

# THE CELESTIAL TOYROOM ANNUAL 2022



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# EDITORIAL

By Paul Winter

Welcome to 'The Celestial Toyroom Annual 2022'. This is the sixth in the series, all of which are available to download free-of-charge from our website. The book continues with the usual format, covering the televised stories of the eleventh Doctor on this occasion.

My thanks to every contributor to the book. As well as some well known names, there are a number of people who have not written for us before, thus enabling us to present a variety of content styles and types across the series and specials. Graeme Wey has also come up with another marvellous cover for us for which I am grateful.

It seems odd now to think that the Eleventh Doctor era almost did not happen because some at the BBC thought the show could not survive the departure of David Tennant from the lead. It does make you wonder if they had actually seen Doctor Who before, or had considered that with David Tennant being the 10th Doctor there must, presumably have been nine prior to him (including a certain Christopher Eccleston!) I must admit that it never crossed my mind that the show would not continue after the 10th Doctor's era and I was never in any doubt about the programme after the first 15–20 minutes of The Eleventh Hour. For me, Matt Smith was the Doctor immediately. Before this, I was doubtful, considering him to be too young, and it was only my confidence in Steven Moffat as

showrunner that meant I did not approach viewing the fifth series with an air of gloom.

As I write this we are awaiting the identity of Doctor number 14 and that means Matt Smith's first series was nearly twelve years ago.

Tempus Fugit.

*Paul*

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# THE ERA

By Nick Joy



Can you remember where you were on 3 Jan 2009 at 5:35pm? I have perfect recall – it was the Bullring branch of Currys electrical store in Birmingham city centre and I was stood next to a wall of television screens as the identity of the next Doctor was revealed in a special edition of ‘Doctor Who Confidential’. Like many who had tuned in for the grand reveal, I went ‘What? Who?’ when Matt Smith was announced as the incoming Time Lord. Who was this stranger? He looked far too young, but I had faith in new show-runner Steven Moffat, who after all had written some fantastic episodes for the RTD era (including *The Empty Child/The Doctor Dances*, *Blink*, *Silence in the Library/Forest of the Dead*). Interestingly, young Smith had already played against Billie Piper in the BBC adaptations of Phillip Pullman’s *Ruby* in the *Smoke and The Shadow* in the North – not that this new Doctor would likely ever get to meet Rose again(!).

Flash forward to autumn 2009 and the recording booth adjoining the Hoddi-

nott Hall in Cardiff’s Millennium Centre. This was for the recording of Murray Gold’s score for *The End of Time, Part 2*, and I was lucky enough to watch the footage (with live orchestral accompaniment) of David Tennant regenerating into Matt Smith. I was immediately hooked by his performance, even in those few moments as the TARDIS flew over London. Of course, NDAs and professional courtesy prevented me at the time from telling anyone what I’d seen, but there was an immediate sense of relief and ownership. We were in good hands. And that was a good thing, because this Doctor was going to be in the driving seat as the show celebrated its golden anniversary. Welcome to the age of the Raggedy Doctor.

David Tennant was always going to be a tough act to follow. For three seasons and a handful of specials he had owned the Doctor, but even he had the safety blanket of a companion carried over from the previous year. Not so for Smith, who was entering the TARDIS with a hard reset. When in *The Eleventh Hour* he crash-landed in the garden of 7-year-old Amelia Pond, somewhere in Leadworth, Gloucestershire, he not only provided a jumping on point for the new viewers, but still needed to convince the old guard that this was the same show. But so much had changed, starting with the version of the theme tune and the logo. The TARDIS was a different colour blue, with white window frames and a St

John Ambulance sticker on a panel. Inside, it had changed from organic coral to Edward Thomas’ fusion of cyberpunk and Jules Verne, but it was still recognisably a TARDIS. Beneath that crazy mop of hair and ‘that chin’ the Doctor dressed in a tweed jacket like a geography teacher, and he wore a bow tie because... well, bowties are cool.

What a thrilling three seasons the Matt Smith era comprises. Stephen Moffat would continue to run the show for a further three series with Peter Capaldi as his lead, and Matt Smith would revisit the stage (*American Psycho*, *Unreachable*, *Lungs*), TV (*The Crown*, the upcoming *House of the Dragon*) and movies (*Last Night in Soho*, the upcoming *Morbis*). It was a time of experimentation – split seasons, additional online content – and a period when the show lived far beyond the episodes, from touring concerts to trading cards, to childrens magazines and toys, to exhibitions and games. Wear a fez today and a lot of people will now associate it with Doctor Who instead of Tommy Cooper. That’s some achievement. But don’t eat fish fingers and custard – it really is a foul combination.

I’m not going to go through every Matt Smith story in forensic detail – that work has already been done by some clever writers who have shared their own views on the stories over the following pages, from the stone-cold classics to those probably best forgotten. What I do want to include is the wider world of Doctor Who in the Smith era, because those 44 episodes transmitted between 3 April 2010 and 25 December 2013 never existed in a vacuum.

For Series 5, Steven Moffat promised a

shift in tone to the fantastical, and this was evident from the outset in *The Eleventh Hour*. From Murray Gold’s delicate ‘Amy’s Theme’ to the arrival of Smith’s mysterious traveller, it played out like a fairy tale... with added fish fingers and custard. We met the infant and grown-up Amy Pond, discovering that Karen Gillan’s character was not a real police officer but a kissogram, and significantly we were introduced to Amy’s boyfriend, nurse Rory Williams, unaware of the role that he would play going forwards. And building on the pan-season arcs of *Bad Wolf*, *Torchwood*, *Harold Saxon* and disappearing bees, we had the recurring theme of the crack in the universe, that would appear this year in such diverse locations as Amy’s bedroom wall, the hull of *Starship UK*, Churchill’s bunker and clouds over Venice. After a trip to the stars (a regular first excursion in the TARDIS for Earth-born companions) in *The Beast Below*, the Daleks returned in Mark Gatiss *Victory of the Daleks*, a celebrity historical that pitched Churchill against the new Dalek paradigm – brightly-coloured, hunch-backed beasts that somewhat inevitably became referred to as ‘Teletubby Daleks’. There was a practical reason for the height (the taller Karen Gillan could now look at them, eye to organic eyestalk, Billie Piper having been shorter) and the vibrant colours were a nice nod to the *Amicus* movie Daleks, but the execution fell short and the whole exercise felt like an excuse to sell five of every action figure and lunchbox.

Two-parter *The Time of Angels/Flesh and Stone* featured Moffat’s return of the *Weeping Angels*, assassins from his superb Doctor-lite episode *Blink*. This also marked the welcome return of



Alex Kingston's archaeologist adventurer River Song, as introduced in Silence in the Library / Forest of the Dead. As with Rory, Moffat gave us no clues at this stage that the character would fulfil a significant role in the years ahead, the actor clearly having a ball with the character, whether in evening dress, battle fatigue, killer red heels or dressed as Cleopatra. The Vampires of Venice was a fun, horror tale, making good use of Croatian locations and Welsh castles, but it was Amy's Choice where we got a better idea of the Amy/Rory dynamic to follow, the latter dying for the first time (kind of). The Silurians returned in an extreme redesign for Chris Chibnall's The Hungry Earth/Cold Blood, and then it was Vincent and the Doctor, Richard Curtis' beautiful, poignant tale of Vincent Van Gogh and mental illness. The Lodger felt like a cost-cutting exercise, dropping the Doctor into contemporary Colchester in a low-key tale of a disguised alien spaceship, marking the first of two appearances of Craig Owens (James Corden) and Sophie (Daisy Haggard) in the show. Moffat concluded his first year with series finale The Pandorica Opens/The Big Bang, two very different episodes that tied up the many threads sown through the year and addressing the crack in the universe.

Doctor Who continued to stay alive in the second half of the year with the second 'Doctor Who Prom' at the Royal Albert Hall on 24 and 25 July, with live appearances by Smith, Gillan and Davill, who introduced selections of Murray Gold's scores and space/time-related pieces of classical music, Smith also appearing in character as the Doctor for some audience interaction. Smith's Doctor would also return in The

Sarah Jane Adventures two-parter Death of the Doctor, alongside Lis' Sladen's eponymous heroine and Jon Pertwee's former companion Jo Grant (Katy Manning). The Doctor would also appear as a pre-recorded projection in the arena tour 'Doctor Who Live: The Monsters are Coming', a concert combining live performances of Murray Gold's scores and popular monsters against a backdrop of a travelling showman Vorgenson (Nigel Planer). On Christmas Day, in between playing 'Return to Earth' on the Wii console or 'Evacuation Earth' on the Nintendo DS, fans would see Stephen Moffat concluding his first year with A Christmas Carol, a re-imagining of Dickens' classic festive tale, with added flying shark and mezzosoprano Katherine Jenkins.

Recognising that a 13-episode series of the show only caters for 25% of the year, Series 6 was structured to be transmitted in two parts, covering off Easter and autumn, meaning that with the addition of the Christmas Day special the viewer was never more than a few months away from a new episode. February 2011 saw the opening of the 'Doctor Who Experience' for its year's residency at Kensington Olympia, featuring an interactive adventure (including a mock-up of the interior of Smith's TARDIS), with the actor performing specially-filmed inserts, before leading travellers into a museum of props and costumes. Such a high-profile attraction continued to keep Doctor Who alive in the months that it was off air, with Series 6 premiering on 23 April with The Impossible Astronaut. But the mood had been dampened by the tragic passing of Elisabeth Sladen the previous week, and a special edition of Doctor Who Confidential followed immediately

on CBBC - My Sarah Jane. The season opener benefitted from some spectacular location shooting in the US, establishing the season arc of the familial relationship between Amy, Rory and River - pregnancy, the identity of who shot the Doctor and the fall of the Silence. This was also a time where the value of internet promotion was being recognised, with many episodes gaining an online prequel or 'minisode'.

The Day of the Moon took us deeper into the Doctor's encounters with the Silence, rescuing Amy, and the first of many appearances of a mysterious woman with an eye patch (Madame Kovarian, played by Frances Barber), concluding with the girl in the spacesuit regenerating. Who was this Time Lord? If the 'timey-wimey' plot twists of the season opener proved too tricky, Stephen Thompson's pirate swashbuckler The Curse of the Black Spot proved to be less demanding on the grey matter, featuring a fun turn from Hugh Bonneville as Captain Avery, a mysterious siren (Lily Cole) and some atmospheric location shooting in Charlestown, Cornwall. The Hugo-award-winning The Doctor's Wife was the first of two episodes written by fantasy novelist Neil Gaiman, featuring a beguiling performance by Suranne Jones as Idris - a living embodiment of the TARDIS - and a makeshift TARDIS console based on Susannah Leah's winning design in a Blue Peter competition. Matthew Graham's The Rebel Flesh/The Almost People took us to a 22nd Century monastery where synthetically-created Ganger workers plotted to kill their human originals, and we discovered the identity of the Eye Patch Woman. The series broke mid-season with Steven Moffat's A Good Man Goes to War

where we discovered that the Amy travelling with the Doctor and Rory was in fact a duplicate, the real Pond being on asteroid base Demon's Run, having been captured by Madame Kovarian. The episode ended with the explosive news that River Song was in fact Amy and Rory's daughter, Melody.

While waiting for the second half of the season to debut in late August, we could also enjoy Smith's Doctor in pre-recorded material in The Crash of the Elysium, a live theatre adventure at Manchester International Festival. After bingeing on the half dozen Target novel reprints released in July, and struggled to get our heads round 'Torchwood: Miracle Day', Series 6 resumed with Let's Kill Hitler. Building on the revelation that River Song is the daughter of Amy and Rory, we discovered that their childhood friend Mels was in fact Melody, who regenerated into River, tying up some of the character's story arc. In Mark Gatiss' Night Terrors, young Alex was terrified by peg dolls, serving as a palette cleanser after some mythos-heavy episodes, while in Tom MacRae's The Girl Who Waited, Amy was separated from the Doctor and Rory and forced to wait 36 years to be rescued, while dodging Handbots. In Toby Whithouse's The God Complex we were tricked into thinking that Amy and Rory had left, when the Doctor dropped them off in contemporary London, fearful that they might get killed if they remained with him, giving him time to return to Colchester in Closing Time for an adventure with The Lodger's Craig and Sophie, who are new parents, and soon to be involved in a plot with Cybermen. But it was the final moments of the episode that were of the greatest interest, as Madame Kovarian

and the agents of the Silence submerged River in the astronaut suit in Lake Silencio – she was the Doctor’s killer. In Steven Moffat’s series finale The Wedding of River Song we discovered that the Doctor knew of his impending death and had taken the opportunity to substitute himself with the Teselecta, calling on alternate universe versions of Rory, Amy and River to help him as all of Earth’s history began to run simultaneously. Smith’s Doctor returned (in his underpants) for a Children in Need sketch, and then on Christmas Day for the Narnia-themed The Doctor, The Widow and the Wardrobe.

As with the previous series, the seventh was split into two, this time starting in the autumn. While production continued, highlights of the first half of 2012 included the launch of the ‘Worlds in Time’ online game and the official Doctor Who Convention over the weekend of 24-25 March, attended by Smith, Davill and Gillan (among others), though for many the highlight was a visit to the studios at Upper Boat and a chance to play in the TARDIS before the set was struck. On 26 May, Smith carried the Olympic torch for a leg between Cardiff and Swansea (linking neatly into Fear Her), and on 20 July the ‘Doctor Who Experience’ opened at its new, five-year home in a semi-permanent structure opposite the new BBC drama village at Roath Lock in Cardiff Bay, expanding on the same structure as the Olympia exhibition.

Series 7 arrived on September 1st with Asylum of the Daleks, somewhat erroneously hyped as containing every Dalek, though the greatest surprise was the early inclusion of ‘Impossible Girl’

Jenna Coleman, here playing the Oswin variant of her character. Subsequent weeks featured high concept episodes structured as mini-movies, complete with cinematic posters – Chris Chibnall’s Dinosaurs on a Spaceship (featuring David Bradley as Solomon ahead of his portrayal of William Hartnell in ‘An Adventure in Space and Time’) and the Power of Three, and Toby Whithouse’s spaghetti western A Town Called Mercy (filmed partially on western sets in Almeria, Spain). The season took its mid-season break with The Angels Take Manhattan, marking the heart-breaking departure of Amy and Rory and a supersized Weeping Angel in the form of the Statue of Liberty. The Doctor Who year concluded on Christmas Day with Stephen Moffat’s The Snowmen, bringing back the Great Intelligence and introducing us to Clara, though not the one we’d be seeing the next year. And look at Michael Pickwood’s glorious new TARDIS interior!

Whatever is planned for Doctor Who’s 60th in 2023, it’s going to struggle to beat 2013’s celebrations for the 50th. It was a year-long party that included a set of Royal Mail stamps, 12 variant covers of the Radio Times in anniversary week and all manner of specials. After a ‘Comic Relief’ sketch on 15 March based on ‘One Born Every Minute’, Season 7 continued with Moffat’s contemporary thriller The Bells of St John before whisking the Doctor and Clara off to the The Rings of Akhaten, Neil Cross’ divisive folk fantasy. The Ice Warriors made a return after an absence of nearly 40 years in Mark Gatiss’ submarine drama Cold War (and addressed the question as to whether the creatures’ endo-skeleton was fixed

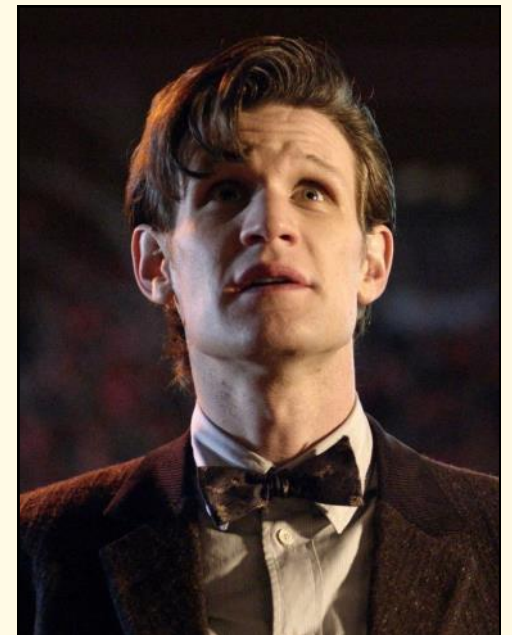
or fitted), while the Doctor tackled the ‘witch in the well’ and other spooky goings on in Neil Cross’ haunted house horror, Hide. In Journey to the Centre of the TARDIS the Doctor had to save his vessel from being salvaged, while digging a little deeper into the Clara mystery’, while the Cybermen returned in a sleek new design at Hedgewick’s World of Wonders for Neil Gaiman’s Nightmare in Silver. Mark Gatiss’ The Crimson Horror was a fun, Gothic treat starring Dame Diana Rigg as Mrs Gillyflower, and the series concluded with Moffat’s The Name of the Doctor on 4 August, addressing the ongoing arc about the Doctor’s impending demise on Trenzalore. With the welcome return of River Song, the episode finished with a surprise appearance of John Hurt as the Doctor, setting things up for the anniversary special.

While waiting for the upcoming birthday, Smith fans could enjoy another ‘Doctor Who Prom’ over the weekend of 13-14 July, with appearances by Smith and Coleman and the usual mix of performances of Murray Gold’s scores, classical favourites and this time a medley of older themes. ‘The Doctor Who Figurine Collection’ launched on 26 August with a model of Matt Smith (and it’s still going strong, over 200 issues later) and the celebrations began properly on 21 November with Mark Gatiss’ love letter to the creation of the show, ‘An Adventure in Space and Time’, with an unexpected appearance by Smith at the end. The Official 50th celebration saw fans packing out London’s ExCeL exhibition centre for the weekend of 22-24 November, with appearances by all living Doctors, while the main event was of course The Day of the Doctor, Moffat’s multi-Doctor

movie. Starring Smith, David Tennant, John Hurt and Billie Piper, the special was shot in 3D and simulcast in over 75 countries. Other treats included Paul McGann’s return in the online minisode The Night of the Doctor and the spoof The Five(ish) Doctors Reboot. The 11th Doctor regenerated into the 12th on Christmas Day in The Time of the Doctor, Peter Capaldi taking the reins. With the crack in the universe closed and the Doctor granted a new cycle of regenerations, the Matt Smith era drew to a close – though he would make a surprise phone call to reassure Clara in Series 8’s Deep Breath.

If I could now call myself on 3 January 2009, at that Currys in Birmingham, it would be with a simple message: ‘Don’t worry – you’ll be in safe hands.’ And I was.

Geronimo!



# THE ELEVENTH HOUR

Review by Paul Simpson

In many ways, The Eleventh Hour is one of the most important episodes in Doctor Who's history – at least for the 21st century incarnation of the show. Not till The Woman Who Fell to Earth was there quite such pressure on an episode to succeed – because after riding high for some years, Doctor Who was making a completely fresh start. As Steven Moffat noted in the commentary to the episode, it was one of the hardest scripts he ever had to write because he and the completely new production team had to show that somehow the series was the same but different – that everything that had attracted people to Doctor Who was still there, albeit in a modified form, but also that there was a good reason for an additional audience to become engaged.

To be fair, Rose of course had had even more pressure on it, bringing Doctor Who back after 16 years (bar one night in May 1996). Christmas 2005 saw The Christmas Invasion, the first time that a huge swathe of the audience had seen the effects of regeneration (Pudsey Cutaway doesn't count), and, like Rose, Mickey and Jackie, viewers weren't sure if the man in front of them really was the same as the jug-eared Northerner who had saved them from the Slitheen. But David Tennant went on to be one of the most popular Doctors ever (and indeed even 11 years after his departure his incarnation continues to be a touchstone for merchandise and spin-offs). There was

talk of Doctor Who coming to an end when Tennant – as well as head writer Russell T Davies and the production crew – decided to move on. Five years? That's a decent length for a TV show nowadays. Another twenty-six year run didn't seem to be something that the BBC contemplated.

Steven Moffat had agreed to take on the role of head writer back in 2008, and turned down the opportunity to work on much higher profile projects because this was fulfilling a lifelong dream. We'd seen something of his take on Doctor Who during the 9th and 10th Doctor's eras, as well as in The Curse of Fatal Death, his mini-drama for Comic Relief back in 1999, and as Holy Saturday 2010 approached (Easter Saturday is the one after Easter, not the day before!), trailers and pictures suggested there was something of a fairy tale approach being taken – a fairy tale via Lewis Carroll, anyway. But before the Doctor could disappear down the rabbit hole, we had to be sure we wanted to go with him.

The previous story to be aired, on New Year's Day, had seen the Master try to take over everyone on Earth, and had finished with a long trawl back through the Doctor's recent history. Then Tennant's Doctor said he didn't want to go, and the TARDIS console room exploded into flames. Matt Smith's Doctor appeared, and after a quick onceover, realised the TARDIS was crashing...

And crash it does, into the garden of young Amelia Pond, and for the first few minutes of The Eleventh Hour, we see the Doctor interacting not with adults (as both the 9th and the 10th did on their debuts with Rose), but with a small child. The younger kids watching saw someone just like them or their classmates on screen spending time with a stranger who was obviously mad, but didn't seem to pose a danger (a fine line that Moffat and director Adam Smith walk very carefully). Matt Smith immediately captures the audience's attention, showing his ability for slapstick comedy (both in this, and in the opening sequence as the Doctor desperately tries not to fall onto London from a great height) as well as being able to turn on a sixpence into protectiveness and concern.

It's followed by the first of the episode's two time jumps and you have to wonder how many of the younger fans realised that policewoman Amy was the same little Amelia grown up – at least before she makes it, and her annoyance about that, clear to the

Doctor. There's a good blend of comedy and drama as she and the Doctor face Prisoner Zero for the first time – rather nicely, in his novelisation of the story for Pearson Press, aimed at 9 and 10 year olds, Trevor Baxendale alters the reason that Amy is wearing the police costume to be because she's going to a costume party, rather than that she's a kissogram. ("What's a kissogram, Mum?") This is juxtaposed with scenes introducing Rory and the coma patients, all of whom are calling for a doctor. Or rather, as we realise quite quickly, the Doctor.

What has there not been in any of this? Well after the complexities of The End of Time, there's been no mentions of Time Lords, or Gallifrey. We don't meet any returning monsters. We've not been wandering through the Doctor's own timeline in increasingly complex adventures – that was to come as Series 5 and Moffat's later tenure would prove. The Eleventh Hour is quite simply the tale of a madman with a box – a madman who manages to convince Amelia Pond that he





may be the only way to stop the Earth from imminent destruction because the Atraxi are going to destroy "the human residence" if they don't get Prisoner Zero.

On a practical note, it helps that this wasn't the first story that Matt Smith filmed. Like Christopher Eccleston in 2004 and Peter Davison back in 1981, Smith had the benefit of shooting a later story first (The Time of Angels / Flesh and Stone saw his debut on set), and getting a chance to find his way into the character of the Doctor before introducing him to the audience. As the episode progresses you can see the Doctor becoming this new version of himself, building up to the terrific scene on the hospital roof where he warns the Atraxi that planet Earth is defended. It remains one of Matt Smith's finest performances in the role.

And it's that scene at the climax of the episode that also reminds the audience that for all the manic driving of a fire engine and texts warning Amy to duck, for all the innate showing off as the Doctor establishes his credentials (and tells Patrick Moore off), for all the eccentricities of fish fingers and custard, this is still the Doctor, and it's still Doctor Who. It's still about one person putting himself in the way because it's the right thing to do. It took some time for the series to fully acknowledge its 20th century run, but now it's part and parcel of who the Doctor is - and it doesn't matter that some of the clips used in the memory sequence involve creatures that didn't threaten the Earth. It's there to serve a more meta purpose - that this is Doctor Who (the character's

name for the great majority of the population, it's worth remembering, and the show). The outer trappings are a little different but the excitement and peril, the humour and the heartache that took the show to become the most watched in the country not that long before continue to be at the centre of the programme.

For me, one of the reason The Eleventh Hour works so well, and why it (along with The Day of the Doctor) is one of the episodes of this era I can return to time and again, is because it's about re-establishing those core elements of the show. It's about the Doctor doing what the Doctor does best - reacting under pressure, improvising, making those around him (Amy, Rory, Jeff, even Patrick Moore) be the best that they can be. It's got humour - sometimes dark, as when Prisoner Zero operates the wrong mouth for the voice, sometimes witty ("I'm the Doctor. I'm worse than everybody's aunt. And that is not how I'm introducing myself"). It's also got the debut of my favourite piece of Murray Gold's incidental music for the series - I am the Doctor - a theme that encapsulates all of the above.

There's nearly always a defining moment for a Doctor in their first story that convinces a jaded old fan like me. For Eccleston it was his realisation about the London Eye; for Tennant it's the quote from The Lion King. For Smith, it's the sight of him walking through the clips of his predecessors. The Eleventh Doctor was here - and I can still remember how pleased I was that was the case.

*Paul Simpson is editor of SciFiBulletin.com*

## THE BEAST BELOW

Review by George Oakes

There is a lot to like about The Beast Below. Perhaps, with the hindsight of a decade and three UK general elections, there's something to learn from it, too.

*It's Britain, but metal. That's not just a ship - that's an idea!*

The Beast Below is a Doctor Who episode of two halves. As with The End of the World years before, it transports the new companion far into the future, a future with plenty to say about the present. Rose Tyler had a cocktail party with the rich and famous who gathered to watch the planet burn. Amy Pond, on the other hand, is offered Starship UK - a Britain which has packed its bags and hurried off to the stars. For a second episode, it's a lot to take in, but writer Steven Moffat is aware of this.

*'Children cry because they want attention, because they're hurt or afraid. But when they cry silently, it's because they just can't stop.'*

The Beast Below offers more than a first trip into the future - it's an opportunity to hold Amy Pond and her friend to the mark. It asks who they are in a place that's gift-wrapped in denial, and guilt, and people who ignore the upset and lost. More than The Eleventh Hour, here is the chance to properly learn who this Doctor is, who Amy Pond will be, and just how much they need each other.

It all starts in the TARDIS. Moments

after Amy's spacewalk, the Doctor's laying down his philosophy. Okay - his supposed philosophy:

'Thing One. We are observers only. That's the one rule I've always stuck to in all my travels. I never get involved in the affairs of other peoples or planets.'

Seconds after that, he's contradicting himself, bounding off to comfort Mandy - a little girl who's lost her friend. But look at how Steven Moffat tackles this. It's all framed through the TARDIS screen, making literal for Amy the jump between observation and interference. It's fearsomely efficient, telling us everything about the Doctor's compulsions - his moral fibre, his compassion - without having to move Amy an inch. Plus, it's funny! A dyed-in-the-wool Moffat moment.

And this is why I'd consider the story two-fold. On one hand, this is forthrightly about the relationship at the heart of the show, which was always going to be key to starting out. On the other hand, The Beast Below is deeply interested in the Britain that the Doctor and Amy find themselves in.

What is sci-fi, if not reflective? Moffat's episode takes its characters - quite literally - to the belly of a country's torment. And, if you hadn't noticed, that's one thing the story isn't subtle about:

'Hold tight. We're bringing down the government!'

What I really admire about the episode is the synergy between the visuals and what the script is railing against. Edward Thomas' production design litters Starship UK with union jacks and all manner of British paraphernalia, which seems to evoke a sense of post-war nostalgia. As the Doctor says, this is 'back to basics'. The citizens walk free, in the hues of the Queen's Britain – a simpler time, with less to worry about. And if you can convince yourself that nothing is rotten, then, indeed, nothing is rotten.

It's hard to detach the political subtext of *The Beast Below* from our present. The central device for the starship's citizens to reckon with – the protest and forget vote – feels more resonant than ever in our age of culture wars and, particularly, arguments over historical revisionism. How often do we hear that history is being re-written by complacent busy-bodies? How often are we told that history is no longer a com-

plex act of archaeology, but a fixed scroll to be defended without question? That fixed scroll, of course, is an easier pill to swallow. It's easier to forget every five years, than to dig deeper and protest.

If *The Beast Below* did not quite resonate in 2010 (and my recollection is that it was deemed a bit of a let-down, after Moffat's previous stories) then perhaps the years after have served up a kind of grim validation. Within a month and one day of the episode airing, a new government had been elected, led by the same party that leads the country today. We've had several opportunities to cast our votes between then and now, several chances to listen out for the rumbling beasts below us. Do we hear them?

I think Moffat's story, at its heart, is about what it means to be honest with ourselves. What links the world of *Starship UK* and our main characters is the fact that they can only find peace by acknowledging the issues they'd rather keep buried. For the Doc-

tor, the *Star Whale*'s predicament cuts through everything he wants to be. Fresh-faced and curious all over again, these brutal options – of dooming either the *Star Whale* or the humans – take the Doctor back to the turmoil of the Time War, where benevolence was no option; where being the Doctor was impossible. To quote the character, taking any of these options should lead to him finding a new name, because he 'won't be the Doctor anymore.'

On paper, this all sounds dark and brooding, but it never feels that way on screen. No doubt, Moffat's humour helps with this, as does the colourful production design, Murray Gold's music, and having our leads tumble around inside a whale. But – I believe the key reason that *The Beast Below* feels redemptive – hopeful even – is that we're witnessing this world through Amy Pond's eyes.

The crucial thing in this plot, which zips between flight decks and steamy vents and even the Tower of London, is that we have someone reacting to it all that's like us. Wouldn't you be tempted to turn tail, and run away from tomorrow? Wouldn't you, if you had something scary and life-changing on the way?

*'I wonder what I did.'*

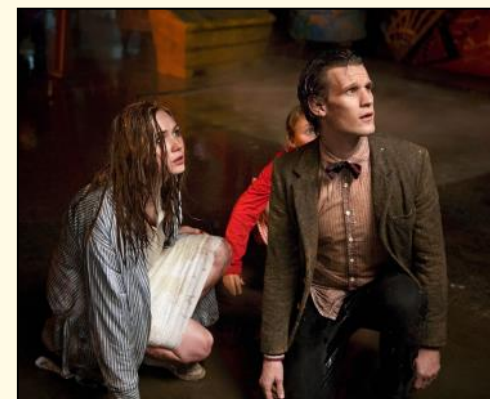
In escaping from Leadworth, Amy is given the chance to learn about herself, and what's important is that we see her getting things wrong. In another clever approach to framing, Moffat reveals to us that Amy has already discovered the horrors about *Starship UK*, and instinctively pressed the forget button

to keep them from herself, and from the Doctor. Vitaly, this puts her on equal footing with him, and the citizens of the starship, and perhaps people at home who wish they could go back and make choices again. If being the girl from Leadworth makes her human, then surely it's the decisions she makes – some regrettable – that makes Amy Pond us.

Putting Amy in a position to step up and save the day speaks a message to everyone, loud and clear: you made a painful choice before. You don't have to again.

Whether this is all fantasy is up to the viewer. I daresay that, to a chunk of the audience, Amy's path and all the allusions to crying children and beautiful creatures proved too saccharine, too banal, when this tale was first broadcast.

And yet, it almost seems radical now. It seems that our world is haemorrhaged not by brand new problems, but by variations of old ones. Bigotry and neglect grow when no one addresses them, when no one protests. When we fall into that problem of forgetting, we uphold systems that bar us from making





the change we want to see in the world.

*But you couldn't have known how it would react.*

*You couldn't. But I've seen it before.*

The last testament from one of Steven Moffat's Doctors was to 'be kind'. Going back to this story, right at the start of his run on Doctor Who, I think we can unlock what that sentiment really means. Kindness is not an embellishment, but a risk. Amy puts her faith in the Star Whale, in generosity, at the jeopardy of the population, because she knows that that ideology is the only thing that will really save us from ourselves. In a way, it's more important than any of the Doctor's three terrible options.

As the old adage goes: when someone shows you who they are, believe them.

At the start of the story, Amy Pond sees the Doctor for who he is – hypocritical, but furiously compassionate. Towards the end, she sees that the Star Whale loves the people who ride on its back, - it literally puts faith in us all. And in herself choosing to free the whale, Amy gets to put faith in herself. She sees torment for torment, and kindness for kindness.

I disagree with the critics, because I find The Beast Below more stirring with age. For every five years, for every button to forget, we can come back to this tale and remember that there will always be Amy Ponds, showing Doctors a better way. It tells us that we can do it too.



## VICTORY OF THE DALEKS

Review by Christine Grit

When Matt Smith was first introduced as the Doctor (with the regeneration scene in The End of Time Part Two) I was not that enthusiastic. 'What have they done now?' I thought. Introducing such a terribly young guy as The Doctor seemed wrong to me. It turned out that I was the one who was wrong, and Matt proved that to me in Victory of the Daleks. Of course, I had already realised he was quite the (funny but at times serious) character in The Eleventh Hour and The Beast Below, so I had already begun to change my negative stance before tuning in. The negativity was in part caused by my not ever really liking changes of Doctors because I always end to be attached to the current one, but I had real doubts that such an actor could fill David Tennant's boots.

Victory of the Daleks is notorious with

some fans because of the introduction of the so-called 'Tele Tubbie Daleks'. Although the colour scheme was nicely thought out (possibly inspired by the 60s films) and they were more imposing than the earlier ones, their cuddly, plastic look made them hard to take seriously. Most fans will also confess to liking the Ironside Daleks serving tea on a tray.

Another issue is the Spitfires into space, with presumably enough air for the pilot inside, no extreme cold, fire power working as if there's loads of oxygen around, and flying with great speed to make it to the moon and back in an eye wink) which of course just cannot be. But lots of things happen in Doctor Who which border on the fantastical although quite often some more scientifically based concepts take part in stories as well. Why not have Spit-



fires attacking a Dalek saucer? There being a Dalek in the War rooms was in itself already beyond the borders of realism, and the spitfires certainly looked spectacular.

The strongest reason for me to warm to Matt's incarnation of the Doctor was the way he handled the Daleks despite the fact that everybody around him saw them as an aid to the war effort during a pretty grim time in Britain's history. That he would recognise them immediately when he saw them was a given. Except for the First Doctor in his very first exciting adventure with the Daleks (see what I did there), no Doctor would ever fail to sense their threat, even when they are polite and ask you whether you would like a cup of tea.

