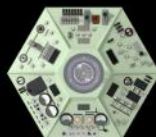


# THE CELESTIAL TOYROOM ANNUAL 2023



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## THE CELESTIAL TOYROOM ANNUAL 2023

### EDITORIAL

By Paul Winter

Welcome to the seventh Celestial Toyroom Annual. For the 2023 edition, which is of course the programme's sixtieth year the only era we were ever likely to choose was one that is ever popular with fans—that of the sixth Doctor and of Colin Baker.

However the sixth Doctor era presents us with a bit of a dilemma. The approach to the annuals has always been to cover televised stories only. This era is shorter on TV than most others (although it is by no means the shortest) which could have led to a shorter annual, or more in-depth articles than usual. However Colin Baker is very much 'the audio Doctor' and to exclude audios from the annual did not seem quite right. After all, Colin received an award from DWAS members in our own 40th anniversary poll back in 2016 as 'Favourite Doctor on Audio'. Going back even further, I was told by Jason Haigh-Ellery of Big Finish when the range first started back in 1999, that having Colin on board helped to get the audios going as everything very much 'coalesced' around him, with his involvement helping to bring other Doctors into the Big Finish stable.

So for this annual you will also find some articles on the Big Finish range and on Slipback, the 1986 BBC Radio 4 story, along with an item on The Ultimate Adventure stage play. And to further recognise that the sixth Doctor era goes beyond the screened stories, we also have an item on the 'lost' season 23.

I am as always grateful to everyone who has contributed to the annual, with spe-

cial thanks to Colin Baker himself for the item on 'The Two Doctors'.

Alister Pearson has provided another superb cover illustration (with help from David Lavelle) and the ever reliable Graeme Wey has this year, contributed the back cover image.

So please sit back, read and enjoy our retrospective for 'old Sixie'.

Paul

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# THE ERA

By Ian Bresman

"You were expecting someone else?"

Welcome to a celebration of the Sixth Doctor. And you would be hard pushed to find a more appropriate way to commemorate six decades of Doctor Who. Sixie at Sixty! It certainly has a ring to it, but it is not just the numbers which make this the ideal choice. Colin Baker's Sixth Doctor embraces all the joy, drama, tears and laughter that you would expect at one hell of a party. He makes perhaps one of the most aggressive entries in the programme's television history, has the most melancholic of exits and then returns as arguably the best of Big Finish's Classic Audio Doctors. It is quite a run, considering the circumstances of 1985, but that longevity is well deserved.

It all started very loudly back in 1984. The days of the Fifth Doctor were up

and, riddled with toxic septicaemia, a regeneration sees a new persona explode into the TARDIS and literally hijack the end of Season Twenty-One. Love it or loathe it, The Twin Dilemma was a gutsy way to close off a season. This new Doctor seemed boorish, obnoxious, brash and overly dogmatic. The season end cliff-hanger leaving viewers to wonder if he will mellow or if there will be weekly tantrums and continued attempts to strangle his companion. Combined with his extraordinary new costume, this is clearly the most emphatic debut of all Doctors to date.

January 1985 and, although it is nine months since we last saw them, we can but assume that Attack of the Cybermen follows on shortly after the Doctor and Peri's adventures on Jaconda. Certainly, the outfit has not changed and



the manner is still abrasive, although some of its harsher edges are softening. This could be a Doctor we can deal with, as long as his ego can be kept in check.

Season Twenty-Two is a colourful set of adventures. A Doctor Who fan's wish list could well include Cybermen, Daleks, the Master and a previous incarnation of the Doctor. A returning companion and Davros would be like icing on a cake. Not that any season should start with a shopping list but seeing all those ticks for 1985's set of stories seemed to suggest this new reign was going for a slam dunk in its first season. Great way to bed in a new Doctor and keep the viewers happy. Tom Baker's opener had Sontarans, Daleks and Cybermen and we all know how that went.

The writing of Season Twenty-Two heralded a bold new era. The forty-five-minute episode format opened up all sorts of plotting possibilities whilst the willingness to explore fairly dark themes produced some of the most shocking scenes in the programme's history. Robert Holmes' macabre tale of cannibalism and genetics, The Two Doctors is a disturbing mix of bleak and joyful whilst Phillip Martin's Vengeance on Varos may be a satirical swipe at media and snuff movies, but shows little restraint when depicting torture, punishment and death. The themes, the writing, the humour and the finished product is very adult.

If Holmes' multi-Doctor outing was the jewel in the crown of this season, it was only by the Who Royalty in its currency. Overall, this is a very strong season, with each story carrying a unique fla-

vor. Before it whisks us off to Telos, Paula Moore's season opening Cyberman tale, feels more like an episode of The Sweeney with its London locations. The Spanish vibe and scale of The Two Doctors gives it movie aspirations, which it really-nearly pulls off. Meanwhile glorious location work abounds giving delightful atmosphere to both Pip & Jane Baker's The Mark of the Rani and the season's climactic Revelation of the Daleks. The opening scenes on Necros in this Eric Saward penned tale are chilling and beautifully filmed.

Whilst Season Twenty-Two was being shown, more drama was unfolding behind the scenes as rumours of the programme's future started to leak. It was mid-way through The Two Doctors that the truth was out – the Doctor would not be back until late 1986, meaning a hiatus of around eighteen months. The onslaught of media coverage over the coming weeks managed to interpret and report this story from every conceivable angle and standpoint. Suffice to say, there were many conspiracy theories to dissect but, as we now appreciate, eighteen months is not really that long to wait between seasons, is it? And, as long as you come back with something good....

Well that something good was Season Twenty-Three – The Trial of a Time Lord. The thirteen new forty-five minute episodes in pre-production for screening early 1986 were shelved and replaced by fourteen twenty-five minute parts of one overall story to be shown in the Autumn. It was a bold move and a clever way for this season to distance itself from its predecessor. Not that the viewer needed any distance, more the powers that be at the

BBC which would decide its fate after transmission.

'Trial' has a totally different pace to it, with a series of cracking adventures given as evidence to the High Council of the Time Lords. The Doctor is being tried for breaking the ancient laws of Gallifrey and generally getting involved in other people's business! Two of the adventures are set in the past, with Peri as his companion whilst, in a third, the action jumps to the future and there is a new friend in the shape of Melanie Bush at his side. Viewed without all the cancellation noise, the years have been kind to this season – the writing and acting are of a very high quality and that amazing opening model shot in the first episode still takes your breath away!

The drama for the Sixth Doctor did not end when filming wrapped on this season. Although his fate had seemed to hang in the balance for a while, sadly his television journeys were not going to continue. Much too much has been said on this subject, but truth be known it did not really suit anybody that Colin's Doctor fizzled away in an off-screen line about carrot juice and led into the series' most unfortunate regeneration sequence at the start of the new season. On multiple viewings, the final scenes of The Trial of a Time Lord, remain strangely moving. You know he won't be back next time, but really hope he will.

Happily, the amazing audio wizards at Big Finish have created many fantastic new tales with Colin Baker as the Sixth Doctor. And continue to do so. Among the joys are a proper regeneration story – The Last Adventure and the 'Lost Sto-

ries' from Season Twenty-three as it was originally planned. These stories include The Nightmare Fair in which the Doctor finally gets Peri to Blackpool and Mission to Magnus which features both Sil and the Ice Warriors. Superb listening. The whole set of plays are joyous and it is great to get an insight into the original plans for the 1986 season.

The Sixth Doctor's television run enjoyed some fabulous guest stars throughout, appropriate to such a colourful period of the show. Maurice Denholm, Eleanor Bron, William Gaunt, Tony Selby, Honor Blackman Kate O'Mara are amongst the glittering list of stars. Jason Connery pops up with very few clothes and even fewer lines in 'Vengeance on Varos', Paul Darrow seems to be really enjoying himself as Tekker in Glen McCoy's Timelash, whilst Joan Sims and Brian Blessed project very loudly in The Trial of a Time Lord (although not in the same episodes). Elsewhere in 'Trial', Colin Baker has some beautiful scenery chewing moments with Michael Jayston's Valeyard and Lynda Bellingham's Inquisitor.

Nicola Bryant as Peri and Bonnie Langford as Mel are superb Doctor Who companions. Consistently bright performances from both actresses throughout



and, for the most part, they are well scripted. Interestingly, Peri's journey is very complete from her opening moments in Planet of Fire through to the double bluff of her future in Mindwarp and then subsequently The Ultimate Foe. Mel is much more of an enigma – when we first meet her, she is already travelling with the Doctor and she is still very much a mystery by the time the Seventh Doctor leaves her on Ice-world at the end of Dragonfire. Big Finish have built beautifully on Mel's story, including the introductory tale she never had on television.

Colin Baker really owns the role of the Sixth Doctor. Of course, every actor in the role makes it their own, but Colin's Doctor has such a commanding presence that you feel him even in scenes he is not in. If you think back to 1984 and The Twin Dilemma, chances are your first thoughts would be that extraordinary costume. Who knows what was going on in the mind of John Nathan-Turner when he ordered, then signed off on such a bizarre outfit. As the stories progress though, the Doctor's persona seems to shine past the clothes he is wearing. And of course, with the benefit of hindsight, we now love the garb as it is so synonymous with this incarnation.

This Doctor is certainly very different to the ones

which have gone before. On the face of it, he does not seem a man of violence, but it turns out he is not averse to using force to either defend himself or to save the day. When he destroys the Cyber Controller at the end of Attack of the Cybermen, we seem a long way from the Second Doctor sealing the Cybermen's tombs back in 1967. And has he not learnt anything from the Fourth Doctor's agonising in Genesis of the Daleks – he seems to have little qualms with his actions at the close of Revelation of the Daleks. Note, as well, the Sixth Doctor is not averse to a glib one liner as a reaction



to a nasty demise, as we witness in Vengeance on Varos. Yes, this Doctor has a very different take on the use of force.

Watching the shows now, we can only wonder how a teatime audience of the mid-eighties would feel about some of the death and destruction which passes through some of these tales – particularly Season Twenty-two.

The Sixth Doctor's era enjoyed massive coverage in the press, most of it around the delay of Season Twenty-three and the premature end of Colin's tenure in the role. The BBC did not seem to anticipate the wave of protest when the world thought that Doctor Who had been cancelled and the exposure can only be regarded as a good thing for the programme.

The world of Doctor Who fandom during this period became a very hot zone. For my own part, I was editor of Celestial Toyroom, the monthly newsletter of the Doctor Who Appreciation Society during the break between Season Twenty-Two and Season Twenty-three – the so-called hiatus. Having been assisting Gordon Roxburgh and Dominic May for the past two years, to find myself in the hot seat at such a torrid time in the show's history was somewhat daunting. But I embraced the challenge and I am proud of the content we produced to keep the members interested.



DWAS in those days was recognised by the BBC and Celestial Toyroom had an important role to play when it came to official news from the Production Office. As the months dragged on between seasons, speculation on pre-production news reached fever pitch. As editor of CT I could not report anything until John Nathan-Turner gave us the story. And the truth was we did not want to print rumours. Over the years I have been asked many times if I knew all along how many episodes Season Twenty-Three would have and absolutely I did not. John told me on our monthly call for the January 1986 edition (which went out to members in December 1985). The great news being that the show was back in production and new stories were on the way.

## THE TWIN DILEMMA

Review by Christopher Stone

The Twin Dilemma is a work of genius. No, I haven't been drinking. No, I haven't been taking drugs either. And no, I'm not winding you up. It's a truly brilliant piece of writing. It's incredibly clever and subverts the whole typical regeneration story.

Before we go any further, and to reassure you, dear reader, that I haven't got my tongue firmly in my cheek, we must address the faults of the story which somewhat overshadow the really good points. The production values stink. It is so EIGHTIES that it actually hurts. Everything in the design and costume is so bold and brash and over-the-top that it's like the people responsible watched Joseph and his Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat on a loop for a month. The problem may have started with Colin's Doctor costume, but it's only the tip of the iceberg. Peri is wearing a hideous checked number which should have been burnt as soon as it was made, and Hugo Lang's replacement top – well he was concussed and that might explain a few things as to his choice – but he looks like he's decked out for a disco. Probably, the less said about it the better.

The costume problem doesn't end there. The actors playing aliens in this story are even more harshly dealt with. Many fans, critics and others point to the Mestor costume which is, quite frankly, terrible. This is even more disappointing when you realise it is Edwin Richfield behind it, who's previous

guest appearance in Doctor Who was as the much loved, Captain Hart. Such a waste of an actor and a dreadful design choice. Yet, he doesn't get the worst of it – the poor Jacondans fair even worse.

What the hell are they?

They've got feathers and horns... I've really no clue. They are wearing some cheap looking 'uniforms' and well they are apparently supposed to be birds. I don't know what to say. Preposterous doesn't even come close.

Props, really rubbish circular stickers, slug eggs made of polystyrene – do I need to go on... I really could for some time, but I won't and give you a bit of breathing space before you suffocate in my despair.

This isn't helped by over-lit sets (a common fault of 80s tv), rather mundane shot choices and just bad directing. Peter Moffatt is normally an ok director (in my opinion), so what's the problem here? Well Peter Moffatt wasn't very keen on the scripts of The Twin Dilemma and they were completed at the last minute so maybe that is the issue. It's just a shame more care wasn't taken on it as it could have been SO much better. The final negative points – and they couldn't be avoided – are the twins. They're just not very good. Well, actually, they aren't just not very good – but they are terrible. So obviously terrible and unconvincing it undermines the entire story. Who would want to kidnap them? Are they really genii? Seri-

ously? They're about as convincing as a marriage vow from Boris Johnson.

Ok. I've got all that out of my system, so now let me explain why The Twin Dilemma actually works and is great.

Let's first address the regeneration story. They are always a problem in Doctor Who. Spearhead from Space is great, but it takes an age for the Doctor to become involved in the action. Though it is great telly, it effectively became the template for the regeneration story as we know it - with erratic behaviour and a dearth of plot. Robot, save a few scenes is pretty terrible; in Castrovalva nothing really happens for the first two episodes; and Time and the Rani, the less said the better.

I cannot group Power of the Daleks with these, but it doesn't really fall into the same category because, being the first regeneration tale, it takes a completely different direction to the narrative.



Even when the series returned in 2005, the first regeneration story, The Christmas Invasion, followed the blueprint put down by Robert Holmes in Spearhead from Space.

The Twin Dilemma is different. Though it feeds off this Holmesian trope, it subverts that method of storytelling.

"Ah!" I hear you cry. "But how does it do that?" Well, don't worry, dear reader. It will be my pleasure to explain and hopefully allow you to realise the subtle cleverness in the writing of this tale.

Let's consider the story from the start. As per the structure defined by Mr Holmes, we are given a Doctor who acts erratically after his regeneration. Mood swings, memory lapses and all the particular signs we would expect to see are given to the viewer and more. He forgets the name of Peri, makes wild statements about his future and his character is all over the shop - exactly like those signs all over Tesco's asking if

you have got a Clubcard yet. Colin Baker does a great job here veering from likable, through camp to damn right scary and his performance sells it well. It's all so typical of the era - so much bigger and so eighties in the outlook and it pushes the viewer to places we find uncomfortable. We are left to really wonder if this Doctor will be ok and during this, the very first episode of his run, we severely doubt it.

Over the years, lots has been said about the strangulation scene. Mostly negative. I wanted to say 'brave' but, given that word in this context can be construed as negative, so I'll choose 'astounding' instead. It was just fortunate that we didn't have the internet in 1984. Could you imagine the vitriol pouring forth from various parts of the netherweb saying that "Doctor Who has been destroyed" or some-such other nonsense. How it got through past producer and script editor is also bewildering and baffling in equal measure - yet it did. And I'm so glad. It sets the scene for the remainder of the story and puts the viewer completely on the wrong foot. For the first time in a very long while - probably not since a brief glimpse in The Armageddon Factor or before that The Invasion of Time, the Doctor is someone who appears not to be able to be trusted.

Is this who the new Doctor is?

Is it possible for us to take the Doctor's word on anything anymore?

Where is the show going to go from here?

