finale..

I know few people who would knock the Capaldi Doctor, regardless of what they think of the Moffat-era production (and I liked it overall although I think he stayed too long). Peter Capaldi's performance in 'World Enough and Time' and 'The Doctor Falls' was superb as were those of the rest of the cast—John Simm finally got the material to give us a decent Master and Missy finished as far more interesting villain than when she arrived. Whilst the story was a bit continuity laden it would have been a great way for the era to bow out. Sadly it wasn't.

'Twice Upon a Time' may have been a fanboy fun-fest. It had bits of The Tenth Planet re-filmed, it had Ben and Polly (briefly) and most importantly it had David Bradley giving his First Doctor, as opposed to his William Hartnell.

But really, what was this all about, and what must the Christmas Day audience have thought? There was a minimal storyline, a returning character in the form of Rusty that I doubt many remembered, and a version of the First Doctor that was presumably based on what we think our Grandad must have been like in 1966. David Bradley got the first Doctor so right in terms of mannerisms, vocal inflections and brought a lovely element of humour to the role. However I do not recognise a lot of how the first Doctor was actually written.

Ultimately I guess this story was 'ok'. I thought Mark Gatiss was very good, and I am sure that the casual audience will have been won over by the marvelous sequence during the Christmas cease-fire on the WW1 battlefield—something which really did happen.

But I hoped for more, and the twelfth Doctor certainly deserved more.

This story? Five out of ten. Peter Capaldi's time as the Doctor? Ten out of ten.