The people working in these underground War Rooms were pretty shocked when The Doctor started beating one of those 'Ironsides' up. Of course the reaction of said Dalek was priceless - "you do not require tea?" - which must have made these people pretty upset, when someone unknown to them takes a destructive turn at an extremely useful apparatus invented by a fellow worker? It did not take long however for the Daleks to show their true colours even if The Doctor himself was a bit slow in understanding what exactly was going on. I liked that. The Doctor may be intelligent and quick thinking, but it was helpful to the viewer that he wasn't overly fast in picking this one up.

Another nice Doctory moment which made me applaud this particular incarnation was the Jammy Dodger scene aboard the Dalek Saucer. Matt played

this nicely straight during the confrontation with the new Paradigm (great word for what effectively was just another design change). This scene was pretty impressive with those five big beasties opposite Matt who was threatening them with a cookie. They found out about that soon enough but at least the act worked for a time. Useful time. Time always comes in handy when one is forced to engage with Daleks, even Tele Tubbie ones.

A lot more could be said about this episode, and I suspect most will agree that letting the Doctor have a meeting with the Daleks early on in his/her era is quite a good idea. The Daleks are well known to every one - sometimes I think they're even more iconic than the TARDIS. It will help a relatively new incarnation to settle quickly within the minds of the fans prone to be a little doubtful - It certainly worked for me!

I am also an enormous admirer of the Tea Tray Dalek!



## THE TIME OF ANGELS/FLESH AND STONE

Review by Matt Hills

If the image of a Doctor Who story is that Doctor Who story, then these episodes have perhaps been boiled down to a couple of concluding moments in fan lore - the appearance of a cartoon Graham Norton, and that scene where Amy propositions the Doctor. Both are jangling intrusions into the overall tone, to be sure, disrupting an effective cliffhanger and threatening to overshadow a crucial contribution to series five's arc.

But there's so much more to disentangle from these joyous, speeding, careening instalments. First to be produced in the new Steven Moffat era, these visually stunning realisations also represent the screenplay-as-mission-

statement. They hail from a writer who knows that he has to hit the ground running, and then doesn't display even a scintilla of pressure or concern, but just steps straight up and says 'OK, you want to be dazzled - well, here you go, then'. Indeed, The Time of Angels feels like a greatest hits compilation of Moffat-esque chicanery before those hits have even been properly recognised and applauded. It is as if Steven Moffat has read all the voluminous fan and journalistic commentaries on his career, and seen everything he has ever created, all while relaxing in some future care home for former Doctor Who luminaries, before then travelling back through his own writerly timeline





to make sure that all the tricks, tics and devices are right there, fully formed and shining bright, from the word go. Because when the Doctor gleefully tells Amy in the second episode that he has shown her “a forest in a bottle on a spaceship in a maze. Have I impressed you yet, Amy Pond?” it is hard not to feel that the viewer-fan is simultaneously being addressed by the showrunner-fan. And when the Doctor reappears in front of Amy with her eyes screwed tightly shut, yet seems to be wearing the jacket that he’s recently lost to an Angel, this toying with continuity error is another marker of supreme confidence. It knows that fans will be watching forensically and furiously; it knows that whole communities will be posting online feverishly, speculating away. So it steps up and confidently plays the game, this time casually giving the impression that someone has dropped the ball – how could such an error have got past the new production team? This is prime ‘attention economy Doctor Who’, designed to be watched intently and debated across the weeks of transmission, conceptualised and created to really cut through.

The use of a specific date at the end of part two feels like part of the same strategy – ‘Amy’s time’, muses the eleventh Doctor, as the contemporaneous audience realise, with a start, that this is actually their impending time – and hold on, is that not going to be the real-world date of the series finale? The date-to-come promises a future resolution and a moment of event television – it is a dry run for #savetheday and November 23rd 2013, in a sense – whilst the continuity-error-that-was not will go on to deliver a key aspect of

series five’s story resolution, of course: we just didn’t know it back then. It’s yet more ‘attention economy Who’, cutting through the clutter of peak TV and assorted media competition by inspiring audience speculation.

Some may accuse the new showrunner of showboating, but he is nothing if not a showman from the outset, perhaps more so than almost anywhere else across his run. The first appearance of the vault forest somehow always puts me in mind of the CET machine from Nightmare of Eden, though where that was a stylised season 17 bit of accented malarkey, this is a full-on fairytale forest, lit and shot for all it is worth (and Adam Smith’s direction of these episodes is pretty much faultless, deserving all the praise it received on transmission). Yes, the ‘forest in a bottle’ is a genuinely startling buzz of purified, incongruous Doctor Who.

Blogging Flesh and Stone in The Guardian at its time of first broadcast (Saturday 1st May 2010), the much-missed Dan Martin lauded this as having a “credible claim to being the greatest episode of Doctor Who there has ever been”, ahead of Genesis, Blink, Tomb and even City of Death. It is a bold, headline-grabbing argument for a bold piece of TV. But re-watching in order to think afresh about this story, I cannot immediately say that Martin must have been incorrect. Perhaps the only foot put wrong here are the titles – they feel generic, a touch corporately bland, and somehow vaguely disconnected from the story’s actual details and concepts. How is it the Angel’s time? Isn’t time more important in part two, in any case, with the appearance of that date and the

ominous crack with its swallowing of time energy? And are flesh and stone not mixed, or visualised as such, in episode one? Shouldn’t that one be Flesh and Stone? The result is a pairing of titles that feel weirdly interchangeable and muddled.

But if you are minded not to agree with Dan Martin, I wonder if there is another accolade for these episodes that is definitely less debatable. I am thinking, very, very specifically of ‘best second appearance for a Doctor Who monster’. Steven Moffat displays his creative ownership of the Weeping Angels not through reverence, and seeking to merely recreate their impact from Blink, but instead through radical reinvention. And, yes, perhaps the reinvention does go beyond even Daleks appearing out of the River Thames, because this tale doesn’t just add to the Angels’ mythos, it remorselessly inverts their previous logics and still leaves them terrifyingly effective. This time around they are not a figuration of TV editing, only moving on the cut or in the flicker of darkness; this time round, we see them move, and they are still properly scary. And this time round the threat isn’t “don’t blink”, it’s “keep your eyes shut”, as Moffat works out a rationale for Amy needing to urgently not see the Angels. Again, the end result is Doctor Who at its most nerve-shredding and suspenseful. Even the business about the image of an Angel is a brilliant addition, working to imply that the TV audience at home could be in just as much danger as the in-narrative characters: don’t watch it on your screens! I reckon you could teach these episodes on a screenwriting course, using them to illustrate how the value of a creation, a creature, does not lie in intellectual

property rules or branded shortcuts, but instead in how you can bend those rules and exploit those shortcuts to make the story-world over anew. These Weeping Angels do not simply hark back to their first huge success – they are no tribute act terror, they are a developing art and an unfolding threat. It is textbook writing brilliance, surely? The Angels’ inversion also extends to giving them a voice. Rather than being implacable object-like, fully dehumanised foes, they can now converse with the Doctor, delivering narrative exposition with the best of them. And while this might threaten to make the Lonely Assassins slightly more run of the mill, any such possible disappointment is warded off via the odd creepiness of Angel Bob as a figure.

These Angels are also dropped into a sci-fi epic, being tracked by River Song and Father Octavian as Steven Moffat conjures a sense of scope and scale by bringing together multiple prior creations. The Angels plus River; it is a tried-and-tested blend of pre-sold elements (familiar favourites) alongside rebranding/recasting, so we can see how this new Doctor and companion measure up. Watching again, I was struck by how viscerally angry this Doctor is at times – my memory of Matt Smith is all fingers and tweed, but his Time Lord is both gutsier and harder, as well as more tender when he implores Amy to remember him. It’s a vibrant take on the character and is always multi-dimensional – you would never guess that this was Matt Smith’s ‘Four to Doomsday’, his first full performance as the Doctor even if it was not his first appearance in broadcast order.

By intertwining a new Doctor and com-



panion with established monsters and a reverse time-travelling enigma, this story also works very effectively in terms of world-building. Father Octavian and his militaristic clerics tweak UNIT-type characters into a different, intergalactic shape. And their representation of the Angels, in turn, as artillery or missiles (“incoming!”) evokes a whole mindset and worldview through just the one phrase, making the Angels – like the Doctor – multi-dimensional and capable of being seen very differently through the eyes of different characters. For Amy, the Angels are a classic Doctor Who gothic monster, but for the clerics they are instruments of warfare to be monitored, evaded and repelled. This distinctive, instantly legible world-building is carried through into well-realised supporting characters; Octavian’s demise is partly so affecting thanks

to the quality of acting between Iain Glen and Matt Smith, but it is also partly down to Octavian’s character being so economically and precisely delineated.

Given that ‘Time’ features in one of these episode titles, and also in view of Moffat’s reputation for time-scrambling, non-linear plotting, how is time travel treated in his first filmed screenplay as showrunner? Of course, there’s the playful leaping across huge swathes of time (“12,000 years later”), and the museum piece rendered as time-traversing text message. There is also a sense of competitiveness over whether the Doctor or River is a sufficiently “complex space-time event” to seal off the mysterious crack of doom that switches from story arc Easter egg to major plot element. But one of my fa-



avourite moments is where the Doctor, having speed-read the historical book that River had previously recovered – a volume which recounts information and lore about the Angels – ponders out loud why it does not contain any pictures. Despite River and the Doctor navigating time in opposed directions, and despite all the non-linear tricksiness and game-playing with temporality, here we get the good, old-fashioned gear-crunch of dramatic irony. Both River and the Doctor work out that the Angels’ images are deadly at the precise moment that Amy encounters this very threat. Similar plot beats are ten-a-penny in crime shows (a detective’s recognition of ‘whodunnit’ at the exact moment that said villain arrives at the protagonist’s family home to menace his loved ones, etc etc). But what elevates the familiar cross-generic narrative beat is a sense that, amid all the time-travelling jumps and contrapuntal timelines, the here-and-now of real-time, sudden realisation can still lurch into prominence in an instant. Regardless of however powerful or knowledgeable the Doctor is, and whether or not he can revisit his own past adventures, sometimes he is still caught in the moment, just a fraction too late, just a second or two out of time. The code-switching between these hugely different versions of time – from time-travel as game/mastery to the irreversible irony of passing time – is one of the storytelling satisfactions of *The Time of Angels*, and of well-written modern *Who* more generally, I suspect.

Given all this self-referential playing with time, what has happened to the magic of *Doctor Who*? (you might or might not ask). Well, on this showing, it

is fully charged and present, thrumming with energy and passion and outright bravado. So much so, that this is an instantly era-defining jolt of hyper-caffeinated *Doctor Who*.

Forget the BBC-promo disruptions of Graham Norton and the grumbles about a sexually active young female companion in a ‘family’ show, and focus instead on the panache, the flair, and the reinvented Weeping Angels that in only their second outing feel as if they’ve been a venerated and venerable part of the show for ages. In these episodes, there’s palpably already a Moffat masterplan for making *Doctor Who* that does everything it can to cut through, that gains and rewards not just the fan audience’s close attention but also captures wider cultural attention and buzz. Not long afterwards, Moffat would come to refer to this sort of thing as ‘tarty’, pinning the idea to ‘movie-of-the-week’ posters and hooky, attention-grabbing titles, but an auto-promotional logic arrives fully formed and sharply instantiated right here, thanks to reimagined Angels remixed with *River Song*, and alleged continuity errors blended with event-TV-yet-to-come.



# THE VAMPIRES OF VENICE

Review by Phillip Hunter Gilfus

There are certain early episodes of nuWho eras that are good, but they just seem like an ordinary story to further establish our new Doctor and any new companions. But Vampires of Venice offers many more guideposts about how future stories will develop and the character of this absent-minded professor-dressed Doctor.

The story of the Smith era is also the story of The Three - the Doctor, Amy, and Rory. It is odd for me to go back and see that Rory is initially just a bumbling, awkward boyfriend, perhaps Mickey 2.0, and the audience could have properly assumed that he might never be seen or heard from again after The Eleventh Hour. But when Matt Smith's Time Lord gets freaked out by an unexpected Amy snogging in the

previous episode, he sees what the TARDIS dynamic could be before we do.

In the beginning, it appears that Vampires re-introduces Rory and immediately sets him up for failure. Mr. Williams seems to be solely filling the role of comic relief on a show that has already has a comic relief Doctor (he is my personal favourite Doctor, but out of all the 21st Century incarnations, he is the most likely to trip over his own shoe laces). While not all fans may have been excited about a flirty-type Doctor/companion relationship, the first few episodes of series five established a young (numerous regenerations aside...) duo off on adventures, wackiness, and fun. Rory's appearance as the third wheel in the relationship, which



would continue for many more stories, makes us wonder if he is worth the effort. I admit, even upon rewatch, I almost don't buy that Amy and Rory are an engaged, romantic couple. There isn't much chemistry other than being really good friends throughout most of the episode (again, shades of Rose/Mickey, maybe?). Even the characters in the story themselves do not see it - Guido, the new companion du episode, says that he thought the Doctor and Amy were engaged. But if the audience has doubts - the Doctor, as always, is here to assure us that everything will turn out for the best.

Rory's rude entry into the TARDIS - objectively refusing to give 'an impressed 'It's bigger on the inside - does seem to annoy the Doctor, but he still gives Rory (and the viewers) a comforting smile. Following the (voluntarily) capture of Amy by the pseudo-vampiric fish people (the Saturnyns), Rory and the Doctor have a rather deep debate. It's an especially piercing discussion, given how early this is in the Smith era, about the Doctor's use of his companions. Not since Davros accused the Tenth Doctor of turning his companions into soldiers in Journey's End have we seen such an artful j'accuse! about the Doctor's effects on his friends. Toby Whithouse's beautiful dialogue, given to Rory, has to be given verbatim:

*You know what's dangerous about you? It's not that you make people take risks, it's that you make them want to impress you. You make it so they don't want to let you down. You have no idea how dangerous you make people to themselves when you're around.*

A stinging indictment of our beloved Time Lord or another ingratiating aspect of Rory?

In the end for Amy and Rory, things come full circle when Amy gives her fiancée a long, big kiss after defeating one of the Saturnyns - proving the Doctor's point that it would have always been Rory getting the post-adventure snog if he was there instead of the Time Lord.

I realise it is almost a crime that I've gone this far and not mentioned the wonderful performance by the late-Helen McCrory in the role of Rosanna Calvierri. My wife is always a fan of sympathetic monsters in Who, and here we have a refugee mother trying to provide a future for her displaced children. In any other telling, she might have been steered towards another plan and helped by the Doctor, as she and her people flee the Silence and the cracks in the universe. Her capture and transformation of unsuspecting Venetian girls into fish wives and effects to flood Venice belie how far she'll go. Ultimately the Doctor condemns her for not knowing the name of her latest victim, Isabella. But I remain impressed with the subtle regality that McCrory gives to this character, one who can stand eye-to-eye with a Time Lord, and who ultimately chooses to end her life (dramatically, of course) when her plans are thwarted. The Doctor cannot allow humans to be killed - but, for a moment, we can almost imagine what a Doctor/Rosanna alliance could have been.

Throughout all this adventure, this remains early days for Matt Smith's version of the Doctor. And yet, thanks to solid writing and Smith's brilliant portrayal, we learn more about what this bow-tie wearing alien is all about. Despite all outward appearances of being awkward and confused by romance (the opening scene with the Doctor jumping out of a cake and sharing with Rory about Amy's advances is certainly in his top 10 entrances), he



has a Seventh Doctor-like way of being the external observer who knows how to manoeuvre people best. He can pluck Rory out of Leadworth, put him in the TARDIS, and then mix him and Amy together to produce a loving couple (which he will do to them again and again, most pointedly in Asylum of the Daleks). We also get a subtle line from the Doctor about him having a thing about guns and explosives – maintaining that characteristic from Tennant’s era. His relationship with Amy brings to mind the Ninth Doctor/Rose and even later Eleventh Doctor/Clara dynamic – just some kids having madcap times in the TARDIS, getting excited about the latest monster/mystery/time and space anomaly. The Doctor even has a biscuit ready for his recently rescued companion, showing his platonic care and concern for her.

We also get a prescient preview of how this Doctor compares with his earlier incarnations. In a blink and you’ll miss it moment – we get foreshadowing of the

debate in the heart(s?) of The Day of the Doctor:

*ROSANNA: One city to save an entire species. Was that so much to ask?*  
*DOCTOR: I told you, you can't go back and change time. You mourn, but you live. I know, Rosanna. I did it.*  
*ROSANNA: Tell me, Doctor. Can your conscience carry the weight of another dead race? Remember us. Dream of us.*

The Eleventh Doctor – the One Who Forgot. The One Who Moved On.

This is an episode to revisit to see how The Power of Three, to steal an episode title, all started. A strident Doctor, adventurous and funny companions, and complex villain – Doctor Who at its finest.



## AMY'S CHOICE

Review by Harry Draper

I moved house recently. The house looks out across a lake, which winks surreptitiously at you in the sunlight. Up in the rafters, I have my own private study. Sometimes I can be found at my desk, tapping furiously away at the keyboard. More often than not, indulging in tea and biscuits.

And what is the subject of my writing? Doctor Who! The show I have grown up with. One day, it just dropped out of the sky and shaped my world.

This is the life. Writing Doctor Who in a picture-postcard house. Just like I have always...dreamed.

Wait. What is that? Birdsong?  
 Oh no.

Tweet tweet.

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*AMY*  
*Not really me, though, is it? Would I be happy settling down in a place with a pub, two shops and a really bad amateur dramatics society?*

*Rory looks outraged.*

*AMY (CONT'D)*  
*That's why I got pregnant, so I don't have to see them doing Oklahoma!*

Oklahoma! was written by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II, arguably the most iconic partnership to

define musical theatre in the twentieth century. The musical tells the story of Laurey Williams (ha!), for whose affections cowboy curly McLain and ranch owner Jud Fry fight. Torn between her suitors, Laurey buys a magic potion – Laudanum – from local peddler Ali Haki. When she takes the opiate, Laurey slips into a dream world, where she must decide...

Amy’s Choice opens in Leadworth. Oh, what a beautiful morning! There are no ducks here, but a flock of geese. Rustic Rory is rocking a ponytail, and likes to ride his bicycle where he likes. He could be mistaken for the lead in a revival of All Creatures Great and Small. It seems Amy is happily playing her part, until she sees a police box landing in her garden through the window. Once again, she knows she’s in an episode of that other hit BBC Television series. ‘I knew. I just knew...’

It’s been five years since Amy and Rory left the TARDIS to settle down in bucolic bliss, happily married and baby on the way. Which is odd, as this is only the seventh episode in this freshman year for Matt Smith, Karen Gillan and Arthur Darvill. As if we are doing a ‘School Reunion’ several years too early. But as you would expect, the unexpected happens. The Doctor and his companions fall asleep on a nice bench. ‘What will they think of next?’

And then, they wake up in the TARDIS. Then, they fall asleep, and wake up on a



nice bench...

Caught in a landslide with no escape back to reality, our leads are set their challenge by the Dream Lord, played by Toby Jones. It's personal for Amy; "It's you they're waiting for. Amy's men. Amy's choice." It's personal for Rory; "Is nobody going to mention (his) pony-tail?" It's even personal for the Doctor; "There's only one person in the universe who hates me as much as you do."

Which is fact, which is the fiction? The TARDIS (if it is real) is drifting towards a cold star. Upper Leadworth, supposedly the safest, duller corner of the universe, (if it is real) is anything but. The possessed pensioners of the Sarn Retirement Home come bearing BEMS in their mouths, reducing the children of this damned village to dust. Children that the Doctor fails to save...

On 15 May 2010, the stakes have never been higher. The Doctor, Amy and Rory are pitted against their deadliest

enemy to date. There are jokes and scares and heartbreak, and before the Next Time trailer hits, some uncomfortable truths about television's most beloved Time Lord will come to light...

*Me: Meh. I'll skip this one, I think. Silurians next week!*

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July 2021. Well. That took a while.

When offered all of the Matt Smith years to discuss, why chose Amy's Choice? Like the speck of candle meadow pollen which induces the freak physic schism, this episode took its time to have a potent effect on me. But eventually, when the Silurians proved a tad disappointing (no third eye?), I went back to this story, woke up and smelt the roses. It is one of the most tightly-written and expertly directed episodes of Doctor Who ever. Funny; "My poncho boys. If we're going to die, let's die looking like a Peruvian folk band". Scary; "Are you calling me a boat?" And



it may just answer the question as why Amy's Choice is the definitive Doctor Who musical.

Here we go.  
Tweet tweet.

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Written by Simon Nye (Men Behaving Badly, Finding Alice), this episode is a vital piece of the puzzle in the Byzantium plotting of Series Five. Nye was brought in by Steven Moffat to take the ever-so-slightly estranged Amy and Rory to couple counselling. Because whilst her fiancé is anxious to get to the altar, Amy is prepared to prolong 'the night before our wedding for as long as we want'. When it comes to time and space, and the Raggedy Doctor who came back for her, she just can't say no.

And although their sardonic shrink lacks a blood supply, the Dream Lord is only too acutely aware of matters of the flesh; 'I've seen your dreams. Some of them twice, Amy. Blimey, I'd blush...'

The Doctor and Rory are uncomfortably aware that they are competing over Amy - "all my parts are basically fine" - which has split the episode into two, bound by birdsong. Fortunately, director Catherine Morshead (Emmerdale, Ashes to Ashes) knows how to sort her men out. It is all in the detail; as Mrs Poggit cranes her neck ominously to stare down our heroes, a flake-like rain begins to fall, pre-empting the deadly frostbite in the TARDIS. Morshead makes the logistical nightmare of effectively shooting two episodes at the same time seem effortless. Her style is perfectly in synch with

the unnerving tone, showing yet obscuring that the Dream Lord is, in reality, offering them a choice between two dreams.

The Doctor, the 'handsome hero' as the Dream Lord refers to him, can be compared to the romantic lead of Oklahoma!, who harbours a suppressed attraction to Laurey/Amy. Yet he has something of the Jud about him. The perpetual outsider. Spooky. Not to be trusted. Rory is perhaps neither, more akin to Will Parker, the bumbling cowboy who nonetheless wins the approval of the fiery, flirtatious Ado Annie Carnes.

But even if he is the gooseberry, Rory proves time and time again that he will do anything to save Amy, in his own bumbling way. Tristan, but brave. He whacks a granny. He cuts off his ponytail. He apologises for every bump as he drags the sleeping Amy up the stairs - just as he will, as the Lone Centurion, ferry the Pandorica through history, from 102 AD to 1996 AD, with a sleeping Amy locked inside. No doubt apologising when he accidentally drops it into the Rubicon.

And so, it seems, will she do anything to save him. Amy rejects her imaginary friend in favour of her real love. "What is the point of you?" she asks the Doctor when he admits he cannot save Rory. For her, it's all er nuthin'.

Nye and Morshead give us an episode that puts the narrative power back into Amy Pond's hands. A power often denied to her this series; losing her parents to the crack in time in her bedroom wall; the Doctor promising to come back for her in five minutes, only

to leave her waiting for twelve years. And in running with the opportunity, Karen Gillan ensures she will stay employed in the profession for a very long time. In fact, she recently announced on her Twitter that

wait  
oh no  
Tweet tweet.

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Quick biscuit break.  
Mmm. That was nice.  
Right. Back we go.  
Tweet tweet.

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“So, what’s his name?”

We must never know who the Doctor is. Which is probably for the best. That’s the point of the question in the opening titles every week after all. But we have had glimpses, seen through the crack in the door, into the Doctor’s mind on occasion; their subconscious thoughts in Part Four of the Time Monster, although “I shouldn’t listen to them too hard if I were you,” he assures Jo, “I’m not all that proud of some of them”. And the Valeyard, an ‘amalgamation of the darker sides of (the Doctor’s) nature’, who wears a tea cosy on his head.

Jones’ Dream Lord is cast more in the image of Fuseli’s incubus. All snarls and smirks as part of his ‘cheap cabaret act’, perfectly tailored to Smith’s subdued, sometimes cantankerous Doctor in Series Five. This psychic sparring partner likes to pop up when least expected, changing his wardrobe as he does, em-

bodying the facets of the man he hates; lord, butcher, hot-headed racing driver, etc. But he does not seem to desire an existence of his own, beyond being the stage manager of the show for a week, pointing out the clichés of a traditional Doctor Who narrative, dropping hints about behind-the-scenes drama. “Has he told you about Elizabeth the First? Well. She thought she was the first...” He echoes a prescient passage River Song reads from the diary of a madman that serves as an instruction manual on the clerics’ expedition into the Maze of the Dead in *The Time of Angels*;

“What if we had ideas that could think for themselves? What if one day our dreams no longer needed us?”

So, what’s his game? Is it to expose the Doctor to his friends, and to himself, once and for all? ‘The old man prefers the company of the young, does he not?’ he opines, the Doctor responding only with a silent, steely glare in the mirror. Or is the Dream Lord doing what the Time Lord is not prepared to do - engineering a narrative scenario in which Amy and Rory prove themselves to each other, an opportunity the Doctor may never consciously have given them otherwise? Perhaps all of these things, or none. Perhaps this is something we must never know.

It’s a familiar device, but it bristles to see the Doctor afraid of his own reflection in the panel of the console. To know that the Dream Lord will always just be round the corner of his eye.

We haven’t even mentioned Murray Gold’s score, discordant and lyrical all at once, or...oh no. We’ve run out of time! Here we go.

Tweet tweet.

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There you have it. Doctor Who’s definitive musical. It just happened to not have any songs. Well, except one.

Tweet tweet.

And everybody lived happily ever after. Arthur Darvill would find himself in the company of three Doctors in crime drama *Broadchurch*. Karen Gillan has gone on to carve an incredible career, from playing Nebula at Marvel Studios to action hero in *Jumanji* and *Gunpowder*

Milkshake. Matt Smith is back on our cinema screens in Edgar Wright’s *Last Night in Soho*, which sees a young woman from contemporary London slip into the glamorous sixties when she falls asleep...

And there’s you and me, reading and writing and loving Doctor Who, with more thrilling adventures in space and time yet to come.

Suffice to say, we’re all living the dream.





# THE HUNGRY EARTH/COLD BLOOD

Review by Stephen Hatcher

The fifth season of new Doctor Who, Matt Smith's first in the role of the Doctor, broadcast in the spring and early summer of 2010 was jam packed with all sorts of things for us to look forward to. Not only had we got the new Doctor that we had been waiting for since the announcement of his casting as long ago as January 2009 – in a Doctor Who Confidential Special episode, in which Matt Smith had immediately impressed as a wonderfully strange, old/young actor; but we knew that we had both Dalek and Cybermen adventures ahead, not to mention the return of the most popular New Series (as we called it in those days) monsters, the Weeping Angels. So, it was a much-anticipated season of many riches – but foremost among those was the very long delayed return to our screens of the Silurians, not seen since the 1984 Fifth Doctor story, Warriors of the Deep.

Over the previous four seasons and eight specials of twenty-first century Who, we had witnessed the revival of Autons, Daleks, Cybermen, Sontarans, the Master – even the Macra (sort of), but it had taken until now for humanity's subterranean reptile predecessors to reappear. It was, in many ways, the answer to many a classic series fan's dreams – or at least it should have been.

So why did it not turn out quite that way? Why is it that The Hungry Earth/Cold Blood disappointed so many fans

so much that it could only make one hundred and seventy-eighth position out of two hundred and forty-one stories in the 2014 Doctor Who Magazine survey of the first fifty years of the programme?

Well, the problem most certainly doesn't lie with the cast, who are all excellent. This early in his run, Matt Smith is terrifically new and different – and Karen Gillan and Arthur Darvill make a very engaging couple as Amy and Rory. The final climactic scene, when Rory is killed (again) and Amy forgets he ever existed is beautifully played by both – especially by Gillan – and is one of the most heart-rending scenes in all of Doctor Who, even though I think we all knew that Rory would be back.

The guest cast are very much up to the standard of the regulars. Meera Syal is insanely likeable as scientist Nasreen Chaudhry, convinced immediately that the Doctor knows what he is talking about and very much up for getting involved to help and to find out more about what is going on. Robert Pugh is no less watchable as Tony Mack, engineer and grandfather, quietly devoted to Nasreen and prepared to go to any lengths to protect his family. Nasreen and Tony's understated romance is beautifully played. Ambrose, Tony's daughter is a much less sympathetic character – a fallible human and a mother whose concern for her son leads her to commit a dreadful crime,

it's a tribute to Nia Roberts that we can understand why she does what she does, even when we know she is wrong. Young actor Samuel Davies as Elliott is just delightful. In contrast to many a child actor in Doctor Who and beyond, he convinces absolutely, giving a fine, natural performance.

Mention should also be made of the late great Stephen Moore. How wonderful to have his extraordinary voice in Doctor Who – although the role of the Silurian leader Eldane in truth gives him very little to do. The story marks the first appearance of Neve McIntosh in the series. McIntosh does her best here – and as we will later discover, when she returns in the role of Madame Vastra, her best is very good indeed – but the twin roles of warmongering Silurian sisters Alaya and Restac are really rather dull – all that hissing and threatening does get rather too much.

So, the problem does not lay with the cast. How about the design? Well, the

whole thing looks good enough. The very green, wet, rural Welsh setting of the 'surface' scenes fits very nicely, bringing to mind another Pertwee story, The Green Death – as does the green coloured veining on Tony's skin, when he is stung by the Silurian's tongue (more of which anon). The underground Silurian city scenes are rather less successful, with the council chamber instantly recognisable as Cardiff's Temple of Peace, a somewhat overused filming location, most notably seen as Platform One in Season One's The End of the World, but it is serviceable at least.

Most criticism of the design has centred around the head-to-toe redesign of the Silurians themselves. These are unrecognisable as the same creatures who first appeared in 1970's Doctor Who and the Silurians – much less turtle-like, more resembling human lizards, and with no third eye in evidence. But the new design works absolutely. The big baggy suits with a zip up the back and the huge head of 1970 just would not





have worked in 2010. These Silurians are credible non-human creatures, who pose a believable threat to the Doctor and his friends – as well as to the rest of humanity. The only design weakness is the horrible CGI sting/tongue. It is noticeable that this feature was quietly forgotten about after this story.

There are certainly problems with the script, instances where writer Chris Chibnall (whatever happened to him?) resorts to info-dumping and 'telling not showing', including having Eldane provide a monologue to explain the end of the story. There are logic holes too. For example, it is all very well Amy and Nasreen sitting down on behalf of humanity to negotiate the division of the planet and a peace treaty with the Silurians, but as the script admits, they have no authority to speak for anyone. We can imagine what the reaction of the elected authorities would have been – around the world, not just in the UK – if those negotiations had reached a successful conclusion; and Amy and Nasreen had emerged to present their agreed treaty. It's unlikely that they would have even been given an audience. It may be best not to think too deeply about that sort of thing, but the logic of the story does rather depend upon it.

The more fundamental problem with this story is the whole concept of the Silurians themselves. In 1969/70, in a season in which the Doctor was exiled on Earth; as a solution to Malcolm Hulke's challenge, to come up with a story that was neither 'alien invasion' nor 'mad scientist', the Silurians – the 'alien' race who were already here, before humanity, was a stroke of genius. Doctor Who and the Siluri-

ans was a great story – as was its sequel/remake *The Sea Devils*. The problem is that it is largely the only Silurian story. Humans accidentally wake Silurians (without initially knowing it); Silurians argue among themselves as to whether to destroy humanity; the Doctor tries to broker a peace; humans blow Silurians up. Essentially *The Hungry Earth/Cold Blood* is another remake of that original story; and for all that it is very watchable and has some excellent features, it is an inferior remake.

For all its faults, *The Hungry Earth/Cold Blood* is a story that can be enjoyed on its own terms. It gives us terrific performances, especially by Smith, Gillan and Darvill and it sets up the series finale by killing off Rory. Above all, it is a story that has had a legacy. The introduction of the terrific Neve McIntosh to Doctor Who and the redesign of the Silurians were important factors that allowed Steven Moffat to come up with something different to do with the Earth Reptiles; to take one isolated member of the race and insert her into human society. *The Hungry Earth/Cold Blood* planted the seed that led to *Madame Vastra* and gave us *The Paternoster Gang* – and for that, we can be very grateful.



## VINCENT AND THE DOCTOR

Review by Ed Brady

Back when I watched the special reveal show of who would follow on from David Tennant's tenth Doctor, I was intrigued to know which direction the new producers of Doctor Who were now going to take the programme next. So, when the secret was finally out of the bag, I remembered one of the second Doctor's lines from the end of his trial in *The War Games* saying something like "that ones too young!" when I saw the new actor who was to be the eleventh Doctor! But no, from the short snappy interview in no time at all, before any actual filming had taken place for the new episodes I could tell this new guy had terrific potential and I could also see that it would be ok with whom the producers had decided to go with. Matt Smith appeared in the reveal show to be very excited and passionate about his involvement in taking over the role of the Doctor in the coming year and his engaging enthusiasm shone through. In a later interview during his time as the Doctor, Matt was said to have enjoyed the "The Tomb of the Cybermen" and had admired Patrick Troughton's performance particularly the way that Troughton had used his expressive face as the second Doctor. This use of facial expression was something that he may have borrowed in his own characterisation of the role. As production preparations started on this exciting new era of the programme, small pieces of press coverage and photographs appeared in various newspapers and genre magazines, showing the new eleventh Doc-

tor in his new clothes. I could see that what was to come was all looking very promising. The eleventh Doctor's look reminded me of the type of attire that earlier Doctors could easily have chosen from the TARDIS wardrobe room and yes the famous bow tie was very much in evidence from those early behind the scenes location photographs. Matt and his new co star Karen Gillan as Amy Pond had both embarked on a nationwide publicity tour to promote the new season and I was particularly thrilled to hear that Matt along with Karen had visited his home town of Northampton during their travels on the tour bus. I had worked for some years in Northampton and had set up home in the town only three years earlier. This young actor did indeed prove to be an inspired choice to play one of the Doctor's incarnations and Matt's portrayal harked back to the type character that I had enjoyed watching all those years ago before the programme was revived in 2005. His immediate predecessors had reinvented the character for a modern audience and had both been great in many different ways. Eccleston had of course kicked open the door and Tennant had ran through it and build on this great opening with a tremendous success of his own. However, once the new 2010 season aired and through Matt's brilliant performance, I could see that the Matt Smith Doctor could believably be a direct descendant of the Hartnell and Troughton Doctors from all those years before. He not only inherited the characteristics of

the earlier Doctor's, but he also brought his own quirks to the character; that was both youthful while being elderly gentleman of the universe again.