For my money it pushes it just as far as you can - without stepping over the line. The only shame about this is that there is really no impact on Peri's character because of the attack. This could

have probably been addressed in a rewrite but, given the last-minute completion of the script, it doesn't seem likely there would have been time.

The key point about this scene, and it is crucial for what is to come, that it makes you lose trust in the Doctor. This is precisely what it is there for. Others will disagree with me about the bluntness and the violence, but it is there for a point.

Given the Doctor's unusual outburst and clear brain fog, it is unsurprising when he meets Professor Edgeworth, the Doctor mistakes the man for someone else. Of course, the Doctor is right, but the audience don't know that. This is important. It is once again a device to undermine faith in the Doctor and the audience's trust in the new regeneration. It's actually quite cleverly done because it doesn't give away the truth immediately leaving enough time for the doubt in his abilities to linger. This also helps with the impact of the cliffhanger to come.

The end of episode 2 of The Twin Dilemma is very good. The teleportation of Peri to safety, the non-appearance of the Doctor and the explosion of the base all fit in with the narrative that the Doctor's brain isn't working properly and juxtapose with real peril. Is the Doctor dead? The only thing which jars somewhat is Peri's reaction. She was being strangled by the man only an episode ago, and now she is mourning his loss? Or is she? Maybe she is bemoaning she is stranded on an asteroid with no hope for escape? Perhaps that's why she is glad to see him again?

Fortunately, the Doctor manages to

save himself and seems to be drifting back into normality, but is he? Convinced that Edgeworth is connected to Jaconda, the Doctor pilots the TARDIS to the green verdant planet which resembles a paradise. When he and Peri arrive, something is wrong. The planet resembles a quarry and is nothing at all like what the Doctor promised leaving the audience with questions. Is this Jaconda? Is the Doctor's memory of the place correct? Is he having another dissociative episode? Just as you feel that the Doctor might finally be coming to his senses and having some competence and memory returning, you are thrown back into the doubt and uncertainty which lay before. Once again trust in the main character is lacking and manipulating the audience and Peri into wondering if the Doctor can save the kidnapped twins and discovering what is really going on.

To compound the issue, the Doctor then mentions giant gastropods which

are seemingly ludicrous. The fact that when they appear they look ludicrous is just unfortunate.

The constant undermining of the Doctor's faculties is the essential part of the story which many do not notice. The whole narrative is constantly trying to pull the rug from beneath your feet in a similar way to a magician yanking a tablecloth from a fully laid table. For the most part I think it works and really adds another layer to this tale.

It's such a shame for so many that the negative parts of The Twin Dilemma detract so heavily from an actually quite clever story which is hampered with so many arbitrary choices in the way it was put together. I'm certain that if this story had the same director as the previous Caves of Androzani, with similar design and flair which are absent from this, it would have been much more appreciated and positively thought about.



## ATTACK OF THE CYBERMEN

Review by Christine Grit

*Beloved Old Sixie inhabits a confusing world.*

It took me quite a few re-watches to understand what exactly was going on in Attack of the Cybermen. Please do not get me wrong, I 'got' most of the plot during the first watch, but I was rather confused about certain aspects of the plot. I also thought it was enjoyable, confusing or not. The presence of female aliens was a big help in that, because that was not exactly what Doctor Who was known for! At least I had not seen many of those. Galaxy 4 was totally unknown to me until some years later.

I have to explain though that the first time I saw the 2 episodes was not in the 80's but more recently. Being Dutch I must acknowledge not to have known a lot about Doctor Who, even if Tom and Peter had been shown on Dutch television. I could watch the BBC for a while, and I loved the series (the small part of it I had seen as a child). Colin was not on Dutch television, and by then we had moved to a part of the country where the BBC could not be watched anyway. I thought it ended with Peter, and I did not understand regeneration.

That regeneration stuff obviously is not so confusing now. I've done quite a bit of catching up! We did see Colin turn up in Blake's 7 in The Netherlands, but although quite a few Doctor Who fans enjoyed that series, it was not the same! I must also point out that I was

not negatively influenced by certain fan publications of the time, to make me think that there was something wrong with the series. I loved Colin as the Doctor (and I still do). I love the outfit. That many coloured coat is just superb. I adore Old Sixie's arrogance and – as we Dutchies would say – his tiny heart. That just means that a person may be pompous and brag a lot, but in reality he is slightly cowardly. A rather endearing character trait as it just goes to show that even Doctors are not perfect and come with flaws. So why was I confused by this story? I will try to elucidate.

The first thing, or rather things, are Peri's shoes. Why is she wearing these awful shoes while she has to walk quite a distance? I absolutely adored the pink outfit, but it is rather obvious the shoes are uncomfortable for her. So why is the girl being tortured in that way? I later learned that a certain producer could be a bit fussy about these things, but a pair of comfortable loafers would have been easy to arrange, and she could still have looked very feminine, if that is what was needed.

The second confusing bit is why the Doctor is even trying to repair the Chameleon Circuit? It is not as if it was necessary during earlier episodes (although it might have come in handy). And why does the familiar police box have to turn into such nonsensical things (like the organ)? That answer is never given, except that the change may be random. Duh. They made it up! But I still don't

get it. I understand the need to showcase what the Chameleon Circuit can do. The significance of the junk yard at Totter's Lane came even later. I did not 'get' that at all and thought when I first watched that the place was randomly chosen. However, later it became clear to me that there is no such thing as a coincidence in any series of Doctor Who. The landing place was carefully chosen for no reason other than a feeling of nostalgia by the producer that he wished to confer on long-time fans. So, we're back to the organ which probably for ever will baffle me.

I was pleased to see Lytton though. The last time I saw him was in Resurrection of the Daleks, a story I remembered quite well because of the high body count. I really liked the idea of the evil reprobate mercenary who turns into the good guy after all. And of course he starts off as a criminal.

Another source of confusion. I 'get' that the sewer part is necessary for the plot and that the love of diamonds gets Lytton where he is supposed to be. Obviously Cybermen in the sewers of London also has great significance to many Doctor Who fans but shouldn't there be a plot reason?

It was a pity the Cybermen turned towards a kind of torture of the worst kind (I had the feeling I was mistakenly watching an episode of a second World War series in part II with too much Gestapo action) which actually was off putting. Of course, I had already seen in Revenge of the Cybermen that they could be rather emotional, there was nothing new in that. But explicit torture? I never was one for the notion of children getting so scared they would get traumatised, but the scene with

bloody and broken fingers was really horrifying. I liked the outward appearance of the Cybermen though. I realise that many fans like the older designs better, but I prefer these. And the idea that there exist different generations of Cybermen is quite easy to understand.

I still am a big fan of the Cryons. I thought they were rather smart in, on the one hand getting a galactic mercenary to help them and on the other hand turning the hibernating Cybermen into a kind of dangerous lunatics. They obviously still needed the Doctor and Peri to get rid of the Cybermen for good but they managed a lot of resistance activities all by themselves. Not bad at all.

Of course the newly regenerated Doctor also gets into his stride here. As mentioned before I am rather a big fan of Old Sixie and it is exactly in this story you get to see who he is and what he stands for. He may never be cowardly according to our beloved late Terrance Dicks, but to be honest he is just a little so here. He can be courageous too though. Everybody notices him - he is unforgettable!

Long live old Sixie!



## VENGEANCE ON VAROS

Review by Paul Burns

Whilst writing Vengeance on Varos, Philip Martin must have used precognitive powers to see fifteen years into the future, or perhaps he used his own TARDIS to travel to the year 2000 to experience the full horror of reality TV's first blockbuster hit, Big Brother. Not only does his story focus on people's discomfort and torture for cheap entertainment, but it also highlights contemporary issues, as the story is very much about the ruling classes keeping the masses in poverty using the smokescreen of media. The rich party as the peasants starve.

Varos started life as a Fifth Doctor story called Domain. After a change in TARDIS personnel, Martin rewrote his script to accommodate the Sixth Doctor, and held the newly named Planet of Fear back for Sixie's first full season. But this was too close to the recent Planet of Fire, and the title Vengeance on Varos was settled on. Martin liked the idea of combining the entertainment business with a prison planet. As he explained to Doctor Who Magazine: "The original officers of the prison planet had become the ruling elite, and the prisoners and their descendants had become the masses who would need to be entertained by violence."

The opening scene features institutionalised viewers Arak and Etta (Stephen Yardley and Sheila Reid) gleefully watching the torture of rebel Jondar (Jason Connery). It is the first indication of a stellar cast in a somewhat difficult

watch. Yardley had already starred in Doctor Who as Sevrin in Genesis of the Daleks, whilst Reid would go on to star as Clara Oswald's grandmother during the Eleventh Doctor's era. Varos was not only Connery's first role in the show, it was his first major television role full stop. Yardley and Reid filmed their scenes separately from the main cast. Vengeance on Varos was shot entirely within BBC Television Centre, with no location filming.

The story continues with The Doctor and Peri arriving on Varos, needing a supply of Zeiton-7 to power the TARDIS out of limbo. They release Jondar, reunite him with his wife, Areta, and overcome various obstacles to reach the Governor, who is having a nightmare negotiating with a delegate from Thoros Beta. The Governor is played by Martin Jarvis, who had already starred in Doctor Who, playing Helio in The Web Planet and Butler in Invasion of the Dinosaurs.

However, Vengeance on Varos is significant more for its myths than its actual story. Mary Whitehouse, the British campaigner and president of the National Viewers' and Listeners' Association had already complained about violence in previous stories, Genesis of the Daleks and The Deadly Assassin, and now her beady eyes were focused on Varos.

But Mrs. Whitehouse completely missed the point that Varos highlights

the very thing she and her cohorts were rallying against. In a tail wagging the dog situation, Martin was mostly agreeing with Mrs. Whitehouse and her Association, as he told DWM: "What we're actually doing is arguing on their side, but are they intelligent enough to see it? You need a sophisticated response and you have to have shows like this, so people's critical faculties can spot what is gratuitous and what is there for a purpose."

Varos is telling us torture for entertainment purposes is inherently wrong. That nuance, along with so many others obviously passes Mrs. Whitehouse by.

It could be argued there are scenes in Varos to concur with Mrs. Whitehouse's concerns, but they are mostly fake-outs. The Doctor has a noose around his neck, but falls through the gallows with the rope unattached. The Doctor 'dies' from dehydration in the 'No Options Kill Centre', but it is all an illusion. Basically, the perceived Varos violence comes down to a semi-naked man getting laser treatment and a foam bath.



Ah yes, the famous acid bath. That scene with the Doctor and Varos guards has entered mythology as the very thing that helped convince the BBC to put the show on hiatus and sending a nation of school children seeking comfort from within their sofas, rather than peeking through their fingers from behind them.

In reality, it was a small number of parents who vented their spleens on Points of View. It did not help that presenter Barry Took used the phrase 'sado-masochistic' in relation to the programme, adding fuel to the glowing embers of disgust emanating from a cluster of middle Englanders comparing Doctor Who to a 'video nasty'.

In reality, the acid bath scene was not gratuitous in any way. Budget limitations prevented the guards dying in graphic detail, and the violence was nothing more than one of them prat falling into the bath (Spike was falling into the water in every episode of Hi De Hi broadcast at the same time as Varos) and pulling his mate in after he had a bit of a dance with the Doctor.

What really lit the touch paper was the Doctor's famous "You'll forgive me if I don't join you" line. If anything, we should be disappointed with that reaction from our hero, despite the fact the guards had intended the very same fate for him. It was dark humour, which has always been prevalent in Doctor Who, though, to be fair, seldom associated with the term 'acid

bath'. The less enlightened joined the dots and cemented Varos' completely unearned infamy.

If anything, seen through a modern day prism, the scene where Maldak (Owen Teale) slaps Peri is far more shocking than the dip in the bath. Despite re-writes to the script to strengthen Nicola Bryant's participation in the story, Peri's role remains somewhat diminished and she is once again in the role of damsel in distress, for men to take their frustrations out on. Indeed, Peri seems to be there for decorative purposes only, as a letter to Points of View proves. A nine year old girl wrote to the programme, condemning Peri's outfit, but adding, "my dad thinks it was very nice. Perhaps they could pay her more money so she can buy the rest of the costume."

A skimpy outfit was the least of Nicola Bryant's worries with the costume and make-up department of the BBC during the filming of Varos. The mask of the 'space chicken' Peri is transforming into was so heavy, it left a bruise on Bryant's nose. It did not help that she was also allergic to feathers.

The make-up process was similarly arduous for Geraldine Alexander, who played Areta, speaking to Toby Hadoke for his Who's Round podcast, she said: "That was awful, that was really painful. Lying there for ages, I was a lizard, Nicola looked gorgeous and I looked terrible."

It is disappointing that deleted scenes at the start and end of Varos highlight the relationship between the Doctor and Peri, and gives Bryant a stronger



presence in the story. Perpugilliam Brown gives as good as she gets in the opening TARDIS scene, describing her companion role as “A teddy bear being thrown around by a psychotic baby.” She makes the Doctor pause when she describes him as “The most inconsistent and intolerant man I’ve ever met.” The closing un-broadcast scene completely softens the relationship between the Doctor and Peri. After saving her from a life as a space chicken, the Doctor warns her to: “Stay away from millet and cuttlefish.” Warm smiles all round. Aw, they actually like one another after all. But the televised edit ends the episode on avid watchers Arak and Etta. A wasted opportunity to move the main characters to a warmer and more inviting place.

Philip Martin was conscious of including a monster in his political and sociological drama, and was keen to make it a water based alien. The risk of water and studio cables were obviously an insurance nightmare, so the creature would sit on top of a tank of water. Step forward Sil, a member of the Mentor species, a representative of Galatron Mining Corporation, or as actor Nabil Shaban called him, “A cross between a tadpole and a turd.”

Martin Jarvis remembered seeing Nabil in a 1981 documentary and suggested to director Ron Jones that he would be perfect. Nabil clearly relishes playing Sil, despite the arduous time spent in make-up and the perils of drying glue under hot studio lights. So hot was the latex bodysuit, Nabil had his friend Tom Watt (Soon to be Eastenders’ Lofty Holloway) fan him from behind.

Nabil realised the character should have an easily imitated mannerism that children could replicate in playgrounds, much akin to Daleks’ robotic ‘Exterminate’. If there is one trope of Sil that is instantly recognisable, it is the laugh. Nabil developed this after he visited a friend with a pet python. Holding the reptile and seeing its tongue dart in and out of its mouth, Nabil imagined the noise it would make. The gargling, rasping, and somewhat disgusting noise was an instant success, forever cementing Sil in viewer’s consciousnesses.

Rather than playing Sil as a villain, Nabil navigates the character as a vain, narcissistic opportunist, eager for power and wealth, so long as his minions gently hydrate him. A creature with masked gimps constantly making him wet can never be taken seriously as a threat, more an inconvenient obstacle.

Nabil played Sil so wonderfully, Philip Martin brought him back a year later for the story Mindwarp, part of the season long The Trial of a Time Lord, where we are introduced to Sil’s superior, Kiv. Following this, there were plans to feature Sil in a story called Mission to Magnus, where the character meets the Ice Warriors. But the aforementioned hiatus ruined that plan.

Sil lives beyond the world of televised Doctor Who, as the meddlesome Mentor starred in Sil and the Devil Seeds of Arodor. Once again written by Philip Martin, the 2019 direct-to-video adventure has Nabil chewing the scenery once again with a large dollop of relish. As a statement of intent, Sil could not have had a better introduction than Vengeance on Varos.

Sil aside, there is no monster of the week present in Vengeance on Varos, and no real threat, apart from the greedy Quillam (Nicolas Chagrin) and Chief Officer (Forbes Collins) who are easily dispatched with poison ivy vines. Oh, and a couple of cannibals in nappies, and once one of them falls, the other one has a tasty meal to keep him occupied. That just leaves the machinations of a divided planet of the haves and have-nots, and a hapless unarmed governor flagellating himself for the perverse enjoyment of his public. A habit metaphorically embraced by contestants in Big Brother and I’m A Celebrity years later.

As you may have noticed from this review, I am more interested in the elements of Varos rather the story as a whole. Colin’s era is not one of my favourites, but as with every Doctor Who era, there is still stuff to enjoy. For example, Vengeance on Varos provides Colin Baker with his most identifiable, iconic pose. As he enters the End Zone on Varos, he raises his left hand to banish the hallucinogenic images of himself, Jondar and Areta. If you see an image of Colin as the Doctor, it will often be this pose that is used.

The dystopian grittiness of Varos is gleefully coloured by lighter moments. Colin Baker relishes his “Peri, eh” pun a tad too much. I loved the brief appearance of The Purple Zone giant fly. Then there is Sil popping Marshminnows into his

mouth with the same glee the Fourth Doctor chomped Jelly Babies, and let us not forget menacing baddie Quillam saying the line, “I want to hear them scream until I’m deaf from pleasure.” which Philip Martin claims is the campest line ever in Doctor Who.

But, as mentioned in the opening paragraph, it is hard not to appreciate the central message of Vengeance on Varos in relation to the current political environment. I found viewing the episodes to be a bit of a slog in places, and felt my mind drifting to pleasing visions of certain real life figures being given televised punishments after losing a public vote.

If Vengeance on Varos offers me little in the way of fictional stimulation, it has provided me with delightful mental images of torture when I hear certain politicians talking. The next time you are enraged by the activities of government, there is no more a comforting phrase than ‘Human Cell Disintegration Bombardment.’



# THE MARK OF THE RANI

Review by Jackie Green

*Like many scientists, I'm afraid the Rani simply sees us as walking heaps of chemicals. There's no place for the soul in her scheme of things.*

The Mark of the Rani sees the Doctor Who debut of husband-and-wife writing team Pip and Jane Baker, who would go on to contribute to another three serials in the 1980's, including the first to feature Sylvester McCoy's Seventh Doctor.

Pip and Jane had begun writing together in the late Fifties and in 1961 their play, A Moment of Blindness, was adapted as the British thriller, The Third Alibi, starring Laurence Payne. The same year they earned their first television credits with several episodes of The Pursuers. During the Seventies, they wrote for programmes such as Circus, Space: 1999 and Z Cars.

In 1976 they were commissioned by producer Graham Williams to write an episode of a thriller anthology, but when he then asked them to write a Doctor Who story they declined, preferring to focus on their own series ideas. When John Nathan-Turner discovered the thriller script in the production office, he was impressed and managed to persuade them to work on a story idea.

That story idea started life as Too Clever By Far, later changing to Enter The Rani, before finally becoming The Mark of The Rani. Pip and Jane later told

Doctor Who Magazine that though they had not been given a brief as such, John had stipulated that the story should have a period setting, include The Master and another opponent who was not so pantomime. The Bakers felt a female opponent would work well, as they did not want a replica of The Master, and so The Rani was born.

The inspiration behind the character came from a friend, a professor of neurochemistry, who they witnessed arguing with a publisher that disagreed with the scientist's view, 'All we are is a heap of chemicals', angrily asking 'but what about the soul?!' That intrigued Pip and Jane and they commented, "The Rani considers herself the very apex of creation, in the same way that the scientist regarded poultry and animals as subspecies, the Rani considers human beings as vastly inferior".

The Doctor and Peri arrive in the 19th Century mining town of Killingworth, in North East England, at the time of the Luddite uprisings and soon encounter a group of miners attacking people and destroying machinery. The local mine owner, Lord Ravensworth, tells the Doctor and Peri that the miners had recently become violent, threatening the work of famed engineer, George Stephenson. A series of clues leads the Doctor to a bath house, where he discovers the Rani, a renegade Time Lord, in disguise. Back in her home planet of Miasimia Gorja, her experiments had left its inhabitants unable to sleep and

so she has begun harvesting brain fluid from the miners and synthesising it back home to fix the problem. The Master has also arrived in Killingworth, intent on using the best brains of the Industrial Revolution to help speed up Earth's development and use the planet as a powerbase. On meeting the Rani, he persuades her that they should join forces to defeat the Doctor.

I have always enjoyed the historical stories of Doctor Who, and particularly those that feature specific historical characters, in this case, Lord Ravensworth and his employee George Stephenson. Thomas Henry Liddell, 1st Baron Ravensworth, known as Sir Thomas Liddell, 6th Baronet, from 1791 to 1821, was a British peer and Tory politician. He employed George Stephenson from 1804 at his Killingworth colliery and encouraged and financed him in the development of steam power, which was vital for the improvement of the efficiency of the wagonways which transported coal from the pit to the River Tyne. The combination of

George Stephenson's achievements in both civil and mechanical engineering has directly influenced much of our railway infrastructure. He foresaw a national network of lines, running at a 'standard gauge' with minimal gradients. Routes he surveyed and structures he designed and built are still in use today. For this pioneering work he is known as the "Father of the Railways".

Colin Baker recommended Sarah Hellings as director, having previously worked with her in 1982 on Juliet Bravo. Sarah had joined the BBC in 1970, initially working as a film editor before moving onto directing segments of the children's series Blue Peter. During her time there, she had filmed at Blists Hill, an open-air museum, in Shropshire and she suggested it as the main setting for The Mark of the Rani. Hellings desire for most of the serial to be filmed on location was an astute one as the setting elevates the episodes by giving them an authentic feel. She recalled in an interview with Doctor Who magazine, "It was a nice location because it



was contained. They closed it for the duration of the shoot. It helped psychologically having some of the infrastructure already there. People forget that filmmakers have to believe in it as well”.

Blists Hill, which opened in 1973, was built on a former industrial complex and the museum attempts to recreate the sights, sounds and smell of a Victorian Shropshire town in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The Coalport China Works were used as the location for Lord Ravensworth’s office. Built in 1796 alongside the Shropshire Canal, the works occupied the factory until it closed in 1926. The Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust bought the site and restored it as a museum, opening it in 1976 and it is now home to the collections of Coalport and Caughley China.

The downside of filming mostly on location was the rainy weather. As parts of the story were required to be shot in clear weather and other parts in the rain, it meant that the crew had to constantly move back and forth between areas in order to get everything filmed. One scene saw the Doctor tied to a pole in the forest by his hands and feet, which took some time to set up as they had to ensure that Colin’s back was supported, so in between shots he had to stay as he was. During filming, rain had started to fall, so the crew rushed to get to the other location leaving Colin, on his own, tied up to the pole for around 30 minutes. Colin recalled that as he waited for the crew to return, a couple walking their dog passed by, spoke to him, but did not offer any assistance. That was the glamour of showbusiness!

Colin’s tenure as the Doctor was plagued by controversy and criticism, with his first full story appearance in *The Twin Dilemma*, being deemed by *PopMatters* magazine as ‘just out-and-out dislikeable, showcasing a hubris and harshness that was heretofore unseen in the Doctor’s emotional canon.’ The criticism of the programme continued into season 22 with Michael Grade, the controller of the BBC1 at the time, saying that the programme had become overly violent and in February 1985 an 18-month hiatus was announced. The criticism of Colin was short-sighted as in *The Mark of the Rani* you could already see the development of his Doctor. There was still some arrogance and rudeness on display, but you could also see real compassion for Peri, alongside horror and outrage at the Rani’s plans and his desire to make sure he put things right. Colin always loved playing the Doctor and that is evident when you watch his performances. He has previously said, “So many actors have said to me ‘You’re really lucky, you’ve got the best part in the country.’ And it is.” It has therefore been a joy to see Colin, being able to show what his Doctor could have been, through the audio stories from *Big Finish*. They have been able to showcase Colin’s dramatic range and a softer side to the Sixth Doctor.

One of my favourite scenes is the cliffhanger ending of episode one, which sees the Doctor tied to an out-of-control trolley, speeding towards the mine shaft. Colin always performed his own stunts in *Doctor Who*, which really added to those scenes, as you were not taken out of the moment by seeing someone, who clearly, was not him. Hellings remembered, “We had to add the pithead wheel to the mineshaft, and

we didn’t have enough track, so we had to shoot it from a lot of different angles to build up the sequence and make it seem long enough.” Colin found the stunt “exhilarating. I was strapped to a trolley and pushed down a hill. There was a brave special effects guy strapped underneath the trolley, trying to steer it.” Colin noted that on screen the trolley looked to be going slower than it was and if he had needed to, he would have been able to jump off.

Nicola Bryant puts in a solid performance as Peri, and I really enjoy the relationship between her and the Doctor. It is full of comedic verbal sparring, with lots of warmth and affection, and it works thanks to the on-screen chemistry between Colin and Nicola. The script does allow Peri to show some of her intelligence, as we are reminded of her botanical background, but she is given little to do, and they still make her look stupid at times. It makes no sense that Peri would push the trolley with the Doctor strapped to it, down the hill, putting him in danger! Nicola is also lumbered with an awful costume, which she hated, saying that the dress made her look like a balloon. The scene that explains that Peri was wearing the dress for the opening of Kew Gardens, which is where the TARDIS was meant to be taking them, ended up being cut.

Kate O’Mara was cast as the Rani, after Sarah Hellings approached John Nathan-Turner, with who she would like to see in the part, and he told her that he had been thinking of Kate too. This proved to be a great bit of casting, as it is Kate’s performance, as the powerful, dynamic and glamorous Rani that makes the character so memorable. The Rani is ruthless, has no moral standards,

and as a scientist she doesn’t allow emotions to get in her way. Her interest and focus are only on the research she is doing. She has no time for the Master’s obsession with the Doctor and does not understand why the Doctor cares so much about humans. When Luke is turned into a tree, the Doctor is furious, but the Rani has no emotion about it, simply saying, ‘Animal matter has been metamorphosed into vegetable matter, so what?’ When we first meet the Rani, she is in disguise, as a 90-year-old woman, which Kate based on how her grandmother walked. What shocked Kate was how she was treated on set, when it was not known, that it was her in disguise. She later recalled, “I was freezing cold and needed something to warm me up. But I was completely ignored!....I was appalled to see how society treats old women.” Kate had previously starred opposite Colin in the 1970’s TV series, *The Brothers*, and they re-create that on-screen chemistry here, with entertaining scenes between the Rani and the Doctor as she taunts him and makes derogatory comments about his new regeneration. We also get to see the inside of the Rani’s TARDIS, designed by Paul Trerise, with the console made primarily from plastic and polystyrene. The set looks gorgeous and was retained for future use, though sadly it never appeared in the series again.

Anthony Ainley returns as the Master, after seemingly meeting his end in the Fifth Doctor story *Planet of Fire*, though we are given no explanation as to how he managed to escape! Ainley always played his version of the Master more pantomime villain than his predecessor, Roger Delgado, and the writers exaggerate that even more in this story.

They didn't feel The Master was needed, saying they enjoyed writing scenes for Colin and Kate and felt they worked well, but they would have worked even better without the Master who upset the balance. Having three Time Lords in one story, on paper, sounds great, but the Master is not given enough to do, and it is never explained as to how his plans, for Earth, would work. Having said that, I enjoyed his scenes and the Master's presence gave the Rani someone to bounce off, showing that she was intellectually superior.

There are elements of the story though that really do not work. The pace at times feels glacial and it is not hard to see why the classic series reverted to the shorter episodes after this season. As a result, it does feel as though there is a lot of padding, with the Doctor getting caught, then saved on a loop. The Rani turning Luke into a tree, as he steps on a landmine she has planted, looks awful and adds nothing to the story. Pip Baker was not impressed with

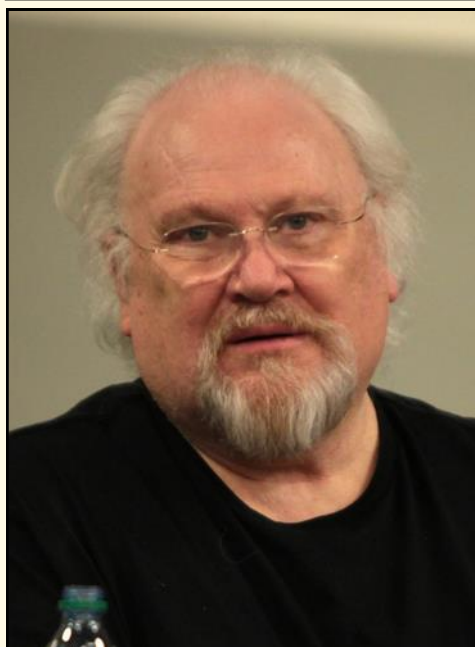
the finished effect saying, "That tree could have been borrowed from a pantomime.....but I think we must take some of the blame. We were working to a budget, and we should have stuck to it." The special effect of the Tyrannosaurus Rex growing from an embryo, as the Rani and the Master are trapped in her TARDIS, is not needed and just looks silly.

Despite these issues, there are many positives to find in the Mark of The Rani. I really enjoyed all the performances from the cast, along with a wonderful musical score from Jonathan Gibbs, great location choice and direction from Sarah Hellings, and for me, it is the best story of season 22.



## THE TWO DOCTORS

Review by Colin Baker



It's nice to know that I have an 'Era' that is worthy of celebrating in an annual publication by the DWAS. I suppose as Hon Pres they had to get around to me eventually! I have noticed by the way that over the intervening years my era has been defined as 1984 to 1986 but purely for reasons of self-aggrandisement, I always characterise it as 1983 to 1986 as I started work on the show at the end of 1983 even though the fruits of my labour weren't on view until the following year.

I am not sure how other Doctors may have felt as they entered the TARDIS for the first time but a combination of events at that time had left me remarkably sanguine about the journey I was

about to undertake. I was perhaps less daunted than I ought to have been. The fact that John Nathan-Turner had been brave or confident enough to offer me the part without any screen test or audition process was of course remarkably empowering and this combined with the knowledge that I had the welcome responsibility of creating the working atmosphere on set and doing what I could to make the experience happy and rewarding for everyone involved. The old 'do as you would be done by' maxim. I knew the importance of that after a decade of enjoying the hospitality of most leading actors when I guested on their shows and noticing the dispiriting lack of it occasionally from others. I was therefore and almost counter-intuitively less fearful/nervous/anxious than had been the case when appearing as a guest in someone else's programme. For a brief period of time, I was one of the lucky and happy few who genuinely looked forward to going to work EVERY day. The only time I felt a slight twinge of nerves was when I did The Two Doctors and the actor I regarded as 'The Guvnor' in the Doctor Who canon, Patrick Troughton came to play with us. Many of our ever increasing 'surgery' of Doctors have accurately cited Patrick as the actor who ensured the extraordinary longevity of our programme by – well by simply being so darned good and so cleverly different. He instinctively and deftly reinvented the role in a way that instantly cemented the Regeneration process as not just a useful conceit, but a fantastic means

of propelling the programme into an exciting and ever developing future.

I had three stories under my belt when we filmed *The Two Doctors* and 'Old Sixie' was evolving slowly but satisfactorily (I thought) after the explosive start that JNT had decreed and which understandably unsettled many viewers, especially as there was a gap of several months after the broadcast of *The Twin Dilemma* before my next story and only that 'wink' to Peri to indicate that all might be well after all, 'whether you like it or not'. Perhaps a rather to brave utterance?

And for the first time in many years, I was to be filming somewhere more exotic than the UK. The events of *The Two Doctors* were to be partly filmed in and around Seville in Spain. The trip began somewhat inauspiciously for the production team when a case containing wigs, make up and eyebrows for the Androgums went AWOL en route and Peter Moffat had to film scenes scheduled for later in the week earlier than he had intended. This allowed Jacqueline Pearce, John Stratton and Laurence Payne to loll indolently around the hotel pool while Nicola and I headed off to the 100 degree Fahrenheit exterior of the hacienda belonging to Dona Arana. This rapid rescheduling continued for the first three days until the wonderful and irrepressible make up designer Cathy Davis managed to improvise replacements in remarkably short order. Cathy

was a force of nature. The first time I spoke to her was on the telephone. She said 'Hello Colin, I'm the Welsh tart whose doing your make up on *Two Doctors*'. That sealed our friendship immediately. She became known to everyone as 'The WT' a badge she wore with honour and distinction.