It was during this impressive debut season of eleventh Doctor episodes, that the talented writer Richard Curtis had his script for Doctor Who brought to life in the episode entitled Vincent and the Doctor, and it turned out to be a beautiful piece of television. The Doctor and Amy are found taking in an exhibition of Vincent Van Gogh's paintings in the present day during the opening of the story and while making their way around the paintings, the Doctor's curiosity is alerted by spotting something he believes is evil in one of the artworks on display. The Doctor gets a rough time approximation from the bow tie wearing Musée d'Orsay tour guide; played by the excellent Bill Nighy of when the painting may have been produced and with this the Doctor and Amy head off to Auvers in France. Vincent Van Gogh will produce the painting of "Church at Auvers" that had caught the Doctor's eye in the Mu-

seum. When they encounter the famous artist at a café, they find a tortured soul who is unappreciated by his local towns folk and attacked for his dark moods that take a great hold of his mental wellbeing. Being suspicious of the Doctor at first, he accepts the two visiting time travellers explanations; partly helped by his appreciation of the Doctor's companion Amy. It is not too long before we are in the monster of the week territory as the the Doctor encounters the presence of a lone alien roaming the cobbled streets and alleyways of the town; but the creature it is not actually visible to himself, Amy or any of the towns people. The large creature has been randomly attacking the villagers. What baffles the Doctor is the fact that Vincent can see the alien with his own eyes and they can't. There is here a believable performance from actor Tony Curran in his take of the troubled genius; who we learn is repeatedly in fits of deep depression for periods of weeks or even months at a time. Having been told that Vincent can hear the colours in his mind, the Doctor asks him to paint what he sees and then

the Doctor recognises the attacking creature from the stars as a Krafayis. The moody locations that are shot during the episodes night scenes provide great atmosphere throughout by director Jonny Campbell; making great use of present day Croatia for the historical town required in the story. The Doctor knows that the creature will appear in the church painting in the Museum in the future and he persuades Vincent to paint the building so that he can examine the monster properly. This he does shortly after the Doctor witnesses one of the painters most depressive episodes. One of the best parts of the tale is seen shortly after the blind creature is seen off with the tripod stand of Van Goth's easel. The Doctor decides in a heart felt moment to take Vincent forward in time to see and experience the admiration people will have for him in years to come; particularly their love of his beautiful works of art that he will never be aware of in his own lifetime. This I can say is the highlight of the episode. It is beautifully played and is a very moving scene to witness as a viewer. The Doctor and Amy return to

the Museum again after dropping Vincent Van Gogh back into his own time and Amy is particularly upset to learn that the gifted artist whom was known to have committed suicide still decides to end his own life after what they shared with him. But, not before painting the Sunflowers and dedicating them to her. When the Doctor and Amy actually leave him back in his own time you really care and feel for Vincent Van Gogh in that he is very much on his own having to deal with his own personal demons after the Doctor and Amy depart for adventures new. Touchingly, If things had been different he would have been happy enough to have married Amy should she have agreed. This episode is a real treat and stands out from all the rest of series five; showing Doctor Who the programme and it's concept at its finest. Applause must also be directed at the set designer and director as there are some clever acknowledgements to Vincent Van Gogh's paintings throughout the episode; particularly the way that the café and his house are recreated from his famous oil paintings. As the





new Doctor, Matt Smith has some great physical moments in this story and there are some nice acknowledgements to the shows past on his visit back to the TARDIS in one scene.

The Matt Smith era proved in season five that it had the potential to go on forever and had a more fantastical and fairytale quality to the look and feel to those weekly broadcasts and this very much appealed to me. It felt like a fresh and welcome direction for the show at the time. It was such a shame that his tenure was all too brief and was over not too long after the fiftieth Anniversary Celebrations had passed us in November 2013. Matt Smith's appeal as the Doctor and his connection with both a younger and older audience brought him world wide attention that of course led to other great work for him that included *The Crown* and other movie and stage roles that he quite rightly deserved for his acting talent. He was a tremendous ambassador for

the programme while he held the keys to the TARDIS and it showed in all his hard work during his time as lead actor. Most notably, in his duties during the promotional interviews during his time on the show with his respect for the responsibility of the role, the programme itself and his show-runner & lead writer Steven Moffat. Evidence of this was highlighted while he took part in the BBC live Proms or his sensitivity in handling and sharing of the lead part, his place in its on going history during the 50th Anniversary events and the mammoth celebrations that were held at the Excel in London. Doctor Who during the Matt Smith years stood tall, particularly before and during the tale end of 2013 and a lot of its popularity is down to the achievement of Matt Smith's successful time on the programme from 2010 onwards. I am certain that whenever he wishes to reprise his Doctor again, on television or on audio he would be warmly welcomed back by his many fans.



## THE LODGER

Review by Chris Stone

I really struggled with exactly what to write about this. In my opinion *The Lodger* is a great episode of the show. It's also one of the funniest episodes of Doctor Who post 2005 and a joy from beginning to end. But what makes it good? Is it really good? And how the hell do I explain why I love it..? Back at the start of the year after I chose this one to have a little write about I found I could not get anywhere with my thoughts. Nothing flowed; it was just a mass of disconnected ideas. Then I forgot. Completely. I came back to it just after *Village of the Angels* aired, but still didn't have a clue what to say. But then I hit upon what works for me about this story, and it all stems from watching the angels.

You see for me Doctor Who can be many things; it can be scary, sad, dark, mysterious, uplifting and fun. No episode is all these, but what it needs to be more than anything is funny. For Doctor Who to work at its best for me it has to have jokes in it. For all the merits of *Village of the Angels*, I wasn't filled with a warm glow of enjoyment when it finished - the same can't be said for *The Lodger*.

It helps that I really like James Corden. I enjoy when he is on screen and, despite his detractors and others may say, he is a likeable presence throughout. His character, Craig Owens, is your everyman - you, me - the 'typical' viewer. Not a hero. Someone who works hard, but can't really make the

step to be noticed as anything special - both at work and at home. This is what *The Lodger* does well.

Sophie, played by Daisy Haggard is a joy when she is on screen. You can see she and Craig have a relationship which they do not recognise from the instant they appear. It is great on-screen charisma which makes you root for them to get together properly by the end of the show.

What really makes this story is Matt Smith. It's not just his performance, which is fantastic, but has another Doctor been quite so socially awkward as Doc Eleven? Just imagine Jon Pertwee's Doctor's spitting out a glass of wine - he would have the whole bottle and then go down to Oddbins and start to critique their entire wine selection.

Surprisingly there are a few references to the 3rd Doctor's time in the TARDIS. The Doctor sings *La Donna E Mobile* in the shower and the device he builds in the bedroom is very reminiscent of the machine built in *The Time Monster*.

It is not just the 3rd Doctor's time we get echoes of. It's also the 21st Century's answer to *Black Orchid*. Where the Fifth Doctor was a whizz at cricket, the 11th is the Pele of Colchester's local football scene.

I like *Closing Time* too, but it falls into oversentimentality whereas this one does not.



# THE PANDORICA OPENS/THE BIG BANG

Review by Ian K McLachlan

As someone who had watched Doctor Who right from the very beginning with An Unearthly Child, I was saddened when with part three of Survival there was no date for it coming back. I would have to admit though that my appreciation of the series had changed over the years. When it had first started with William Hartnell as the Doctor, I would do anything in my power to ensure that I was by a television when the opening credits rolled. It was more or less on for every week in the year (barring a six-week summer break) and as the epic journeys of the time traveller unfolded, I watched each new adventure avidly.

If asked now what my favourite season of the show was, I would have to say season three and in particular the episodes that John Wiles was the producer

of. These stories were particularly exciting and with the deaths of Katarina and Sara Kingdom the show could hardly be described as safe viewing. Although I saw each story as a separate entity what was equally important was the ongoing narrative. In some respects, the original run of the show had aspects of a soap opera though unlike most soap operas it did move around from location to location, and it did have only a small regular cast.

I have to say that I liked all the occupants of the TARDIS during its monochrome years, but I would have to admit that I liked some more than others. When one of the crew left in those days you knew that you would not get to see them again. But thankfully the makers of the show kept on producing



likeable performers when a member of the cast needed to be replaced.

I liked the way they made television with a mixture of film and videotape. I was always aware of the times when a production moved from videotape to film. It was usually either for an outdoor scene or for something that would have been more difficult to record in the studio. I always liked the way that television back then was more seen to be linked to the theatre rather than to film. Therefore, the scenes were longer, and dialogue became more important than action. There was only a limited change of scenes that could be made within a single episode. There was a lot more emphasis on character back then and the actors had to be that much more charismatic to hold the viewers' attention.

I have always taken an interest in how programmes were made, rather than just watching them being transmitted and not being aware of how and why they came to be. I perhaps could put that down to my eager reading of the Radio Times, when with each new Doctor Who serial there was an article to accompany it. These would not only mention the cast of the upcoming serial but also divulge some behind-the-scenes information as well. My interest in how my favourite TV programmes came to be made has continued to this day with lots of such books lining my bookcase shelves.

For me the great change in my appreciation of Doctor Who was the coming of the video recorder. This meant that I was not tied to the television to a particular day and time when it was decided by those who controlled BBC1,

when the programme should be transmitted. This also meant in time that some of the older stories could be released on expensive VHS to be fully appreciated once more. In the years that followed, the history of the programme (apart from the sadly missing episodes) has become more accessible to more people than ever used to be the case. The Radio Times Doctor Who Special and The Making of Doctor Who were the first two publications which allowed fans some access to what went before, information that had been very difficult to access in the 1960s.

The re-release of the original Hartnell novelizations kickstarted another important development, which meant over time all the stories from the classic era would be made available to all who wanted to read them. Recently Britbox has meant fans could within a week watch episodes from every era of the programme. This to me has changed things completely and while the BBC on occasions want viewers to see Doctor Who as one continuous narrative having most of the past adventures available just stresses the inconsistencies within the narrative of the series.

Like so many fans I was delighted when the show returned in 2005. But it is said that you must be careful what you wish for. Would a new series of the programme tarnish the cherished memory of the programme that first attracted you? Would it have been better to have remained a collection of cherished memories? They tried to remake The Prisoner and Randall and Hopkirk (Deceased) but can anyone claim that these remakes were as good as the originals?

I must say that when I rescreen the monochrome episodes, I still enjoy them as much as I did when they were originally broadcast. And I will have to admit that the animated stories are a pure delight for me, and I particularly enjoy seeing these episodes in colour! To be honest I would have preferred the new series to have been a reboot of the franchise rather than a continuation; in the same way that I would have preferred Jodie Whittaker to be a new incarnation of Romana or a completely new Time Lady.

For me Chris Eccleston never really felt like the Doctor of old. The same is true for David Tennant. I simply could not see either of them as being the same being who sabotaged the TARDIS on Skaro or who played dizzy Dalek games in Victorian London. The first four seasons of 'nu-Who' had enjoyable stories in them but with the length of the adventures being truncated; the lack of cliff-hangers and the Doctor's outfits being somewhat more 'normal' I was very aware of the differences between

the two eras as well as the similarities.

Then Matt Smith came along as the Doctor. To me here was a Doctor more like the Doctors from the classic series. Although he was the youngest actor so far to play the role - and probably had fewer credits than any of the others - I could see him very much as an old man in a young man's body. I liked his costume, with his bowtie bringing back favourable memories of the second Doctor. Matt was very enthusiastic as the Doctor, and he could be lively and amusing at times. Also, he was exceptionally good at the quieter and more introspective moments as well. It was obvious that here was a Doctor who had done his homework and who was determined to build on what had been previously known about this time traveller.

There was a further echo of the adventures of the second Doctor in that the eleventh Doctor had two companions - one male and one female - as the second Doctor also mainly had. I have al-

ways liked that combination - a hero and a heroine for companions and an eccentric Doctor.

As far as I was concerned the fifth season of the revised Doctor Who was my favourite thus far. Although to be honest I had preferred some of the previous companions to Amy, I thought her interactions with the Doctor were invariably interesting. I had always enjoyed that Doctor Who travelled in time as well as space and the fact that the Doctor had met Amy when she was Amelia, emphasised that aspect of the series. Some child actors can let down a production with the delivery of their lines, but the girl playing Amelia, Caitlin Blackwood, was more believable than most. This was possibly helped by the fact that she was in real life related to Karen Gillan.

I have always thought that the original TARDIS team was interesting in that it effectively starred three generations - represented by the Doctor (senior), Ian and Barbara (middle) and Susan (young). With the TARDIS team of eleventh Doctor, Amy and Rory one has effectively only one generation covered as far as the actors playing them was concerned. I presume this helped the actors as they were similar ages but, at the same time, the way Matt played the Doctor made you believe that he was not the same generation as the other two.

As The Pandorica Opens begins you are aware that elements from many of the previous episodes, including cameo appearances by Vincent Van Gough and Winston Churchill, are there to tie all the previous episodes together and move towards a series conclusion. This

episode and the one that follows it, is the climax to the 'crack in time' theme which has been there throughout Steven Moffat's first season as show runner. I well remember the thrill I got when 'Strangers in Space' name checked the adventures that the four time travellers had been through together. This was a little something extra for long term fans of the show. Over the years thankfully the series has had only a little amount of continuity to deal with. However, I would say that all long running series needs some continuity, hence my total dislike of The Timeless Children which threw out everything that we had known over more than 55 years.

The quick pre-credit sequences are interesting and highlight the vast difference between the original series and this new version. There is no way that in the 1960s a videotaped production like Doctor Who could have had so many short scenes in such a short space of time. Interestingly enough in both these episodes while there are a number of what I would term 'character revealing' scenes which are nicely played - especially the ones featuring the Doctor - they are short enough to keep the momentum of the episode going. This is quite unlike that recent scene in Resolution with Ryan and his father, which seemed to me like a sequence from EastEnders inserted into a Doctor Who episode.

Both The Pandorica Opens and The Big Bang have a great deal of action and content in them. I suppose in this day and age many fans will rewatch episodes time and time again and maybe pick up things that they missed the first time around. In its earliest days you



could not do that, so the plots had to be simpler and easier to understand first time round.

I admit there are parts of this two-part finale that I cannot quite understand – especially how the Doctor managed to escape the Pandorica and how Rory is now alive but as an Auton before he becomes human again. Steven Moffat was always one for his ‘timey winey’ moments. However, these two episodes look expensive, and each have a great number of standout moments in them. To me what these two episodes are all about is giving fans memorable scenes that are definitely crowd pleasing. I would very much like to have a novelisation of this story to help me to understand it properly. The scenes with the Cyberman head are particularly memorable and striking and shows how much special effects have improved since the days of the classic series.

In the classic series we were denied the opportunity of seeing different alien enemies gang up together against

the Doctor, something that The Pandorica Opens finally gives us. For me the best scene of all is when all these alien races suddenly turn up one after the other and lock the Doctor in the Pandorica. Although we did not see them in person, I was particularly delighted to see the Drahvins name checked.

Of the two episodes I preferred the first one. As I was always a fan of the historical adventures, I was particularly pleased to see the short scenes set in the past. I also thought it interesting that part of the action was set in Roman times and that Rory had become a Roman Auton. I remember that a Roman legion appeared during Pat Troughton’s farewell story The War Games and I wondered if perhaps these scenes were a nod in the direction of that story, as the Dalek suddenly rising up to appear on the rooftop was a nod to the sudden appearance of a Dalek rising from the Thames in World’s End.

River Song’s scene in the prison at the



beginning was very amusing and I felt that she continued to play a pivotal role throughout the two episodes. Her piloting of the TARDIS was interesting, and her concluding scenes hinted at more surprises to come.

After the Daleks were defeated in The Dalek Invasion of Earth there was time to play out the sad scene where the Doctor decides to let his granddaughter remain in that time period and marry David Campbell. The main content of The Big Bang seemed to also be completed with time to spare. The universe being rebooted meant that Amy and Rory could be married. As usual we saw the everyday alongside the fantastic. The wedding reception scenes were particularly convincing and then we had the rather unusual step of the bride making a speech. (Something which in my experience which rarely ends well!) Then the TARDIS materialises and the Doctor joins in the party. His dancing is a sight to behold and affords us some amusing moments.

The Doctor is then seen alone – just as he was when he left the party after the Green Death incident. However, unlike that story he does not remain for long in that state with his meeting up of River Song and then Rory and Amy bursting into the TARDIS. Maybe a throwback to the opening episode of The Smugglers when another couple give a lonely Doctor companionship?

Both episodes are well directed by Toby Haynes. While both episodes move along at a brisk pace there are moments of quiet and moments of humour as well. The scenes of the Doctor popping in and out of the action are particularly effective – if a little con-

fusing to me and makes great use of the time-travel theme of the show. While its earliest days the time travel aspect was used mainly to get the travellers to an exciting destination, now the whole aspect of what time travel can do is an important ingredient in the make-up of the show.

Murray Gold’s music is as effective as ever and really enhance the whole production. I feel that the incidental music has always played an important role in the series, and I am someone who is happy to listen to the musical soundtracks of particular stories. On the other hand, the most recently produced episodes as far as I am concerned really miss Murray’s music.

I came away with the feeling that this two-part adventure had rebooted the universe of Doctor Who to such an extent that what followed afterwards was not really set in the same reality as all the years that the show had been going previously had been. I used to like the fact that in Doctor Who when someone died that was it. They stayed dead, like what had occurred with Katarina and Sara Kingdom. I disliked it when a character made a noble sacrifice only to have it completely undermined by them not being dead after all. What was particularly poignant was that the first two companion deaths were both female.

Steven Moffat has claimed that his interpretation of the series had a fairytale like quality about it. These two episodes definitely have that underlying tone to them which make them enjoyable to watch at the time. However, I feel that they are ones where you would not go away and think about



like the story Vincent and the Doctor. They are an enjoyable romp like most episodes with River Song in them, as her catchphrase Spoilers tend to remind you that what you are watching is a TV programme.

I have always felt that while the best stories of the classic era were dramas like Marco Polo and The Daleks many of the new series stories to me seemed to be more like comic strips come to life. That can often happen when there is lots of money available for special effects. It used to be said that Doctor Who would really benefit from having a generous special effects budget. However sometimes less is more, and writers can become much more creative if there are a number of restrictions on what can and what cannot be afforded to put on screen.

In any television production the really important thing is the script. These are well written episodes, albeit sometimes maybe too clever for their own good. But they are never boring and offer a number of surprises along the

way. More than ten years after their production to my eyes they still look good, and are episodes that viewers can enjoy watching again and again.

But for all their glossy production values they are not as believable as the early stories were. But as they are made for a different era, perhaps what viewers of the programme now want are 'nods to the audience of the programme's history' and an acceptance that Doctor Who is not real, and any of the events dramatized within its stories could never ever happen in real life? But is that just my age talking and do today's viewers not equally suspend their disbelief and hope that one day a craft, which could move both through time and space, might become a reality. And that there might be a benevolent alien out there, who is willing to come and rescue us from all the problems that present day humanity seems to have created for themselves.



## THE SARAH-JANE ADVENTURES

# THE DEATH OF THE DOCTOR

Review by Martin Spellacey

In November 2014 the two-part finale of the 8th season in the revival of Doctor Who, Dark Water/Death in Heaven, explored the concept of death as visualised through the eyes and mind of Steven Moffat. To a child watching this story, the concepts of death and loss are tackled head on. Even before the titles roll, Danny Pink is tragically and unequivocally killed. Clara, grief-stricken, vents uncontrollable anger at the Doctor and the concept of the afterlife is given a horrifically novel twist.

Four years earlier, Russell T Davies had also tackled the concept in (to date) his last televised adventure featuring the good Doctor - Death of the Doctor. Once again loss and its effects are explored but, perhaps surprisingly for a show aimed specifically at children, I would argue that this CBBC adventure tackles the subject in a much more adult manner.

In both stories the writers are of course confined to relaying their ideas as they attempt to explore the concept of death and loss whilst at the same time providing the audience with an adventure yarn.

To better understand the way children respond to the concept of mortality we can turn to the advice of another child-friendly doctor - one Dr Barnardo. The organisation's child bereavement service explains that children are not born with an automatic understanding of

death (that it is universal, inevitable and always has a cause). Adults, they correctly say, have a responsibility to help them understand these difficult concepts and this is done best by giving the child clear honest information about the subject in an accountable manner and on a frequent basis. So how do both these stories measure up to this ideal?

Well, to start with Dark Water tackles death head on. We are left in no doubt that Danny is dead at the start of the show; his body is clearly shown in the street as emergency services surround him. Clara confronts witnesses, and tributes at Coal Hill School (where he worked) are shown. In Death of the Doctor, the Doctor's demise is merely alluded to. There is no body on display and our protagonist doubts the veracity of the information that she is given about the death. Barnardos recommend using clarity when communicating to children about death; they advise that we should clearly use the word 'dead' rather than phrases like 'gone to sleep' or 'lost' or 'gone to a better place'. So Dark Water is clearly much more explicit in stating what has happened to Danny, but it also presents a bureaucratic afterlife which refers to itself as 'The Promised Land', 'The Nethersphere' or, even worse, 'Underworld' (which in itself can be described by some Whovians as a potential fate worse than death!). But I digress.

As important, if not more so, however is that children need to be told repeatedly that when someone dies they can never come back. It is essential to explain that the dead person doesn't eat, sleep or feel any pain. This is where *Dark Water* falls down. The whole concept of 3W is that death is not an end. Worse, comments like "we've got a burner in number 12", or "looks like somebody left their body to science" after a particularly harrowing scream, explicitly state that the departed are feeling everything that happens to their corpses. The dead in *Dark Water* remain conscious, the dead are aware. Some even come back as a cyber-Brigadier. Good grief.

Children who have experienced loss benefit from understanding that everyone dies at some point but most people don't die until they are older. In *Death of the Doctor* the person who has allegedly died is thousands of years old. In *Dark Water* one of the dead that we meet is a child who has been shot in error by one of our heroes. Danny is in the prime of his

life as he dies. His victim had not even made it out of childhood.

Children need to hear that nothing people think or say can itself cause death. Often children blame themselves when somebody special to them dies. It is important to emphasise to them that the death was not their fault. In Russell's story Jo blames herself for the loss of the Doctor. She says she believes that he never came back to her because she was somehow stupid. Children frequently associate something they have said or done with the reason that a loved one has passed. In showing the pain and loss of self-worth she feels when she discovers that our hero returned to Sarah a number of times, but not to her, Russell's writing brilliantly conveys that hurt and confusion. This then gives him the opportunity to explain to the audience through the Doctor that her fears are unfounded. The Doctor tells her she isn't stupid, she was just harder to find. He did return to find her, if only to witness her living a full life as she sailed down the Yangtze in a tea chest...



When explaining death to a child it may be helpful to link it to a previous experience of death that the child may have witnessed or experienced. Russell's writing once again paints an evocative picture of Rani's own experiences as her father reminds her of the trauma felt by her own mother when her grandfather died. The story of Gita compulsively cleaning everything, including a younger Rani herself, is a deliberate nod to the fact that Rani has undergone such pain in her past. Yet, with time, she moved on. It helps set the scene for children watching the story to understand the aberrant behaviour that Sarah displays as she struggles to come to terms with the pain she is herself feeling.

Children's understanding of death changes as they mature. From 0-2 years grief is often expressed loudly as children search repeatedly for the deceased. Between 2-5 they will think literally, so use of language and concepts are extremely important. Care must be taken when communicating with them. To be fair to Steven, 0-5 isn't the target audience for *Doctor Who* but images such as expired souls shouting "Don't cremate me" offer little comfort to children and may seed problems later on in their development. Often at this age, it is important to capture memories that will help them as they develop. Photographs, videos and memorabilia of their lost ones are vital at this stage.

This is the whole premise of the Shansheeth plan to create something tangible from the memories of Jo and Sarah. It's their intimate recollection of the Doctor that is so precious to the alien race and so deep-seated in our heroines

that provide the motivation for the story. Yes, our wonderful ladies do get to meet the incumbent incarnation of the Doctor (beautifully played by Matt Smith) and get to walk once more on an alien planet, but the story cleverly bases itself equally as much on something different. It's about their collective memories of their lives with the Time Lord as much as it is about the adventure in hand.

From 5-8 children can usually understand that death is inevitable. And here is perhaps the target audience for the CBBC show. Children who have suffered bereavement will frequently ask questions about death and may become preoccupied with thoughts of death. The Shansheeth themselves vividly explore this idea. Their whole motivation for trying to stage the death of the Doctor to create a key so they can steal his TARDIS is because they are fed up with death. It has become toxic to them so they want to eradicate it from the universe. They cannot see beyond their own obsession with the subject.

Between the ages of 8 and 12 children at this stage often find communication difficult and are prone to challenging behaviour. Clara takes this to the extreme. Apparently drugging the Doctor, forcing him to take her to an erupting volcano whilst she scatters all the copies of the TARDIS key into the devouring lava, could possibly be described as 'challenging'. I'm not convinced it's the worse thing she does in the show, but in dealing with her loss it's explicit. With Colonel Karim it's more subtle. Her motivation for turning traitor and aligning herself with the Shansheeth is explained away in an unfinished line



that alludes to her own experience of painful loss.

Teenage years are painful enough as it is. Between the ages of 13 to 18 teenagers are particularly vulnerable as at this stage they try to resolve problems for themselves and find it difficult to seek help from adults. Santiago, expertly played by (a pre-Game of Thrones) Finn Jones, clearly shows the complexity of adolescence. His frustration as he describes his seemingly idyllic childhood as a series of painful events that lose him connection with his parents is honest. He is instantly identifiable as he shifts from cocksure bragging about the globe-trotting achievements of his family, all the while strutting about with his knickers on display at every opportunity. His arrogance is gossamer thin and behind it is a childish envy of the stability of Clyde and Rani's domestic normality. Though his parents are both still alive, the fact that he hasn't seen them since he was a young child is a kind of bereavement in itself. His loss is palpable and he doesn't know how to reach out.

Steven Moffat loved his ...of the Doctor' stories, whether it be 'Name', 'Night', 'Day' or 'Time', but Russell T. Davies got there first with his 'Death of the Doctor' - a story in which the Doctor does not actually die, but in which the themes of death and loss are woven throughout to a young audience. Both Death of the Doctor and Dark Water/Death of the Heaven are excellent stories, written by talented writers with plenty to say, but it is the one written for kids that behaves in a more grown up way. When it comes to talking about loss I will take talking vultures over flying Cybermen any day if the message is that there is a way to live on with grief. And as we see Jo and her grandson wave at their new friends, and Sarah call her son at the end of the story, it's the connection with the future that wins through.

*For more information on how children deal with loss, Barnardos have a wealth of information on their website, [barnardos.org.uk](http://barnardos.org.uk).*



## A CHRISTMAS CAROL

Review by Russell Sandberg

### Past

From Blackadder to the Muppets, several popular franchises have adapted Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol for their festive specials. Although it is just one of several Christmas stories written by Dickens, A Christmas Carol has become perhaps the best known non-religious Christmas story and therefore the go to adaptation for television and film Christmas specials. The story is better known than any other piece of classic literature. Everyone knows who Scrooge is. It is also perhaps the best known and arguably the most accessible time travel story there is.

Doctor Who has never been shy of borrowing ideas from classic stories. A Doctor Who episode that pays tribute to A Christmas Carol was therefore to be expected. Indeed, an argument can be made that the novels structure informs that of The Trial of a Time Lord series in the Sixth Doctor era.

It would be expected that in the revived series an adaptation of A Christmas Carol would have taken the form of a celebrity historical like the Tenth Doctor episodes with William Shakespeare and Agatha Christie where the Doctor's quips have helped to inspire the author he meets. However, this could not be done with A Christmas Carol since the Doctor had already met Charles Dickens on screen. The Ninth Doctor adventure The Unquiet Dead is the Doctor Who Christmas special that never

was. It formed part of the 2005 debut series of the revived series at a time when the thought of a Christmas special of Doctor Who was fanciful.

Yet, by the time the Doctor Who version of A Christmas Carol aired in December 2010, the special had become a tradition. However, the festive episodes of the first Russell T Davies era had become less Christmassy as time had gone on. The year before A Christmas Carol, in 2009, the focus was on the Tenth Doctor's regeneration with a few party hats and a brief visit to a church on the side, The End of Time left traditional Christmassy shenanigans to the BBC idents that were dedicated to the outgoing Doctor. The year before that, in 2008, The Next Doctor was also not particularly festive. In short, by 2010, it had been a long time since robot santas. But in contrast with its immediate predecessors, there was no escaping the festive references in the 2010 Christmas special. Though not set on Earth, the word 'Christmas' is frequently used, Christmas carols are played and the point that a mid-winter festival celebrates being 'halfway out of the dark' becomes the main theme of the episode. The story hinges upon the Doctor being able to redeem Kazran Sardick in a similar manner as Dickens' ghosts converted Scrooge and brought him fully out of the dark.

### Present

A Christmas Carol was the first episode



of the Steven Moffat era of Doctor Who to be made with the team knowing that they had a success on their hands. It was later revealed that the BBC came close to pulling the plug entirely at the thought of David Tennant and Russell T Davies leaving. The 2009 Christmas idents underscored how ubiquitous Tennant had become in the role, becoming possibly the first actor to be definitely seen as the Doctor by the public at large since Tom Baker. The exit of Tennant and Davies meant the pressure was therefore well and truly on. Though Moffat's scripts during the Davies years had been rightly lauded, his lead actors were largely unknown. The longevity of the series also suggested that presiding over an inevitable decline was probably the most likely scenario.

Yet, the Eleventh Doctor's first series had been an instant success. And so, as Moffat and his team turned their attention from publicising the series

that had just ended its transmission to producing their first Christmas special, they knew that it was a hit. This newly found confidence informs every frame of the episode. There are also one or two signs that Moffat had also been working on the first series of Sherlock which was transmitted after season 5 had aired. The success of the modern-day reinvention of Arthur Conan Doyle's detective furthered the confidence and esteem of the showrunner and his team. While Russell T Davies had presided over a successful number of Who spin-offs alongside the main show, Moffat was in the driving seat of two prime time BBC one success stories. In A Christmas Carol you can see that this is a production team with their feet firmly behind the desk and Matt Smith's Doctor is now at the height of his powers. Still fresh but now not only established, but iconic too. Bow ties and fezzes had become ubiquitous.



There were several links between A Christmas Carol and the preceding series 5. It is a clear example of the Doctor Who as a fairy tale style that Moffat spoke of when promoting his first series. The costumes worn by Amy and Rory provide humorous reminders to stand out moments in the 2010 series. The playing with time travel in A Christmas Carol to revisit past versions of main characters to change events in the present carries straight on from The Big Bang and would be seen as a hallmark of Moffat's writing. However, it is arguable that this was the high point in Moffat's use of time travel in this way, together with the main series 6 arc revisiting and revising the Doctor's death. However, despite what is often claimed by Moffat's critics, there is nothing particularly complicated at all about the use of time travel in A Christmas Carol and the rewriting of Sardick's past by the Doctor is not particularly controversial. As Moffat pointed out in interviews at the time, although the Doctor talks about the importance non-intervention, he fails to practice what he preaches. Pretty much every Doctor Who story is about rewriting the future in some respect.

However, in several respects the 2010 Christmas special was an atypical episode of Doctor Who. There is no real monster and as Moffat pointed out in the corresponding episode of the much-missed Doctor Who Confidential, Kazran Sardick is a rare redeemable foe. The Doctor's mission is not to defeat or to stop him but to persuade him. Although there is a big scale threat in terms of the crashing aircraft and also high jinks with a shark, the story is a far distance from the 'end of the world' stories that series finales

and Christmas specials had gravitated towards under Russell T Davies.

### Future

'A Christmas Carol' provided several pointers for how Doctor Who was to develop during the Moffat years. While series 5 saw Moffat adapting the Russell T Davies template of how a series of Doctor Who was structured, from here on Moffat subverts that template and introduces a sense of greater unpredictability. A Christmas Carol is somewhat of a half-way house between the subtle adaptations of series 5 and the more unleashed approach from series 6 onwards. It carries on the Russell T Davies tradition of having major guests in starring roles in Christmas specials. Indeed, here there are two them in Michael Gambon and Katherine Jenkins. But it breaks with immediate past precedents by continuing to include the Doctor's existing companions albeit in a somewhat reduced role. It also feels less like the mini adventure movies served up by The Runaway Bride and Voyage of the Damned. A Christmas Carol also underscores that Moffat's Doctor Who is more likely to leave Earth behind

Moffat's Christmas specials are less designed to be watched in a busy and noisy family Christmas environment while full of turkey and recovering from alcoholic beverages. The specials that followed A Christmas Carol would become more like extended episodes of the regular series. This might have been caused by the 2011 special, which provided an exception to this rule. The Doctor, the Widow and the Wardrobe attempted to emulate the success of A Christmas Carol by deriving inspiration from the tales of Narnia. This less

straightforward adaption proved to be less successful than A Christmas Carol and so further literary inspired adaptations did not follow, though movie inspired Christmas specials were a feature of the Twelfth Doctor era. The Return of Doctor Mystero riffed on superhero movies while numerous horror tropes were present in Last Christmas.

A Christmas Carol also saw a considerable step up in terms of its design. This was due at least in part to the arrival of Michael Pickwood as production designer. Watching the episode over a decade later on a large TV screen, it still stands up and its visuals remain comparable to recent high quality television shows. The opening shots establishing the town look as if they ought to be in a Hollywood blockbuster. Pickwood would be rightly lauded for his redesign of the Tardis console room which debuted in the 2012 Christmas special but his immense contribution to

the show began here and is instantly noticeable. Doctor Who had never looked so good.