The opportunity to work with Pat Troughton was undoubtedly the highlight of this story for me. He was disarmingly modest, effortlessly clever and a joy to work with. Very soon we stopped being Master and Apprentice (as we were in my eyes, at least partly) and became two sides of the same Doctor coin, as it were. And his playful and affectionate relationship with Frazer Hines spilled over to include Nicola and me. We had many happy evenings in the pool at the end of a day filming in soaring temperatures and there is somewhere online a collection of photographs of Frazer on Patrick's shoulders and Nicola on mine wrestling in the pool. I think you will agree that I had by far the better end of that deal. Even though I had met Patrick before -



missed. She was brilliant as Chessene O' The Franzine Grig - the 'civilised' Androgum whose descent to her cannibalistic roots was chillingly portrayed in that wonderful scene where she knelt down on the stone steps to lick my blood as I fled the chateau after being stabbed.

Laurence Payne, I had worked with ten years

earlier when he was Claudius and I was Laertes in *Hamlet* at The Theatre Royal in Windsor. Indeed, I was doing this when David Troughton got married and I met his father for the first time. It was when rushing back for a Saturday matinee that my car exploded on the M4. I was given a lift to the theatre (while my Mini Cooper burned) by a van driver whose response when I offered him free tickets for *Hamlet* was 'Ah no thanks mate - I'm in the building trade myself!' Fair enough I thought and just got into the theatre for 'the half.'

It is a tribute to the production team led by John Nathan-Turner and Peter Moffat that they coped so well with the challenges of lost wigs and make-up, the soaring temperatures and the constant need to reschedule so well. In the end, shooting days frequently finished early. We actors, as always, were unaware of problems that became known after the event (for us). It seems that there were early problems with the script between the office and Robert Holmes as circumstances and changes of location demanded successive re-thinks. We were just delighted to be

at his son David's wedding at which I was best man after having shared flats with him in the 1970s - this was the first time I had worked with him. And as you may well imagine it was a joy. He was just one of those actors who simply doesn't know how to be anything other than true, real and very good and completely undriven by any ego. That makes it so much easier for everyone else to do what they do well as well. And both Patrick and Frazer had that sense of fun that keeps spirits and energy up without interfering with the work. And I like to think that I share that philosophy and characteristic so that everyone is glad they came to work that day - or at the very least don't wish they hadn't.

Also in the cast was the delicious and delightful Jacqueline Pearce who became a great friend. For several years my wife and I would visit her on her houseboat and she came to our home. I did an episode of *Blake's 7* before I was in *Doctor Who*. Sadly she did not figure in that story, but I had met her many times at Conventions and loved her openness and humour. She is sadly

working on a Robert Holmes script secure in the knowledge that he was considered by many to be the pre-eminent Doctor Who writer at the time.

It seems I was destined to be The Doctor in two stories that were to be criticised for their violent content. I still maintain that both The Two Doctors and Vengeance on Varos were certainly raising the stakes in shock elements but in order to make the point that bad things have to be challenged. And some things are just 'badder' than others. I was not a script editor or producer. I was an actor who had no brief or right to challenge story lines. I have actually recently refused to be in a film that was repellently and disgustingly graphically violent because it had no point at all beyond shocking.

What is acceptable on television has been swinging like a pendulum in different directions over the years. It's just as well that Shakespeare isn't writing now – Titus Andronicus wouldn't have had a chance.

I am sure that I share with you all a sense of relief that our world is getting back to normal after the constrictions and isolation of the last few years – if it ever was 'normal'! I am very much looking forward to meeting many of you at future events in 2023 and beyond.

Jodie has moved on to pastures new after making her joyous mark indelibly on our programme and after a brief and interesting ten(n)ancy, Ncuti Gatwa will be blazing another new and exciting trail across our screens. And Russell T Davies is at the helm again – a show-runner who seems to have stardust in his fingertips and a subconscious feel for the zeitgeist of the time. Maybe it's not subconscious; maybe he's just very, very clever as well as being super creative.

But whatever it is we are in for glorious times I predict. I can't wait. But I'll have to!

Colin



## TIMELASH

Review by Simon J. Painter

So, Timelash. The story with the unfortunate anagram. Reputedly one of - if not the - worst Doctor Who stories ever. Regularly down the bottom of the big DWM poll of stories, along with the other usual suspects (The Twin Dilemma, Fear Her, among others). Is it really as bad as all that? I've not only re-watched it, but also read the novelisation by the original author, Glen McCoy, to see whether the fan opinion is deserved or not.

First off, let's put aside the issue of the odd ropey effect. Yes, there are a few, but that's classic Doctor Who for you. The Caves of Androzani is an absolute classic, but there's that absolutely cringe-worthy lava monster. It doesn't really matter in Androzani because of the quality of writing, acting and direction - and it really shouldn't matter here either. But yes, the TARDIS seatbelts are absurd. Yes, the Timelash looks like an IKEA cupboard full of tinsel. But they tell the story, so I'll accept them and move on.

The set design itself is fine, but hardly memorable. That's somewhat in keeping with the story though. It's hardly mentioned on screen, but the city is meant to be an underground bunker in which the Karfelons are sheltering from the harsh surface conditions.

The costume designs aren't anything special either. Functional, tell the story, but nothing amazing.

The Karfelons look suspiciously like they're wearing curtains, but once again - it tells the story. I really do have to give some praise to Vanessa Poulton's make-up work though. The Borad is an absolutely fantastic bit of design, the blue-skinned androids are really quite striking and Vena's glamorous New Romantic look whilst hardly realistic, looks great.

What about performances? Aside from the regulars, the stand-outs are probably Robert Ashby with his incredible actor's voice as the Borad or Blake's 7 alumnus Paul Darrow as Tekker. I've heard some criticism of Darrow's performance over the years, but d'you know what? It's fine. Sure, it's a little over the top, but the story honestly needs a bit of colour. Especially when you consider how bland a lot of it looks. Other than that everyone is just basically fine - despite the odd bit of ham here and there.



So, visually there aren't really any problems. It's perhaps a little middle-of-the-road, but not actually bad. So, where does this reputation come from?

Sadly, there's no way to get around the issues with the writing of this story. It's a paradox, in a way. On one hand, there are so very many ideas bouncing around in this story, but on the other, nothing feels all that well developed.

When it really comes down to it - what is this story actually about?

The most likely answer I can think of is that this is an early example of a "Historical celebrity" story - like *The Unquiet Dead* or *The Unicorn and the Wasp*, where the Doctor meets a famous writer from history and takes part in a story inspired by their works - but which cheekily suggests was their true inspiration. But if that's the case, why the odd decision to reveal Herbert's true identity only in the closing scene.

Even odder than that is that Herbert doesn't really seem to serve any story function whatsoever. Think about it - other than simply observing, he only really does two things. He takes in the temporally displaced Vena, and volunteers to stay with the Doctor as he attempts to prevent the Bandril missile strike. But the former could easily have been dispensed with, given how easily the Doctor finds her. The latter actually accomplishes nothing, aside from padding out episode 2 a bit. So, why include him? He's effectively a redundant character.

It doesn't end with Herbert either. There are some great ideas in *Timelash* as well. The idea of a villain that uses

time-based technology has some real potential, but it doesn't come to anything. What does the Borad use his technology for? Pretty much just executions, just about all of which could be swapped for laser beams or any other, more conventional method, and the story wouldn't be affected in the slightest.

I know the *Timelash* technically doesn't execute anyone - it sends them to Scotland in the middle ages. But, those people sent are never mentioned again, and the Doctor never shows the slightest interest in going to rescue them. From the perspective of the plot, they might as well have been guillotined.

There's also the Doctor's use of time travel to destroy an Android by sending it back in time. That's a great idea, and something I feel sure Steven Moffat would have based an entire episode or two about. Here though it's a mystery set up in one scene, then explained a scene or two later, but without contributing anything to the story that a laser blaster wouldn't have managed.

That leads me on to the idea of story hooks. The actual story of *Timelash* is so conventional, it's practically the ultimate archetype of an 80s Doctor Who



story (*The Doctor* helps some grungy rebels with great hair to defeat a totalitarian dictator). Given it's that lacking in anything novel in its structure, it wouldn't have done it any harm to include a few mysteries to keep us interested. Why do these people know the Doctor already? Explained that same scene. How does a burning android appear from thin air? Explained a few scenes later without much interest. The mystery of the Borad's true identity is dangled before us in one of the later scenes, only for it to turn out to be someone we've never heard of, and likely aren't interested in.

Another thing missing from this script is any sort of emotional depth. Take the Karfelons witnessing the return of their mythical saviour figure - *The Doctor*. When you watch on screen, they barely seem to show any interest. They should have been in awe of him. There's an intriguing scene earlier on when Mykros enters a room that - for the first time in his life - isn't monitored by the Borad. That should have been a big character moment for Mykros, suddenly free of an invisible, but all-pervasive tyranny he's known since birth. On screen, he only appears to regard it as a mild curiosity. Tekker's realisation that the Borad is out to commit genocide should have been a huge moment, in which Tekker realises the sheer depth to which he'd been used and manipulated. Barely a flicker of feeling shown on his face. A little human emotion beyond the bare plot might have helped elevate this story somewhat, but the writer doesn't seem especially interested.

This problem is all the worse with the female characters in the story. They're all incredibly, almost ridiculously pas-

sive. Peri is kidnapped early on, and saves no further purpose in the plot, except for adding to the Doctor's motives to stop the Borad. Vena served just about no story purpose. She steals an amulet, then falls into the *Timelash* entirely by accident, and then that's just about it for her, story-wise. She's there throughout, but does just about nothing actively of her own volition. Poorly-written female characters isn't all that unusual in 80s Doctor Who, but this is probably worse than most.

There are also so many unresolved plot threads. Why include the 3rd Doctor's previous visit? Why does the android steal Peri's St. Christopher? Where are the other *Timelashed* Karfelons? Why does the Borad use the *Timelash* when he expresses disappointment at not simply killing his prisoners? None of these questions have answers.

I have no evidence for this, but I also suspect that the last third or so of episode 2 was written in a rush because it had underrun. Up until the death of the Borad, there's a vaguely logical sequence of events with a reasonable pace. After that point whole new plots start up, like the Karfelon missile, the Borad resurrecting himself via a previously-unmentioned Cloning technology, which also somehow preserves your personality. There's obviously also the most infamous bit of lazy writing in Doctor Who history - the doctor escaping the Karfelon missile with what is effectively an "I'll explain later", as parodied by Steven Moffat in *The Curse of the Fatal Death*. All of these ideas are thrown in at a moment's notice, then conveniently resolved soon after. The plot in this last act lurches all over the place in a desperate attempt to stay

alive until 40 minutes have passed. It's a pretty unforgivable bit of writing, in all honesty.

The last thing that's always bothered me about this story since I first saw it, was the Borad becoming the Loch Ness Monster. Not only does it contradict an earlier story, but also how can that work? He's got a pretty strange-looking face and hand for sure, but he still essentially looks like a human in silhouette. How could it be the Borad in all of those blurry Nessie photos?

So, is this the worst Doctor Who story ever? Honestly, it probably is. There are saving graces, some good ideas - even if they are undeveloped, some great make-up effects, and a few entertainingly hammy performances. It's greatest sin though, is that it is just so under-written, with very little evidence shown that the writer has made any effort, or cares much about the story he's crafted.



Even a Hollywood style effects budget would not have saved this script, or made it any less unloved than it is.

In case you're wondering whether the novelisation solves any of these problems - honestly it doesn't. It's very, very slightly tighter written, but the gaping problems of the plot can't be solved without a radical re-write of the whole thing.

Timelash is still Doctor Who however, so the quality bar is higher than usual. I'd still watch this story over the best that many other TV series have to offer. There are still things about it you can enjoy.

While it might be one of the worst stories if you rank them in that order, it's far from deserving hate. I wouldn't blame anyone that considers this one of their favourites - even if it's far from being one of mine!

## REVELATION OF THE DALEKS

Review by Alan Stevens

On 16 July 1984, shortly after starting his vacation, Eric Saward was commissioned to pen a new Doctor Who adventure called The End of the Road. Tighter restrictions at the BBC had made it increasingly difficult for script editors to write episodes, therefore, Saward chose to work on the story between contracts.

Running for 97 pages, the earliest surviving draft of Revelation of the Daleks "Episode One" varies in many surprising details from the version transmitted on 23 March 1985.

To begin with, Peri, the Doctor's companion, emerges from the TARDIS "dressed in a white jumpsuit" whilst the Doctor is "wearing a white, full-length cloak, over his familiar costume." This is explained on page 26 when the Doctor says he is "wearing a cloak of mourning", and on page 19 we have a script note that states, "The colour associated with death on Necros is white. This isn't only reflected in the rooms we see, but also in the simple tunics all the attendants wear."

Peri still throws her bread roll into what the script calls "a large pool of smelly, stagnant water", but on this occasion, it is "snatched under the surface by unseen jaws" and not the hand of a mutant.

The explosion and the resulting "column of water [which] shoots up from the pond" first appear in the re-

hearsal script, with Peri remarking, "That was my lunch. It's the last time I eat any more of your home-cured ham." This was changed to "nut roast rolls" for the broadcast.

Much of the dialogue is different.



The Doctor defines the planet's technology as "about five hundred years ahead of Earth's", which, since Necros is a world colonised by humans, may suggest the adventure takes place in the year 2485.

Peri also makes what could be an oblique reference to the cannibalistic Androgums from The Two Doctors, when she expresses her hope to meet "people we could dine out with, rather than the sort we've met recently, who wanted to dine on us."

The Doctor feels she needs "the company of people of your own age. Being

stuck in the TARDIS with an old fogey like me must be very depressing.”

Peri replies she'll just settle for a rest, and the Doctor responds enigmatically, “There's plenty of that here. It's what the planet specialises in”, which causes Peri to give “the Doctor an uneasy glance.”

This kind of deception is more akin to the Seventh Doctor's treatment of Ace, and, indeed, a few scenes later, there is a similar confrontation between the Sixth Doctor and his companion:

PERI: I'd rather you had told me the truth. I sometimes find your patronising manner unbearable. When are you going to stop treating me like a child?

THE DOCTOR: I just don't like to worry you.

PERI: Don't you understand? I worry even more when you don't tell me what's going on.

Their dialogue on discovering the “weed plant” (Saward's script note says “Latin name to be supplied”) and their initial encounter with the mutant is close to what we get on screen, although when the Doctor produces his pocket watch and attempts hypnotism, Peri says, “What are you trying to do — bribe it?”

Next is a rather bizarrely sexualised description of the Doctor's fight with the mutant:

“Like embracing lovers, the Doctor and the mutant roll, bounce, slither down the banking, as though acting out some orgiastic ritual.”

Not unsurprisingly, this was deleted



from all subsequent versions of the script.

Peri's attack on the mutant is also more explicitly violent:

“Peri reaches the bottom of the bank, picks up a large stone, staggers to the fighting duo, and brings the stone down on the mutant's head. The first blow has little effect. She starts to panic and Peri strikes him again, then again. Still, the mutant remains immune. Peri suddenly loses control, desperate to save the Doctor. Peri lashes out harder and more viciously. The mutant roars and brushes her away. Peri sees the mutant is weakening and rushes in, desperate to dislodge him. Suddenly the mutant gives in, roars and clutching his bleeding head, rolls off the Doctor, growling and moaning. Peri continues to hit the mutant, her anger and fear having fused into an act of blind rage. Momentarily, the choking, gasping Doctor remains on

his back struggling to ventilate his lungs. Slowly becoming aware of what Peri is doing he struggles to sit up.”

THE DOCTOR: (SCREAMS) Peri!  
(SHE PAUSES IN MID-BLOW AND TURNS HER TERRIFIED FACE TOWARDS THE DOCTOR)

THE DOCTOR: You've won. Put the stone down.

“Peri stares at the Doctor for a moment, then discards it. As she does, she glances down at the mutant. His head is covered in blood. The sight seems to snap her out of her momentary catatonic trance and she starts to sob. Quickly, she gets to her feet and moves away from the mutant, her sobs growing louder and more painful to the ear. The Doctor scrambles to his feet and crosses to her. He then places his arm around her in an attempt to comfort. For a moment, Peri seems to accept it, but then pulls away. She is now beside herself with frustration and anger.”

PERI: Keep away from me! Don't touch me. (SCREAMS) I thought that thing had killed you.

(HER INVOLUNTARY SOBBING PREVENTS HER FROM CONTINUING)

THE DOCTOR: It's alright.

PERI: It isn't. Why did you bring me here? You said it was a safe place. (LOSING CONTROL AGAIN) You lied to me! You lied! You lied! You've made me a murderer.

(PERI RUSHES AT THE DOCTOR, HER FISTS FLYING. THE DOCTOR IS ABLE TO DODGE MOST OF THE BLOWS, BUT PERI'S RAGE GROWS FIERCER)

THE DOCTOR: Stop it, Peri!

“But she is beyond listening. Left with no other alternative, the Doctor slaps

her hard around the face. The blow sends her crashing to the ground, but Peri is quick to recover. Her tears suddenly gone, her eyes are now full of contempt. The Doctor looks down at her.”

THE DOCTOR: I'm sorry.

(BUT PERI ISN'T TO BE PACIFIED, AND HISSES:)

PERI: Never, ever hit me again.

(THE DOCTOR NODS. HE IS TOTALLY CONFUSED, AS THOUGH HE HAD NEVER HAD TO FACE SUCH A SITUATION BEFORE)

THE DOCTOR: You left me with no alternative.

From the rehearsal script onward, all the material featuring Peri's bludgeoning of the mutant as it lies helpless on the ground, her verbal and physical attack on the Doctor, and his retaliatory assault on her have been cut.



Season 22 was originally scheduled for a much later evening timeslot, which no doubt prompted this more adult content, but it's unlikely such a level of violence would ever have made it onto UK screens before the nine o'clock watershed.

As for the Doctor choosing to strike his companion: in the decades-long history of the series, it's difficult to find a comparable incident. During Invasion of the Dinosaurs, Sergeant Benton consents to the Third Doctor using his "Venusian oojah" to knock him out, so the former can escape detention. In Robot, the Fourth Doctor, suffering from post-regenerative mania, tied up Harry Sullivan and hung him in a cupboard "like a pair of old boots" — but it's an off-screen act intended to be seen in a comedic light. The closest parallel, therefore, would be Six's attempt to strangle Peri during The Twin Dilemma, though again, it's due to "manic moments" brought on by another regeneration.

There is no real precedent for the Doctor to slap Peri in the face and with such force, she is knocked down.

The Doctor and Peri's conversation with the dying mutant doesn't stray significantly from what we finally get, with the only notable deviation coming at its conclusion:

THE DOCTOR: Why are you crying?  
 PERI: Because I killed him.  
 THE DOCTOR: Save your tears. He forgave us.  
 PERI: (HORRIFIED) How can you be so insensitive?  
 THE DOCTOR: Am I? Are you sure you're crying for him, and not yourself?  
 PERI: How dare you?  
 THE DOCTOR: The same could be said to you. How dare you insult his memory with your self-pity.

It appears likely this exchange was inspired by a scene from Pyramids of Mars where the Doctor and Sarah find the body of Doctor Laurence Scarman:

DOCTOR WHO: Strangled.  
 SARAH: The mummies?  
 DOCTOR WHO: Not this time. There are marks. His late brother must have called.  
 SARAH: But that's horrible! He was so concerned about his brother.  
 DOCTOR WHO: I told him not to be. I told him it was too late.  
 SARAH: Oh! Sometimes you don't seem...  
 DOCTOR WHO: Human?

However, in the case of the Sixth Doctor, his callousness is also tinged with an element of bullying.

The draft doesn't have the Time Lord's pocket watch being broken as he and Peri clamber over the boundary wall into Tranquil Repose. This is a rehearsal script addition. The Doctor's discovery of his memorial statue in the Garden of Fond Memories (here, called the "Garden of Remembrance") and his conversation with Peri about the paradoxes of time travel, remains more or less intact. The difference comes in the final shot when Tasambeker, while viewing on a laboratory monitor screen Peri's "frantic" reaction to the Doctor's apparent death, "smiles then titters. Davros joins her in the mirth. Then they both break out into a helpless burst of laughter." In the rehearsal script, an additional page cuts back to the Garden of Remembrance; "The Laughter of Davros and Tasambeker is carried over on the soundtrack"; and it ends with a close-up on the edge of the fallen statue as "blood begins to gush from beneath it."

Turning to the other characters, we are told, "In front of D.J. is a large bank of monitors. Each monitor shows a different scene: the new and old catacombs,

reception area, etc. (but not Davros' lab.) We can also see the Garden of Remembrance, the rough ground, with a high shot of the Doctor and Peri on the move, several star fields, etc... Although D.J. is dressed in the formal white, he has attempted to modify his uniform with a dash of his own personality. He also wears a colourful headband and dark glasses. D.J. has two voices. The first is a Mid-Atlantic, hyped-up version which is his 'professional' D.J.'s voice. The second is his own, a much flatter English accent."

Davros and Tasambeker are not D.J.'s greatest fans.

TASAMBEKER: Are you sure we shouldn't have him destroyed?  
 DAVROS: You are becoming obsessed with his destruction, Tasambeker. He will die when it is convenient to my cause. And not before.



TASAMBEKER: Of course. Forgive me. It's just that I am still learning the art of embalming. He has such a fascinating head and he would make an excellent subject. His lips would have to be set just so, to capture his expression in life.  
 DAVROS: His head you may have. The rest of him I shall tear personally limb from limb.

D.J.'s commentary on events is a fair approximation of what we hear during the finished production. However, following the Doctor and Peri's encounter with the mutant, D.J. observes, "This is all getting a bit nasty."

Moving on to Grigory and Natasha, the former is said to be "fifty" whereas the latter is described as "a slim, athletic, plain woman, in her early twenties."

Their actions follow a similar trajectory, but with some variations. When initially confronted by Takis and Lilt, Natasha's response is to throw a "stun grenade", which results in the death of two attendants.

Grigory and Natasha's appearance in the "incubation room" is absent from the first draft, as is the incubation room itself. The glass Dalek is evidently a later addition, as both the rehearsal and



camera scripts read, “in the corner of the room is a white Dalek covered in a thin, blue membrane. Whatever, the impression should be that the Dalek is organic and in a state of growth.”

The living decapitated head of Natasha’s father also first appears in the rehearsal script:

“The door of the box slides open. Inside we see the severed head of Stengos, standing on the stump of its neck.”

The above replaces the sequence from the draft script where Natasha lobbs a grenade into a lift and the explosion is accompanied by “a terrible alien scream. Natasha and Grigory exchange a confused glance. Then, without hesitation, Natasha steps into the lift. Before her are the remains of two Daleks. Grigory pops his head around the door and is horrified by what he sees.”

GRIGORY: What are they?

(HE ENTERS THE LIFT)

NATASHA: I don’t know.

(GRIGORY EXAMINES A DESTROYED DALEK)

GRIGORY: They seem to be machines of some sort. Yet the green membrane is organic.

NATASHA: They must have been creatures in some form of transport.

Natasha attempts to use the lift to escape, but “Lilt rushes in and jabs the butt of his gun hard into Natasha’s stomach. She crashes to the floor: once there Lilt starts to put the boot in. All Grigory can do is cower in the corner.” When Takis arrives he calls a stop “but Lilt goes on kicking” until “Takis levels his rifle”:

TAKIS: I said stop.

LILT: She killed Vine and Semple. (TAKES OUT A KNIFE) I’m going to mark her.

TAKIS: Touch her, and I’ll kill you.

The destruction of the two Daleks doesn’t play well with Davros:

DAVROS: My Daleks have failed.

TASAMBEKER: But why?

DAVROS: I must speak to Kara.

TASAMBEKER: But Great Healer, you said your Dalek force would be invincible.

DAVROS: And so they shall be. But I must have more money for research. (RANTS) I cannot build a race of new Daleks with inferior materials. I must have more money. I must have my way! Nothing must stand between me and my destiny. I shall create the finest force of Daleks the universe has ever seen.

By the rehearsal script, the explosion in the lift has been dropped. However, an earlier scene is added in which Natasha kills a guard and blows up a Dalek with a grenade before entering the old catacombs.

Again, Davros gets upset:

DAVROS: That isn’t possible. They have destroyed a Dalek!

FIRST DALEK: It was a prototype mark one.

DAVROS: But fitted with an energy barrier. Nothing should be able to penetrate it, especially a grenade. Why is my work constantly hampered by lack of funds?

Natasha will go on to wreck one more Dalek before the episode is over, but

Davros’ undoubted apoplexy remains unwritten.

Saward describes Kara as “tall, sexy, fortyish and very much in control of herself and everyone around her. She is striking in appearance rather than beautiful” — whereas Vogel, is simply denoted as “her male assistant.”

Their discussion with Davros over the monitor screen remains largely the same, as does Kara’s meeting with the two assassins she has employed to kill Davros.

“The Grand Master Orcini is tall, slim, and fit. He is in his mid-forties with a shock of white hair. He is dressed in a simple, black tunic. Bostock, his assistant, echoes the Grand Master in dress — but whereas Orcini is a neat, almost dapper man, Bostock, is dirty and untidy. He also has the unpleasant habit of sniffing and then cuffing his nose when he becomes excited.”

“Although she had never met Orcini before, she greets him like her oldest friend. She extends her hand, but Orcini ignores it and gives her a small nod of the head. He doesn’t like being touched, neither does Kara like the rejection, but says nothing. She continues, her manner even more brittle and phoney than before.”

In the broadcast the gestures are less overt; Orcini sidles away from Kara’s approach, leaving her momentarily disconcerted.

Orcini’s squire is, according to Saward, more welcoming.

“Bostock leers and steps forwards al-



most grabbing Kara’s hand. He kisses her hand. As he does Kara makes an almost involuntary movement to pull away. Downwind of Bostock is not a very pleasant place to be.”

The point where Kara dupes the assassins into accepting the bomb disguised as “a one-way transmitter” is missing from the draft script.

A note on page eight asserts, “We do not see Davros until later in the episode. Neither at this stage, do we recognise his voice, as the words we hear sound as though they are emitting from a throat clogged with water.”

When Davros is finally revealed on page 58 the description reads, “Instead of his familiar chariot we see the head of Davros suspended in a large tank of clear liquid.”

By the rehearsal script, this attempt to conceal his identity has been dropped, with Tasambeker’s role as Davros’ stooge passing instead to a Dalek.

Tasambeker, we are told, “frantically starts to bite her nails” during “moments of stress”, and is further shown to have a poor working relationship with her head of security.



DAVROS: Takis would be an excellent security officer if you nurtured him properly. Learn to control your temper, then you will learn to control the minds of others.

The one character missing from the first draft is Jobel. This is odd because his name is based on Mr. Joyboy, the senior mortician from Evelyn Waugh's satirical novel *The Loved One*, which formed part of the source material for *Revelation of the Daleks*.

The rehearsal script depicts him thus:

"Mr. Jobel enters. He is fat, greasy-haired, and bespectacled in 'John Lennon' round framed glasses. Like everyone else, he is dressed in a simple white tunic. But Mr. Jobel is the head embalmer and qualifies for the sartorial splendour of two small gold flashes on the collar of his tunic top."

Jobel's addition to the story is transformative. It sets up a more convincing interaction between Takis and Tasambeker, because Jobel's evident disdain for the woman gives Takis and Lilt the means to undermine

Tasambeker's position within the power structure.

Likewise, Tasambeker's unrequited love for Jobel opens her to mockery from Takis and Lilt, contempt from Jobel, and



malevolent manipulation from Davros. How closely the 138-page rehearsal script for "Episode Two" adheres to Saward's missing original draft is unclear, yet it's difficult to imagine what would have transpired without the Tasambeker/Jobel/Davros dynamic.

As it is, with the structure and content much closer to the production as broadcast, we begin with all the characters in place:

"Jobel, who is still wearing his rubber apron and gloves, is out for a stroll. He reacts to Peri's screaming as though he has just heard the first cuckoo of spring."

When he attempts to seduce Peri over what may well have been the Doctor's pulverised corpse, she responds "Are you some sort of animal?"

There is a cut back to Davros' laboratory after the Doctor has emerged from under "the plastic debris of the statue",

with his white cloak covered in fake blood. Tasambeker is confused by his survival, causing Davros to respond "It is all as planned. I think you should attend the Doctor. Be gracious. Treat him as though he were an honoured client. But get him into the catacomb. He must not escape."

She greets the Doctor and Peri in the reception area: "like her uniform" Tasambeker's "manner is equally as starched." When she details the services offered by Tranquil Repose the script states "Tasambeker begins to sound more and more like the contents of a badly written brochure."

Meanwhile, outside Tranquil Repose, Bostock and Orcini find the dead body of the mutant, with the former asking if he is allowed to slice off one of its ears:

ORCINI: You didn't kill him.  
(AS THOUGH FROM NOWHERE, BOSTOCK PRODUCES A SPRING-LOADED FOLDING KNIFE)

BOSTOCK: Go on, Master, just a small token.

(WITH A TERRIBLE NOISE, THE SPRING FLICKS THE BLADE OPEN)

BOSTOCK: He won't miss it.

ORCINI: (SHARPLY) Hasn't the creature suffered enough in life? Surely you can spare it mutilation in death.

Bostock apologises and puts his knife away.

ORCINI: When you look at me, do you see an anachronism? For that's what I am.

BOSTOCK: No, Master. You are the finest soldier I have ever had the honour to serve.

ORCINI: I am no longer a real soldier.

Soldiers are technicians nowadays. They hide underground and operate their machines of destruction. A bomb would kill Davros as effectively as a bullet from my gun. Only fools would take the risks we do.

BOSTOCK: You're wrong, Master. You're a man of honour. You do what you think is right. That's why you are a good soldier.

Orcini fires his machine pistol, and the ground explodes: "The bullets have been fitted with bastic heads. They will penetrate solid rock."

"Pull back and we see on the bank above the duo, two white Daleks... Orcini spins round... and opens fire. The bastic heads explode on impact." Nonetheless, he only succeeds in destroying a Dalek eyepiece and doesn't cause the huge explosion which shattered the Dalek in the television serial.

Returning to Kara, when Vogel tells her "the president's ship is precisely on schedule", she replies:

KARA: Splendid. It seems that punctuality is the only thing a politician can be relied on for. Remind me, when I hold supreme power, always to be late. I would hate to be caught in a trap similar to my own devising.

The bomb they've planted on Orcini "will explode in forty minutes. In a small puff of smoke, I will free myself of Davros and President Vargos. Such a sweet thought."

VOGEL: Shall I inform our agents on Vargos' planet?

KARA: Why not? The sooner his federation of ten planets is destroyed, the

sooner I shall control the food supply of the galaxy. (SIGHS) Poor, Orcini. He was such a dedicated man.

There are further dialogue cuts when Tasambeker tries to warn Jobel of Davros' desire to kill him, an act which she herself has been instructed to undertake.



JOBEL: I don't believe you. You always were a scheming witch. You're trying to undermine my confidence. I'm Jobel! (HOLDS UP HANDS) These have served the dead throughout the galaxy. The Great Healer does not want to see me on my own slab! This place wouldn't function without me!

Confessing her love, Tasambeker tells Jobel they must leave together, but he is not persuaded.

JOBEL: I think I would rather put my head in the fire than spend any unnecessary time with you. (TASAMBEKER BUCKLES UNDER THE INSULT)

TASAMBEKER: I don't think you understand how serious I am. The Great Healer has made me the same offer of immortality as he made to you.

JOBEL: You'd make a good Dalek.  
TASAMBEKER: I'm prepared to give that up.  
JOBEL: Then you're a fool. Anyone who is as talentless and plain as you blatantly are should grasp any offer with both hands.



Instead of an embalming syringe, Tasambeker plunges a blade into Jobel's chest and "stabs him again and again. She then throws away the scalpel and runs crying from the room. Jobel unsteadily turns to see her go. Blood starts to trickle from the corner of his mouth."

JOBEL: (UNABLE TO BELIEVE IT) She's killed Jobel. (SCREAMS) The witch has killed Jobel!  
(HE TOPPLES FORWARD, HITTING THE GROUND WITH A MIGHTY CRASH)

At this juncture, there appears an extra scene. It reads "On a monitor we see a distraught Tasambeker running along a new catacomb. Pull back to show Davros and first Dalek."