Indeed, the fact that A Christmas Carol was a Christmas special means that it is often overlooked. It is a gem in what was undoubtedly (another) golden era of the show. The dialogue sparkles with a tight witty script by Moffat being performed by the unique double act of Michael Gambon and Matt Smith. The story pays homage to Dickens but is no simple pastiche. The doomed relationship at the centre of the rewritten story provides the heart of the episode. If this were not a Christmas special, then it would be even more rated as a Doctor Who adventure. And if this was not a Doctor Who story then this would likely be lauded as a classic and repeated religiously every Christmas time. For me, this is undoubtedly the best Doctor Who festive special and deserves to be treated like its Muppets namesake and watched every December.



## THE IMPOSSIBLE ASTRONAUT/THE DAY OF THE MOON

Review by Bedwyr Gullidge

Has there ever been a better opener to a series of Doctor Who than 2011's The Impossible Astronaut/Day of the Moon? Personally, I don't think so. Allow me to make my case.

Matt Smith's second series as the Eleventh Doctor was highly anticipated. Following a very successful transition from the Russell T Davies era, the Steven Moffat/Matt Smith debut series of 2010 had gone down very well both with fans and critics alike. The youthful exuberance and quirkiness of new incarnation Smith paired with the delightful charm of Karen Gillan became an instantly popular combination. Add in some wonderful stories such as Vincent and the Doctor, The Eleventh Hour and a pair of sublime two-parters, and the Doctor Who production team had a hit on their hands. The pressure was therefore on to maintain the momentum with a strong second series. They often say that the second album is the hardest. The proverbial sophomore slump beckoned. A tough task.

Unsurprisingly, the upcoming new series of episodes was promoted with the usual mix of trailers, appearances, and interviews. Standard predictions about the best season yet were far less attention grabbing than the prospect of viewers finally discovering the identity of River Song. We had all been wondering that! It was widely known that the filming of this new series had also included a little sojourn from the streets

of Cardiff to the deserts of America.

Although other stories had previously been set in the United States of America, The Gunfighters for instance was set entirely in the US, minimal filming had actually taken place there. The 1996 TV Movie starring Paul McGann, although set in San Francisco was predominantly filmed in Vancouver, Canada. A few years before The Impossible Astronaut/Day of the Moon, some second unit filming had taken place for Daleks in Manhattan/Evolution of the Daleks, none of which involved the main cast. The news that scenes were being shot in the wide expanses of Utah was a big deal. Unsurprisingly, many of these shots featured heavily in the promotional material.

However, it was the coverage particularly in Doctor Who Magazine which





was the most intriguing. You may remember the four different covers of DWM 433. Each cover featured one of the main characters, Amy Pond, The Doctor, River Song and Rory Pond, with a guarantee that “one of them WILL die in the amazing season opener!” Talk about getting you hooked!

Debate and discussion raged. Of the contenders few would suspect the Doctor. Even Steven Moffat wasn't crazy enough to kill off his lead character in the first episode of his own show. Rory was definitely an option. He'd already been dead and come back so seemed logical. River Song already had a peculiar timeline, but we had seen her death already. But maybe that wasn't her first death? Amy Pond however was way too popular a character to kill off. Surely?

A TARDIS crew of four also brought back the dynamic from the very beginning of the show with the First Doctor, Ian, Barbara and Susan. The new quartet featuring in The Impossible Astro-

naut/Day of the Moon was also akin to that which we saw in Season 19 with Nyssa, Tegan and Adric travelling alongside the newly regenerated Fifth Doctor. It was fresh and new, yet familiar. Although this combination of multiple characters has proved less successful in recent years, the additional room required to allow the characters to have meaningful contributions to the plot was afforded by having a two-episode opener to the series.

Starting a new series with a two-parter had not been attempted since the show had returned to BBC One in 2005. It seems logical. A strong 45 minutes which makes viewers want to come back and see how things are resolved can surely reduce the drop in viewers that a new series would often get the following week with less promotion. Its a sound strategy. The Impossible Astronaut ticked all the boxes to encourage viewers back the following week.

The opening episode of the two-parter is a sublime piece of work. From the

very opening movements it rattles through at a terrific pace. Our heroes are reintroduced. The viewer is blindsided by a shocking twist only to be twisted in another direction shortly thereafter. Then we are introduced to a new, captivating alien creature.

The Silence were a wonderful invention. Mysterious men in black suits have been rumoured for decades. It even inspired a movie franchise. They had already been used in Doctor Who for the animation Dreamland. But, in typical Steven Moffat style, what if those 'men in black' weren't men at all. What if they were aliens? The Silence were incredibly effective, not just on screen but off screen as well. Although I was fortunate enough to know the person behind the mask, even helping him on with it, it was still incredibly unnerving. Looking into the sunken eyes of an alien creature, even one in a fancy suit, sent a shiver down the spine.

Building on a similar idea to the Weeping Angels, the concept that the creatures would be forgotten when no long-

er observed was particularly clever. Their ability to implant ideas and instructions was then of course utilised by the Doctor to defeat them. Peak Steven Moffat ingenuity. The Silence were so good that it is no wonder the Silence would appear several times during Series 6, not least in the next episode Day of the Moon.

For those viewers who did return the following week the conclusion more than delivered upon the promise of the opener. For instance, those scenes set in the orphanage are some of the creepiest that Doctor Who has ever broadcast. Then of course we had that cliff-hanger ending!

From the stunning location footage to an engaging storyline, an eye-catching new alien villain and a dramatic cliff-hanger, all featuring our new favourite Doctor and companion characters, 'The Impossible Astronaut/Day of the Moon' is, in my humble opinion the best opener to a new series of Doctor Who we've seen.





# THE CURSE OF THE BLACK SPOT

Review by Paul Winter

So, how do you follow a story like *The Day of the Moon*, so visually attractive, with a epic storyline and that marvellous cliff-hanger with the little girl regenerating in the alley and the scans on the TARDIS monitor of...? I think it is best not to try too hard, and that is what happens here.

Into this run falls a simple 'monster of the week' type of story. It is not too ambitious but still manages to create a sense of mystery and tension early on which, unlike the mega-story arcs we are now so familiar with from the Steven Moffat era, is clearly explained and resolved at the end.

The production plays up a lot of the humour that is present in the Matt Smith era, much of which is down to the actor himself. The danger is always that you go too far and this episode

almost does that, but just about avoids it, I think. Nonetheless, the pirate costumes, flying apparitions and the 'plank' take us very much into pantomime territory. It is easy to undermine the authority of the Doctor in such cases, but Matt Smith manages to retain his credibility and save the day.

It was nice to see such a good cast including Hugh Bonneville as Henry Avery, (also making his mark at *Downton Abbey*) recognising the consequences of the superstitious beliefs of his crew even though he did not share them. Whilst it was very much in cameo mode, I was delighted when he and his son Toby (Oscar Lloyd) returned briefly in *A Good Man Goes to War*.

This will always be an 'also ran' type of story but nonetheless it is a sound and very enjoyable production.



# THE DOCTOR'S WIFE

Review by Tony Jordan

It was a real coup when Steven Moffat managed to persuade Neil Gaiman to write for *Doctor Who*. He has, after all, won awards including the Hugo and Nebula, not to mention the Carnegie and Newberry medals.

When I first heard the title I was concerned that *The Doctor's Wife* would be end up being *The Doctor's Daughter 2.0*, the latter being a story I hold in low regard. Happily I could not have been more wrong. Indeed further awards would ensue, with the Ray Bradbury Award for Outstanding Dramatic Presentation and the Hugo Award for Dramatic Presentation both making their way to Gaiman for his script.

The actual concept of the title dates all the way back to the mid 1980's. Producer John Nathan-Turner was becoming increasingly concerned at leaks that were, seemingly, emanating from the Production Office and wrote it on a board alongside genuine upcoming story titles to try and track down the source.

Put simply, *The Doctor's Wife* is a love story. First, and foremost, a love story with the TARDIS, the remarkable invention that has been part and parcel of *Doctor Who* from the very first episode.

It is also, however, a love story written by Gaiman for his second wife, the singer, songwriter and performance artist

Amanda Palmer. Following his divorce from Mary McGraw, Gaiman and Palmer had entered into a relationship in 2009 culminating in them being wed at the very start of 2011.

I draw attention to this as Gaiman worked on the various drafts of the script at the very same time that his relationship with Palmer was blossoming. Filming of the story took place in the final week of September and early October 2010, as they were preparing for their marriage. The transmission date changed a few times, with the episode finally being broadcast at 6.30pm on 14th May 2011.

The graveyard of hundreds of TARDISEs (TARDI?) is a juxtaposition for the graveyard of relationships. And just as fresh relationships can be built from the ruins of past ones, so can Time and Space machines. The Eleventh Doctor is still trying to find the Time Lords in the same way that Gaiman was trying to find true love.

The story itself concerns The Doctor receiving a distress call from an old Time Lord friend which quickly leads him and his companions to a place beyond our Universe. Arriving on the sentient planet House, he quickly realises that he's been drawn into a trap which has already proved to be the nadir of hundreds of his kind.

The star of the show is undoubtedly Suranne Jones with her wonderful,

sparky portrayal of Matrix invaded Idris. There's a Frankenstein theme running through many parts of the episode, the most obvious example being House's experiments on Auntie and Uncle, with them having been remade several times using body parts from the Time Lords that were lured to their death.

However, more subtly Idris exudes elements of Elsa Lanchester's performance as the Bride in the classic 1935 film *Bride of Frankenstein*. The redoubtable Paul Kasey puts in a decent turn as the Ood Nephew, but in all honesty apart from adding another familial reference, and being sent as a second thought by House to kill those in the TARDIS towards the end of the story, I am not sure that he contributes a great deal. Even with that though, it's a very tight cast and that undoubtedly benefits the thrust of the narrative.

Having talked about the Bride of Frankenstein, equally as strong an influence on the character of Idris is Amanda Palmer. As I said earlier, the script developed at the same time as her relationship with Gaiman. As a performance artist Palmer's live realization of her art is quirky, full of vigour and in parts eccentric. There are numerous examples on YouTube - just check out 'Runs in the Family' live and you may find facets of Idris right there!

Matt Smith has great fun interacting with his TARDIS-turned-real, and there's some excellent dialogue between the two. I love Idris's assertion that "I always took you where you needed to go."

It's good to see Karen Gillan and Arthur Darvill separated from The Doctor

and having to battle their way against House through the Old Type 40. The success of the sub-plot must have helped lead to the 2013 episode *Journey to the Centre of the TARDIS*.

Overall, there is so much to like about *The Doctor's Wife*, including the return of the Cloister Bell. It's full of heart and is definitely one of my favourite Matt Smith stories. And don't forget that bunk beds are cool!

Having been fulsome in my praise for *The Doctor's Wife*, I have to say that I'd have been happier if Gaiman hadn't written another story for the show: instead of this we got *Nightmare in Silver*. But that's another story for someone else....



## THE REBEL FLESH/THE ALSO PEOPLE

Review by Ian K McLachlan

The first fan letter that I ever wrote to any actor was the one I sent William Hartnell in 1968. In it I suggested that it would be great to see him return as the Doctor in a new adventure. I was delighted when he sent me not only a handwritten reply, but also a signed photograph as well. He explained that there could not be two Doctors in a story. He then said that he had suggested the idea when he was the Doctor, that the original Doctor had an evil son who looked exactly like him, and both had a TARDIS. Sadly, his idea was rejected but he thought that his idea would be exciting for the children and that it would have required him to play both parts.

I was intrigued to hear this as during his time on the show twice he had played two parts. In *The Chase* he appeared as both the Doctor and the Robot Doctor. I remember when I was on holiday and watching *Journey into Terror* on Crieff Hydro's television, the shock I got when the Next Episode title came on and it was *The Death of Doctor Who*. Was my favourite series coming to an end? Thankfully not. While at times William Hartnell played the Robot Doctor at other times it was played by Edmund Warwick who had appeared in my all-time favourite Doctor Who serial, *The Keys of Marinus*.

Thankfully *The Chase* is one of the surviving Hartnell serials so viewers are able to see for themselves via the DVD

that the doppelganger in that story did not really work. The technology was not readily available to pull off effectively the same actor playing two roles in the same scene.

In another of my favourite Hartnell stories - *The Massacre* - once again William gets to play two roles - his regular part as the Doctor and the mysterious Abbot of Ambrose. Sadly, this serial is missing from the archives so modern-day audiences cannot see how effective or otherwise it was. I remember at the time believing that the Doctor and the Abbot were one and the same person and was shocked when the cliff-hanger to episode three saw Steven looking down on the dead body of the Abbot. Was this really the death of Doctor Who? Thankfully not. In the Troughton era, Patrick played two roles in the previously missing *Enemy of the World*. Patrick played both parts very differently giving a foreign accent to Salamander. Again, there was the question of whether or not Salamander was really the Doctor in disguise. However, most viewers, as opposed to characters in the narrative, were convinced from early on that the Doctor had a doppelganger. The two characters did not meet until the final scene which was shot on film. Sadly, there was not much interaction between the two of them until the evil dictator found himself ejected into space.

Nowadays there is so much more that



can be done with Doctor Who when it comes to special effects compared to what was available to the makers of the programme in the 1960s. But I would argue that being able to achieve so much more visually does not, in my opinion, mean a necessarily better story. In the most recent Doctor Who series Flux there were several versions of the thirteenth Doctor, with one scene featuring two of them basically flirting with each other. But to be honest I much preferred the stories that I have previously mentioned to episode 6 of The Flux. Sometimes less is more, and for my money there were simply too many strands to the narrative in Flux for me to be able to keep up with it all!

The Matt Smith two-part adventure The Rebel Flesh/The Almost People explored the doppelganger theme much more than any of the previous stories did. In this adventure, as well as the Doctor, other main characters had their doppelgangers too. Thankfully, the technology had advanced to

such an extent by then, when a human and their doppelganger appeared in a scene at the same time, you could not see the join! Thus, this two-part story would have been impossible to have been made in the 1960s and I rather like it when the modern version of the series does stories which could not have been done previously. Having said that, what I particularly liked about the story was it had elements of it which harked back to the programme's past. I believe that originally more of these kisses to the past were originally planned to be included, but in the finished production some of them did not appear.

Most of the second Doctor serials were stories which could be called bases under siege although interestingly enough The Enemy of the World was not one of them. This story very much harked back to that version of Doctor Who. The action mainly took place in a monastery with scenes in the TARDIS making up all of the remaining ones apart from the final one. The loca-

tion used was Caerphilly Castle and I must say I could not always work out what were the location scenes and what were the studio ones.

The story had quite a small cast which meant that all the actors had meaningful roles unlike many guest roles in the new version of the show. I liked the fact that after the teaser and the TARDIS scene the eleventh Doctor, Amy and Rory leave the space and time machine to basically explore this new place that they had landed on. This was what happened quite a lot in the classic series and the 'exploring where the travellers had landed before getting themselves into trouble' was a trope which was very much part of the classic series.

I have always preferred it when a Doctor Who season is composed of a set of serials complete with cliff-hangers. This story is virtually equivalent to an old four-part serial, and this meant that the storyline could actually 'breathe more easily'. I particularly like the cliff-hanger to The Rebel Flesh were we meet with Ganger Doctor complete with his prosthetic face. It is a very creepy scene, and the makeup is terrific.

This serial while perfectly acceptable as a standalone adventure had also elements within it which formed part of the arc of the sixth season. We see the mysterious Eye Patch Lady and the ending of The Almost People is rather startling and dramatic and results in the viewer rethinking Amy's role in the story.

In a way the story is quite a straightfor-

ward one. The Doctor is somewhat puzzled as to Amy's possible pregnancy. Then the TARDIS is caught up in a solar storm and lands on an island situated on Earth in the future. The Doctor, Amy and Rory soon find a monastery which has been turned into factory whose purpose is to pump a valuable acid off the island and onto the mainland. As this is dangerous work, those whose job it is to work there, have been using 'programmable matter' - which is a liquid called 'The Flesh' - in order to create doppelgangers of themselves to complete the more difficult jobs. These doppelgangers are called Gangers and are controlled by their human originals.

The Doctor is worried that the solar storm will do untold damage to the factory and her crew and offers to evacuate them all, using his TARDIS. The leader of the group, Miranda Cleaves, dismisses his kind offer. The storm strikes the monastery, and it is realised that as a result of that storm, the Gangers have become sentient beings.

The humans discover that two of them have been replaced with Gangers - both Miranda and Jennifer. There then follows a battle of wits as both the Ganger group and the human group are determined to destroy each other. It is interesting that in many ways the quietest one of the human group, Jennifer becomes the most malevolent Ganger of them all. They all retain the memories that the humans had. She turns into a monster with a terrifyingly long neck and as an even bigger monstrous creation later on.

I personally found these effects both



believable and unsettling. Although the special effects in this story were limited, compared to what came in Doctor Who much later, I felt that they made a very positive contribution to the adventure.

There are several very touching scenes between Rory and Jennifer throughout the story and it is obvious that he cares about her and wants to look after her. How will this affect his future relationship with Amy? There continues to be friction between the Doctor and Cleaves, especially after she kills one of the Gangers. While she does not regard it as being important, the Doctor chastises her reluctance to see it as a living being.

The first episode ends with the appearance of a Ganger version of the eleventh Doctor. In the second episode things liven up especially when the two Matt Smith Doctors are on screen. To begin with the Ganger Doctor has some problems as he seems to be having flashbacks to some of his

previous incarnations - notably the third, fourth and tenth incarnations.

While this is happening, Rory has gone to try and find Jennifer. The Ganger version of Jennifer kills the human version, and tricks Rory into getting the humans into the place where the acid is stored. This results in the death of the human Jimmy. With the aid of a video-call from Jimmy's son Adam, the Doctor convinces the Gangers that they are as much living beings now as the human who created them. He convinces them to work together to save themselves. The Ganger Jennifer is furious at this and turns herself into a monstrous being which the Doctor defeats by turning her into the liquid which she was created from.

The Doctor is able to make the surviving Gangers permanently human. Amy starts to have contractions and when the three time travellers return to the TARDIS, the Doctor admits that he had wanted to examine the Flesh, because he had known that Amy

had been a Ganger for some time. To the surprise of the viewers the Doctor turns Amy into raw Flesh. The final scene is of Amy, the human being, lying pregnant on a bed being watched by the mysterious 'Eye Patch Lady.'

Part of the fun of these episodes is working out whether a particular character is in their human form or are in fact a Ganger. This is not always obvious as the Gangers do not always appear with their prosthetic makeup on in every scene that they are featured in.

This is particularly interesting in the case of The Doctor. It is difficult to know when the real Doctor is participating in a scene or if it is his Ganger version. Matt Smith is particularly impressive when he is on the screen playing both versions at the same time. Thankfully, Matthew Graham did not go down the route of making the Ganger Doctor evil, but rather surprisingly reserved that role in the plot for Jennifer. I would have liked to have seen Matthew Graham write more Doc-

tor Who stories because I felt that this was a vast improvement on his previous story Fear Her.

It was a well-directed story by Julian Simpson with the lighting and music being particularly effective. It added something to the ongoing narrative of the sixth season while being an enjoyable adventure in its own right. It was also a story which asked questions about the nature of humanity and of what can be achieved when people whoever they are, are willing to work together. Watching it reminded me of all the science-fiction episodes which dealt with the relationship between humans and robots.

If we were to find our robot servants becoming humanised, would we seek to destroy them or would we rather live together with them. But saying that, would we ever regard them as being our equals?





# A GOOD MAN GOES TO WAR

Review by Paul Driscoll

One of Steven Moffat's fears when he became showrunner was that as a 'dour Scot' his version of Doctor Who might lack the emotional impact that made Russell T Davies' revival so popular. He even asked his good friend Richard Curtis to script a series five episode partly to address this expected shortcoming. But Vincent and the Doctor did not stick out like a sore thumb, despite Curtis weaving in familiar elements from his playbook on how to manipulate the audience – just as instructed by Moffat. In truth, Curtis's approach to writing, in turn influenced by the emotionalism of Spielberg, was one that Moffat himself would turn to throughout his tenure. No more is this in evidence than in *A Good Man Goes To War*, a story that despite any reputation to the contrary is so simply plotted that it allows all the standout moments to be those that would generate the greatest feels.

Although the episode starts and ends on a note of hope, with the Lone Centurion demanding to know "where is my wife?", and the Doctor excitedly heading off to find Melody, the viewing experience is deeply traumatic. Even with the knowledge of what happens next, there is something terribly disturbing about seeing our heroes in so much pain. The moment when Amy realises that she was holding a ganger version of her baby is truly heart-breaking, despite the violent nature of the revelation. The strength of Karen Gillan and Arthur Darvill's acting makes such an unnatural event seem completely plau-

sible. Few actors could have pulled this off so effectively, but they had already achieved such heights in the closing moments of *The Pandorica Opens*, when Amy finally remembers Rory, just before he kills her.

Matt Smith's Eleventh Doctor is very much the alien trying to be human, but perhaps because he has been written by a writer unsure of how much empathy he can channel, he is surprised when he experiences some very human emotions. The tear of joy when invited in for Christmas dinner with the Ponds (*The Doctor*, *The Widow* and *The Wardrobe*) shows how far he has come from the man on a mission who found it so hard to empathise with Vincent van Gogh. And here he is shocked to discover that he can also feel great anger, especially when someone is hurting his friends in order to get to him.

The Eleventh Doctor's anger, born as it is out of genuine love for his companions, is the set up for what would turn out to be a gradual fall. It started with the death of Rita in *The God Complex*, an event that made him want to part with Amy and Rory for their own protection, reached a peak after the events in New York made him retreat to the clouds, and ended with the Doctor's last stand and eventual resignation at *Trenzalore*. But on the face of it, his assumed victory at *Demon's Run* is hardly a moment that warrants Vastra's assessment 'my friend, you have never risen higher'. The win

happens all too easily, even allowing for it to be a trap, and it feels small fry compared to his universe saving exploits in the past. Here he and Rory are only there to save Amy and the baby, and the fact that Moffat is holding back significant information about Kovarian and the army of clerics until the end of the next series does not help.

The battle of *Demon's Run* happens, of course, with the viewers knowing with Amy, Rory and River Song that the Doctor is destined to die, not on *Trenzalore*, but at *Lake Silencio* at the hands of the impossible astronaut. We learn that Melody Pond/River Song is the one who will kill the Doctor, a time-baby raised to be his assassin. The lack of immediacy of this event, when compared to a mother giving birth and having her baby stolen from her, makes us temporarily forget all that. Our need is to see baby Melody returned to Amy and Rory, an act we assume would circumvent the Doctor's death and change the future.

Moffat's *Doctor Who* is largely optimistic and replete with happy endings against the odds, yet despite Rory's multiple resurrections, the bait and switch of the Teselecta at *Lake Silencio*, the resurrection of the likeable Strax, the reuniting of Amy and Rory, the temporary resurrection of Clara, the freeing of Bill Potts from her cyber-conversion, and the redemption of Missy, Amy and Rory never get to hold their baby again. The fact that Amy is made infertile compounds this irreplaceable loss, and the revelation that they unknowingly grew up with Melody as a school friend is poor recompense. There is a sense, then, in which the horrors of *A Good Man Goes To War* are never resolved. It is almost impossible to rewatch the episode without being left with a sad heart, something that cannot be said even of *Doomsday* thanks to the events of *Journey's End*.

That sadness also finds expression in the character of Lorna Bucket. She barely has any scenes, but arguably she



is one of Steven Moffat's best creations. Her death is a permanent reminder that the Doctor can never be an all-conquering superhero, that they need us as much as we need them. Amy Pond has not quite got it yet, but the scales will soon be lifted (The God Complex, shortly after Rory has come to a similar realisation in The Girl Who Waited). Right now, she can still think of her own daughter as a superhero. Yes, it is a joke about how the name Melody Pond sounds compared to Melody Williams, but it is also a mark of Amy's continued idealism. It is a hope she shares with Lorna when she clings onto the prayer leaf. There is magic in that prayer leaf, but as for the Doctor's cot - that functions in the opposite way, to ground him, to make his vulnerability apparent.

Ultimately the Doctor fails Lorna because he has already started to turn from the healer to the aggressor, something that River warns him about with the revelation that the people of the Gamma forest translate the word Doctor as Warrior. But it is not just about the Doctor. Travelling with the Doctor could potentially turn his com-

panions into warriors instead of healers, a point made most poignantly in the unworded response of Rory to Strax's last words. When the Sontaran reminds Rory that he died as a nurse not as a soldier, Rory will have felt the disconnection of being a nurse himself, while dressed as a Roman Centurion. In earlier drafts of the script, Rory responds by telling Strax he is a nurse too, but Darvill's look says the same without words.

Steven Moffat will go on to have much more to say about the Doctor's attitude to war, particularly with both the introduction of the War Doctor and the Twelfth Doctor's conflict with ex-soldier Danny Pink, but A Good Man Goes to War marks the first tentative step in exploring what would become such a significant theme. Add to this the introduction of what would become The Paternoster Gang, the revelation of who River Song is, and the foreshadowing of the Doctor's eventual demise, this mid-series finale must surely be remembered as one of the most significant chapters in the Eleventh Doctor's run.



## LET'S KILL HITLER

Review by Paul Burns

When Steven Moffat first introduced River Song in the 2008 two parter, Silence in the Library/Forest of the Dead, there was no hint of the character living beyond the episodes. Indeed, she actually met her end in the climax of the story, her data ghost uploaded to the library. But Moffat, who had originally named the character as part of a dirty word acronym (A River Song Ending), obviously had plans for River, having dropped delicious breadcrumbs to her connection with the Doctor.

She reappeared in 2010 in the two parter, The Time of Angels/Flesh and Stone, but it would not be until Series 6 that Moffat really delved into exactly why River is so important to the Doctor, and her saga pretty much dominated the series arc, tying the character very closely into Amy Pond and Rory Williams. Series 6 was split into two parts, with a six-week gap between A Good Man Goes to War, (in which River reveals to Amy and Rory she is their daughter, who has just been kidnapped by the Silence) and Let's Kill Hitler. The gap included a short prequel to Hitler, where an extraordinarily calm Amy leaves an answer phone message on the TARDIS phone reminding the Doctor he promised to look for the missing baby Melody. It is a call he fails to pick up, instead he sits morosely in his blue box. No one seems that bothered about Melody. After all, she is River, and River is fine, right? It is tonally weird but leads into one of the best and campest episodes ever.

Let's Kill Hitler opens with Amy and Rory creating a crop circle to attract the Doctor's attention. It appears he has done very little in the search for Melody. Before this can be explored, they are interrupted by Amy and Rory's friend, Mels, arriving in a stolen sports car and telling the Doctor: "You've got a time machine, I've got a gun. What the hell, let's kill Hitler." Speaking of the episode's titular character, Steven Moffat was determined to not portray him as a menacing figure: "If you really want to p\*\*s off Hitler, don't make him into an icon of evil," Moffat explained to a BFI audience in 2011. "Take the Mickey out of him, make him a joke, have him punched by Rory and told 'shut up Hitler'." Although the intent was to make Hitler a figure of ridicule, he was still responsible for wounding Mels, and therefore could be oddly credited for the creation of River.

Let's Kill Hitler is, to all intents and purposes, River Song's origin story and a showcase for Alex Kingston's range as an actress. She is obviously loving the camp....

000100100010101010011111000000  
0.....

*Is it working? Is the channel open? Hello, can you hear me sweetie? Paul, can you hear me?.....look, I'm sure you are doing your best to explain this part of my story in a linear review, words in the right order and everything, but it's so much more complicated than you real-*



ise. My timeline and the Doctor's were never aligned. He was going forwards, I was going backwards, until he met me for the last time and...I died. In between my last and his first were countless frustrating and amazing years. Alright, I don't have long, the WiFi in the Library is shocking sometimes, I just need to explain in my own words how important that man was to me, is to me.....

01110000101010111101010111.....so rry, lost connection again. I'll start with mum and dad. They thought they were taking care of me, I was making sure they got together. Mum needed the penny dropping prompt to see dad as more than just a distraction from thinking about her raggedy Doctor. As you saw, it was a hoot growing up with them. The trouble was, I was a very very bad girl. Couldn't help it. Troublemaker is hard wired into my DNA. As Mels I felt I was finding my way, finding my limits, and then smashing through them. All it took for me to be my best self was a bullet from Hitler.

.....011101010001011011000....sorry, where was I? Ah yes, my final regeneration. I had great hair as Mels, but as River I achieved maximum hair power. Clothes and dress size were on point, and I had a mission. it was time to kill the Doctor. He didn't make it easy. He never makes anything easy. But I had my orders, he had to die. After we danced a little, swapping guns and bananas, I used the cruellest weapon, one he had no defence against. I've been called femme fatale many times, but I totally lived up to my name with that kiss. As the Doctor laid dying, I suddenly had a thirst for blasting nazis, and stripping bare a room full of Germans.

But it took a time travelling shapeshifting robot full of tiny humans to tell me who I am. It was time to let go of Melody Pond and become River Song, and River Song loved the Doctor. That impossible, frustrating, brilliant madman In a box. I knew what I had to do. Give that impossible man my life, all my lives. Small price to pay for giving the Universe back the Doctor. When I kissed him the second time, we connected and I felt a thousand dormant suns burning again. Not bad for a second kiss....Xxxzxx 01010010010001000000 10 ....annoying, so much more to say, but no bandwidth to say it with. Back to you, Paul before I tell you any more...spoiler.....011010100000000100 ..

What was that? Anyway, where was I? Ah yes, I was talking about Alex Kingston. I was hesitant about using a certain overused description in regards to Alex's portrayal of River, so I will let Alex use it herself: " I have women coming up to me saying that she's a fantastic role model. That's it's great to see a woman in her 40's being kick-ass."

River Song, the baby of Amy and Rory, kidnapped at birth by Madame Kovarian and the Silence and trained to be a ruthless assassin. As



good as Nina Toussaint-White was as Mels (I would love to see her again because ten minutes in one episode was nowhere near enough screen time) she was really the starter to Kingston's main course. Doctor Who had never seen anything like River Song. Exploding (literally) onto the screen with a quote from The Graduate and toting a gun, River gives the Doctor a poisonous peck and then faces a gang of nazis with a typically hilarious speech: "I was on my way to this gay gypsy bar mitzvah for the disabled when I suddenly thought, gosh! the Third Reich's a bit rubbish. I think I'll kill the fuhrer." She then downs the nazis with a blast of regeneration energy and leaps on a motorbike. Can you imagine any previous companion doing all that? I mean, Sarah had trouble getting up a small bank and Mel was captured with an old lady's giant hairnet.

The creation of the Teselecta was another audacious idea in an episode already full of them. Helmed by dashing Captain Kirk figure, Carter, the identity thieving robot sets its sights on the dangerous River, determined to "give her hell." for the murder of the Doctor at Lake Silencio. As the Doctor succumbs to the Judas Tree poisoning, Amy and Rory gain control of the Teselecta and show River who she becomes. Inspired by what she sees, along with her parents confirmation the Doctor is indeed "worth it", she gives up the rest of her regenerations to save him. As the Doctor tells Rory and Amy, "She did kill me, and then she used her remaining lives to bring me back. As first dates go, I'd say that was mixed signals."

I love everything about Let's Kill Hitler. But the high point is Alex Kingston's portrayal of River and the fiery chemistry between her and Matt Smith. That was exemplified in the brilliantly directed exchange just before River plants her first kiss on the Doctor. After a suitable rampage through Berlin, the playfully psychotic potential murderess is then given a sharp left turn and we see the vulnerable, honourable side of River, as she sees the woman she will become, thanks to the Teselecta (honestly Moff, you literally gave us the Beano's Numskulls!) and the heartbroken would-be killer becomes the saviour. One kiss almost killed the Doctor, another brought him back to life. It is all very Snow White!

Whilst I am focussing this review largely on Alex Kingston chewing the scenery with a large dollop of relish, I cannot ignore Matt Smith's performance. From his beautiful exchange with a Tardis generated Amelia Pond, to his astonishing physicality during the 'legs going to sleep' scene. He proved once again he is one of the best actors to play the role of the Doctor.

It is fantastic Alex has grabbed the opportunity to extend the life of River beyond the TV series, with The Diary of River Song for Big Finish proving to be extremely successful.

Recently Alex has written her first River novel under the pseudonym Melody Malone, an identity she adopted in The Angels Take Manhattan, but.. spoilers! That will be covered in this very book a little later.

# NIGHT TERRORS

Review by Paul Winter

I think that Night Terrors is a very under-rated Doctor Who story which contains a lot of elements from classic fantasy (monsters in the cupboard), a strong SF-led concept (a couple desperate for a child but who cannot have children and failed with IVF suddenly realising that they cannot therefore have an eight year old son) and some real domestic issues (struggling with a troubled child and the issue that many people face at some point in their lives of being unable to pay the bills).

There is no doubt that our parents, Alex and Claire, care deeply for their son George, even though they do not know where he came from, and in turn, George is desperate for that love and acceptance, fearing that the Doctor has come to take him away. But we can feel the situation is just not right. And Amy and Rory have disappeared.

I find the sections with the Ponds trapped in the dolls house a little detached from the rest of the story and I do wonder if we could have done without it (and indeed without Amy and Rory on this occasion). It is still quite creepy though and reminds me a little of a story I remember from when I was very young involving children being captured and put into a machine that turned them into toys. I always found that a little disturbing and I wish I could remember more about it. Maybe it could form the basis of a future Doctor Who story? (By me!)

Episodes like Night Terrors are not cited amongst the greatest journeys of the Doctor and as such, they often get overlooked. This is a shame as all the elements for a good adventure are there.



# THE GIRL WHO WAITED

Review by Ian Wheeler

In the 1975 classic Tom Baker story, Genesis of the Daleks, the Doctor is forced to make a moral decision with far-ranging consequences. "Do I have the right?" he asks, as he ponders whether to destroy the entire Dalek race at the very beginning of its development. We suspect that he won't because, well, that's the kind of guy the Doctor is, and he believes that even from a species as evil as the Daleks "must come something good." Despite the protestations of Sarah-Jane, who insists that the Daleks are "the most evil creatures ever invented", it is unsurprising the Doctor hesitates. The Doctor heals things, he doesn't destroy them. Ultimately, the decision to destroy the Dalek incubator room is taken out of the Doctor's hands by a trundling Dalek, but the Time Lord's hesitation tells us much about his sense of morality.

35 years later, in the Matt Smith episode The Girl Who Waited, the Doctor is forced to make another, more personal decision. It is not the fate of a whole race which is at stake but that of a single individual - the Doctor's companion, Amy Pond.

Over the pandemic period, I've been rewatching the entirety of the 21st century run of Doctor Who and it's made me change a few of my opinions. For one thing, it made me realise that the Doctor, Amy and Rory are probably the most successful Doctor/companion line-up of the modern series. It created an interesting new dynamic to have two companions who were romantically involved and it's clear that the Doctor cares about Amy and Rory very much indeed. For that reason, I find the Doctor's actions in The Girl Who Waited





somewhat inexplicable. In fact, it would not be over-exaggerating to say that in this story, I think the Doctor makes the most questionable moral decision that he has ever made.

Arriving in the white, sterile environment of Apalapucia, Amy quickly becomes separated from Rory and the Doctor, a fairly standard opening to a Doctor Who plot. The twist here is that Amy has found herself in a faster time stream. As part of the 'kindness facility', she will be left to live out her whole life at an accelerated rate whilst the Doctor and Rory can only look on helplessly.

The Doctor and Rory stage a rescue attempt. But when Rory reaches Amy, she is 36 years older. The Doctor resolves to restore the younger Amy. He promises, falsely, that it may be possible to sustain the paradox of both the older and younger Amy existing. But this cannot be done. The older Amy must be wiped from existence to save the younger version.

Whichever way you look at it, the older Amy is the original Amy. She is Rory's girlfriend several decades on. When the Doctor closes the door on the older Amy, he is effectively killing her. 'She's not real,' he claims, but in fact she is as real as he is. He is not 'saving' the younger Amy, he is in fact creating a new, alternative version of her. This remains to me, the most morally ambiguous thing that the Doctor has ever done. Never before or after has the Doctor played God to such an extent. Even the fact that the younger Amy is complicit in persuading her older self to sacrifice herself, and the older Amy ultimately agrees, doesn't alter the basic 'wrongness' of the decision.

"I hate the Doctor. I hate him more than I've ever hated anyone", says the older Amy. She has every right to do so.



## THE GOD COMPLEX

Review by Tim Gambrell

I set myself a challenge. I wanted to give a balanced view of The God Complex, so I asked myself what I really liked about the episode. I quickly realised the answer was 'pretty much everything'; it's a gorgeously made and intelligent episode. So, I considered what I didn't like, or liked less about the episode. My answer turned out to be 'pretty much nothing'.

This, then, is me trying to justify why I like the things I like about the episode. Praise Him.

Base Under Siege. Hoorah! The God Complex is a good old base under siege story - a classic format for Doctor Who since the 1960s. There's no way out, the TARDIS is taken away, and something is trapped in there with everyone, gradually killing them all. Can everyone be trusted? Very much the stuff of nightmares. Praise Him.

The Hotel. It's strikingly different to see a Doctor Who story set in a hotel, and it fits the programme's format completely. The long, samey corridors, stairs and landings. The carpet, the general décor. And the distant T-junctions, where shadows of things just out of sight grow and loom. Perfect. The occasional bursts of CCTV footage add extra flair to the visuals and up the discomfort. Who is watching the CCTV? The monster? No one except us? Is it 'found footage'? The Blair Witch Project in a hotel? Praise Him.

The Muzak. Murray Gold's incidental music is a perfect fit for the twee hotel setting. Chirpy, unnaturally positive without being upbeat. In any other situation it would blend into the background, as repetitive muzak does, only occasionally registering during quieter moments. But there are plenty of quieter moments along these empty hotel corridors and landings. The happy muzak becomes wholly unnerving in its sheer ordinariness. It's utterly at odds with the drama unfolding beneath the tinny speakers. Murray Gold. Praise Him.

Fear and Faith. These two go hand-in-hand throughout the episode. The viewer is encouraged to pick up on the religious motifs because, of course, the episode is called The God Complex. To the Doctor, faith, belief or religion is simply part of who people are, an aspect of them - or maybe a coping mechanism. So, he automatically focuses on the fear. This is, after all, what he's used to working with.

Nightmares, loom heavily over the narrative. We love a good scary Doctor Who; that thrill is often what attracted us as viewers in the first place. A monster hunts the characters, trapped within a hotel where the rooms move, and somewhere is a room containing everyone's worst nightmare. Once an individual finds their nightmare room, it triggers them to uncontrollably utter the words 'Praise Him', which means the monster is now com-

ing for them.

It is logical for the Doctor (and the viewer) to assume the characters are being hunted for their fear, having experienced their worst nightmare. But fear is simply a means to an end. As we and the Doctor find out towards the end of the episode, the monster isn't feeding on fear at all.

There are some very subtle discussions on the subject of faith, or belief, within *The God Complex*. It's woven into the dialogue in a natural and conversational way, never didactic or preachy (pun very much intended). In the pre-credits sequence, the character Lucy talks about her worship. The phrase 'Praise Him' is thrust upon the viewer – a standard Christian refrain with reference to God. As the opening theme crashes in, we leave Lucy at the mercy of some unseen monster, but in a state of reli-

gious calm, not fear. Later, Joe says he's seen the light, as he sits in a room full of laughing ventriloquist's dummies.

It's not all Christian dogma, though. Rita is a Muslim. She has rationalised her situation by believing everyone is in Jahannam – an afterlife for evildoers. Presumably her 'evil' was getting a grade B in maths and letting her father down – as per her nightmare. Rita's faith comes to the fore when she faces death. She has accepted her fate and, in a truly effective scene, the Doctor is powerless to affect that acceptance. Her faith gives her a calm strength. The Doctor's more rational view makes him feel responsible. Violently so.

Of course, we soon find out it was Rita's faith – and that of others – that's been feeding the monster. Doctor Who rarely tackles religion – at least not in the way that viewers experience orthodox religion. I suspect many

viewers were like me, guilty of equating faith to religion. After all, the characters do say, 'Praise Him,' a lot. But, as the Doctor details after he's realised his error, faith covers more than just orthodox religions.

The deciding factor, of course, is Amy Pond, because, essentially, *The Doctor Gets It Wrong*. And then eventually he gets it right. Simple as that. All along he's assumed – as have we, the viewers – that it's ultimately fear that's giving people away and feeding the monster. Even though, after Joe's death, he lists 'faiths and fears' amongst the things that have been taken from Joe, it's the fear he focusses on. It's only when he realises that Amy is in mortal danger that the Doctor twigs otherwise.

There is a slight re-tread, here, of the end of *The Curse of Fenric*. Amy's faith in the Doctor has to be broken to save her life. And, wow, those moments in Amy's nightmare room with little Amelia Pond totally pull at the heartstrings. The Doctor has already lost Rita

– the companion who almost was; he's determined not to lose Amy – the companion who already is.

Ironically, if the monster was feeding on fear, it surely would have consumed the Doctor, then, too, because he was more afraid than anyone. Praise Him.

The Progression Of Gibbis. I was going to say that David Walliams' Gibbis goes on a journey as the episode progresses. But on reflection, I don't believe that's the case. I think the journey belongs to the audience. We see less of his comedic antics and more the schemer that hides beneath. The Tivolians wear their susceptibility to being conquered as a badge of pride. It's a deception.

Gibbis shows the Tivolians to be manipulative, unpleasant and – possibly, therefore – utterly deserving of all that comes to them. Which is good, since a race who are perpetually being conquered and enslaved would have little appeal beyond a throwaway gag. On the face of it, Gibbis being the sole survivor from the group is as infuriating to





the audience as Rickston Slade having survived in Voyage of the Damned. But we can't always have stories where only the nice people live. Life doesn't work that way, and neither should fiction. Besides, it is in keeping with Gibbis' character for him to be the last one cowering. Praise Him.

The Monster. Isn't it just beautiful? Distantly related to the Nimon, we're told (whom the Skonnons treat like a god in The Horns of Nimon.) The Minotaur-like monster looks great when it finally appears. It's also shot really well, using glimpses and shadows to raise the tension. 'Suggestion' will always increase the audience's appetite and fear factor - our subconscious will fill in the gaps and imagine something potentially far more terrifying. Of course, this can induce disappointment when the final reveal does not live up to the picture the audience have already painted for themselves. Thankfully, that's not the case here. Who doesn't love a wet snout? Praise Him.

Rita. The regular cast are great, as al-



ways, and David Walliams is very clearly the guest star. But it is Amara Karan, as Rita, who shines in this episode right from her first appearance. Walliams' comedic antics are rather irritating - in keeping with his character, so it's likely that he was well cast. But it is to Karan's credit that the viewer is instantly drawn to Rita.

Rita takes charge as soon as she, Gibbis and Howie appear. But not in a bossy way, rather through intelligent deduction. This automatically impresses the Doctor. The viewer has likely reached the same immediate conclusion the Doctor does: she would make a great companion. It all serves to increase the impact when Rita dies. The audience has fallen for her as much as the Doctor has.

Rita's death highlights the lack of understanding the Doctor has on matters of religious belief; how someone could have sufficient faith to not fear death, to accept it as an inevitability and to be at peace with themselves about it. At that point, the Doctor is helpless, powerless. Rita is in charge and will not relinquish her position. The Doctor's reaction to Rita's death is partly a response to his being made helpless, but also to Rita's obvious qualities as a potential companion. Praise Him.

The Ponds leaving. The Doctor - and the audience - have lost Rita. The Doctor nearly lost Amy. It makes perfect sense, then, for the Doctor to want the Ponds to leave him at the end of the episode. It's a beautifully written, beautifully played - beautifully underplayed scene. After a number of traumatic exits for companions, designed to shred the viewer, emotional-

ly, this hits home as a perfect exit for two much-loved characters, allowing them to settle properly into married life together.

The Doctor instigates it. He wants them to leave him while they still can. He worries that they might die if they stay with him - as he believes he will soon die, also. I still feel that it was a shame the Ponds weren't left there, to live that life. Praise Him.

So, what is a God Complex? To what does the episode title refer? A God complex is an unshakeable belief, characterised by consistently inflated feelings of personal ability, privilege, or infallibility. A person with a god complex may refuse to admit the possibility of their error of failure, even in the face of irrefutable evidence, intractable problems or difficult or impossible tasks.

And it's working on several levels in the episode. It applies to the Doctor, the monster and the prison within which

they're all trapped.

Firstly, Rita tells the Doctor very openly, 'That's quite a God complex you have, there,' in response to his claim that he has to keep everyone safe.

Secondly, the monster, like its cousins the Nimon, has a God complex. They set themselves up as deities and then feed on faith. But things went wrong for this one. It ended up trapped in a specially-designed prison in space - a complex created to feed its deity in perpetuity. But it was now tired, desperately weary and longing for a death that it could not self-induce. In a very literal sense, it was a being with a God complex, trapped within a physical God complex, helped - or beaten (depending on your point of view) by another being with a God complex.

How brilliant is that?

Praise Him.  
Praise Him.  
Praise Him...



## CLOSING TIME

Review by Paul Winter

Closing Time, is in many ways, a Matt Smith era 'greatest hits' type of story. It is written to showcase the fun side of the 11th Doctor's character as well as re-uniting him with James Corden's Craig Owens, who now with his partner Sophie, has a son, Alfie. The script is shaped around Smith and Corden as a double act, whilst also containing elements that drive the narrative into the conclusion of the River Song story arc and the apparent death of the Doctor at Lake Silencio in Utah (which we, the viewer have already seen of course).

I have no issues with Doctor Who taking liberties with the story-telling where they are driving the narrative along and this happens with aplomb here. In fact, I think it probably goes a

little too far. We have a huge cyberman base in a cavern under a department store in Colchester that nobody has noticed before, a (reversible) cyber-conversion process that does not seem to be anywhere near as terrifying (or threatening) as those we have seen in previous stories, both new and classic. I suppose it does not matter that much as really, the story is about the Doctor and Craig as opposed to the cybermen themselves. It may not follow internal continuity that closely but to be honest, I am not sure I care too much.

Closing Time is not an important part of the cyberman canon in any way, but as a simple piece about the characters involved it is a worthy part of the eleventh Doctor era.



## THE WEDDING OF RIVER SONG

Review by Harry Draper

Doctor Who is a show about many things, not least time travel. And sometimes, it is even a programme about time itself.

In The Wedding of River Song, all of history is happening at once. Our planet is a modern Capriccio, an infusion of anachronisms where dinosaurs and Silurians roam alongside the Romans, steam locomotives stop off at Area 51 (now an Egyptian pyramid), and Jules Verne has clearly gone into car manufacture, as Hondas take you around the world in eighty days. And the clocks never tick. This is not merely eras overlapping, spilling out across the canvas and melding into one another. Time is contracting, threatening to crush everything within to a chronological pulp. The catalyst is River Song, part Mrs. Robinson, part Manchurian Candidate,

refusing to murder the Doctor at Lake Silencio in Utah on 22 April 2011, even though this is a fixed point in time as history has ordained. Apparently.

The finale to Matt Smith's sophomore series is very much an echo of the finale to his freshman year. The universe is dying on a particular date, the Doctor can only save it if he pops his clogs, and there's a wedding. A contrivance perhaps, particularly as the dramatic impetus of Smith's swansong was the inevitable Fall of the Eleventh on the Fields of Trenzalore, all of which is conveniently foreseen by the blue headed, beheaded Dorium Maldavor, who no doubt streams all the latest episodes on iPlayer into his visual cortex.

However, as usual, history is rewritten by the winners. The Doctor most defin-







itively does not die at Lake Silencio or Trenzalore because, well, that would be rubbish, wouldn't it? If they are meant to pop their clogs, the Doctor is going to keep Death waiting for a long time.

Prior to The Wedding of River Song, we had seen time travel determine the narrative order of events. The Space Museum flirts with the concept, as the Doctor, Ian, Barbara and Vicki find their future selves exhibited in vitrines like mint-on-card Character Options figures. Mawdryn Undead goes further, cutting from Tegans interactions with the Brigadier in the past to the Doctor's with the Brigadier in the present. Cause and effect are occurring years apart and yet within a matter of seconds from our perspective. In Smith and Jones, Russell T Davies has the Doctor going back along his own timestream to meet Martha in the past, so that she is convinced in the present that he does indeed have a time machine.

Once Blink, aka The One with the Statues, came along and made the classic sci-fi staple of the ontological paradox into BAFTA award-winning television with scares and jokes and mild nudity, it

seemed inevitable that all of these would feed into Steven Moffat's stewardship of the show. It would not simply be a tool of the trade, it would be the trade. This comes to pass in episodes such as The Girl Who Waited and Heaven Sent amongst others. Moffat has, unsurprisingly, a fascination and affinity with time as a narrative device, as he divulged in an interview with Christel Dee on The Fan Show; "Sometimes, the Doctor's unique relationship with time can be at the centre of a story. Because (they don't) just own a time machine. (They) live in one." This reaches its zenith in the Doctor and River's relationship, whereby they "keep meeting in the wrong order", which owes its influence to The Time Traveller's Wife by Audrey Niffenegger (now being adapted by Moffat for HBO).

However, in all of these examples, time is still somewhat submissive. Events occur because of freak accidents or hiccups, be it a transmat pod here or a slipped time track there. The Weeping Angels are a predator whose adaptation for survival is to zap their victims back into the past to feed on the potential energy of the days they would have lived. Even the Doctor, particularly in



their eleventh incarnation, is known to cross the timelines with abandon for cheap tricks, from fetching a thirsty Amelia Pond a drink from herself in the past to securing the working folk of Sardicktown a lucky jackpot on a lottery that does not exist, all so that he may save an old miser's soul. The Doctor and River's story is never about the logistics of rectifying their out-of-synch timelines, but about the graspable drama of two people falling in love with one another. It is just impossible to properly track which of them fell in love first, and it began (at least for one of them) with the other dying.

In short, Time in Doctor Who is often, as you would expect in fiction, an artifice. Malleable. It does whatever the writer wants to move the story along. It most emphatically cannot be rewritten - not one line! And yet it can. Doctor Who usually follows the example of Back to the Future, in that the most dramatically satisfying order of events is presented. The crack in time erases Rory from history in Cold Blood, but he is obviously not absent from the previous episodes he has appeared in. Because it is, at the end of the day, a television show. Much like the resolution to Back to the Future, Amy and Rory have their wedding cake and eat it in The Big Bang; Amy has her parents back, as well as her imaginary friend. Essentially, any writer in this genre has the right to say, 'the laws of time are mine and they will obey me!'

The Wedding of River Song does something a little different. It is one of the few episodes of the television series to posit the idea that Time with a capital T is a force to be reckoned with, and one which reckons with us. 'Time is dying,'

the Doctor repeatedly says, as if were living, as if River's self-sabotage of her assassination attempt is the steak through the vampire's heart. A notion that Chris Chibnall has recently explored with a figurative forceps in War of the Sontarans. "Before Atropos, Time ran wild," explains the Priest Triangle, who has seemingly been driven insane by having to constantly update the TARDIS Wiki page. "If the Mouri are broken, Time shall run unstoppable. Time is destruction. Time must not be unleashed." Yaz questions its phrasing. "You talk about Time as if it was a force." The Priest Triangle reaffirms that "Time is evil. And it will seek its own."

This is A Big Concept. Your reviewer is no chronologist, so this is only a brief approximation of the real science. Time is not a force akin to gravity, but a measurement. (Einstein has us covered there.) Time measures the period you spend in the shower or reading this article. Technically, yes, time cannot actually die, and it cannot actually be evil. But of course, that is the fact, and this is fiction. If we break down the wording, if Time in Doctor Who is indeed 'evil', this infers that it has a consciousness, intention, emotion even. An omnipotent force of nature that has power over us all, as depicted through the harrowing melted clocks in Salvador Dani's The Persistence of Memory (1931). Conjurer as much as, if not more than, illusion.

This could be attributed to a hysterical overreaction or prejudiced opinion on the part of the Priest Triangle. Nonetheless, it does seem to have a basis in Doctor Who prior. Is Time not simply affected by River's actions, but enacting

revenge and/or engineering circumstances in which the Doctor is forced to submit and repair the damage? It is perhaps not unlike time reasserting itself when the Doctor saves Lobus Caecilius (Peter Capaldi) and his family from the destruction of Pompeii, only for Lobus' descendant John Frobisher (also played by Capaldi) to kill his family and himself in Torchwood: Children of Earth. Therefore, is the Doctor not simply taking advantage of Time by faking their death at Lake Silencio, but fooling it, alluding its judgement? In philosophical terms, what are the implications of this interpretation? Is Time a god entity akin to the Great Intelligence or the Nestene Consciousness, one that has to be controlled by the Time Lords or the Mouri for reality to exist as is? Where do we begin with the minefield that is the Time War?

If nothing else, this reading provides a possible explanation as to who is singing that haunting nursery rhyme in Night Terrors, which foretells the Doctor's death:

*Tick tock goes the clock  
He cradled her and he rocked her  
Tick tock goes the clock  
Even for the Doctor...*

Time and the Doctor have a unique relationship. Because Time does indeed seek its own, and ensures that whilst their clogs will never be popped, the Doctor's friends will always grow up and leave in the end. But that is why the Doctor keeps running away in a rickety old TARDIS. Not because of mythologies like the Hand of Omega or the Hybrid or the Division. Because the Doctor always remembers their friends - "My friends have always been the best of me" - and they cannot wait to meet the next one.

So many friends. So little Time.

*The author would like to acknowledge the invaluable help of fellow Doctor Who fans on Twitter in recalling Russell T Davies' theory about Caecilius and Frobisher.*



## THE DOCTOR, THE WIDOW AND THE WARDROBE

Review by Nick Joy

While a glance at some message boards and corners of social media might suggest otherwise, Doctor Who fans are typically a forgiving bunch. Maybe it is because the old-timers have had to put up with so much disappointment along the way (the cancelled seasons, the abandoned stories, the wilderness years, the wiped episodes) that generally we are just grateful to have some new Doctor Who, even if there's a compromise. And there's no greater compromise in this reviewer's eyes than the Doctor Who Christmas Day episode, which typically isn't made for us, the faithful viewers. Showrunners Russell T Davies and Stephen Moffat have both made it clear that the hour transmitted on December 25th is designed

to be easy to understand by all members of the family, regardless of whether they have watched the show before. Mythology arcs and continuity be damned, the special is designed to be as standalone as possible, to help them digest their large festive meals in between other BBC favourites. It is with this context that we joined The Doctor, Christmas Day 2011.

Having revisited Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol for his previous special, Steven Moffat's second one (nu-Who's seventh) took its cues from C S Lewis' Narnia series of children's books, in particular the first in the run, 1950s The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe. Once the title of The Doc-





tor, the Widow and the Wardrobe was announced, we immediately created the image of a snowy landscape, mythological creatures (and possibly some theological allegory?) What we actually got was something of a strange hybrid, which certainly didn't skimp on the snowy trappings or sense of wonder, but it's a long way away from Lewis.

In the pre-credit scene, the Doctor is forcibly ejected from a spaceship, grabbing a spacesuit as he exits. He crashes to Earth on Christmas Eve, where he's helped by Madge Arwell (Claire Skinner, *Outnumbered*) to get back to his TARDIS. Three years later, at the same time of year, the Doctor wants to repay this debt by helping Madge and her children enjoy Christmas - he knows (as does Madge) that her husband Reg (Alexander Armstrong, *The Sarah Jane Adventures*) an RAF pilot, has been reported missing, presumed dead in a mission over the English Channel. The Arwells have relocated to Uncle Digby's house in the Dorset countryside to get away from the bombing of London. This is an overt link to the Lewis novel, which is also set in a country house in the same time period, that one owned by Professor Digory, with the Pevensie children also having been evacuated to flee the Blitz.

The Doctor declares himself to be the property's caretaker (he would assume the same occupation in Series Eight's *The Caretaker*) and tries to impress the children with moving chairs and an animated Christmas tree. Madge is prompted to tell the children that "This is going to be the best Christmas ever", masking the sorrow that once the festivities are over, she'll have to tell them that their father is dead. Un-

known to her, the Doctor has (somewhat recklessly) added a special present under the tree, a dimensional portal that takes you to a snowy forest. Cyril's curiosity gets the better of him, and he peeks inside the present a day early, shortly followed by the Doctor, Lily and Madge. In the forest, they meet a wooden king and queen, who are desperate to transport the lifeforce of the trees before they are destroyed by the actions of Androzani harvesters, planning to reduce them to battery fluid through acid rain.

The Androzani workers are Droxil (Bill Bailey), Ven-Garr (Paul Bazeley) and Billis (Arabella Weir), the latter two named after outgoing execs Piers Wenger and Beth Willis. Decked out in yellow armour, the casting of comedians Bailey and Weir might not be in the same JN-T 'stunt casting' vein of light entertainers Ken Dodd or Richard Briers, but they are woefully underused - the greatest crime being that they aren't given anything funny to say. In subsequent 2005 Christmas special *The Husbands of River Song* at least the comedians Matt Lucas and Greg Davies had some gags to play with.

The tripod Androzani Harvester that Madge hijacks to save her children is a nice design, but by this point any similarities between the episode and Lewis have long gone. Claire Skinner's Madge takes the lead to protect Cyril and Lily - they're all she has left - piloting a golf ball ship through the time vortex and fortuitously saving her husband's life at the same time. Reg's bomber had come down because it had no light to follow and now Madge had created a beacon (a Christmas star of Bethlehem) for them. The plane

lands, Madge is no longer a widow and Christmas is back on course again. Prior to this episode, one of Alexander Armstrong's best-known comedy creations was on 'The Armstrong and Miller Show' as an RAF pilot, and the actor wisely avoids dipping in to that arena by playing it straight here - it would have been very easy to wink at the audience. As a tick-box exercise, this episode ticks off themes and cliches from the Christmas list, but it is the final five minutes that save it from redundancy, as the Doctor visits Amy and Rory and let him know that he's still alive after the events of Series 7.

The Doctor observes the 'humanywumany' trait of happy crying, though viewers may not have been so convinced by the contrived circumstances of Reg's salvation. It is the final moments of the hour with the Doctor and Amy reconnecting that are more worthy of your tears, the magic chemistry between Matt and Karen sparking again. He is surprised that there's already a space set for him at the table, but that is because they never gave up

on him and knew that he would return one day. No, it is YOU who is crying.

Christmas is the season of forgiveness, and of course we forgive writer and showrunner Steven Moffat for the over-abundance of this Christmas feast which is burdened by a surfeit of trimmings. It's an episode that you don't need to watch again, because you won't have missed any of the nuance on that first viewing. You could miss it out entirely in a series rewatch and you will not be at any disadvantage, and yet it deserves to sit there in the 'Doctor Who' chronology, bridging Series 7 and 8, meeting its ambitions to fill that Christmas Day slot with season-appropriate joy. If I was going to be picky, I might challenge the use of wardrobe in the title - there's no such furniture featured in the story - but that would make me a real misery. There are better specials (and a couple are worse) but for an hour of the show where everybody lives and the jeopardy factor is not to the max, step this way under the Christmas tree.



# ASYLUM OF THE DALEKS

Review by Mark Donaldson

An estranged husband and wife receive some unconventional marriage guidance therapy when they get kidnapped by aliens. It is a high concept pitch, ripe for the screwball comedy of *His Girl Friday* or *The Awful Truth*. Penned by former sitcom writer Steven Moffat, *Asylum of the Daleks* could have been a breezy series opener about a bickering couple who find love again in a high-stakes situation. One of the criticisms often levelled at Moffat is his compulsion to go for the laughs, as if this is a bad habit from his career as a sitcom writer. What this criticism fundamentally fails to acknowledge is how much more interesting drama is when it makes us laugh and how much more compelling comedy is when it successfully deploys pathos. Moffat regularly achieved this throughout *Press Gang*, where he tackles themes such as sui-

cide, child abuse and mental health.

*Asylum of the Daleks* has a similarly heavy theme at the core of it. Not the dissolution of Amy and Rory's marriage, but the root cause of their estrangement. Is Amy's infertility not one of the most adult themes ever tackled in *Doctor Who*? Especially as it's not dealt with through sci-fi allegory, but by facing it head-on. As a result, *Asylum* feels like Moffat is apologising to the audience for so glibly handling the kidnapping of Amy and Rory's child, whom they never got to raise, at least not conventionally. The events of *Demon's Run* did indeed have an impact on the characters and it's devastating. The science experiments and torture which Amy endured at the hands of Madame Kovarian have rendered her infertile, leading to a growing distance



between two adults who cannot vocalise their fears and disappointments. It is a logical continuation of the overarching themes from the previous season; fatherhood, distance from our children, parental responsibilities and anxieties. At the opening of Series 7, the pressures and losses of these have become too much to bear for Amy and Rory and, perhaps, Steven Moffat.

Without wanting to psycho-analyse the man, or get the DWAS into a libel case, we'll stick to the facts. Working on *Doctor Who* takes over your life. Russell T Davies has spoken of it, as has Chris Chibnall and indeed Steven Moffat, who had two boys to raise amid heading two of the BBC's biggest global hits. Are his own anxieties of being an absent father at the core of Series 6? Is *Asylum of the Daleks* his biggest fear? That life with the Doctor will



lead to divorce? We will perhaps never know, and nor should we want to pry. However, *Doctor Who* particularly under Steven Moffat, has always been about tackling human fears. From *Blink* to *Asylum* these fears have shifted from statues to shadows to being unequipped for parenthood, losing a child and losing a partner. Yet through it all, the Doctor provides a hand to hold, a reassuring presence that allows us to believe that everything will be okay. Sometimes it glibly glosses over the horror of the situation, but other times he engineers a situation that allows things to fix themselves. It is what he does in Moffat's first published *Doctor Who* story, *Continuity Errors* and he does it time and again in *A Christmas Carol* and indeed *Asylum of the Daleks*.

Amy may believe that he cannot fix everything, but the Eleventh Doctor firmly places fixing the Ponds' marriage at the heart of his mission into the asylum. He may be distracted by some gnarly looking eyestalk zombies and the mystery of the flirty, charismatic Oswin Oswald, but his true mission is to bring Amy and Rory back together. There is something in Matt Smith's ageless performance that manages to make the Doctor feel like both the upset child of divorce and concerned friend. It is unclear how seriously the Doctor puts Amy in danger of Dalek conversion in order to force her into talking to her estranged husband. We know he could pop the wristband on her at any moment, but to do so would remove the spectre of death. Amy and Rory can only be honest with each other when they believe that she is about to die. It is a moment that is not explored in any real depth but does hint at how far the



two will eventually go for each other in a few episodes' time.

It is an unconventional approach to marriage counselling but pays off with the couple reunited and in love with each other as much as ever. After this crossroads, we see them in a far more domestic light in their remaining episodes.

We know that Series 7 was Moffat's most challenging and toughest time in his career on Doctor Who, so we have to wait a little bit longer for him to rebuild himself. As a writer, he is a perennial tinkerer, constantly responding to his prior work and revisiting ideas he may have fumbled on a first attempt. World Enough and Time/The Doctor Falls for example, is a more successful rendering of many of the themes from Dark Water/Death in Heaven. Asylum of the Daleks is a story that strives to lend weight to the climax of A Good Man Goes to War, which was all-too-easily swept away by the appearance of the grown-up Melody in

the form of River Song, followed by a summer break.

Oh, and there are lots of Daleks in it. And yet, as with much of Steven Moffat's work, these old favourites, so key to the mythology of the show – Special Weapons Daleks, Spiridon et al – are set dressing around what is fundamentally a rich character piece. The stunning location work, a late-period addition brought about by snow near the location of A Town Called Mercy, lends the episode a cinematic look, appropriate for this series of 'mini-movies'. Asylum of the Daleks is less Ingmar Bergman's Scenes from a Marriage and more The Parent Trap. However, it is interesting to see the show tackle some supremely adult themes head-on as Doctor Who continues to transition from Saturday night family entertainment to global prestige sci-fi drama over the course of the Steven Moffat era.



## DINOSAURS ON A SPACESHIP

Review by Ian Bresman

Dinosaurs are cool. Cool, but somewhat enigmatic with their rare appearances in Doctor Who's television adventures. Maybe it is their size, maybe it is their mythic status, maybe it is they just simply do not work as a plausible adversary. Whatever the reason, it is still great we can get all misty eyed with thoughts of 1974 London terrorised by a T-Rex and his chums, the Whomobile and Operation Golden Age in the second story of Jon Pertwee's final season. And now, roll on nearly forty years and the dinos are finally back, ironically enough in the second story of Matt Smith's swansong season.

Doing exactly what it says on the tin, Dinosaurs on a Spaceship is a fantastic romp, moving at such a whirlwind pace, you rarely have time to catch a breath, let alone start asking questions like

“but?” or “why?”. But who cares, it is highly entertaining and with Smith at the peak of his powers in the lead role, why not just sit back and enjoy?!

As the tale begins, the Doctor receives an SOS from the Indian Space Agency (ISA) – they need his help to stop a massive spaceship that is currently hurtling towards earth. He has six hours to complete the mission, otherwise the ISA will obliterate the ship with a payload of missiles. Needing some help, the Doctor calls in the Ponds (accidentally scooping up Rory's father, Brian in the process) whilst also enlisting Queen Nefertiti and John Riddell, an Edwardian big game hunter. With the TARDIS full, it heads off to intercept the spaceship.

The ship is in fact a Silurian ark, taking



its occupants along with flora and fauna from prehistoric Earth to colonise a new planet as their home. However - there are no Silurians left on board, just a pirate called Solomon, a couple of argumentative robots and dinosaurs. Lots of dinosaurs. Seemingly, Solomon had attacked the Ark, hoping to nab the dinosaurs and sell them on the black market. But he had bitten off more than he can chew, literally getting chewed up by a raptor in the process. With the Silurians all dead (awoken in batches by Solomon's robots, then jettisoned out the airlocks), the ship switched into automatic mode and set a course from whence it came - Earth! And it is not going to stop when it gets there.

From a Doctor Who fan's point of view, there is a certain level of comfort going into another season with the same main cast. There is no settling in required and you can enjoy any little updates in their circumstances before diving into the new adventures. By the time we reach Dinosaurs on a Spaceship, we know that the Ponds time is nigh, but

there are still a few more games to play. They are great companions to spend time with and it would have been lovely for them to see the whole season out.... c'est la vie! Karen Gillan never disappoints as Amy - here, she is in the middle of quite a large ensemble piece, but still shines. And Arthur Darvill's Rory, arguably the cutest boy in the blue box since Ben Jackson, is forever a perfect foil for both her and the eleventh Doctor. In this story, they are joined by Rory's Dad, Brian (Mark Williams) emphasising the life of domestic ennui they are embarking on, whilst injecting some deliciously timed humour into the proceedings.

At the start of this episode, Amy tackles the Doctor about 'moving on' from her as he fills the TARDIS with new buddies. He claims that he has just decided to have a gang- he has never had a gang and he wants to see what it is like. Maybe writer, Chris Chibnall already had ideas of how full he would like the TARDIS if he ever got hold of the Head Writer's position! Well, whatever happens down the road, in this script the eleventh Doctor's new gang



all have an equal share of the action and a go at delivering some of the many one-liners.

Most successful of the guest companions is Mark Williams as Brian. Williams, well known for his portrayal of Mr Weasley in the Harry Potter films, is great here in the first of two appearances. You can tell that Rory is a chip off the old block but, more importantly, his journey of outrage, acceptance and then wonderment give him a complete arc within the confines of this one story. His indignation that he is "not a Pond" and the understated relationship progression with his son are just two of the delights of the performance. And one of the best of the Carry-On style gags lands squarely in Brian's hands in the form of two golf balls!