DAVROS: (MUTTERS) Emotional fool. (TO DALEK) Have her destroyed.

For the camera script, his second line

was changed to "Exterminate her!"

The moment where Kara is escorted through the corridors of Tranquil Repose by two white Daleks has also been deleted.

KARA: This is outrageous! You're treating me like a prisoner.

FIFTH DALEK: Proceed.

KARA: I would have at least expected transport. After all, I am a V.I.P.

FIFTH DALEK: I do not understand. What is V.I.P.?

KARA: Considering the way I'm being treated, let's settle for 'very insecure person.'

The attempt to kill Davros fails, with the head in the tank revealed as a simple "lure, a focal point for the assassin's bullet."

The genuine Davros forces Kara into revealing her treachery to Orcini, who "takes a fine long needle and drives it up under Kara's breastbone... Kara gasps, then collapses, dead."

When the Doctor enters Davros' laboratory, he "looks around the room at the bodies of Kara and Bostock", then "glances at Orcini."

THE DOCTOR: Surprised to see you here. Thought you would have dealt with this rubbish and be on your way home for tea by now.

DAVROS: I am not so easy to destroy.

THE DOCTOR: So I gather. The last time we met, your ship was blown up. I thought, with you on board.

DAVROS: Not when there is an escape pod to be had.

THE DOCTOR: Or, it seems, a lift by transporter to this place.

DAVROS: There I was fortunate, alt-

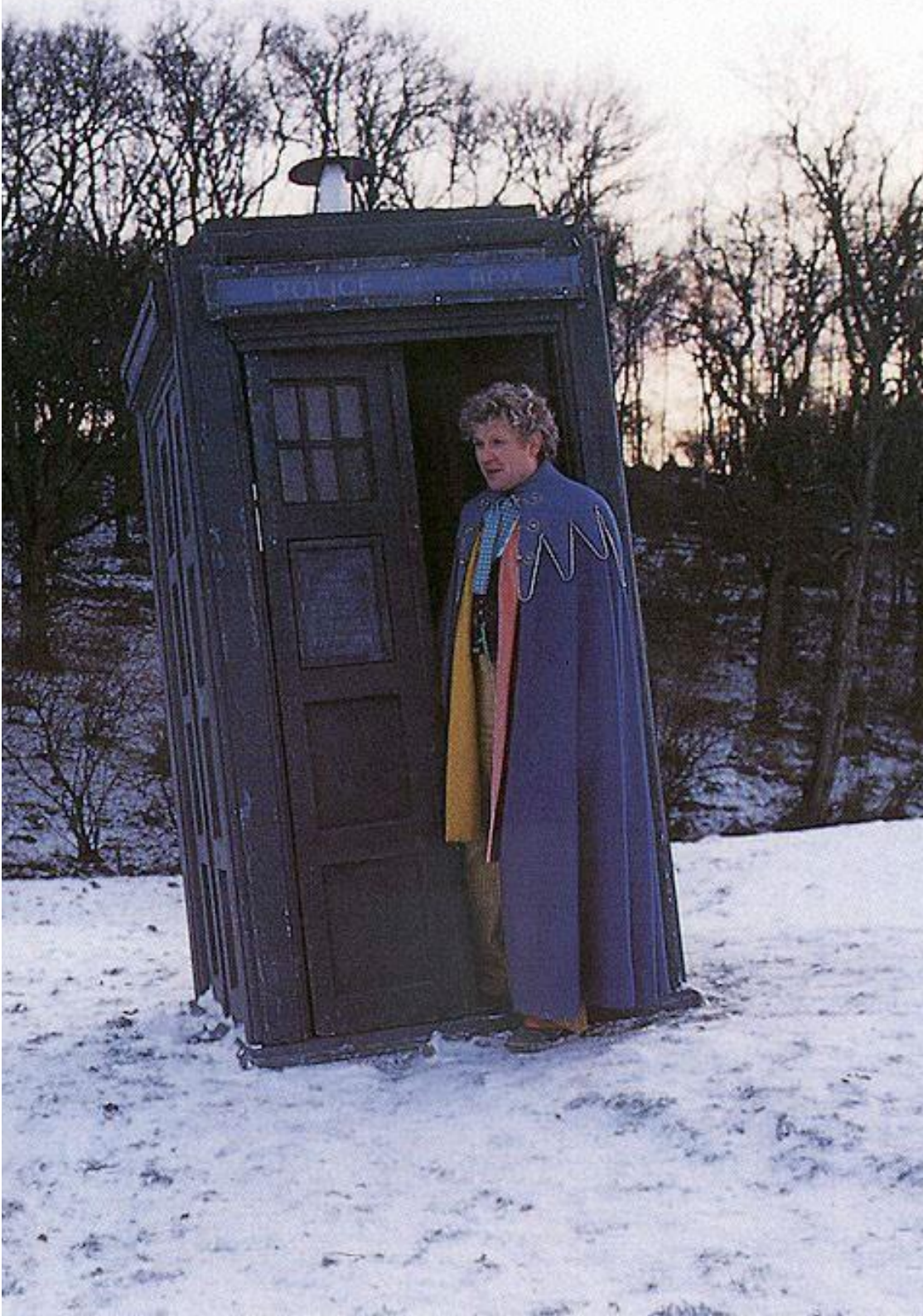


though I had to wait many months. I almost died.

THE DOCTOR: It seems that during your vigil you developed a sense of humour. I very much like the statue.

After the grey Daleks arrive from Skaro, declare their intention to put Davros on trial, and leave with their prisoner, Peri says, "The Daleks will execute him, won't they?" To which the Doctor replies, "I hope so", thereby making them supporters of capital punishment!

In conclusion, there is no doubt Revelation of the Daleks is a macabre, cynical, and blackly comedic masterpiece, recollecting the works of Jacobean playwrights such as John Webster, Thomas Middleton and William Shakespeare. But as this article demonstrates, redrafts, editing, and reappraisal were essential key factors in its ultimate success.



## A FIX WITH SONTARANS

Review by Paul Burns

A Fix With Sontarans was originally broadcast on BBC1 on 23/2/85. It was included in a wish fulfilment programme for children, where they got the chance to experience once in a lifetime moments, simply by writing to the host. The episode, written by Eric Saward and directed by Marcus Mortimer, was broadcast on the same evening as part 2 of The Two Doctors, with the same three actors playing the Doctor and Sontarans in both productions. The companion, however, was different.

The episode paired the Sixth Doctor with previous companion Tegan Jovanka. Producer John Nathan-Turner asked Janet Fielding to appear after a disagreement with Nicola Bryant over a pantomime appearance, (as recently documented in an interview with Bryant on the recent Season 22 Blu-ray set). The Doctor accidentally transports Tegan on board the TARDIS and this brief exchange is a glimpse of what their relationship could have been. Tegan describes herself as "All charm, all heart." to which the Doctor responds, "All mouth."

It's here that the TARDIS welcomes aboard a new companion. The Doctor announces his arrival, hoping the matter transporter will deliver someone with "Great courage, vast intellect and incredible perspicacity." Many children would have written to the host in the hope of meeting the Doctor, and lucky eight year old Gareth Jenkins was cho-

sen to appear on the show.

Gareth very kindly agreed to be interviewed about the episode for this annual, and I began by asking him about the Sixth Doctor costume he wore, as he mentioned in his letter to the show: 'I have got Colin Baker's Doctor Who suit made by my Nan.'

"My grandparents were devoted to my sister and I. My grandmother had been a seamstress during the war, and was able to make the most beautiful clothes. My grandad was a painter and decorator, and loved painting and creating art in his spare time. For two Doctors (Peter Davison and Colin Baker) they recreated the outfits which they created for me as presents. My grandad even made a cat brooch just as Colin Baker had on his lapel. I would spend hours playing at being the Doctor - driving my sister and cousins absolutely mad as I insisted on them joining me on my make believe adventures!"

Gareth recalls the events leading up to the filming of the episode:

"I do remember quite a bit about the run up to the show. I don't remember writing the letter, but I do remember the BBC researcher coming to visit us, with me showing him my tent TARDIS and outfit and asking questions about why I liked Doctor Who. We also had to stay a number of days in London as a family in the run up to the recording of the episode so that I could rehearse. We went to the BBC rehearsal rooms in

White City every day, and we met so many BBC stars there - it was an incredible experience. Both Colin Baker and Janet Fielding were so kind and lovely. They really helped us all feel at ease, and enjoy the whole process. I was incredibly nervous the day before the recording, and was very sick. I think I was very aware just how many people would be watching at home, and I found that very daunting."

The episode featured, as every good Doctor Who episode should, monsters. The titular Sontarans were played by Clinton Greyn, and Tim Raynham. The fearsome war clones wanted to kill Gareth, as he is destined to lead the Earth Defence Force against the Sontarans in 2001. Surely, any eight year old would be ducking behind the nearest TARDIS console if they met two overly large Sontarans? "I wasn't scared meeting the Sontarans as we first met the actors and so I wasn't

frightened once they were in costume, but my sister (only four at the time) definitely was!"

After dispatching the Sontarans with a handy steam bath, Gareth, the Doctor and Tegan celebrate their victory. It is here where the 1985 and 2022 versions of the episode part company, for obvious reasons. But before we get to the newly edited version, in 1985, Gareth was presented with a genuine Sontaran gun. "Alas both the Meson gun and my costumes were left behind after a family house move so I no longer have them."

The original 2003 DVD release of The Two Doctors featured the unedited 'A Fix With Sontarans', including an appearance by the host. Understandably, subsequent pressings of the release excluded the mini episode entirely, but the Season 22 boxset release restored it, with a new ending. Instead of the



host appearing on the TARDIS viewer, a shot of a CGI Sontaran battle fleet is seen, with new dialogue from Colin Baker: "This is just the beginning."

After his brush with fame, Gareth chose a completely different path in life, though no less heroic and admirable. "My current job is as Advocacy Director for the charity Malaria No More. We campaign to the British government and other governments to put in place what's needed to finally eradicate the disease. Hundreds of thousands of children still die of malaria every year and yet with the right funding and continued scientific research, these lives could be saved. In September a major funding decision will be made to support malaria programmes and it's imperative our government and others steps up and provides the money needed, especially after knock backs in support as a result of covid."

Looking back on his time with the Doctor in the TARDIS, Gareth has nothing

but praise for Sixie: "Colin Baker will always be MY Doctor - kind, funny, creative, brave - to me he is the epitome of the Doctor, and was a terrific role model for me as a young boy. It's been wonderful to see him again on a few occasions at Doctor Who events. I will always be so grateful to him and to Janet Fielding for the experience they, and the BBC, gave me."

And, as for passing on the mantle of Whovian to the next generation: "My son Harry is only 5, and my daughter is just 2, so they're a bit young yet for watching Doctor Who but I shall definitely be encouraging them to watch the programme. I still love it and I think they'll both really enjoy it too."

Fortunately, with the help of the Blu-ray restoration team, A Fix with Sontarans can be enjoyed once again by a whole new audience of Doctor Who fans, and Gareth's children will be thrilled to see their dad saving the Doctor and Tegan. And perhaps wondering

why their dad is not a bit more famous after saving the Earth in 2001.

Thanks to Gareth for granting the annual an interview. For more information on Malaria No More: [www.malaria-no-more.org.uk](http://www.malaria-no-more.org.uk)



# SLIPBACK

Review by Nick Smith

Some of the best Doctor Who stories are heard but not seen and feature Colin Baker as the Sixth Doctor. But long before Professor Evelyn Smythe was a twinkle in Nick Briggs' eye, fans were treated to an original, official adventure featuring Young Sixie and Peri (Nicola Bryant) – Slipback.

This BBC Radio original presented a great opportunity for the production team and fans alike. Written by the TV series' then-script editor, Eric Saward, it was both a chance to reach a new audience and to stretch the scope of Doctor Who. With no budgetary constraints on costumes or locales, the TARDIS really could go anywhere, any time.

Best of all, Slipback had the benefit of an excellent cast. Most likely thanks to the tale's fast turnaround time – it was recorded in one day – Baker and Bryant were backed by a phalanx of veteran thespians: Valentine Dyall, who had voiced the Man in Black on radio and personified the Black Guardian on TV, played the grotesque Captain Orlous Mosten Slarn. Character actor Jon Glover (the management consultant in The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy TV series) is First Officer Shellingborne Grant. Nick Revell (Billy the Kid and the Green Baize Vampire) plays both crewman Bates and space cop Snatch. Jane Carr, who read The Wolves of Willoughby Chase for Jackanory, is the Computer, Ron Pember (Alain Muny in Secret Army) is Snatch's partner Seedle and Alan Thompson (Praxis in I, Claudi-

us) pinch-hits as every other voice.

In its snappy ten-minute episodes, Slipback is best when it lets its actors relish their roles – as Seedle and Snatch, Pember and Revell bounce off each other as if they've really been partnered for years. Carr skilfully goes from dreamy to ditz to dangerous over the course of the story. Dyall relishes his slimy final role, making the disease-riddled Slarn sound suitably grotesque, a selfish, horrible boss who threatens to kill his crew with his poisonous pustules.

Saward is definitely focused on the characters. Fettered only by his imagination, he keeps the setting simple, choosing the traditional Doctor Who environment of a bunch of corridors on a spaceship. The Vipod Mor is a dull-as-dishwater survey vessel livened up by the creature in its bowels – an ever-roaring Maston, hungry for humans.

The Doctor and Peri visit the Mor not to defeat this creature but to follow up on a vision the Time Lord has experienced. There's a nice use of the audio medium as a voice invades his dreams, paying off later in the story when the identity of the voice is revealed. The Maston seems to exist mainly to imperil our heroes and snarl at other characters who get in its way.

Despite the tropey setting, Saward does flip some conventional elements upside down with variable effect. Supporting



characters get almost as much airtime as the regulars. Humour is as prevalent as the drama – I'll explain later. Most important of all, the Doctor's normal role of active protagonist is undermined; in a Deus ex machina moment, a Time Lord appears to tell him to do nothing. So he does.

Three factors affect the way Slipback is told and heard, all relating to the time it was broadcast. By July 1985, the TV series had been set back a financial year following complaints about vindictive violence, along with BBC Controller Michael Grade just plain hating the show. Tasked with injecting more light-hearted fun into the Doctor's adventures, Saward seems to be saying, 'You want jokes? I'll give you jokes!'

Comedy at the time was stretching its rubber chicken legs from the slapstick ledge of old-school working-class sight

gags to the new heights of alternative comedy. Through the early '80s, audiophiles had chuckled to the antics of alt comics such as Alexei Sayle (... and the Dutch Lieutenant's Trousers), Tony Allen, Pauline Melville, Andy de la Tour and Jim Barclay (Alternative Cabaret). On the box, Rik Mayall, Ben Elton and others brought us The Young Ones and Saturday Live, a breath of funky punk air in a TV sea of 'Allo 'Allo, Hi-De-Hi! and their ilk. To give a flavour of Saturday Live I present exhibit A: 'Crocodile Snogging', a

sketch that featured The Dangerous Brothers and a real croc; and exhibit B, 'Exploding Politicians.' Ah, to be alive at the time of 'Crocodile Snogging'... it seemed like anything was comedically possible, as long as it was unsuitable for your granny.

Tame, staid humour was out. Shocking, gross-out, anti-establishment gags were in. This was an environment where the Doctor could get drunk, an authority figure like Slarn could bask in a gory, incurable disease, and the TARDIS console could be described as flashing and grunting, 'like some dirty old man in a park.'

So far, so hilarious (according to taste) but once the characters are introduced and the story settles down, Slipback becomes more serious, with the fate of the universe at stake. It's a missed opportunity.

If anything, Slipback isn't silly enough – with a few more gags it could have stood up as an oddball audio comedy. Saward doesn't dare steer the story too far from the TV show's tried and tested formula, placing it firmly in the melodramatic milieu of the Sixth Doctor era.