Elsewhere, a bemused Queen Nefertiti (Riann Steele) bitches and barbs with John Riddell (Rupert Graves), with Amy often caught in the middle acting as peacemaker. Steele and Graves are both superbly cast, bringing the characters just to the right side of comic book and playing them with relish. Once again, some nudge-nudge dialogue finds its way into their scripts and an inevitable inuendo about a big weapon finds the viewer wondering if Captain Jack was anywhere nearby.

And what about the villain of the piece? Well, peril for the team here is more about the massive out of control spaceship hurtling towards a collision with earth than the chief protagonist, Solomon. Although he triggered the scenario, as a nemesis for the Doctor and his chums he is somewhat low down the scale. Over a couple of low-key inter-

actions, it becomes obvious that this pirate is going to be fairly easy to out-smart. Taking Nefertiti as hostage ups the ante slightly, but you never feel she is any real danger.

The role of Solomon is interestingly played by David Bradley. A year later, he memorably recreated William Hartnell for the fiftieth anniversary special, An Adventure in Space and Time. He then suddenly appeared in Doctor Who again a few years later, in the guise of the first Doctor - the breath-taking cliff-hanger at the end of The Doctor Falls followed by co-starring duties with Peter Capaldi in his finale, Twice Upon a Time.

Bradley has since gone on to reprise his interpretation of the first Doctor in many enjoyable Big Finish audio plays. His performance as Solomon in Dinosaurs has the danger of being overshadowed by his subsequent contributions to the series, which would be a big shame. This is a lovely, understated performance, with both anger and desperation coming to the boil





throughout his scenes.

And so on to the dinosaurs themselves! Well, thinking back to the lovely ones in 1974, it is very pleasing to see them return looking so sparkly, big and scary in true post-2005 CGI style. Amongst the favourites on call for this outing are the T-Rex and some very nasty-looking Pterosaurs. However, the star of the dinoshow here is the Triceratops or Tricey as he becomes affectionately known. Tricey becomes quite close to our heroes, with Brian building a particular bond. One rollicking sequence has the Doctor leading an escape astride the back of this huge beast, chased by Solomon's robots (peevisly voiced by the comedians Mitchell and Webb). Hard to imagine Jon Pertwee and Elisabeth Sladen making a getaway like that!

Dinosaurs on a Spaceship is certainly a very entertaining slice of the Steven Moffat era. It is big, brash and bold with larger-than-life characters, big monsters and an enormous spaceship. The script is tight, the action is explosive and the soundtrack keeps the whole thing cracking along at a right old clip. And at the centre of it all, one amazing man is going to save the day yet again.

Matt Smith is totally engaging as the Doctor. His performance is full of so much energy and physicality, it is kind of difficult to take your eyes off him. There is something about his Doctor which oozes childlike naivety and curiosity, whilst at the same time embracing his galactic worldliness. Within the opening minutes of this story, he is trying to disentangle himself from an over-eager Nefertiti and in the next scene

trying to extricate himself from a double-date with Riddell. No doubt wanting to distance himself from any bodily pleasures, he is still curious and likes to fit in. But he does not really know how – in this episode he bizarrely kisses Rory on the lips, without any inkling that this may not be right.

There is a tinge of sadness to him as well, which ultimately leads this adventure to a bittersweet conclusion. He knows the Ponds are moving out of his life, is desperate to keep them by his side and is crestfallen when they want to go back home at the end of this story. We share that sadness – we do not know what is around the corner for them, but life in the TARDIS is never going to be the same again.



## A TOWN CALLED MERCY

Review by Nick Smith

Mercy means caring about others, no matter if they're horse or human or part bucket of bolts. Or a mercy can be an event you're grateful for, even if that event is the death of someone who's suffering.

Mercy is also the name of a small town that minds its own business, surrounded by rock and brush and not much else for miles around.

Mercy, Nevada is my town and I like the isolation. It's a haven from all the so-called progress out east. I'd call it a cow town but we ain't really got no cows. We do mess with modern life occasionally, though; some small time back I heard they made one of them new-fangled moving pictures about our little town. Since I'm a badge-carryin' reviewer in the last days of the Old

West, I rounded up my posse – actually, me and my gal Linda Sue – to take a look-see.

The picture starts with a shoot-out but this ain't your usual kind. The fight don't seem entirely fair but we're comin' in at the end of it. It definitely shows where we are and the worth of the yarn that's gonna be spun. A mysterious guy with lantern lights where he shouldn't have any takes care of some hapless varmint. We've seen this dance a million times, I'm ashamed to say. I'm left hoping the writer Toby Whithouse will add some new kicks to the can-can, if you'll pardon the extended music hall metaphor. And he does, by Ringo!

That Whithouse feller likes to indulge in narrative horseplay. He has the mystery



gunslinger sayin' he's going to hunt down the Doctor. That automatically gets us thinking he means our Doctor – it sure as heck ain't Holliday.

The Doctor we're used to comes from far away and has company with him in the form of Amy and her hapless beau, Rory. They come upon Mercy – the town that is – and find it surrounded by rocks and pieces of wood with a Keep Out sign to boot. Not exactly the warmest of welcomes. Nevertheless, bein' as curious as a cat but with a few more lives, the Doctor heads for Main Street, the ornery Gunslinger watching him all along.

Whithouse pulls another sidwinder move when he has the townsfolk talkin' about an alien doctor. Later, we discern there's room enough for two aliens in this town – our Doctor and the town physician, Kahler-Jex. Even then, things ain't what they seem. Goldarnit, there are more twists to this story than a tornado on a merry-go-round!

Our Doc's used to talking hisself out of some tickly situations but this time it's the town marshal, Isaac, who saves him, a human demonstrating the quality of mercy just as the Doc's companions are prone to. Isaac is one of those dependable types that can last longer'n a day flashing the badge, keeping his word as best he can, distracting the Gunslinger while the Doctor goes explorin' territory that looks a heap like Spain, with not an Androgum in sight.

The Doctor finds Jex's ship, which looks a little like an egg. I hear there's a planet called Ork with similar jalopies. Jex is from Kahler, where he was tasked with turnin' soldiers into cyborgs. Just imag-

ine what he coulda done with six million dollars more.

This cyber-surgeon is a kind of Victor Frankenstein, building monsters then having to live with them. Like the Baron, he is tortured by the consequences of his actions and strives to do the right thing; his real monsters are the one that tear at his conscience. But Jex is not destroyed by his creation. He is, eventually, emboldened by it.

Meanwhile the monster he's made, the shootist formerly known as Kahler-Tek, has better aim than Frankenstein's experiment. Tek has one goal – to hunt down the fools who tore him down and built him back up again. When you're far away from a war, be it civil or interplanetary, it seems a mite pointless. Finding a reason to it is like diggin' for fool's gold, you're gonna end up with a sore back and not much else. Otherwise Tek embodies the wistful loneliness and introspection of Mary Shelley's angst-wracked big man.

In the US of A we pride ourselves on not meddlin' in the affairs of others. A man should have his freedom, long as he ain't courtin' cattle or somesuch. These alien types don't exercise such gentlemanly restraint, stickin' their unAmerican noses where they don't belong. And look at the trouble it causes! Children missing out on their learnin' because they're in church hidin' from a remorseless cyborg. Men getting all riled up, ready to give the Gunslinger what he wants. Never mind that this is the smallest mob I ever seed outside of Death Valley.

The meddlin' does come with some good, mind. Cholera is a mighty big

problem in 1870, mostly out east where people live on top of each other. There, they do their best to 'check the evil' by quarantining and encouraging the sick not to cough all over their unsuspecting fellow men. The two medical factions of the 'contagionists,' and the 'anti-contagionists' spend most of their time arguing how virulent the disease really is. The proof is in the thousands of poor dead families up and down the Mississippi.

We don't have such issues with overcrowding but having been reared by dusty-bottomed cowboys, sanitation is not our forte. Thank the Lord for Kahler-Jex, who treated the disease and stopped Mercy from becoming a ghost town. I wonder what future ailments he could have cured if he'd stuck around? The street lights are brighter than ever thanks to Jex being ahead of his time with electric gizmos.

And then there's our tea-drinking Doctor, righting wrongs wherever he finds 'em like a starbound ranger. He doesn't enhance our vigour or our nightlights but he does improve the way we look at the world and the people around us. Don't matter if they got dippy marks on their face or mechanical side arms. They have humanity and they matter.

He makes some strange first impressions, though. I hear tell that hootenwaller with a big chin and a bullet hole Stetson is that dirty word – a pacifist. So imagine our astoundment when he pulls a gun on Kahler-Jex! I mean, who's the real gunslinger around here?

The Doctor don't like it if he gets a gun pointed in his face but he's at the end of his rope and he ponders – just for a tense moment – what it would be like if he turned the tables and took a man's life in a cold-blooded fashion. It's a tes-





tament to the acting in this here flick that we believe he could pull that trigger. Mebbe that's what makes the scene seem so wrong-headed and out of place. There's no bluff here, no table-turning. The Doctor's plumb upset. Mind you, the moment's been set up in the last instalment of this chapter play...

Apparently he's been through a rough patch recently and has allowed a jackanapes named Solomon to get blown up with missiles. Sure are a lot of explosions around this Doctor feller. By God's grace his companion Amy talks him out of firin' his piece. She seems to stick with her friend to make sure he don't do nothing the universe will regret later. But maybe his out-of-character behaviour helps convince her to go home with Rory after this escape.

To give him credit, once he's past his hissy-fit the Doctor does help the town, having the inhabitants run all over Main Street with marks on their faces like they ain't been to the bathhouse in a month. This confuses the Gunslinger, who is programmed to recognize Jex's brand. Jex is expected to leave in his giant egg but the yolk of his conscience is too heavy after what he's done to Kahler-Tek and his ilk.

Rather than letting the Doctor decide his fate, he takes the threads in his own hands and takes his own life. It's an existentialist moment, one that surprises and dismays the Doctor.

After the seemingly obligatory fireworks, the Doctor, Amy and Rory bid adieu. Although their adventure ends with tragedy for Marshal Isaac and Jex, an optimistic man might call it closure.

Sure, there's been a few deaths, but the west wouldn't be very wild without its high mortality rate. The Doctor leavens the darkness with humour, which don't seem out of place in an exploit that balances seriousness and whimsy like a Buffalo Bill trick rider.

This tale has a narrator, giving it an extra epic scope. Funny enough, the Doctor's visit to Tombstone also has narration, of a different kind. A singer glorifies the action with her talented tonsils in the story dubbed The Gunfighters. With its slick silver screen sensibilities, A Town Called Mercy deserves a more elegant elegy, and it gets it.

It's been a long time since our town was under siege but every now and then, when trouble's brewing, our sentinel is sighted. He's but one wonder out on the range; folks steer clear of him or thank him quick and leave him be, taking his weird appearance in their stride. While England is fancy and all, the American landscape holds infinite potential for danger and delight. The desert, with its broad night sky and long moon shadows is uncanny and transcendent, land of the 'strange and unexplainable.' A cyborg ain't out of place here. And neither is a Time Lord.



## THE POWER OF THREE

Review by Tony Jordan

There is more to The Power of Three than meets the eye. What it is, what it could have been, how it is viewed nearly a decade on, and more...

Let us start at the very beginning. To my mind the original title, Cubed, was both superior and pithier than what it became. The seeming need to spell out the fact that the story was about the combined potential of The Doctor, Amy and Rory was discourteous to the audience's intelligence.

It is important to see the positioning of The Power of Three within both the Eleventh Doctor's and, more importantly, Amy and Rory's narrative. It is their penultimate episode, and therefore although not a direct set up for their downbeat farewell in The Angels Take Manhattan, is leading their story to an end after 2 1/2 series spread across as many years.

In a key scene half-way through the episode the Doctor says he believes that Amy and Rory are considering stopping travelling with him - they clearly should have! Indeed, Brian's question about what happened to the other people who peregrinated with the Doctor provides a hint of what is to come. As for the Doctor himself, it feels to me like the start of his journey to regeneration in The Time of the Doctor.

Clocking in at just 41 minutes and 14 seconds, The Power of Three has the distinction of being the shortest episode since the programme returned

seventeen years ago. The reasons for this will be discussed in due course.

It was the Year of the Slow Invasion, the time The Doctor came to stay, not to mention the Invasion of the Very Small Cubes. "There are soldiers all over my house and I'm in my pants" must be one of Rory's more memorable lines!

There's a clear comparison between a year of 'real life' for the Ponds with that in the TARDIS. I have to say that I have an issue with companions not travelling full time with the Doctor - his being able to drop in and out whenever it suits is an antithesis to the central core of the programme, namely that he takes strangers on an amazing series of continuous adventures. Indeed, just before the UNIT soldiers arrive at Pond Towers, Amy surmises that for the Ponds it's been; "ten years of you, on and off".

The appearance of Kate (Lethbridge) Stewart in Doctor Who is a pleasure, although of course the character herself had first been seen seventeen years earlier in 'Downtime'. There is plenty to love in the first half of the story - Brian's OCD with the cubes, the tone of which is pitched just right: the lovely 'The Apprentice' cameo; the 'Birdy Song' gag at the Tower of London. The whole concept of the UNIT Base being under the Tower is excellent and, as with Kate, a set up for future stories including the 50th Anniversary.

The cubes are active for just 47

minutes and then deactivate, having scanned everything across Earth. After nine months people have long since accepted the cubes and take them for granted, perhaps as we did with Covid-19. It is interesting to note that when the Doctor shows up, the chaos returns. The main protagonists are away for seven weeks while in the middle of their anniversary party, again something I am not keen on. We then juxtapose the Doctor living a 'real life' while at the same time discussing his history - inventing Yorkshire Puddings, playing tennis on the wii while talking about the legendary Fred Perry. I find that cleverly, and well, plotted.

The cubes finally return to life and Brian is kidnapped. The Doctor waits for the countdown to hit zero, they open but there is nothing inside which seems to make no sense, until people around the world start dying of cardiac arrest, as a result of a pure electrical surge targeted at the nearest human heart.

Interestingly Amy uses a defibrillator on the Doctor - did Grace not do something similar in the 1996 telemovie with

drastic consequences? The Doctor and Amy go through one of the seven portals on planet Earth, conveniently of course located at the hospital, finding both Rory, who had preceded them, and Brian on slabs.

At last, we get to The Shakri. Existing in all of time, according to myth they are universal pest controllers. Their aim is to halt the human plague before the spread of humanity in colonising space. "The human contagion must be eliminated". "The tally shall be met".

Portraying The Shakri, Steven Berkoff is on screen for little more than three minutes. The Doctor describes him as the ship's automated interface but says he can stop the second wave using the cubes to turn people's hearts back on again. Was this a deus ex machina of necessity owing to Berkoff's behaviour on set? A lot of reviews at the time talked about an underdeveloped, rushed and disappointing resolution, the reason sometimes being given that Steven Berkoff proved to be very difficult to work with. Allegedly virtually all the footage they shot featuring

Berkoff was unusable, and the ending as broadcast was the best that could be cobbled together from what was salvaged, along with some pick-up shots filmed later with Karen Gillan and Arthur Darvill. The original intention wasn't for The Shakri to be a hologram, or for the plot to effectively be resolved entirely by the sonic screwdriver, but that's what the production team felt best able to achieve. This is the given reason as to why The Power of Three runs for just 41 minutes.

In an interview given to promote the episode, director Douglas Mackinnon said: "The experience of working with him (Berkoff) on Doctor Who was something that will never be repeated; you could ask anyone on the cast or crew and they'll agree that his participation was extraordinary."

I find this fascinating. When I booked Steven Berkoff for The Capitol IV several people told me that I had made a mistake and that he was very burdensome to work with. For sure I had heard of his reputation before even consider-

ing Steven as a guest, and as a result made sure that my research for our interview was thorough.

What transpired that Sunday afternoon in Crawley was a wonderful 45 minutes where he was fascinating, entertaining and humorous in equal measure. I think it goes to show that you should never pre-judge anyone and that going that extra mile can pay dividends.

Back to the story itself one final, and chilling, thought. Brian's farewell, telling the Ponds to go with The Doctor, is effectively their death sentence. Having said that, according to the webcast P.S they happily lived out their lives in 20th century New York City.

Ultimately, looking back nearly a decade, I think that The Power of Three is a perfect example of mid-Moffat Who. There are some very good ideas and a decent script from Chibnall, but also overarching problems that are part and parcel of how 21st century Doctor Who - and not just that of Steven Moffat - has been structured.





# THE ANGELS TAKE MANHATTAN

Review by Jackie Green

*I always rip out the last page of a book. Then it doesn't have to end. I hate endings!*

Nine months before this episode aired Steven Moffat announced that Amy and Rory would leave in the seventh series in heart-breaking circumstances. After toying with the idea of involving the Daleks, Moffat felt that the Weeping Angels would be a better fit. He said at the time "There was something about the Weeping Angels and New York that just seemed to make sense to me, and I thought of the story for this episode while in New York. I had loads of ideas for the Weeping Angels on both the previous stories that I never got anywhere close to using, so it was good to find the opportunity".

Karen Gillan had been steadfast in her opinion that she would not be back in the show, even for guest appearances, saying she wanted her character to leave "on a high when the character was at her prime" and to "go with everything that she wants". Returning, she felt, would take away the impact from her final scene.

In keeping with the movie genre theme, we had seen in each of the previous episodes in the series, The Angels of Manhattan takes on the detective film noir and stylistically it looks superb with the pre-credits opening setting up what was to come as we meet private detective Sam Garner who has been hired to investigate Winter

Quay, a building infested with the Weeping Angels. As he meets his older self, who warns him that the Angels are coming for him, he runs up to the roof to try and escape only to find the Statue of Liberty is a Weeping Angel and he is sent back in time to be trapped there for the rest of his life as the Angels feed on his time energy.

One of the reasons I love Doctor Who is because of my fascination with time and this episode really ticks that box for me with Moffat coming up with a great idea of telling the story in the form of a book. At the start of the episode The Doctor is reading a novel about a 1930's detective named Melody Malone. The Doctor soon discovers that he is reading what is happening to them now when the skinny guy in the book tells Melody Malone "I just went to get coffees for the Doctor and Amy. Hello, River". Rory was now with River Song in 1938 New York sent back there by the Weeping Angels. The book has been written in the future by River Song to help them but a glance at the chapter titles tells you that the outcome is not looking good when one of them is 'Amelia's Last Farewell'!

It had been two years since we had seen a full story with the Weeping Angels (they had made a cameo appearance the year before in The God Complex) and it was great to have them back. I am not easily scared when watching Doctor Who, but I have to admit I most definitely was when

they made their first appearance in Blink! In this outing we are introduced to another form of the Angels known as the cherubim and these are even more creepy. The cherubim are not silent like the Weeping Angels with their childlike giggling and audible footsteps. The idea for the cherubim came about when director Nick Hurran travelled to New York to hunt for locations early on in pre-production. One of the places he visited was Central Park, where he photographed Bethesda Fountain, constructed in 1868 by Emma Stebbins. The centrepiece of the fountain was the sculpture of a tall angel surrounded by four smaller cherubs.

Visually the episode really works with the majority of it being set at night allowing the viewer to see where a statue is and where it has moved to by a flash of lightening. The image of the Statue of Liberty as a Weeping Angel at the top of Winter Quay with the neon

sign lighting up the Angels fangs looks fantastic. This caused many a debate amongst fans as to how, in a city that never sleeps, was the Statue of Liberty able to move without being noticed. Moffat's response to this was "In those terrible days, in that conquered city, you saw and understood only what the Angels allowed, so Liberty could move and hunt as it wished, in the blink of an eye, unseen by the lowly creatures upon which it preyed. Also, it tip-toed".

You could not have Amy and Rory's farewell without River Song, and it is nice to see Alex Kingston again who always puts in a great performance. This is a more subdued River Song than we are used to but that works well within the context of the episode. She shows her soft side when she disguises breaking her wrist to The Doctor, knowing he does not like endings and when she is faced with losing both



her parents, she still agrees with her mother that letting the Angels send her back in time was the only chance for her to get back to Rory. Alex Kingston knows the character of River Song inside and out and it has been fantastic to see her being able to continue River's adventures with Big Finish and in Alex's first River novel, released under the pseudonym of Melody Malone.

The Eleventh is my favourite new series Doctor and that is all down to Matt Smith. He may have been the youngest actor to play the role but watching him you really believe The Doctor is a very old alien. He brings a wonderful physicality to his performance with arms flapping, his stagger and spin and the wringing of hands. I love his quick-paced delivery, but he is also able to convey the grief that The Doctor carries around with him. Matt is on great form here as he shows the heartbreak

The Doctor feels of losing his companions as he begs Amy not to leave him. I always get a lump in my throat when I watch him running through Central Park so he can read the message Amy has left him on the last page of the book.

The Doctor not being able to go back and rescue Amy and Rory irked some fans who argued that he could pick them up somewhere outside of New York but Moffat disputed that by saying "...in normal circumstances he might have gone back and said, 'look we will just put a headstone up and we will just write the book'. But there is so much scar tissue, and the number of paradoxes already inflicted on that nexus of timelines, that it will rip apart if you try to do one more thing. He has to leave it alone. Normally he could perform some surgery, but this time too much has already been performed".



The previous episode, The Power of Three, had set up the narrative that Amy and Rory could not give up The Doctor but faced with being separated from each other forever we are left in no doubt how much they love each other. They make the decision to jump together from the roof of the apartment building in the hope of creating a paradox and just when you think it has worked, Rory is sent back in time again with Amy following him in an emotional farewell to The Doctor. Both Karen Gillan and Arthur Darvill have impressed throughout their time as Amy and Rory and this episode is no exception as they bring both humour and emotion to their performance. Matt, Karen and Arthur always had a really good on-screen chemistry and I was sad to say goodbye to this particular TARDIS crew.

I thought it was a really nice and emotional touch in the final scene, for the story to be brought full circle back to The Eleventh Hour. In the afterword of the book, Amy asks the Doctor to visit the little girl waiting in the garden for him who will need a lot of hope. She tells him to tell her of the adventures that are coming if she is patient. She will fight pirates (The Curse of the Black Spot), fall in love with a man who will wait two thousand years for her (The Big Bang), give hope to the greatest ever painter (Vincent and the Doctor) and save a whale in outer space (The Beast Below).

This is the story of Amelia Pond. And this is how it ends.

Well almost....there was a P.S to this story when the following month the BBC released an animated storyboard

that depicted how Rory's father Brian became aware of Amy and Rory's fate. Taking place one week later in Brian's timeline after The Power of Three a letter is delivered to him by Anthony, the son Amy and Rory adopted in 1946. The scene was written to be a DVD extra but was unfortunately not filmed due to time constraints.

Writing out two popular characters in a satisfying way was always going to be a hard task but overall, I think Steven Moffat did a good job. I loved the story and the performances along with a great production design, wonderful musical score by Murray Gold and superb direction from Nick Hurran and for me it is easily the best episode in the opening half of series seven.







## THE SNOWMEN

Review by Russell Sandberg

It is surprising that this is the first Christmas special set in the Victorian era (if you exclude *The Unquiet Dead*) given that it is a frequent time period for *Doctor Who* stories and also the way in which the nineteenth century has become linked to Christmas.

It is often said that the Victorians created Christmas as we know it today. In medieval England, Christmas had been all about twelve days of Christmas, boisterous feasting and drinking to mark the end of fasting. Under Oliver Cromwell, it had become banned. The Puritans viewed it as a drunken debauched extravagance with no religious significance. When the monarchy was restored, the ban on Christmas was lifted

ed but it remained a subdued affair. It was the Victorians who reinvented Christmas as a time for family and for good will towards all. It was the Victorian writers - chief amongst them Dickens - who conceptualised Christmas as a humanitarian festival. It became concentrated on the two days of Christmas Day and Boxing Day. And many of our traditions - crackers, puddings and the like - date back to this era.

Yet, the idea that the Victorians created Christmas as we know it is an overstatement. Many old traditions were revived in new forms. The feast became the Christmas dinner. The boisterous singing of rude carols became the sedate Christian carols still sung today. And some of the claims about Victorian inventions are overplayed. It is often asserted, for instance, that Prince Albert was key to bringing the Christmas tree to the UK. Yet, earlier royals had had such trees, Albert simply popularised it.

The Victorian legacy on Christmas celebrations underlines that the relationship between change and continuity is more complex and nuanced than it first appears. And that is also true of the 2012 Christmas special, 'The Snowmen'. At one point, the eleventh Doctor exclaims, "This is the day that everything begins". And to an extent, he is right. This episode introduces a new title sequence, a new TARDIS interior and a new companion, but then does the unexpected and kills that companion off.



There's also far more continuity in this episode than previous and subsequent Christmas specials that tend to either be stand-alone one-offs or regeneration specials that draw entire eras to a close. By contrast, this special was scheduled halfway through a (split) series. It shows something rarely shown: the effect of a previous adventure on the Doctor. It also reunites the Doctor with regular characters in terms of the Paternoster Gang.

The continuity links go further than this, though. The idea of the Doctor retiring finally visits an idea mooted during the Tom Baker years. And the whole story serves as a prequel to two Patrick Troughton stories, one of which was to be largely re-found in the coming year, the 50th anniversary year. The Snowmen also serves as a prequel for that 50th anniversary year. The soft reboot in terms of title sequence and TARDIS interior, strips things back ready for those celebrations. And the Great Intelligence reintroduction is not just a prequel to the

Second Doctor classic adventures but sets the scene for the arc that will run throughout the second half of season 7 culminating in the reveal of a face that the Doctor has tried to forget.

The story also sows seeds for the future with Jenna-Louise Coleman (as she is billed here) given much more to do than the usual companion. The multiple roles she plays, and her proactive adventuring role would effectively make Coleman a co-lead and would do much to pace the way for a female doctor. It could be argued that this is the day that that begins.

Like the Victorian Christmas during which it is set, 'The Snowmen' is a winning mix of the old and the new which sums up the strength and confidence of the series as it enters its 50th year. The hilarious Sherlock pastiche and references underscores that confidence and how popular Moffat's work had become at this time. It set the stage for what would be a sensational 50th anniversary year.



## THE BELLS OF ST JOHN

Review by Mark Donaldson

In a retrospective interview with Doctor Who Magazine following his departure from the showrunner role, Steven Moffat cited The Bells of St. John as his "most run-of-the-mill" script. He is being unfair on himself; run-of-the-mill it might be but as an opener to the 50th anniversary season it appropriately sums up everything we've enjoyed about the show in the five decades previous.

What sums up the madness of Doctor Who better than evil Wi-Fi and an anti-grav motorcycle? The Spoonheads are the sort of, creepy-and-compelling-but-also-a-bit-ropey monsters that have been the show's stock in trade since Sidney Newman revoked his 'No Bug-Eyed Monsters' edict. The swivelling heads attached to a shape shifting server retains that uncanny recognition that is key to some of the show's best mon-

sters. They are not particularly threatening or memorable but, in the moment, they are certainly unnerving. There's a clear correlation between Yetis on the loo in Tooting Bec and sentient servers in a trendy London coffee shop.

What's striking about The Bells of St. John is that it's a rare contemporary, 'urban' story for this stage of the Moffat era. Up to this point we have only really had Night Terrors, which was more heightened and fantastical and the previous year's The Power of Three. Watching the Doctor and Clara materialise on the South Bank then ride through London on a motorbike brings Rose and The TV Movie to mind.

Whilst the motorbike ride is unbearably twee due to a rare Murray Gold mis-





step, there are genuinely thrilling moments in this. Case in point; the motor-bike ascending the Shard and the way the story introduces Clara and any new audience members to the TARDIS. Escaping and subsequently rescuing the passengers and crew of a jet plane, it is the sort of breathless introduction to the Doctor's time machine that has been a regular fixture of the show since two schoolteachers happened upon a police box in a junkyard back in 1963.

A plot involving computer technology and a new addition to the London skyline are reminiscent of 1965's *The War Machines* whilst the story's villain *The Great Intelligence* neatly connects the death of the Victorian governess Clara with the life of 2013 au-pair Clara. Not to mention teasing us up nicely for the return of (most of) *The Web of Fear* to the archives.

And yet, *The Bells of St. John* is more than a mere shopping list of elements from the show's past. It's driving us towards the future – the 50th anniversary and *The Day of the Doctor*. It's the (proper) introduction of a companion who will become an integral part of the next three years of *Doctor Who*. As this anniversary year continues, Clara Oswald will become the most important companion in the show's history. She literally splinters herself across the Doctor's timeline to save multiple incarnations from the *Great Intelligence*'s scheming. (As a sidenote, presumably due to the *Timeless Child* reveal we have hundreds more Clara's than we originally thought?)

That confrontation with the *Great Intelligence* began in *The Snowmen* – or *The Abominable Snowmen* if we are being

precise – but it's here that it takes hold as the series arc, alongside the riddle of the *Impossible Girl*. We can argue for hours about how successfully that arc is played out, but I think the heart is in the right place. After all, the companions have been just as important as the Doctor to the success of the show these past fifty years.

Imagine *An Unearthly Child* with a grumpy old man and his off-kilter granddaughter. They'd never have made it as far as Skaro. It is Ian and Barbara's show first and foremost. It's them that introduce us to the mystery of *IM Foreman's junkyard* and it's them who we, as viewers, originally identify with. They also round the Doctor out into the more palatable, compassionate hero that we have today.

So, what better tribute to them and those who followed than Clara Oswald, the ultimate *Doctor Who* companion? It is not for nothing that she gets her name from Elisabeth Sladen's middle name. Perhaps this is where the disappointment in Clara's arc is rooted. If she is the ultimate companion, is it not something of a shame that she is introduced as a mystery for the Doctor to solve rather than a friend for whom he can show all of time and space?

And yet, there is something in Matt Smith's performance and Moffat's writing of the Doctor that hints at his protectiveness and fury at Clara being put at risk being more than disappointment at not being able to solve this enigma before she dies. The Doctor is clearly taken with Clara from the off, and after two and a half years of travelling with Amy and Rory it is refreshing to see the 11th Doctor in full-blown

charm mode. We can discuss his underlying intentions, but there is a keenness to share adventures with someone again and displays a healthy respect for Clara and her outlook.

Smith and Coleman crackle together and it is a real shame that we don't get more of them before the 11th Doctor regenerates. The scene where the Doctor is chastely camped out keeping watch is tender and touching whilst the rooftop café discussion is the sort of electric back-and-forth you get from the best Doctor and companion pairings.

So yes, this is very much business-as-usual *Doctor Who* but is that really such a bad thing? We all know that Steven Moffat likes to experiment with narrative and form in pursuit of keeping this fifty-something franchise fresh and new. There is nothing envelope-pushing about this story, that is true, but it does

display a lot of the hallmarks of Moffat's previous, more revered work. There is a haunting quality to *Celia Imrie's* lost child in a business suit whilst the lost souls stuck in the network is quite a jarring and unnerving concept. They have all been done by Moffat in some form before of course, but if cribbing from your own back catalogue is good enough for *Douglas Adams* and *Terrence Dicks* then it's good enough for Steven Moffat. So yes, not particularly inventive or original but there is a lot to be said for a solid story that's told well.

*The Bells of St. John* is exactly that and, in summing up nearly 50 years of what makes the show so appealing, it is the perfect season opener for *Doctor Who's* 50th anniversary series.



# THE RINGS OF AKHATEN

Review by Simon J Painter

I had not seen this episode since it first aired in what turns out to have been far more years than I had ever realised could have passed. Where does the time go? My memories of that single previous viewing were that it was a pretty mediocre story. From what little I have heard around, fan opinion seems mostly to concur with me. It is one of the least well regarded in the 7th series. So I was honestly curious to know whether time had been kind, and whether my opinion would have moved any.

I started off thinking I'd clearly misjudged the story. Firstly it opens with the Doctor reading the Beano, which got an instant cheer from me. I even had to show my oldest daughter that clip, as she is going through a Beano phase at the moment. The alien market looks great, and the masks on the extras are terrific - even if they are almost all completely unmoving. Oddly the alien makeup on Emilia Jones to play Merry is a little lack-lustre - she looks like she had some cocktail sticks popped onto her face in a rough pattern - but fine, it means we can see her face and performance properly, and it is a lovely performance. There is the mystery of the Long Song, the floating pyramid tomb, the creepy, creepy Vigil sneaking around in the shadows. There are some interesting ideas too, like a currency based on objects that are valuable to you *personally*. So at this point I was wondering, why did I find this all so disappointing

last time?

That is when we hit the third act, where the villain is revealed, and everything is resolved. That is where it becomes obvious that things are not really hanging together properly.

The biggest problem, for me at least, is that the plot really does come apart if you stare at it too hard. For instance:

- What is the relevance of the Long Song? Does it work? Does it serve any purpose at all, aside from the entirely ceremonial? We are told by the Doctor that 'Grandfather' will wake periodically to claim a sacrifice whatever the worshippers do, so are they singing to prolong the feeding cycle, or is it entirely useless? We never get an answer.

- Who is the grumpy soul-sucking zombie in a glass box in the pyramid? How did he get there? What purpose does



he serve? If there is an arrangement to provide sacrifices to appease Grandfather, then why is he locked in a box? Why not let him accept his sacrifice and go back to sleep quickly? There is a line of dialogue from the Doctor that he's an 'alarm clock', but that is really not helpful.

- Why is Clara's tragedy so much more overwhelming for the evil alien planet than the thousands of years of tragedy the Doctor has lived through (including, the loss of his entire family, race and home world at one point). Never explained. (the real, meta-fictional, real-universe reason is that Steven Moffat wanted more focus for the story on Clara, and to avoid repeating finales from previous stories. That is fine, but there are more logical ways to do it).

- Why does the Long Song change from 'sleep' to 'wake up' when the Doctor goes to challenge the space planet?

Emotionally it is powerful, and it is rather a lovely song, but as with the other things, it just doesn't make sense.

- If the evil alien planet lives off the offerings of the crowd that assembles to see it once in a while, why does it have to wake up periodically to demand *more*? I would really like to see this all fleshed out a bit, but what we are given is really quite frustratingly vague.

The resolution is far too easy as well. It's another one of those 'emotion the baddy to death with emotion, while giving a rousing speech' endings that I thought had finished with the end of the RTD era, but here it is, back again. It is especially disappointing considering we are told the lives of civilisations hang in the balance, and that we're presented with an enemy so awe-inspiring that even the Doctor is scared of it.

The villains are some of the least





threatening in the series history, come to think of it. There is the zombie in the box. Never really a threat, due to being unable to physically reach our heroes. There is the evil planet, but despite the talk of the threat it represents to numerous civilisations, it simply hangs there in the sky like a roughly-carved pumpkin lantern. There is no tangible sense of danger from it either.

I would love to know what went wrong. My guess would be that Neil Cross (the writer) had some brilliant images in mind at the beginning, but had not the time available to really develop everything properly. The script feels like it is *nearly* there, but just needs one more edit to bring the themes into proper focus.

Come to think of it, what even are the themes?

Plot-wise, this fulfils the same function as *The End of the World*, *The Beast Below*, and others. Throw our new companion into a wild, futuristic environment. Let her be the star of the piece, so we can see how well she copes traveling with the Doctor, and give her a few scenes to show off her talent as an actress too. It has to be said that Akhaten fulfils this perfectly. Jenna Coleman leads for most of this episode, and she manages it effortlessly. Great supporting performances from Matt Smith and Emilia Jones too (I also got the shock of my life, preparing for this article, when I realised that she's one of the stars of *Locke and Key*!).

I have heard suggestions that Clara is being presented with a 'dark mirror image' of the Doctor in the villain of this story. An ancient creature, sometimes called grandfather by those close to him,

stuck in a rectangular box. A being that draws young women in, and uses them for his own purposes. I suppose I can see that, but what is the point that's being made? Clara does not learn anything from the experience - and rather than being wary of the Doctor, ends up as one of the longest-running companions in the series' history!

There's the slightest hint of a theme tackling religion and mythology. Clara asks the Doctor whether the beliefs of the Rings' inhabitants are true - that life in the universe began here. The Doctor simply looks a bit shifty, and replies that it's a "good story". That idea is left hanging in the air, but never explicitly referenced again. Is some sort of general point being made about the nature of religion and stories? Is it meant to tie in to the Long Song or the Queen of Years role as a sacrifice to something she believes to be a god? Is it saying that those of us that are not religious can still appreciate holy books as good stories? Is it suggesting that the Doctor doesn't care whether it is true or not, because he's enjoying the mystery? I am honestly not sure.

The other major theme of the episode is the idea of the emotional weight we grant to objects. Clara's leaf (what tree is that from? Those leaves last longer than UHT milk!) is granted story weight and even ultimately incredible power by its connection to her parents' courtship. Her ring, previously owned by her Mum, has literal value to the inhabitants of the Rings. That is an idea with some potential, and worth exploring, but it is really just set up for Clara to emotion the baddy to death at the end. It does not seem to tie into anything else in the episode, thematically.

My gripes with the ending aside, I would say that *The Rings of Akhaten* isn't bad. The visuals, the special effects, the performances are all top notch. I can imagine that a few people in the wardrobe, set and makeup departments had an amazing few weeks working on this one! The issue is entirely down to the script. It feels unfinished. Some great bits, some excellent individual scenes and speeches, a few well-landed gags, but thematically a bit of a half-formed muddle. Nearly there, but not quite.

Considering this was written by the guy behind a superlative series like *Luther*, I really would have expected better. I would have put it down to lack of familiarity with genre fiction, but Neil Cross is reportedly a Doctor Who fan. Maybe he simply didn't have time to flesh out his ideas to his usual standards?

It is far, far from the worst Doctor Who story ever (hey there, *Timelash*!), it is not even close to being the worst episode of the New Series (take a bow, *The End of Time*, *Love and Monsters*, *Fear Her* and one or two others), it is just tragically mediocre, made worse by looking so really, very good. I would love for it to have been better than it turned out to be. If I were giving *The Rings of Akhaten* a report card to take home at the end of the day, it would probably say 'Good effort. Could do better. Try harder next time'.

Considering too, that Neil Cross went on to write *Hide*, a significantly better story, it would seem he did just that.



# COLD WAR

Review by Owen Taylor

What happens when you let Mark Gatiss get to reimagine one of his favourite classic monsters? You get *The Thing* meets *Hunt for Red October* as we meet Ice Warriors on a Submarine set to *Ultravox* and *Duran Duran*! Yes it is 1983, the height of the cold war and we are at the North Pole.

This 3rd outing for Clara brings a look at her from a different angle to the ones either side of it as the quest to discover who this impossible girl is is ignored for more of a classic companion adventure. In fact, what perhaps makes this episode work so well is that the impossible girl story is side-lined to focus on the reimagining of a classic monster.

The episode sets up the classic base under siege motif before the TARDIS even arrives as our serious faced Russian sub-marinas are pulled from their missile launch drill by the dulcet tones of David Warner singing *Ultravox*. With the classic Stoic bearded Captain and trigger happy Political Officer established immediately it's time to see the real big bad, in this instance a block of ice. As the foolhardy submariner ignores the order not to defrost it we see a scaly arm burst from the ice. This new Ice Warrior armour is immediately recognisable while at the same time making it more apparent it is armour, rather than a thick hide, with enhanced mechanical movement noise. Once the warrior starts his rampage through the sub causing it to sink, it is time for the TARDIS to arrive.

Our carefree couple dressed for Vegas are soon thrown in the deep end [literally] as they watch the Tardis disappear while convincing a shocked crew to head for a sea shelf. It is then time for the first confrontation as the Doctor stands oblivious to what is behind him. It is noticeable that as soon as he is confronted Matt Smith immediately switches to full Troughton mode with ruffled hair, bowtie straightening, gulping and exclaiming "I'm always serious, with days off." We also have the revelation that it is the HADS that have moved the TARDIS as the Doctor got bored and turned it on, and an explanation why the Russians can all speak perfect English (it is thanks to the translation circuits).

Here then we are confronted with the full lumbering form of our Ice Warrior. Gone are the shaggy wisps of hair between armour plates replaced instead with a sleek scaled armour that can wade through a fusillade of bullets, though still be overwhelmed by a quick electric shock which even the Doctor thinks is a bit of a design flaw! Following a quick joke about the hissing, "What is that? Is that gas?", our warrior identifies himself as Skaldak, and as the Doctor's face falls, we know Skaldak has a history. A quick briefing on the Ice Warriors tells us this is "Grand Marshall Skaldak, Sovereign of the Tharsisian caste, vanquisher of the Phobos heresy, greatest hero the proud Martian race has ever produced."

From here on it is full *The Ice Warriors* and *The Seeds of Death* homages, as our Martian seeks to take control, this time of the nuclear weapons instead of the T-Mat system or Ioniser, in a vision of making the Earth uninhabitable. What stops this becoming a simple re-telling of stories of old is how Mark Gatiss presents his modern warrior. During a press conference he said "I think they're almost the definition of the old Doctor Who monster. They're big, they're lumbering, they're slow, they're green, they're hissy." What he does from this point on is invert everything we are expecting as we get to see the Reptile inside the biomechanical armour.

We know immediately our trapped submarinas are in trouble following their knocking him out with a cattle prod, (normally reserved for polar bears), as we are reminded of the Martian code; 'Harm one of us and you harm us all'. To emphasise Skaldak means business, it is explained his enemies held him in such regard they would carve Skaldak's name into their own flesh. This obvi-

ously isn't your normal hissing awkward lumbering Warrior or hands on hips Ice Lord, this one means business.

As Clara is sent in to speak to him we start to get more of the creature inside. Not just a soldier but a father realising he has lost his daughter and apparently his people as his signal is not responded to. As he talks of singing the songs of the red snow, a lament to the fall of the Mars ecosystem we discover that he can leave his suit, and he is fast! Gone is our lumbering slow creature replaced with a hunter who dissects his opponents to gain the measure and capabilities of where he finds himself. Even the hissy growling is more reminiscent of the Predator hunting Arnie than the classic warriors of Mars. We also see a mastery of sonic technology normally reserved to the Doctor as Skaldak is able to remote control his armour as well as the traditional sonic blaster with the Doctor proclaiming "sonic tech, the song of the Ice Warriors."

The Doctor is seemingly disturbed by who Skaldak is, but is this guilt for previ-





ous encounters or fear of the soldier inside? We get hints at the upcoming Day of the Doctor reveal laced into his conversation with the sub captain - "Saldak won't talk to you, you're an enemy soldier. A soldier knows another soldier he'll smell it on you a mile off. " "He wouldn't smell it on you Doctor?" is the rebuke that tells us how he is being seen by the sub crew.

While this slow build up to the ramifications of the Time War has paraded through the modern series let us not forget the Doctor once sent the entire Ice Warrior fleet into the sun to save Earth. When he says they go way back he means it, and there is red snow on his hands as much as Skaldak's.

This episode not only brings a graven faced war weary Doctor back alongside the usual carefree childish one but also brings the dangers of travelling with the Doctor home to Clara in a way not explored in the other episodes around it. When she is looking for approval from the Doctor following her actions,

she is told "This wasn't a test" but the teacher/student feel is evident. However soon she sees death properly for the first time as the crew are dismembered. This is no strange alien world or robot wife hub, these are real people with real lives as the look at Stavashm's warrant card with photo of loved one shows. For the first time Clara is confronted with the body count that accompanies the speech the Doctor gave in the previous episode.

"I was doing ok. I mean I went in there and I did the scary stuff. I went in there with the Ice Warrior and it went ok. Actually it went as badly as it could have done but that wasn't my fault... So I'm happy about that, chuffed. Seeing those bodies back there, It has all got very, real."

Our impossible girl is shown to be a normal person having to deal with a situation that is no longer a carefree game. History is in flux and the world she knows and returns to each trip can simply be wiped out in an instant. It is



however Clara that can appeal to Skaldak's warrior code more so than the Doctor and the soldiers. Leaving his armour is the greatest disgrace for a Martian warrior, yet he returns to it to launch the missiles. As he retakes the mantle of warrior it is Clara that can remind him of his daughter and the honour of family over the need for revenge spurred on by the thought of loss. As he is teleported to his people who appear to rescue the sub at the last minute is it her influence that stops him avenging a slight to his honour or the simple relief to find he is not alone? It is the Doctor who asks him to show mercy, but it is Clara who can speak to his honour as the Doctor threatens mutually assured destruction.

Cold War fits a lot into 45 minutes. It feels like a classic Who story while simultaneously bringing the world weariness of the modern show along with it. Fundamentally it is a base under siege romp as the crew try to stop a nuclear launch after a misunderstanding. At first glance it is a commentary on the 1980s; "It's a dangerous time Clara, East and West standing on the brink of nuclear oblivion, lots of itchy trigger fingers on the button" "Isn't it always like that?" "Sort of, but there are flash points, this is one of them. Hair, shoulder pads, nukes! It's the 80's, everything's bigger!" There is no irony that this was broadcast less than a year before Russia annexed the Crimea and it's similarities to the emergence of Western / Russian tension are evident.. It certainly plays to Matt Smith's acting strengths as he flips from cosmic clown [or startled giraffe] to stern teacher who can take control of a room with just a look.

What it really is however at heart is a lovingly crafted revival of a classic monster. It brings a strong noble warrior race out of that slow, lumbering hissing green monster. It makes them a race bound by honour and loss and avoids giving them the comic effect that the Sontarans became by The Time of the Doctor.

With Cold War Mark Gatiss shows just what the threat one can be, much like Dalek did back in series 1. This reinvention sits perfectly between the threat of The Seeds of Death and the political players of the Federation on Peladon, and makes you hope there are more buried out there in the ice waiting to be discovered.



# HIDE

Review by Christine Grit

Hide is an episode based firmly in the good old Seventies. You can see it especially in the colours – of the clothing but also of the furniture. I recall the kind of furniture colouring we used to have when I was growing up. Looking back one can only say: “yuck”, but of course for an episode taking place in that particular time, it has to look authentic and “yuck” is actually very good!

And how does a 21st century Doctor like Matt Smith fit into that 70s atmosphere? Very well actually. Matt was really getting into his stride after two seasons of being the Doctor. Of course, one starts making comparisons with the 70s Doctors – Jon Pertwee and Tom Baker but to be honest, those guys would not have looked for a haunted house like this one, where the relationship between the two guest characters Alec Palmer and Emma Grayling is actually more important than the ghost or monster itself – let alone where the monsters get to be romantically involved as well. In the 70s I believe the action orientation in Doctor Who was more important than the relationships between characters. There could certainly have been kind and gentle monsters but ones in love with each other? I don't think so.

Matt however is quite brilliant as the Doctor here. He maintains that bit of awkwardness which his Doctor always brings to the fore as far as relationships are concerned; not just with his companion but with other characters as

well. For good order, this does not apply to relationships with (young) children (he really is the Children's Doctor on screen) but it does when adults are concerned.. That rather youngish (you can actually imagine a 14-year-old expressing himself in much the same way when encountering people in complex relationships) way of showing uncomfortableness when he first realises there is something more going on between other people than just being colleagues, mates or friends is just priceless. It always makes me laugh.

He also shows off a bit of youngish exuberance while wandering through the house with some candles. Why candles? It is not as if there is no electricity in the house! I have read too many stories about candles being blown out by sudden breezes to really appreciate going for a walk with candles up and down stairs! But that's beside the point. This is a Doctor who really enjoys a bit of adventure, taking risks, and so forth, jumping right into danger, not realising this escapade of ghostbusting could lead to truly frightening circumstances.

It is a pity that the focus in the fan debates after broadcast was more on the 'wrong' pronunciation of Metabelis III than on the really good and scary 'Haunted house stuff' and the way in which this Doctor handled it. We knew from the start there would not be a real ghost – this is Doctor Who after all and even ghosts need some kind of scientific explanation. I thought the outcome

of the apparition being someone stuck in a pocket universe rather neat. A pocket universe opens up so many more possibilities in creating an explanation for ghostly appearances than a parallel one.

Although we have had a number of Doctors who understood and expressed fear, I think Matt's way is one of the best. He uses a lot of facial muscles, especially the popping of the eyes when uttering that he really is frightened. I expect it would be a real 'behind the sofa' moment for younger children, because if the Doctor shows fear, the situation must be really bad! I actually expected there to be more dangerous things happening than the Doctor being stuck in a relatively small space with – true – a possible encounter with an unknown creature. Unknown creatures are almost daily fare for the Doctor after all.

I must admit to wondering all the time why there seemed to be a 'crooked (wo)man ghost' in the house as well – meaning the actual Caliburn House where most of the action takes place, not the fake imagined one in the Pocket universe. Had Alec and Emma never been confronted by the creature during their long sessions in trying to raise the ghost? I presume they did not stay in the all the time, especially not Alex since he owned the place. And I was wondering even more why neither the Doctor nor Clara seem to notice the creature and try to find out more about it. I mean, the drop in temperature in a certain place was noticed and taken account of, but nothing was done with the fact that there was actually a monster lurking in the corridors. We viewers had seen the creature pass by quite

a few times, though only in the shadows.

It took until the near end to find out that the 'monster' had actually been noticed and that our clever Doctor had known that it was present all along. Of course, it was fun to again see Matt use his wonderfully expressive face when he realises why the creature had chased him (and of course the stuck time traveller before his arrival) at all. This leads him to asking Emma for a favour, so the two creatures could be together again, and left me with the question of how Alec and Emma were going to cope with two of these beings on a very real earth in 1974 after the Doctor and Clara had left. But I suppose that is another story.

All-in-all I feel that only Matt Smith could have pulled this story off as the Doctor because of the need to explicitly expressed emotion, in particular the fear.





# JOURNEY TO THE CENTRE OF THE TARDIS

Review by Paul Burns

Imagine the Van Baalen brothers appearing on an intergalactic version of the Jerry Springer Show:

“Tonight, we have three brothers working through their issues. First of all, let me introduce you to Tricky. He went through cataclysmic life changing injuries during an explosion, and was rebuilt with cybernetics, and when he woke up his brother, instead of comforting him and supporting him, told him he was an android....FOR A JOKE!” Cue booing from the audience and the man who married his cow realising he would not be the most morally repugnant person on the show.

If we are all being honest, Journey to the Centre of the TARDIS would probably not feature on many people’s best of lists, and that has a lot to do with the

somewhat extraneous presence of the Van Baalen brothers; so let us deal with them first, before we get onto the more positive aspects of the episode.

The most puzzling aspect of the Van Baalen brothers is the Doctor immediately using them as a search party inside his own ship. Writer Steve Thompson then decided to layer on that bizarre back story of Gregor telling his younger brother he was an android because he was jealous of him getting his father’s company. This may have been Thompson’s way of adding some depth to essentially plot driven characters, but it just serves to highlight the weaker points of the story. Additionally, It is an odd narrative choice to have a base under siege story with characters seemingly shorn of any likeable qualities.



To be fair, Ashley Walters, Mark Oliver and Jahvel Hall do their best with the material given, but you cannot help but think their presence is somewhat unwanted in an episode that has the chance to not only explore the Doctor’s shaky and uncertain friendship with Clara, but also investigate the inner workings of the TARDIS. The dysfunctional Van Baalens just get in the way of the real meat of the story.

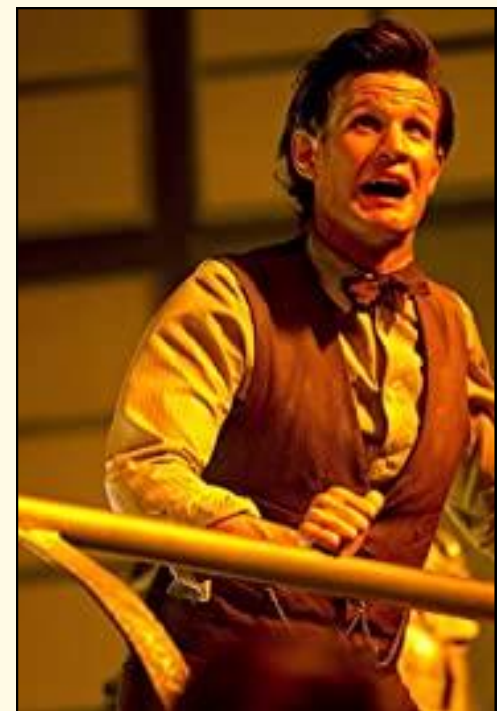
Elsewhere, however, there is a lot to unpack. From the outset we get another reminder the TARDIS is not particularly fond of Clara’s presence, emulating the uncertainty the Doctor feels about his new companion. He gives the TARDIS and Clara an opportunity to bond by having Clara fly the ship, but that is interrupted by the Van Baalens magnetic tractor beam. After the Doctor bizarrely recruits the very people responsible for damaging his ship as a rescue team, they all set off to find the missing Clara. She is busy investigating the TARDIS, accusing the ship of “showing off” when she enters an impressively designed library. She finds a book titled The History of the Time War, where she discovers the Doctor’s real name. Considering the level of sophisticated and advanced technology contained in the TARDIS, it is pleasing the Doctor is still relying on simple pen and paper to record history.

I have often thought the TARDIS is a huge CCTV unit, recording everything that goes on within it, and that supposition is supported when the console is tampered with, and ghostly voices from the past fill the ship.

I mentioned base under siege, and for that to happen, we need monsters

chasing people down corridors. The story takes a very dark turn when it is revealed the monsters chasing the Doctor, Clara and Van Baalens are actually future versions of themselves burnt to a crisp by the Eye of Harmony. The creatures’ pursuit is expertly handled by the deft direction of Mat King, who ramps the tension up from Clara trying to avoid the creatures in the library, to their full reveal, just before the Doctor escorts his companion to safety at the heart of the TARDIS

Once they are through, the Doctor uses the opportunity to question Clara about her true identity. She is surprised to learn she has lived on a planet of Daleks and has been a Victorian governess, and as a viewer, we feel this could be the moment her mystery is unravelled. But that tantalising rug is whipped from under us once the Doctor discovers



Clara is as confused as him. After a hug they leap into the actual heart of the TARDIS, which is beautifully realised with floating pieces of machinery in a featureless environment.

There is somewhat of an eye roll, when the story is wrapped up with an actual reset button, or a 'Big Friendly Button' which literally fixes the crack in the TARDIS and returns everyone to their previous non crispy forms, leaving the scavenging Van Baalens to live happily ever after. It is an audacious move to wrap a story up so literally after allegations the show has adopted the Deus ex machina resolution in the past. 'You want a reset? Here's a Big Friendly Button!'

Journey to the Centre of the TARDIS is a flawed but potentially fine episode, with the obvious highlight being Matt Smith's performance. He is truly a mercurial actor, handling the gravitas and insanity of the Time Lord with ease. This is exemplified by his hoodwinking the brothers, getting them, and us to an

extent, to believe that he was willing to blow up the TARDIS if they did not help him. He is playful, commanding, frightened, determined, suspicious and ultimately heroic all in the space of forty four minutes. At all times, his performance is utterly believable and is a further example of how brilliantly he played the Doctor.

It is harder to like Clara, especially when she punches the Doctor immediately after rescuing her, but Jenna Coleman is hampered with the impossible girl tag attached to her character. She does her best with playing a plot point rather than a fully fleshed out character. Thankfully, that was soon resolved, but that is for a review further down the line.



## THE CRIMSON HORROR

Review by Stephen Hatcher

Recent comments by returning Doctor Who showrunner Russell T. Davies that he would like to see a whole multiplicity of spin-off programmes from the main show, in the manner of the American Marvel, DC or Star Wars universes is in many ways an exciting prospect. Perhaps, The Further Adventures of Nyssa, as suggested by Russell, might be a spin-off too far, but there are undeniably many interesting characters, situations and concepts that have featured in Doctor Who since 1963, that have the potential to become successful shows in their own right.

This is not a new idea, of course. In fact, it has been in the air as far back as the 1960s with Terry Nation's attempts to get a Daleks series off the ground and the Peter Cushing radio series that did not quite happen. Then in the 70s there was talk of a UNIT series and of course, Jago and Litefoot - neither of which, at the time, really came anywhere near happening in anything more than the imaginations of fans. The 80s brought the first ever official Doctor Who spin-off, K9 And Company, which took more than twenty years to move from being a pilot into two series; entirely different both from that original pilot and from each other.

It was only with the arrival of the twenty-first century and the revival of Doctor Who under Russell T. Davies that genuine spin-off series from the main show actually came about. Let us count them; we had the full-scale dra-

mas - Torchwood and The Sarah Jane Adventures of course, and later under Steven Moffat we had (briefly) Class. Let us not forget too (or perhaps we might allow ourselves to), the Australian K9 series, nothing to do with the BBC, but sanctioned by the tin dog's co-creator Bob Baker. Then there were the documentary and making-of series - Doctor Who Confidential; Torchwood Declassified; Totally Doctor Who and the web series, The Doctor Who Fan Show.

The first Russell T. Davies era was a time when Doctor Who seemed to be taking over the BBC. There were weeks when it seemed impossible to turn on BBC1, BBC2 or BBC3, without finding some Doctor Who related content. Under Russell's successor, Steven Moffat, the drive to find spin-offs seemed to calm down a little, with the showrunner overseeing two phenomenally successful shows in Who and Sherlock (thank goodness that the wilder fan demands for a crossover were resisted).

This period saw a huge expanse in the area of the audio spin-off, with Big Finish producing many such series. Let us not forget that the first Big Finish releases were spin-offs from the Virgin New Adventures Doctor Who books, in the form of The Adventures of Professor Bernice Summerfield. The first decade of the 21st century saw series based on the Daleks, Cybermen, Iris Wildthyme (a character from the BBC Who novels), Sarah Jane



Smith (before the BBC series), Davros and the adventures of Leela, Romana and K9 on Gallifrey. The last ten years has seen the arrival of spin-off series centred around a proliferation of characters and situations from both classic and modern Doctor Who, (in no particular order, other than that which I can see them on my shelves): UNIT (modern version); Torchwood (in various forms); the Master (several incarnations); Jago and Litefoot; Counter Measures (based on characters from the story Remembrance of the Daleks); Charlotte Pollard (a popular Big Finish companion of the 8th Doctor); Jenny the Doctor's Daughter; Lady Christina; Winston Churchill; River Song; Rose Tyler; Donna Noble; Rory Williams; Class; New Earth; the Robots (of Death); and the Paternoster Gang. Let us be clear, some of these have proven more successful than others, with the less interesting ones failing to go beyond a couple of series; however, some have been very successful indeed. It was no surprise that Torchwood quickly found its audience;

and while it only took thirty-four years to happen, Jago and Litefoot has of course proven very popular; then there is The Paternoster Gang. The sad death of Trevor Baxter and the consequent ending of Jago and Litefoot has left a definite gap in the Big Finish schedules for adventures in Victorian England with a science-fiction twist; and the exploits of Silurian consulting detective Madame Vastra (Neve McIntosh), her wife/maid Jenny Flint (Catrin Stewart) and their Sontaran butler Strax (Dan Starkey) have become the perfect fit for that gap.

Of course, the ending on television of both Torchwood (with a whimper) and The Sarah Jane Adventures (in tragic circumstances) in 2011, did not end the desire to find another spin-off. If hardly anyone was hankering for a series set around Coal Hill School on that night that the announcement of Class was handled so badly in 2016, then, I venture to suggest, the announcement of series featuring River Song, Rose Tyler or The Paternoster



Gang might have been received much more warmly.

Although there is no evidence to suggest that it was ever intended as such, the de facto pilot for a potential Paternoster Gang series had already been broadcast three years earlier, The Crimson Horror, the eleventh episode of Doctor Who Series 7. And what a success it was, both as a pilot and as a stand-alone episode of that series. It is a strong episode for both the regular leads, the Doctor and his companion; it has two terrific guest star performances; and it puts the potential spin-off characters front and centre of the action, showing us what their solo series might look but tying this adventure solidly into the main series.

Let us remind ourselves of the plot. The episode begins with the Paternoster Gang being asked to investigate a mysterious disappearance linked to the Sweetville factory in Yorkshire. Here they discover a series of bizarre deaths, with bodies left a bright crimson colour. Jenny is sent incognito into the factory, where she discovers the Doctor, still alive, but in a catatonic state and the same crimson colour as the dead bodies, being kept as a pet 'monster' by Ada, the blind daughter of the factory owner, Winifred Gillyflower. With the Doctor revived he and the Paternoster Gang find and rescue Clara and confront and defeat Mrs Gillyflower and her alien/prehistoric slug parasite partner, Mr Sweet, before they can bring to fruition their plan to destroy humanity.

Of course, the whole thing is elevated considerably by the presence in the

cast of two fabulous guest stars, mother and daughter Dame Diana Rigg and Rachel Stirling as Winifred and Ada Gillyflower – and they are both just wonderful. Rigg drips with venom as the evil older Gillyflower: "Do you know what these are? The wrong hands." We begin perhaps by wondering if she too is a victim, controlled by the parasitic Mr Sweet, but by the time that she meets her deserved end, we can be in no doubt that this is a thoroughly amoral psychopath, who is prepared to sacrifice anyone and everyone to her own ambition. It is a very powerful performance, matched every step of the way by Stirling as the tragic Ada, desperate to win her mother's affections, unaware that she herself is a victim of the older woman, having lost her sight in one of Winifred's experiments. The performances of these two alone would have saved a weak script – but this is a very fine one, perhaps Mark Gatiss's strongest for Doctor Who.

I must own to having a problem with Matt Smith's Eleventh Doctor. Less than a month after The Crimson Horror aired, it was announced that Smith would be leaving the role at the end of that anniversary year – and I must admit, at the time, I was not sad to see him go. I think for me, the problem is that he 'got' the Doctor so very quickly, certainly by the end of his first episode, The Eleventh Hour in 2010, that it seemed that he had already covered all the ground that he was going to. We had seen the confident and the insecure; the silly and the serious; the light and the dark; the playful and the brooding; the child and the ancient. And we had seen how Smith could go through all of these phases, almost without drawing breath, sometimes all

within the same speech, never mind the same scene. In many ways he had shown himself to be the perfect Doctor, in what was very nearly the perfect introductory story. However, as his episodes followed, watching them in sequence, it felt that we had seen what Smith was doing many times before – last week, and the week before, and the week before that. Smith is a simply wonderful Doctor, when watched a single episode at a time, rather than in a series. I have come to appreciate his performance much more in the years since, than I did at the time.

In *The Crimson Horror*, he is thoroughly excellent – so long as you have not been watching the previous episodes of the series, immediately beforehand. I remember at the time, loving the first sixteen minutes of this story, which is effectively a Paternoster Gang adventure, and then my heart sank as the Doctor emerged to take over the story, doing all the same, fast talking, wavy arms, twirling business that he had done in every one of his episodes.



Hindsight has made me judge him much less harshly.

Later in her run on the series, a strong body of fan opinion came to regard Jenna Coleman's Clara Oswald as having stayed around too long. Here however, she is – at least in this incarnation of the character – in only her sixth story; still that mysterious impossible girl, who was quickly establishing herself as one of the most popular companions of modern Doctor Who. Clara's appearance in this episode is very much restricted – we first see her in flashback after seventeen minutes and she is not rescued to join the Doctor and the Paternoster Gang in the adventure proper until twenty-four minutes in – almost half-way through the episode.

Mention of the flashback sequence brings us to the interesting and rather odd structure of this episode. In other circumstances, another writer, working with another showrunner might have made a two-part story out of *The Crimson Horror*. Part One would have dealt

with the initial investigations of Sweetville by the Doctor and Clara and would have ended on the cliff-hanger of the pair being subjected to the treatment; leaving the story as we see it today, to be told mostly in Part Two. What we get, however, is all the material that might have been Part One, condensed to a lengthy flashback sequence, complete with sepia tinted pictures, as the Doctor recounts his and Clara's adventure to Jenny. It really works rather well, keeping the story moving at a cracking pace.

The story as produced breaks down neatly into four parts: the first sixteen minutes is a solo Paternoster Gang adventure; then we get an adventure for the Doctor with Jenny Flint as his companion – and isn't she magnificent; all leather catsuit and karate, a wonderful combination of Audrey Hepburn and Emma Peel (I wonder what Diana Rigg thought of her performance). Even setting aside the rest of the Gang, a series with Jenny as the Doctor's companion would be something to behold. Then we have that flashback sequence; and finally, an adventure starring the Doctor and Clara aided by the Paternoster Gang, as the five friends unite to defeat Mrs Gillyflower. It is four varieties of story in one and is neat, inventive, and fast paced.

With hindsight, we know that we did not get that spin-off series for the Paternoster Gang – or at least we have not yet. But *The Crimson Horror* gives us a good idea of what such a series might have looked like. We would have had the strong, interesting, and varied characters that such a series would have needed, and we would most certainly have had a great setting, that the BBC

has consistently shown itself able to recreate to perfection. It has often been noted how well Doctor Who works in a Victorian setting – the recent release of the newly animated version of *The Evil of the Daleks* demonstrates as much; but interest in the period and in shows set there, goes way beyond that. The Sherlock Holmes stories in their many and varied forms are enduringly popular and nineteenth century-set science fiction or particularly detective stories have been a staple of British TV since the 1950s. Non-genre writers regularly look back to the period too – witness the recent popularity of shows such as *Queen Victoria*, starring a post-Who Jenna Coleman. What all these shows have in common is the unique atmosphere of that peculiar period of invention and innovation, in which Britain, and London in particular, opened up to the world – when the cosmopolitan society that we know today began to emerge. I have no doubt that *The Adventures of the Paternoster Gang*, even today, eight years later, would find a dedicated audience. Perhaps it is not too late. *The Crimson Horror* shows us it could work. Surely, it is exactly what Russell T. Davies is looking for, in his search for spin-off shows.

So, there we have it, *The Crimson Horror*; a great Doctor Who story with a unique structure, featuring two fantastic guest performances; which is also a pilot episode for a spin-off series that we've yet to see. It really is something rather lovely.



# NIGHTMARE IN SILVER

Review by Owen Taylor

Cybermen! Those emotionless relentless menaces. From a lone head under the sands of Arizona to their rebirth in another universe the Cybermen have deleted and upgraded constantly. This time however Neil Gaiman presents a post Cyberman future, a thousand years past their defeat by humanity.

So what is there to fear for a day trip out with Clara's two wards Archie and Angie? What makes the Doctor turn from a child high on E-numbers to a more serious bug hunter. Having arrived to cash in on his golden ticket for the spacey zoomer and unlimited ice cream on Hedgewick's fun world we soon discover an abandoned amusement park whose only inhabitants are Webley, the owner of World of Wonders museum, awaiting Dan his removal

man, and an Imperial punishment platoon. The world has been declared off limits due to people going missing, and the park is long closed.

Having convinced the Captain of the platoon he is an Imperial consoul, with no knowledge of the missing Emperor, we discover Webley's wonders include three deactivated Cybermen in their familiar new era armour. Manipulating the chess playing cyberman is Porridge, Webley's diminutive sidekick who is able to work the space zoomer for the kids. Having had their zero gravity ride it is time for them to leave, but the Doctor has spotted some metallic bugs that need investigating.

So it is time to tuck the kids up to sleep among the wax works while the Doctor,



Clara and Porridge investigate. As they do Clara asks about how the Cyber Wars were won and here we discover the real price of defeating the Cyber race as Porridge points to the big black hole in the stars; "the Tiberian Spiral Galaxy. A million star systems, a hundred million worlds, a billion trillion people. It's not there anymore. No more Tiberian galaxy. No more Cybermen."

This is the price to pay for stopping the enemy that uses your fallen as spare parts. This harsh reality of how all consuming the Cybermen are is a stark contrast to Craig's love for his Son stopping them in the previous season. And there is more to come.

As Angie ignores the Doctor's warning to not wander off and goes to the army barracks because she is bored, Webley is grabbed by a suddenly animated chess cyberman and swarmed by the metallic bugs. Then as Angie is quizzed by Captain Ferrin about Porridge, whose short stature seems important, Archie is grabbed by a sleek silver hand back at the World of Wonders. This is all building to a big reveal, as Clara tries to retrieve Angie, Captain Ferrin sees Porridge and they are confronted by a Cyberman. No more clunky form with giant C on its chest. Here we have a sleek armoured silver model with blue energy shining from its chest unit [stark industries would be proud]. It is also fast. No more clunky heavy movement here it moves faster than the eye can track when it chooses, grabbing Angie before the assembled troops can coordinate an attack.