The second factor tempering Slipback's scope is its intended audience. Lasting one hour total, it was broadcast in short segments on Pirate Radio Four. This was a summertime magazine programme that ran in the morning aimed primarily at kids in their early teens. To get to Who you had to listen to wittering DJ Steve Blacknell, advice from Adrian Mole (read by Nicholas Barnes), dally with Roald Dahl stories (read by Griff Rhys Jones), hear Top 40 tunes and ride with Lill the Biker, AKA Miriam Margoyles. Radio 4 tried hard – too hard – to draw in young listeners who probably wanted to be playing outside on their BMXs instead.

Kids had slim TV comedy pickings at the time. Bob Rentaghost Block explored Galloping Galaxies. Bill Oddie ran a stage school in From the Top. Stu Francis did chores in The Crazy Kitchen. On teatime telly, Doctor Who was losing its dyed-in-the-wool family audience to wonderful populist nonsense like The A-Team. Radio Who's remit was to capture brats bred on Hollywood sci-fi.

Perhaps there wasn't the time or inclination to compete with the likes of NPR Playhouse's aurally intoxicating Star Wars adaptations; for whatever reason, the opportunity to capture space battles or alien worlds was not taken.

Instead, the wee listeners got something more valuable and lasting than special effects. They got ideas. A sassy computer with a personality disorder. An art thief who undergoes a brain transplant to evade the authorities. A starship thrown back in time, kick-starting the universe with its own demise. These fascinating concepts were almost too big to squeeze into ten-minute parcels, bursting to get out of the radio and leap into inquiring young minds.

Did I say sassy computer?

Douglas Adams' best-known oeuvre The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, also birthed on radio, is doubtless a major influence on Slipback. Saward has been summarily accused of aping Adams with the tone and content of this script. The evidence is plain to hear – Hitchhikers and Slipback both have a complaining robot, a cheeky ship's computer and an apocalyptic event to tackle. Every nerdy British kid in the early '80s knew Hitchhikers and would have recognized the similarity in wit. Saward was smart to appreciate Adams' impact on younger folk.

Let's call it an homage and move on.

Ahem.

So, kids. Apart from understanding the lure of ideas and space-nerd humour, Saward stuck to the motifs that seemed to work on regular, and especially mid-'80s, Doctor Who. Scary monster, check. Repressive, uniformed hardasses with guns, check. Doctor mistaken for a criminal/murderer, check. Cliffhangers with the Doctor yelling his companion's name, bleeding into credits – double check. Periiiiiiiiiii!

These elements are endearing rather than grating, especially through a nostalgic 37-year-old lens. Most emblematic of all is the relationship between the Doctor and Peri. In episode one, they snipe at each other, Peri complains, the Doctor is obtuse. The dialogue is edited – or left to play out – with some pauses between the lines, which gives the comedy an improv feel. Just when we're starting to wonder why Peri puts up with Six's rudeness and whether she has Stockholm Syndrome, there is an interesting development. They stop bickering.

After the TARDIS lands, the pair are too busy having adventures to play Mean Girls. The Doctor is genuinely concerned when Peri gets separated. When we're not visiting the array of supporting players, Baker and Bryant's chemistry is apparent. We want them to be victorious together.

It doesn't happen, though. The climax is an internal one, centring on the Doctor's struggle over whether to intervene or not. Thanks to the pop-up Time Lord, the Doctor does not do anything, letting the Mor crash. The wrap-up is so abrupt that we don't find out what happens to the supporting characters; they either die from a hideous disease or die in an explosion. The fate of Shellingborne Grant is as mysterious

as his origins. The Doctor and Peri are safe to have more adventures in many different forms.

Which brings us to the third factor that influenced Slipback's form and style. Baker's persona could not be contained by just one medium and his face was seemingly everywhere.

The mid-80s was an era of expansion. Lionheart Television International, Inc. had successfully syndicated Doctor Who across the USA and the thirst for merchandising had to be quenched. Target books were fulfilling their mission to novelize all broadcast stories. Donald Cotton had broadened their scope with his comedic adaptations of The Myth Makers and The Gunfighters. Michael Holt provided us with puzzle books in which the Doctor set and solved problems. 'Choose your own



adventure' was a thing, so we got 'Find Your Fate' Doctor Who books. In 1985, FASA published a role-playing game, allowing fans to truly choose their own adventures. Record Shack released a barely listenable charity pop record, Doctor in Distress, which should probably have been called Listeners in Distress. The Doctor was ubiquitous, and the possibilities seemed endless.

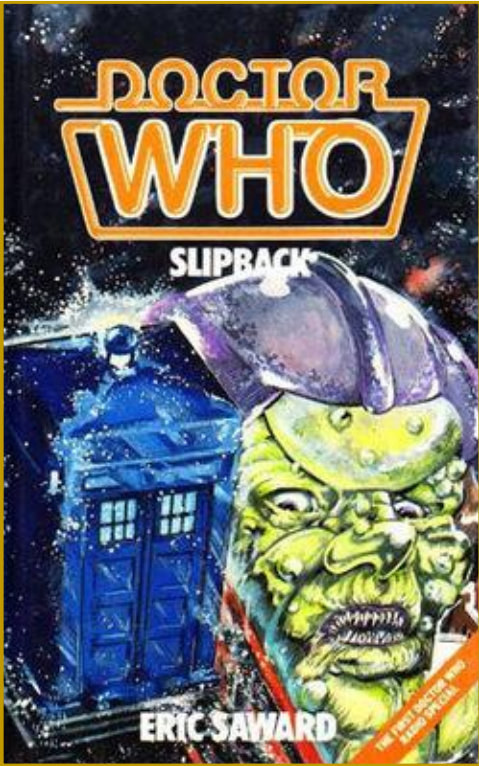
In such an optimistic environment, radio made perfect sense. Surprisingly, Doctor Who had never explored this medium in great depth before – Genesis of the Daleks and Doctor Who and the Pescatons had appeared on vinyl and Destination Earth had not been a traditional serial. Hitchhikers had shown the potential for audio science fiction, both in terms of innovation and commercial success. The adaptable Sixth Doctor would fit right in.

In a later slot with more time to wrap up the plot, Slipback might have fared better. Today it's a curio, with Colin Baker playing a younger, more abrasive character we don't encounter in his newer audios. It's a time capsule of '80s humour and radio production that cannot be recaptured. Valentine Dyall sadly passed away two weeks after recording, one week before broadcast. The other actors went on to be familiar voices and faces on radio and TV.

Glover voiced robots and alien vultures for The Sarah Jane Adventures, as well acting in several Big Finish productions; Carr has had an incredible career, which includes Babylon 5 and DC's Legends of Tomorrow; the

distinctive Pember played the Taxman in Red Dwarf and Den Timpson in Rum-pole of the Bailey. Baker and Bryant, of course, got to develop their characters and soften their relationship in audio spin-off releases.

The audio format actually works well for this era. There is no tasteless coat, no blood, no on-screen violence. Just bright ideas, colourful characters, high peril and the grand trappings of space opera.



# FUTURE IMPERFECT—THE LOST SEASON

by Jeremy Bentham

They really were bolts from the blue. "Doctor Who axed in plot by BBC" screamed 'The Sun' newspaper's front page on Thursday 28 February 1985. "Dr Who is being dropped from the screens by the BBC. It is too expensive to produce" claimed The London Evening Standard which had first broken the story a day earlier.

Yet how could this have happened so suddenly? Less than eighteen months earlier the show had headlined 1983's Children in Need telethon with a UK premier of its first movie-length story, The Five Doctors. Over in America the Hyatt Regency Hotel at O'Hare Airport had simultaneously played host to one of the biggest Doctor Who conventions ever staged.

And both events had followed a year of heady celebrations marking Doctor Who's twenty years on air, celebrations punctuated by a Radio Times special, a best-selling coffee table hardback, sell-out episode screenings at the National Film Theatre and an Easter outdoor event that had seen more than 54,000 visitors trying to cram into the grounds of

Longleat House, eager to meet the stars of the series.

Dubbed the 'cancellation crisis', February's news announcements were also bolts from the blue for the programme's resident Producer and Script-Editor who, up until 27 February, had been fully immersed, commissioning storylines, scripts and organising production schedules for Colin Baker's second full season which was due to start filming in May.



As the cancellation story rumbled on, four official reasons were given by the BBC for this apparently sudden decision to drop the show. It had become too expensive to produce. It was far too violent for a teatime show. Its ratings were dropping. The show was past its sell-by date.

Giving voice to these views was entertainment mogul Michael Grade, newly returned from a two-year stint in the USA and installed, since September 1984, as Controller of BBC1, a post which gave him command of all budgets and airtime allocated to programmes broadcast on the corporation's flagship channel.

By his own admission Grade was no science-fiction fan, thinking it was expensive to make, consumed excessive production resources and only appealed to niche audiences. At heart and by background Grade was a showman who believed there were better, more affordable means of securing large audiences, particularly when fulfilling his remit to continue BBC1's domination over Saturday night broadcasting.

Grade was unphased by the flack his allegedly personal decision to halt Doctor Who attracted in the media. To him it was simply journalistic flummery helping to sell a few newspapers. Interviewed by Matthew Sweet for the Doctor Who, Season 22 Collection Blu ray set in 2022, he was unequivocal concerning his verdict.

"My decision was final. I wasn't going to do any more. I couldn't justify spending license fee payers' money on a show that was so far past its sell-by date... The whole genre has moved on to a

level where the show is now risible."

Pressed whether he had discussed these opinions beforehand with Doctor Who's Producer, John Nathan-Turner, Grade admitted they had only met once or twice during the year to talk about future productions. "I thought he [Nathan-Turner] had let the world pass him by. It was still relying on the tricks and techniques they had used for twenty years. Spielberg had happened. George Lucas had happened. No amount of suspension of disbelief would get you to buy into Doctor Who as it was presented then."

So that was it? Job done, Doctor Who cancelled, resources and money freed up for major new initiatives like EastEnders and further development of the BBC's Breakfast Time service. Another cost-cutting axe would be swung by Grade for similar reasons later in 1985, terminating BBC1's other sci-fi series, The Tripods, two-thirds through its intended run.

Yet, unlike The Tripods, it was not game over for Doctor Who. Hidden beneath the initial hyperbole about scrapping and cancellation were clear statements that the show was only being "rested for 18 months" and that "it will be back, and it will be better than ever".

Questioned further by Matthew Sweet about those contradictions between his standpoint and the fact work on a 1986 season was going to proceed, Grade conceded some production work did have to continue once funds had been committed past a point where he would have faced criticism from his own bosses for simply writing off public money. Once the main feeding frenzy from this



'crisis' story had abated, Grade was clear about the way ahead as he saw it. "Cut back on the violence and concentrate on character and story, and we'll stagger on. [But] the sooner it finishes, the better as far as I'm concerned." On the "back better than ever" quote Grade was resolute he had never said this in the first place, blaming it as an example of BBC Public Relations spin.

Nevertheless, the fact that Doctor Who did carry on until the end of the Eighties suggests the programme held on to some friends within the corporation's higher echelons, friends who were prepared, if not to oppose the BBC1 Controller, to sidestep his wishes and angle for ways it could continue.

Yet finding that way forward proved anything but straightforward. Could it continue governed by a Controller anxious to throttle its funding? Bill Cotton, Managing Director, BBC Television and

Grade's boss had allayed fans' fears of a total cancellation by publicly stating the show would come back after its 18-month hiatus, but he did not directly control its funds.

Who should make Who was also in question. Significant numbers in fandom, particularly those critical of season 22's diet of visceral horror, excessive violence and even Nicola Bryant's eye candy costuming, argued in print for a change of Producer to usher in a new era. Others though, virtually equal in number, rallied around John Nathan-Turner and Eric Saward, favouring experienced hands on the tiller to make best use of their resources.

Casualties that could not be ignored, however, were those criticisms about gratuitous violence, falling ratings and a house-style perceived as lagging behind other fantasy/SF offerings of the period, such as ITV's Robin of Sherwood, Channel 4's innovative Max Headroom: 20 Minutes into the Future, even ITV's imported miniseries V and V: The Final Battle which had so dented BBC ratings for the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics.

On the issue of violence Grade found himself with unexpected allies, and not just Mary Whitehouse whose April 1985 speech at the annual National Viewers and Listeners Association conference berated Doctor Who for its "assault on family viewing-time values" Many general viewers as well as fans had also taken to their typewriters that Spring, deploring season 22's many "disturbing scenes of torture, dismemberment and suffering".

Script Editor Eric Saward defended these elements, arguing that a grittier,

realistic approach to violence was preferable to sanitised offerings in shows like *The A-Team* (Doctor Who's main opposition on ITV during 1985) where characters emerged unscathed from fight scenes, major explosions and car crashes. Perhaps with an eye on the future, Nathan-Turner's responses were more cautious. He did acknowledge some sequences had exceeded standards acceptable for teatime viewing but equally asserted that when season 22 was originally conceived the timeslot envisaged was going to be 6.15, not 5.20. And putting it into a teatime slot had been a decision made by BBC1's Controller...

The falling ratings insinuation was harder to reconcile. Purely in numerical terms the 1985 season attracted a rough average of seven million viewers per episode, just as preceding seasons had more-or-less enjoyed in 1983 and 1984. However, in terms of overall audience share, ITV was experiencing significant percentage boosts from new viewers tuning in to watch *The A-Team*. And that did pose a solid threat to the corporation's Saturday evening domination goal. Doctor Who needed to compete for those two million plus viewers who had deserted the series since Peter Davison's first year.

However, achieving that target brought up Grade's perception of a production house-style behind that of its competitors. The move to 45-minute episodes should have given opportunities for greater plot exposition, more room for character development and more engaging performances. But these ideals were frequently hampered by its traditional technical framework as a video-taped, studio-bound production with

expensive overheads, limited time for complex effects work and even tighter limitations on outdoor filming.

A brace of season 22's serials had tried to buck the constraints, *The Mark of the Rani* and *Revelation of the Daleks* with their relatively expansive outdoor shoots, but inevitably payback had to be serials reliant on action confined to more limited settings or sets; *Acton side streets* (*Attack of the Cybermen*), *corridors* (*Vengeance on Varos*), *space station infrastructure ducts* (*The Two Doctors*). Over-reliance on such padded run-around scenes in Doctor Who was even spoofed by comedian Lenny Henry with a sketch widely recognised as an accurate observation of 1985 production values.



Worse was the impact these lengthier exposition, 45-minute episodes had on sales of Doctor Who abroad. Many countries, including the show's biggest purchaser, the USA, required episodes cut into 25-minute running lengths. Often this policy delivered season 22 episodes minus traditional cliff-hangers, with nothing more dramatic than, for example, a character leaving a room preceding the crash into end credits. Hardly a magnet for edge-of-the-seat viewing.

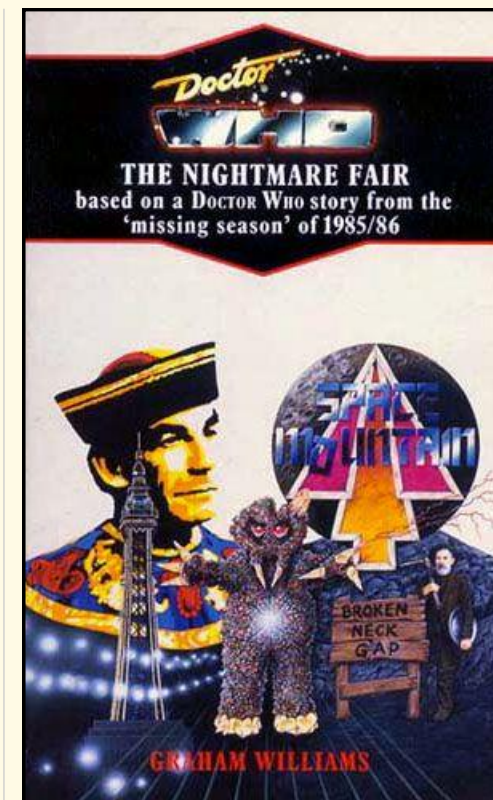
A supposed scoop in 'The Sun', dated Saturday 8 June, confirmed a rumour fans had been hearing for some months; the next season of Doctor Who would comprise just 14 episodes. And those 14 episodes would see a return to the 25-minute format. In essence, season 23 would be half the running length of its predecessor.