So what do you do when you encounter a lone Cyberman? Apparently you blow up the planet... That is how serious a

menace they have become in the future, even after a thousand years of being thought extinct.

Clara is put in charge of stopping the bomb while the Doctor goes to rescue the kids, and the only place for them to make their stand safely is Natty Longshoes comical castle. Moat, drawbridge and battlements, but comical. While they head there and begin to formulate a plan the Doctor finds his bugs - no more cybermats as even they have been upgraded to cybermites! Teleporting to the Cyberbase buried deep under the planet, here a partially cyber converted Webley explains that towards the end of the war the Cyber planners built a Valkyrie to store and repair cyber units, hence the disappearances at the funworld. Now the Cyberiad [a name that will reappear seasons later] is looking for children to become new cyber-planners due to their limitless imagination. However the mites have been scanning the Doctor's brain and have seen a new possibility. As he smugly says he cannot be converted as he is not human another upgrade is revealed - that they no longer just use human parts but any organic matter. The mites do their work and the Doctor is infected by the Cyberiad as the battle for his brain begins.

Thus begins a tour de force showcase of 11s range from face pulling and bow tie twiddling to pirouetting back and forth of Doctor/Mr Clever the Cyberplanner. This surprisingly emotional interface drips with malice as it attempts to take control, discovering the obsession with Clara and agreeing to play chess for control of the Doctor's brain and for Angie and Archie (though perhaps someone should have warned

it about what happened to the Doctor's last chess opponent).

Back at our comical castle we discover that Porridge has run away from a duty that the captain refuses too. As a watching cybermite spies on them it alerts the stalking Cyberman to the attempt to arm the bomb and kills the Captain before she can complete the command. So this weapon of last resort now lies in Clara's control via a remote detonator. As they go on the offensive to take down this lone Cyberman we discover yet more upgrades. Not only can it move at speed but it can also detach limbs to take down opponents such as its hand which can scuttle independently, and its head, to be used as a decoy. Only a single Cyberiad class blaster can vaporise it while shock gloves can knock out the part cyberised soldiers it had incapacitated previously.

Meanwhile after the Cyber-planner notes the Doctor has removed himself from their records and history but can be reconstructed by the gap left, the Doctor notes the Cyberiad is linked to

millions of signals within the Valkyrie. He also points out that while being far removed from their origins the cyber operating system still uses the code that was susceptible to cleaning fluid and gold, allowing him to slap his golden ticket to his face, regain temporary control and move himself the kids and Welby to the castle for the final confrontation.

On arrival and having incurred Clara's wrath about the kids' situation the Doctor has himself tied up to continue his game. As he loses more control of his mind, the Cyberplanner is able to trick Clara into revealing their defences and drops in that the Doctor calls her his impossible girl. As he attempts to trick her into thinking the Doctor has romantic feelings, the planner is able to destroy the bomb remote leaving the 3 million reactivated Cybermen able to attack and then build a spacecraft to begin a new Cyber invasion.

The last ditch attempt by the Doctor to stall the attack makes the planner draw on the cyber units processing power,

stopping the assault and allowing him to use a shock glove on himself to remove the implants, having freed Angie and Archie. However as the Cybermen come back online it seems nothing can save them without the Emperor's override for the bomb, until Angie points out that Porridge is in fact the Emperor having recognised him from the imperial coin and waxwork where he is just depicted taller. As Porridge confirms he is indeed Emperor Ludens Nimrod Kendrick, called Longstaff, the 41st. Defender of Humanity, Imperator of known space, the arming sequence begins and alerts the Imperial flag ship which is able to warp in and teleport them and the TARDIS aboard before the planet implodes destroying the Cybermen.

Then having declined to become Empress, Clara is able to get the kids safely home while the Imperial Flagship takes Porridge back home to resume his duties confirming no Cybertec remains. Yet, as it warps away, a single signal begins to flash—upgrades will continue! This episode has everything that makes

a great episode of Doctor Who. A mixture of comedy and threat amongst a setting that should be seen as safe. We get to see a full range of the Doctor's character from carefree and childlike to scientist and seriousness that hides a dark side beneath his comical exterior. What really makes this episode stand out though is how Neil Gaiman explores and updates a classic villain from relentless yet easily defeatable monsters of old to a threat that demands the most drastic of measures. It also lays groundwork for ideas that will be explored seasons later such as the Cyberiad and classic but updated look, even if - for now - they cannot fly.

You can no longer rely on cleaning products, gold or even love. Now this Nightmare in Silver will swallow whole galaxies - you will be upgraded, please wait...





# THE NAME OF THE DOCTOR

Review by Ian Bresman

So here we go – Series Seven finale, the start of a trilogy that will climax in the regeneration of the Eleventh Doctor and nudging on the Fiftieth Anniversary. There is a lot riding on The Name of the Doctor, so you start to wonder what showrunner, Steven Moffat will throw at us. Well, almost the kitchen sink to be honest. There are mini episodes (available through the Red Button), returning foes and friends, Gallifrey, glimpses of all previous incarnations of the Doctor and most of this happening in the first ten minutes! It is either going to be one hell of a ride or a confusing mess that we will take years of unpicking before we proclaim it to be a masterpiece.

Let's start with those mini-episodes. She Said, He Said is a lovely three-minute prelude to The Name of the Doctor in which Clara and the Doctor ponder on who each other is whilst strolling individually around the TARDIS. Each of them ominously concludes that they find out on the day they went to Trenzalore. It is a great tease and worth seeking out on YouTube. Equally good, but somewhat more disturbing, is Clarence and the Whisper Men. In this two-minute clip, we find ourselves in the cell of Victorian murderer, Clarence DeMarco (Michael Jenn) as he is being tortured by the Whisper Men. Although he thinks they are a figment of his imagination, they are in fact impregnating his mind with a set of time-space coordinates which he will pass on to Madame Vastra.

And if that is not enough additional material to whet your appetite, Strax pops up for a trio of series finale related transmissions back to his home world. In each of the Strax Field Reports – The Name of the Doctor, A Glorious Day and The Doctor's Greatest Secret – the over excitable Sontaran updates Sontar with the oncoming battle and also reports on the first sighting of the War Doctor. All lovely stuff, very tongue in cheek and enjoyable for it.

So what of the episode itself? Well, we open in Victorian England with our favourite Silurian Detective, Madame Vastra (Neve McIntosh) visiting Clarence DeMarco in prison. DeMarco claims to have important information which he is willing to share in trade for his life. Returning home to Jenny (Catrin Stewart), she immediately sets up a bizarre conference call, bringing her attendees across the mists of time and space to a sort of virtual séance/Madhatter's tea party. They are inevitably joined by their Sontaran chum Strax (who has been fighting peasants in Glasgow for some inexplicable reason), followed by Clara Oswald and then Professor River Song.

It is always good to have River back and, although her role is smaller in this tale, it is almost better for it. Alex Kingston delivers her lines with such relish, always keeping the character the right side of arch camp and avoiding self-parody. As the rest of the virtual delegates sip tea from bone China cups,

River suddenly produces a glass of champagne. "How did you do that?" Jenny asks in wonderment. "Disgracefully" comes River's response.

Vastra updates everyone on her discussion with DeMarco – it seems the Doctor has a secret which he should take to his grave, but that it has been discovered. River recognises the coordinates that DeMarco had revealed and tells them that the Doctor must never go there. At this point, the Whisper Men turn up and, in the mayhem, Clara manages to get away. When Clara reunites with the Doctor, she finds out that the place he must never go is Trenzalore, which is his last resting place. However, the bad news is, they must go there if they are to save Vastra, Jenny and Strax who by now have been abducted by the Whisper Men on behalf of The Great Intelligence.

For the second half of the story, we find ourselves on Trenzalore. The Doctor's tomb is an enormous TARDIS and

The Great Intelligence wants inside which requires the Doctor to reveal his name, and he is not about to give that up. Unless of course, his friends are threatened. In the end, River appears again and utters the Doctor's name, allowing The Great Intelligence, in the guise of Doctor Simeon, access to the Doctor's time stream and the opportunity to wipe out all the good he has done over his many lives.

It takes a while to get to the point of this story, but it is both fun and frightening getting there. The returning characters help as, in themselves, they are a glorious treat for fans of the eleventh Doctor's tenure. The Paternoster Gang are a lovely, mismatched trio. It is no surprise that their adventures continue on audio with Big Finish. Elsewhere, an excellent Richard E. Grant's ghoulish Doctor Simeon is resurrected as an embodiment of the Great Intelligence and River is just icing on the cake.

The Sontarans were one of the more evergreen of the Seventies-



created races. It does seem though that, since they first cropped up in 1973's *The Time Warrior*, their menace has diminished. They are certainly more frightening when they are on their own. Think of Linx and then Field Marshall Styre in *The Sontaran Experiment* – both scary, convincing warlike aliens. When they crop up again in *The Invasion of Time* and *The Two Doctors* they do not seem such formidable opponents, even though they arrive in number. Which is probably why Strax works – he is on his own and definitely breaks the mould, so a truly individual Sontaran! It could also be that he is just so ridiculous, very well-scripted and delightfully played by Dan Starkey.

Clara Oswald is in full 'impossible girl' mode for this outing. Jenna-Louise Coleman is appealing enough as an assistant, but the character is often weighed down with a back story which seems too ridiculous and convoluted to fully embrace. In *The Name of the Doctor*, Moffat does much to unravel who Clara is, where she came from and the impact she had and still has on all the Doctor's lives. It is an inevitability that the Doctor's companions throughout time have impacted his actions so is it too much of a stretch that one person, one impossible girl, has impacted all of them? Well, you would probably think so until the conclusion of events on *Trenzalore*. It certainly ties up some of the loose ends regarding the girl who arrived in this world on a leaf!!

Of course, there is no shying away from the opportunity to put Clara in-situ with Doctor's one through to ten either, although some of the glimpses are so fleeting it would take several

viewings to find them all. Some of elements of this sequence are more successful than others. Jon Pertwee roaring past in *Bessie*, using a clip from *The Five Doctors*, works very well and the flash of Colin Baker's sixth Doctor costume striding past an archway is lovely. Is that a clip or an extra?! Does not matter, it works. Peter Davison hanging around in *Arc of Infinity* did not look quite right in the eighties and is equally troublesome here, whilst Clara looking down as Sylvester McCoy hangs around in *Dragonfire* does not work as well as some of the others. The great thing is, you see them pre-opening credits and then again when Clara jumps into the Doctor's time stream near the end of the episode. Spot the Doctor – best game of *Series Seven*!

Matt Smith is again on great form as the Doctor, a sheer joy to watch his performance. He has a lovely scene with Jenna when Clara is relating the details of her conversation with River and he realises that a trip to his grave is on the cards. Clara is busying herself pouring tea, quite perky until she sees the Doctor's face crumpled with pain and tears. Very moving. And the heartstrings are tugged again later when he says his farewells to the already dead River Song. The kiss feels like a moment that we have all been waiting for, but it is very well done.

*The Name of the Doctor* has one more treat in store for us at the very end. John Hurt is *The Doctor*. The scene is set for a big anniversary special! Bring it on.

## THE DAY OF THE DOCTOR

Review by J. Jeremy Bentham

*Doctor Who* has navigated some truly impressive milestones through the years, but few challenge the sheer enormity of *The Day of the Doctor's* accomplishments in 2013. At its heart was the achievement of 50 years as a broadcasting institution, a true rarity in the predominantly ephemeral world of television. Okay, not 50 continuous years on screen, nevertheless the show's presence in the nation's psyche had remained largely undiminished, even during its period in TV wilderness, thanks to reruns, on-going commercial-ly available products and – let's not sell ourselves short – the loyalty and fervour of its fanbase here and abroad.

That loyalty had been rewarded many times over since *Doctor Who* returned to the airwaves in 2005. Decently funded, well-produced and augmented by several notable spin-off series and supporting shows, the programme had become, by 2013, one of the biggest things on television and across the wider spectrum of media interest as well.

And it was a proud time to be a *Doctor Who* fan. Newspaper attention was continuous, merchandise was everywhere, award nominations were frequent, and so too were the wins. There were stage shows, music concerts, exhibitions, cinema campaigns and, as the





50th anniversary year dawned, announcements of a massive BBC-hosted convention that would take place in the cavernous halls of the Excel Centre in London over the anniversary weekend itself.

You had to be there, and if you couldn't there was saturation coverage across many TV and radio channels to remind you of just how big these celebrations were and how monumental would be transmission of the anniversary episode on Saturday 23rd November 2013; exactly half a century since viewers in the UK got their first opportunity to sit down and watch episode one of this most unusual science-fiction drama.

The rewards for those who did sit down and view *The Day of the Doctor* were lavish. The biggest worldwide simulcast of a television drama, the number one watched programme of the week in the UK and almost universal praise from critics and reviewers, hailing it as, "...a joyous marker in the series, uniting two of the most beloved Time Lords and setting them together on a rousing adventure full of crowd-pleasing nods and winks".

But this is all common knowledge, certainly to anyone who was a fan of the programme around 2013. The purposes of the above paragraphs are mainly to reinforce how broad the landscape of Doctor Who was that year, and how epic in scope Steven Moffat's double-plot script had been. Bottom line: it was a story that saw the show reach the summit of a popularity peak unknown since the early 1980s.

Of course, there were some academic brainteasers. Could *The Day of the*

Doctor have hit so many top spots without all the attendant hype, promotion and publicity? Did casual viewers really 'get' the separate but connected plot strands taking place in different time points? And were there just too many knowing winks to the past?

Either way, such points remain academic simply because verdicts have concluded *The Day of the Doctor* was a joyous and appreciated exposition of Doctor Who at its best: celebrating the past, resting a few long-term story arcs such as the Time War during its present, and opening up further opportunities for the future. The sight of 'ordinary Gallifreyans' (the Shobogans?), a depiction of the Doctor's childhood home, references to *The Ancients of Gallifrey*, even the surprise revelation of a Doctor outside the linear list of those familiar in the title role since 1963 – all grist to the mill of new ideas essential to keeping the show fresh and thriving in the 21st century.

A few commentators have suggested *The Day of the Doctor* was/is best watched by those with long-term memories of the series, as though Winston Churchill's quote, "the farther back you can look the farther forward you are likely to see" applies when trying to digest fully all the knowing references punctuated throughout this special. There's some truth in this. Certainly, you reap a much greater benefit if you have the fan capability of full immersion into a topic, soaking up all available information, detail and trivia about it with inexhaustible gusto. Luckily, though, age is not a prerequisite for this quality. All bar 97 Doctor Who episodes exist visually and are reasonably accessible, plus with the ones that are absent there

are now high quality audio recordings that can be pored over, as well as an ever-greater availability of scripts and transcript material.

That said, it is possible too that a slower-paced process of immersion by, say, watching episodes in the order as they were originally broadcast, can inspire one extra degree of appreciation for *The Day of the Doctor*; a realisation that we are fundamentally watching the same Doctor Who as was first rolled out with *An Unearthly Child*. There remains still that sense of continuing aboard the same voyage of discovery which began when the world was far more black and white.

Technically that first episode cannot compete with the movie-quality visuals of Moffat's epic, but there are some artistic similarities. Camera movement in the 2013 episode had to be fairly continuous in order to make the 3D technique work effectively. But in 1963 Waris Hussein likewise tried hard to keep his cameras moving as an artistic means of keeping viewers 'accompanying' Ian and Barbara as they strove to unravel the mysteries of a darkened junkyard.

Most comparable, studio-bound dramas of the early 1960s, especially children's programmes, were far more clunky with their use of static shots, relying on actors' performances to carry the weight of a story. Right from the start most directors on Doctor Who injected pace into their studio recordings, and on those few occasions where they didn't, for example, parts of *The Sensorites*, it showed.

Greater still are the narrative funda-

mentals linking Coburn and Moffat's stories. Bigger on the inside than on the outside, the TARDIS, stuck in the shape of a London police box, remains one of the show's biggest ideas and a continuing icon of the series. Just as it dazzled in 1963 with that first journey back through time to the stone age, so in *The Day of the Doctor*, we are equally dazzled by an apparent multiplicity of this astonishing craft flying to save a beleaguered planet and consign fleets of Dalek saucers to oblivion. Truly it remains as much a star of the series as its alien pilot, still "bringing hope wherever it goes".

A star, of course, needs something or someone to shine on, and was there ever a finer marriage made than between the TARDIS and its permanent resident? Even after 50 years the jury is still out as to how sentient this miraculous craft is, but regardless of a verdict it still transports its Doctors to wherever they are needed, be that to save the whole universe from annihilation or to save one small tribe of cavemen from freezing to death in 100,000 BC.

Sleeve notes for the 2006 DVD release of *An Unearthly Child* observe this about William Hartnell's performance, "...Hartnell is the Doctor, and the strength, power and authority he bestows on the character is electrifying". How easily can such a description equally apply to the three principal Doctors appearing in the anniversary special? Doctor number 11, "the man who regrets" is a whirlwind of constant motion, beguiling onlookers with a manic, almost awkward gait while his mind works feverishly to resolve solutions. Doctor 10, "the man who forgets" is no less brilliant but uses his



geek-ish energy in a more self-promoting way, projecting himself as a recognisable hero, complete with a hero's long coat ... and sandals.

And what of the War Doctor? Real life has so prematurely robbed us of one of the finest actors ever to assume the Doctor's mantle. A world-weary warrior, so tired of conflict yet with eyes implacably focussed on seeing through a terrible ending to a terrible carnage, regardless of its apocalyptic cost. John Hurt was every inch a Doctor, and the strength, power and authority he bestowed on the character was similarly electrifying.

Both *The Day of the Doctor* and *An Unearthly Child* are slightly unusual in the history of *Doctor Who* insofar as they are both stories where the Doctor is the hub of the two plotlines. He is acting for himself rather than arriving, discovering, distilling and enacting solutions to largely benefit others. Ian and Barbara are kidnapped so the Doctor can maintain his privacy and anonymity. The War Doctor walks alone on his path to finish an otherwise interminable war despite knowing, as the audience knows, the children of Gallifrey will be incinerated just as horrifically as those in that visually similar playground of children seen in *Terminator 2* when the sudden flash of a nuclear explosion brings an end to their play. "The day they all burned".

Yet, for both Doctors there was ultimately a redemption that steered them towards more enlightened personal futures than their immediate courses of action presaged. For the first Doctor it was lengthy exposure to human beings as travelling companions that softened

his steely exterior and brought an eventual twinkle to his eyes. For the War Doctor it was heeding Clara's simple plea for him to choose life above any bleaker alternative, just as perhaps he had done before. Was it really a coincidence that behind his childhood home audiences could glimpse a mountain? Perhaps the mountain where the Doctor's hermit mentor first showed a younger Gallifreyan how all things, no matter how small and insignificant, glow with life and colour, "...like a perfectly cut jewel"?

Which brings us to the Curator, whose role and identity were left deliberately obscure by the end of the anniversary special? Could he really have been Doctor 4 all along? Or maybe a projection of some future Time Lord just as K'anpo or the Watcher had been? Who knows? Either way the surprise appearance of Queen Elizabeth I's appointed Curator of the Under Gallery and protector of her realm was unequivocally a prickling behind the eyes moment for fans of the series old and new.

50 years on it was indeed good to know that the Doctor's journeys continued to be in good hands, and while Doctor 11's body might soon be wearing a bit thin the only wisdom to his successor from Clara (sort of...) was, "Waste no more time arguing what a good man should be. Be one"

Doctor 12, take note.



# THE TIME OF THE DOCTOR

Review by Alan Stevens

Production-wise, 'The Time of the Doctor' looks nice and Orla Brady gives a strong performance as Tasha Lem, the Mother Superior of the Papal Mainframe. Indeed, I was so enamoured, I named my cat after her.



I'm also glad the Daleks make an appearance because I'm of the firm belief that anything, from 'Pride and Prejudice' to 'Citizen Kane', can be improved by the addition of the mutated denizens of Skaro.

Nevertheless, even Daleks can't save this Christmas turkey. Which brings me to my first gripe. What is the thematic link between Clara Oswald's family Christmas dinner and the town of Christmas on the planet Trenzalore, aside from both turning up in a story broadcast on Christmas Day?

Answer: Nothing. No more than a coincidence. Yet surely the juxtaposition is crying out for a connection to be made?

The same question can be posed for the "dead and decapitated" Christmas turkey, the severed Cyberman head (which the Doctor is using as a surrogate com-

panion/data storage unit), and the broken-off Dalek eyestalk he offers as "proof" of his "courage and comradeship."



Are these merely random elements, thrown into the mix for humorous effect?

It would seem so.

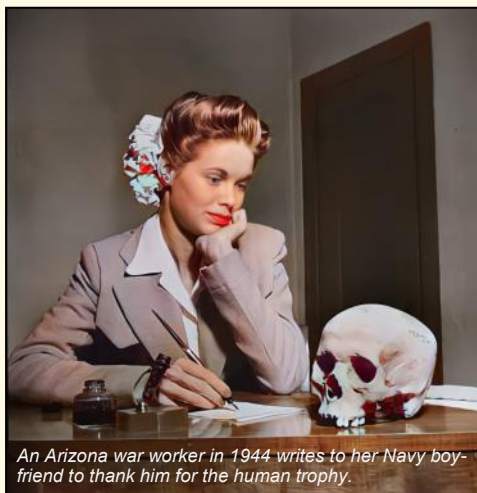
Observing Clara's undercooked turkey the Doctor opines, "I think a decent vet would give it an even chance." Later, when trying to roast the bird by exposing it to the time winds he states, "It'll either come up a treat or just possibly lay some eggs."

Now, me being an old school Doctor Who fan, my mind was instantly taken back to 1979 and the Tom Baker adventure 'City of Death', even if, on that occasion the Doctor reversed Professor Kerensky's time experiment, resurrecting the dead chicken before returning it to an egg.

It occurred to me that Steven Moffat might have drawn on this previous tale when writing his own poultry endeav-

our. But, if so, that's as far as the connection goes. Any reference to the Sixth Doctor taking up vegetarianism during Season 22 has itself been lost to the winds of time.

Similarly, any attempt on the part of the viewer to elicit a deep psychological insight into the Doctor's character from his macabre desire to collect and brandish body parts of his fallen enemies, or to play naked Twister, is an exercise in futility.



He is simply a wacky, fun guy, who, when not slapping Clara on the backside, or forcing a kiss on Tasha Lem, is happy to spend his remaining life "fixing toys and fighting monsters" whilst conducting a planetary war that annihilates a number of alien battlefleets, and leaves the plains of Trenzalore peppered with grave-markers.

The seeds for the Doctor's dark side may well have been planted during the show's 2005 relaunch (before, even!) but Christopher Eccleston's thirteen-episode run as the "happy go lucky" killer who leaves devastation in his

wake has since been commodified and repackaged as a part of a template from which new Doctor Who stories are drafted.

And this has apparently led to the reductive showrunner idea that if you have precedent, then you don't need to demonstrate cause and effect.

Which is very apparent if we examine the story's various call-backs to 'Bad Wolf/Parting of the Ways'.

Here's a demonstration.

During the former, the Ninth Doctor tricks Rose into returning home as a means to save her from the coming bloodshed.



In 'The Time of the Doctor', the Eleventh repeats the same deception twice more, this time to spare Clara from the trials and tribulations of the ongoing conflict on Trenzalore.

Both narratives conclude with the companion returning to save his life.

Shouldn't an entity as clever as the Doctor have spotted these recursive patterns by now?

In fact, he has only to cast his mind

back one story to find another example where Clara saves three versions of himself from destroying Gallifrey and burning to death two point four seven billion children.



What's more, Donna raised this during the 2006 adventure 'The Runaway Bride', advising the Doctor to find a new companion double-quick "because sometimes, I think you need someone to stop you", and then, even more explicitly in the 2008 episode 'Journey's End', telling him he is "lacking that little bit of human. That gut instinct that comes hand in hand with planet Earth. I can think of ideas you ... couldn't dream of in a million years."

In short, the role of the companion in the twenty-first-century series is to aid and inspire the Doctor, whilst also acting as their moral arbiter.

But this is a lesson the Doctor repeatedly fails to learn, as the rigid format of the programme refuses to allow him that space.

Instead, we are given an unceasing repetition of plot points and character ticks, where events take place, not through any logical progression, but rather, seek justification from the fact they have happened before.

Of course, being part of the writing

team that brought Doctor Who back, might account for why Moffat seems blind to this shortfall. But you'd think he'd have become cognisant as he scrabbled to find plausible reasons for Eleven's refusal to leave Trenzalore.



The Doctor tells Clara that "it's a stand-off. They can't attack in case I unleash the Time Lords, and I can't run away, because they'll burn this planet to stop the Time Lords." Reasonable enough, until you remember what Moffat conveniently forgets: that the crack in the wall of the clock tower is "a split in the skin of reality" — which means, as the Matt Smith Doctor elaborated in his debut adventure, "if you knocked this wall down, the crack would stay put because the crack isn't in the wall ... [it's] everywhere."

Further, the explanation ignores the fact that the trigger for the conflict is the Doctor himself: the Time Lords will only re-enter our universe via the crack in space/time if the Doctor states his real name to indicate that "it's safe to come through."

And his protest that they "will come in peace", is countered by Tasha Lem and exposed as facile. "It doesn't matter," she tells him. "They will be met with a war that will never end. The Time War will begin anew. You know that, Doctor."

If the Doctor's strategy really is to wage war until those who wish to prevent Gallifrey's return are dead, then what was all that in 'The Name of the Doctor', where during a previous visit to Trenzalore the Doctor discovered his own grave!

"This is where I end up. This face, this version of me. We saw this planet in the future, remember?"

"Change the future", Clara asserts.

"I can't", the Doctor replies. "You think I'm just going to fly away, abandon everyone?"

Here, the Doctor is admitting to Clara he does have a choice, that his destiny is not fixed, and yet a few scenes later he's telling Tasha, "You can't change history if you're part of it."

Ultimately then, we must conclude that the Doctor remains on Trenzalore, not because he is trapped by fate, but rather through Moffat's decision to re-use plot details from 'The Parting of the Ways' whilst failing to adequately rationalise them.

As a result, 'The Time of the Doctor' can be seen as an analogy for the entire Matt Smith era, in that as the tale of Trenzalore progresses, it makes less and less sense: whether in regard to the conveniently porous forcefield Tasha Lem throws around the planet, or why it takes the Daleks three hundred years to even think about making a direct attack on the Papal Mainframe.

The story abounds with non-sequiturs:

Why does Clara walk out of the TAR-

DIS carrying a roast turkey if she thinks she's still on Trenzalore? Had she forgotten that this was meant to be her family's Christmas dinner?

You could argue that she's made a tacit decision to die with the Doctor, but this contradicts the companion's repeated plot function within the series, which is to look for alternatives and not give into acceptance or despair.

Another head-scratcher is the Doctor's statement that the Silence are "confessional priests. Very popular. Genetically engineered so you forget everything you told them."

How can they be "popular" if you can't remember them?

And evidently, the psychological value of confession is to unburden oneself — something which is rendered void if you've forgotten you'd done it.

Then we have this exchange:

TASHA LEM: The Kovarian Chapter broke away. They travelled back along your timeline and tried to prevent you ever reaching Trenzalore.

DOCTOR WHO: So that's who blew up my TARDIS. I thought I'd left the bath running.

TASHA: They blew up your time capsule, created the very cracks in the universe through which the Time Lords are now calling.

So let's get this straight, Tasha. You're telling us that without the cracks there would have been no Siege of Trenzalore and no split with the Kovarian



Chapter. The same cracks that first appeared in the universe after the Kovarian Chapter broke away and blew up the Doctor's TARDIS?

If the cracks were always there, as part of a predestination paradox, can you please explain why the Doctor didn't encounter these space/time ruptures prior to 'The Eleventh Hour'?

And what about our discovery in 'Victory of the Daleks', that the events of 'The Stolen Earth/Journey's End' were erased by a crack. How come there existed a time when the Dalek invasion was remembered, even to the point where, according to 'The Waters of Mars', an encounter between Adelaide Brooke and a Dalek would inspire both her and her descendants to journey out amongst the stars?

All this demonstrates that cracks can only have manifested after the TARDIS exploded, and not before, which hits that "big ball of wibbly-wobbly, timey-wimey stuff" out of the park!



Finally, we have to address the possibility that the Eleventh Doctor is actually Doctor number thirteen!

To be fair, the idea that David Tennant "regenerated and kept the same face" is supported by what we are told in 'Journey's End' – that after healing

himself, the Doctor siphoned off the remaining regenerative energy "into a handy bio-matching receptacle."

Equally, the casting of John Hurt as the War Doctor only occurred because a replacement for Christopher Eccleston was needed, and, although Paul McGann was the obvious next choice, rumour has it that this was vetoed by Moffat's superiors who wanted a big star name.

Nevertheless, in retrospect, it does make you wonder why this version of the Doctor thought Dorium Moldova's prophesy of "the fall of the Eleventh" applied to him?

Even more confusingly, it appears Moffat was incapable of shifting from the idea that Smith is the Eleventh Doctor, titling his first draft script 'Twelfth Night', then failing to make the Christmas cracker epigram, "Extract from Thoughts on a Clock by Eric Ritchie junior", a match:

"And now it's time for one last bow, like all your other-selves. Eleven's hour is over now. The clock is striking twelve's."

Perhaps Moffat couldn't come up with the appropriate rhyming words...

Let's see if I can.

"And now it's time for one last bow, like all those other has-beens. Your final hour is over now. The clock is striking fourteen's."

What do you think?

Oh, suit yourselves!

## AND FINALLY.....

By Paul Burns....

*Aside from a few minutes at the end of Deep Breath, the Eleventh Doctor's journey ended quite spectacularly at the top of a clock tower on Trenzalore, but there were other 11th Doctor moments on television. To end our annual Paul Burns revisits those special bits for Comic Relief and Children in Need...*

The Children in Need events, televised in November, featured trailers for three of the Eleventh Doctor's Christmas episodes between 2010 and 2012. Matt Smith, teamed with Karen Gillan and Jenna Louise Coleman introduced the respective trailers but there were instances of in character new material and an actual 'minisode' in 2012.

In 2010, Matt and Karen appear in costume to invite two very excited brothers onto the Tardis set, and Matt demonstrates his ability to cram a whole Jammie Dodger in his mouth. Matt tinkers with the Tardis to reveal the trailer for the Christmas episode, A Christmas Carol.

In 2011 Matt appears in character as the Doctor to auction his clothes for Children in Need. First, is the jacket, made of 'infinity tweed', followed by his "ordinary shirt", his "hyper trousers" and lastly his three boots. He appears dressed in hologram clothes that can be removed using the red button. Cue a naked Doctor running for cover. Then we see the trailer for The Doctor, The Widow and The Wardrobe.

But the real treat comes in 2012. Matt tells us the Doctor has just lost Amelia Pond "The woman who will never be replaced in his hearts". Enter Jenna who tells a guilty Matt it's fine as Karen is in LA. Then we are treated to the minisode/prequel: The Great Detective.

We are in Victorian London, and the Paternoster Gang of Madam Vastra, her wife Jenny Flint and their butler, Strax the Sontaran have gathered to goad the Doctor into coming out of his self-imposed retirement. In this great Steven Moffat penned prequel, Vastra opens the Gang's gambit by telling the Doctor about a potential alien meteor shower, when this has no effect Vastra promises him a "nice tea room." Jenny takes the baton next and tells the Doctor a professor is going to split the world open with a giant drill, before she stumbles that this could be the ramblings of a drunkard. Strax, succinct as ever, announces he has declared war on the moon!

The Doctor solemnly tells them "I don't do this anymore." before he disappears. He has just lost his best friends and the Time Lord just wants to be left alone.

This will not be the only prequel shown before The Snowmen, but Vastra Investigates will be covered with the review of the episode.

Finally, in 2013 Terry Wogan and Tess Daly introduce a clip from Day of The

Doctor, complete with an end credit: 'The Doctors will return'. Terry mentions fish fingers and custard.

Comic Relief featured the Eleventh Doctor twice. In 2011 Steven Moffat produced two minisodes called Space and Time, complete with proper opening titles, starring Matt Smith, Karen Gillan and Arthur Darvill.

Matt appears in character as the Doctor, coming out of the TARDIS in the Comic Relief studio, telling Jonathan Ross and Claudia Winkleman that he has enjoyed the whole show from five hours in the future. Space and Time are broadcast later in the evening.

The Doctor is tinkering in the Tardis, with Amy asking him why he never lets her pilot the ship. Rory advises him against it, having had experience of her driving. Ho ho, women drivers, eh? But things are about to get worse. We then enter into the dubious upskirt plot line with Rory damaging the Tardis because his attention was diverted. At this point we have to remember this episode is part of Comic Relief, and not just a stand alone Doctor Who episode. The TARDIS materialises inside itself and what follows is a truly mind bending 'timey wimey' three minutes. A second Amy appears and starts flirting with herself: "True love at last." the Doctor intones, before another Doctor tells him to pull the 'wibly lever'. Once the crisis is over, the Doctor returns us to the problematic conceit of Amy's clothing and tells her to put some trousers on. Yes Amy, you nearly destroyed Time because YOU chose to wear a skirt!

In 2013, Matt is glimpsed in costume

standing in front of the TARDIS during a promo declaring "I'll decide what I'm going to do when I've got my fundraising kit."

During the televised programme, there was a sketch featuring the combination of One Born Every Minute and Call the Midwife. Miranda Hart gets as close as she is ever going to get to the TARDIS when The Eleventh Doctor appears at the request of a harassed husband, plagued by the cast of Call the Midwife. Matt chews the scenery, relishing the opportunity to play a saucy Doctor, remembering the night he spent with one of the nuns! The Doctor is there to prevent a danger greater than Weeping Angels, Cybermen and Daleks put together: the birth of Jedward!

Following this sketch, Matt appears in the Comic Relief studio as the Doctor, warning Claudia Winkleman, or "Winkle woman" as he calls her, that he "Won't be sniffed." Undaunted, Winkleman pursues him, with the Doctor waving his sonic screwdriver at her.





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