'The Sun' credited Jonathan Powell, Head of Drama and Nathan-Turner's immediate boss, with defending the programme's return against more negative views expressed by Grade and Head of Programmes, Brian Wenham. Powell would also have been instrumental in retaining the services of Saward and Nathan-Turner, much to the latter's dismay at missing out on an expected move to a new programme.

Contrary to 'The Sun's' scoop, a move back to making 25-minute episodes had been known about since the time of the hiatus. By that point three stories for season 23 existed as whole or partial draft scripts, albeit written to the 45 minute format. These were *The Nightmare Fair* by Graham Williams, *The Ultimate Evil* by Wally K Daly and *Mission to Magnus* by Philip Martin.

All three were two-part stories but by 7 March 1985 every writer lined up for season 23, including Robert Holmes, Michael Feeney-Callan and possibly Christopher Bidmead, had agreed to the need for 25-minute scripts and episode breakdowns. There were, however, significant gaps between aspiration and fulfilment.

*The Nightmare Fair* had been inspired by a desire to rematch the Doctor against the Celestial Toymaker largely



within and beneath an elaborate amusement park ride at Blackpool, where it would be revealed the Toymaker was planning to bend more humans to his will by deploying a video game capable of enslaving the minds of defeated players.

Some exterior filming would have taken place at Blackpool's pleasure beach, but most interior scenes were studio sets inside and below the Toymaker's 'Space Mountain/Gold Mine' ride. There, the Doctor, Peri and a human named Kevin would have spent much time exploring the ride's many passageways, encountering perils along the way. Later, upon being captured, the Doctor would wind up imprisoned in a cell, feverishly working to assemble a device to corrupt the power of the Toymaker's video game

prototype. In short, an old-style run-around story broken only in the first 15 minutes by a several police station interrogation room scenes where Kevin, looking for his missing brother, tries to convince disbelieving policemen that people are vanishing at the amusement park. The police then took no further part in the story.

Chunked down into 25-minute episodes it is difficult to imagine how so wordy a script would appeal to viewers wanting more action with their adventure. This shortfall is ironically exemplified in one exchange between the Doctor and his immortal opponent:  
 "Doctor: Brevity is the soul of wit.  
 Toymaker: So I believe, but I've waited so long for this meeting, I've had plenty of time to make up five words where one would do."

The Ultimate Evil adopted other familiar Doctor Who tropes: a desire by the Doctor to visit a paradise world for a holiday but winding up instead in the court of a distant planet's governing class where a would-be usurper plots to depose the land's noble and rightful ruler. Towards this end the usurper has allied himself to an unscrupulous alien trader, Dwarf Mordant, possessor of a space weapon that temporarily instils murderous rage within its victims.

The Doctor spends much of the opening episode squabbling with Peri inside the TARDIS before finding himself, in part two, imprisoned in a cell again. The Doctor too falls victim to Mordant's hate-inducing ray, closing episode one by attempting to stab two scientists with shards of glass.

Dwarf Mordant is a repugnant, if some-

times cowardly creature, prone to such old-school outbursts as, "Right, meddling Doctor! Let's just make sure that you have a good welcome when you arrive for your holiday - a welcome that ensures that you don't come back here again in a hurry! If you're still capable of going anywhere, that is."

Later, addressing Peri, he demonstrates his feminist credentials by loudly screaming, "Shut up you interfering old busybody. Who needs ideas from women! Shut up Shut up! Shut up!"

In many respects Mordant's appearance and mannerisms echo those of Philip Martin's Sil creature, first introduced in Vengeance on Varos and due to reappear in season 23's Mission to Magnus alongside more old faces, the Ice Warriors.

Martin had only just begun drafting his scripts when word came through that



all work should be suspended pending a review of season 23 by Saward and Nathan-Turner.

The outcome of said review is, of course, well known. Faced by stories that looked tired, dated, clichéd, wrongly formatted and replete with elements that had attracted fire from BBC upper management, Nathan-Turner chose to scrap the entire series and start again, at some considerable cost to the show's budget.

Whether The Children of January, The Hollows of Time or Robert Holmes' Auton three-parter set in Singapore, Yellow Fever (and How to Cure It) would have offered more inspired fare will likely never be known.

Certainly, when The Trial of a Time Lord did appear it had addressed many of the issues Grade and his peers found objectionable. The horror and gore were gone, story pacing was livelier, electronic and visual effects much improved, there was less bickering between the regulars, and even Peri's costumes were deemed less "salacious".

But 18 months was still a long time, and

out of sight had meant out of mind. By the time Doctor Who returned to Saturday evenings in September 1986, it was up against a buoyant ITV, where new episodes of The A Team were attracting audiences above 10 million. In comparison Trial... struggled to rise



above 5 million while the programme immediately preceding it, Roland Rat – poached from TV-AM in 1985 by Michael Grade – fared even worse.

Had it been wise then to take Doctor Who off air for so long and waste so much money cancelling a season in production? Perhaps fittingly, the final comment should go to Michael Grade.

*"The culture of the BBC is it's never wrong. It has never understood that owning up and saying we got it wrong and doing it quickly is a sign of the strength of the organisation. And the weakness is to keep pretending that everything we do is right, and we defend everything."*

## THE TRIAL OF A TIME LORD

# THE MYSTERIOUS PLANET

Review by Russell Sandberg

May it please the court, I am Counsel for the defence and I am here to rebut the charge laid before us today in this courtroom.

The charge laid before us that season 23 of Doctor Who in general, and the first four episodes of that season in particular, provide an example of a fictional show mirroring its real life fate. The notion of the Doctor being on trial in the series reflects the way in which the TV programme was itself on trial, under attack from leading figures in the BBC and facing the axe. Both the Doctor and the programme's lives were at risk.

The charge laid before us is that in the same way that the television series was struggling in real life, the episodes of Colin Baker's second season are also examples of a series no longer at its peak. The prosecution's case is that these are not exemplary episodes of Doctor Who. The real life difficulties have led into production, not to mention public consciousness, leading to a series of episodes that are not prime examples of Doctor Who.

My submission seeks to rebut this charge and will contend that the alleged similarity between the framing device and the real life fate of the programme has been overplayed leading to this season and the first four episodes in particular being underappreciated.

It is true that the framing device of the trial is a little on the nose. I concede

that the ubiquitous funny head wear worn by the court personnel and the legalese may well be off putting for some casual viewers. The court scenes often disrupt the flow of the story and hardly provide spectacular cliff-hangers. The procedural change from an inquiry to a criminal trial is unlikely to lead many viewers to hide behind the sofa.

However, it is the story that the court is watching that I wish to defend. In other programmes, this framing device would be used as the basis of a clip show of previous programmes. But here the court personnel have a real treat: they are watching a new previously unseen episode of Doctor Who.

And what an episode it is. It is written by the great Robert Holmes. It is his final script for the series, recorded just before his death. But it has a reputation as not being 'classic Holmes'. It was tampered with by the then script editor Eric Saward following orders from the above that he considered detrimental to the script. This reputation is unfair, however.

It is true that these episodes, often collectively titled 'The Mysterious Planet', are not quite up there with Holmes' classics such as 'Spearhead from Space', 'The Ark in Space', 'The Deadly Assassin', 'The Talons of Weng-Chiang' or 'The Caves of Androzani'. Yet, such high heights are not easily nor often reached. 'The Mysterious Planet' is of similar quality as other Holmes' scripts

such as 'The Sun Makers', 'The Ribos Operation' and even 'The Power of Kroll'. It is high quality, entertaining Doctor Who.

It may be argued that if the framing device is jettisoned then 'The Mysterious Planet' could be considered a quintessential Doctor Who serial. The Doctor-Companion relationship here is reminiscent of the seventies; indeed Sarah Jane Smith gets a name check. Like many Doctors, Colin Baker absolutely nails his performance in his second season. There's plenty of humour, not least from the squabbling between the characters of Glitz and Dibber. The very fact that Glitz would return marks him out as a classic Robert Holmes creation.

The story too works. It is well paced and performs that model Doctor Who trait of blending the ordinary and extraordinary. The adopted title 'The Mysterious Planet' does not do the serial justice. There is no real mystery as to the actual identity of the planet, with hints and discussion of this early on and no real dramatic resolution of this point. That is not the main point of the plot. That said, these episodes arguably pull off the 'seemingly alien planet is earth in future' revelation with more aplomb and significantly less sermonising than its twenty-first century counterpart, 'Orphan 66' (though perhaps that episode will benefit from a retrospective reappraisal in almost forty years time).

Watching 'The Mysterious Planet' as part of the recent blu-ray release, and out of the context of the time in which it was made, Holmes' swansong impresses. The opening model shot con-

tinues to look stunning. The sets evoke a world that is not quite our own. The dialogue fizzles, it is genuinely funny and the action engages. In short, it is an underappreciated Holmes story that provides a cracking slice of Doctor Who.

Perhaps it is the trial framing device that is to blame for this story's poor reputation. So, why doesn't it work? On one level, it's because it's less exciting and gripping than the actual Doctor Who adventure. There is clear evidence of padding in the trial scenes to overcome the under running script. There is little sense of jeopardy as Colin Baker dominates proceedings. The swift movement of all of the characters to watch the evidence being played out probably reflects the sentiment of the viewer. The fact that at several points we are watching the trial personnel watch a screen of the villains watching a screen of the protagonists suggests that the story was perhaps not the most suitable for the trial framing device.

That said, the trial framing device is not that bad. Although some of the Doctor's puns do not really work, there is much humour to be derived from these scenes which for the early episodes at least are used selectively. The issue of unreliable narration and the censoring of evidence add a new dimension to a series that after all is in its twenty-third season and sets the scene for what is to come later on. Perhaps if the series had not been on trial in real life, then the use of the trial framing device would have felt fresher and more innovative.

Indeed, another reason why it doesn't quite work is because of all the televised stories to this date the adventure presented is by no means the strongest

evidence available of the charge the Doctor is being prosecuted for: of meddling with the lives of other civilisations.

A further reason that may be put forward for why it does not quite work is how jarring it is. However, I think the gulf between the Doctor Who adventure and the legal drama is a strength: it underscores the difference between the legal conception of justice and the Doctor's conception of justice.

Although the series has portrayed the Doctor being on trial twice, explicit representations of law in Doctor Who are rare. (At least in the televised adventures: 'The Doomsday Contract', the unmade Tom Baker story by John Lloyd, subsequently produced by Big Finish provides a scathing legal satire that deserves to be on Law School syllabuses)

Unlike some other science fiction texts, the depiction of justice in Doctor Who rarely explicitly involves law: it is usually about the Doctor appearing and fixing an injustice or combating an evil threat. The idea that problems encountered could be redressed by the police and other legal actors is typically either ignored or rejected. Indeed, it is sometimes the evil threat that appears to have legal or bureaucratic tendencies.

The trial scenes in 'The Mysterious Planet' continue to equate the legal and the bureaucratic. The staid, formal and ceremonial nature of the courtroom contrasts with the Doctor's instinctive, pragmatic and dramatic means of solving with injustice that focuses on the roots of the problem and invariably involves dismantling a



system rather than trying to encourage it to cleanse itself.

As we have seen, this is perhaps why these episodes and this season are often criticised or dismissed. The juxtaposition of a Doctor Who adventure with a legal drama underscores how much more compelling and effective the actions of the Doctor are. Viewers are more interested in the story before them than the legalese. The stakes are higher and the outcomes more transformative there than the trial itself.

Perhaps the audience is right. Perhaps the Doctor's conception of justice should be used to critique the dominant bureaucratic legal conceptions of justice. There is a need not only to re-appraise these episodes but to pay closer attention to how law, order and justice are represented in Doctor Who – and to use the Doctor's approach as a means to critique the narrow bureaucratic nature of legal systems that perpetuate themselves and their inherent biases in a way that does not permit criticism or reform of the system itself.

Although I'm not sure that would please the court, I rest my case.

## THE TRIAL OF A TIME LORD

### MINDWARP

Review by Tony Jordan

Given that he directed six stories in just five years, Black Orchid, Time-Flight, Arc of Infinity, Frontios, Vengeance on Varos and Mindwarp, Ron Jones had his fair share of duff uns, but he certainly came up trumps with his final work on Doctor Who.

He was undoubtedly helped along the way by a quite superb score from Richard Hartley, and it's great that he worked with Mark Ayres for the Season 23 Blu-Ray release even though it's not quite the same. For what it's worth, You Tuber Artmuzz (Art Crichton) has done a brilliant recreation that is easily accessible.

I'll happily confess to being a big fan of the story, whilst acknowledging its issues. Indeed Mindwarp may well have been one of the greatest stories of all time if it wasn't for it being the second segment of The Trial of a Time Lord. The uncertainty as to whether or not what is shown on screen, that is the viewer's television and not that in the court room, is real makes it difficult to have any certainty about what whether or not what we're watching is 'the truth'. The constant mantra from both The Inquisitor and The Valeyard that 'the Matrix never lies' makes things very tricky. Is the Doctor really a snivelling two faced coward or is his regular assertion that 'it was never like that' correct?

Colin Baker is quoted at length as trying to discover for himself whether his be-

haviour had been affected by the mind probe, whether his actions were all part of some sort of grand scheme or whether The Matrix is lying. Having asked Eric Saward, Philip Martin and John Nathan-Turner none actually seemed able to say with any certainty which left our Hon President feeling that, because the trial sequences themselves weren't the work of the writer, it was rather cobbled together.

As but one example, Peri is betrayed by the Doctor, taken to the rock of sorrows and interrogated. 'It was never like that' asserts Sixie. For the sake of this review I've decided that, on the basis of what we discovered in The Ultimate Foe, the Matrix is lying as part of the Valeyard's plot and will move on.

The early wordplay in the Court Room (Brick yard, Knacker's yard etc) is both puerile and pointless, but there we go - one of the very few missteps in the dialogue. The Doctor and Peri's arrival on Thoros Beta, home planet of the Mentors, is extremely effective. The mix of the location at Telscombe Cliffs, East Sussex, and special effects really works.

Our first clue that things aren't necessarily as they appear is when the Doctor doesn't let Peri know where they are until after they are attacked by one of Crozier's experiments, the Rark. Her memories of what Sil did to her on Varos, ie being turned into a bird, must still have been vivid. Talking of Sil, Nabil Shaban takes the character to the next

level here - I love his new costume and the performance is slimy to the 'nth degree. In my notes I wrote down that Sil is a snivelling little shit, and I stick with that!

Jones assembles a top drawer cast all round including, of course, Brian Blessed. What can be said of King Yrcanos? I absolutely adore the character. It's Blessed channeling Prince Vultan with added Philip Martin. Yrcanos is "King of the Krontep, Lord of the Vingen, Conqueror of the Tonkonp Empire". Tucked away there's a great line from Peri; "actors playing over the top", it's a really lovely little in-joke, as are Crozier's experiments failing to work on the thick skulled King. Indeed the script is devilishly clever; full of humour, horror and tragedy.

Dorf of Kanval, Yrcanos's equerry, is a genuinely tragic character having been transformed in to a lycanthrope as the result of Crozier's experiments. His pleas to die with a pitiful 'help me' are heart wrenching. Later on the 'more

than yourself' scene with Peri, Yrcanos and Dorf is full of pathos.

Throughout the story the tunnels are effective and well lit. I feel for the downtrodden slaves being assessed who have given up all hope and seem to be channeling the vibe of those who were executed by the Daleks in episode three of *Destiny of the Daleks*.

The old Mentor asking Yrcanos to tone it down in episode four is hilarious, but brings about a sea change in tone. The TARDIS appears shortly thereafter and the Doctor is pulled away from Thoros Beta and taken to the Space Station where The Trial of a Time Lord had started eight episodes earlier. You sense things aren't going to end well.

Events on Thoros Beta continue after the Doctor's removal with a devastating, if ultimately false, narrative. Once in Crozier's laboratory, Peri is slow to realise her terrible fate while at the same time Yrcanos has decided that she will be his bride.



The time bubble is superbly used by Ron Jones, and is a really stunning conclusion to the narrative. We're told that Yrcanos was placed in it by the Time Lords to hold his arrival back at Crozier's lab until after Kiv's mind was successfully transplanted into the shaven headed Peri. 'Protect me, I am your Lord and Master' is truly chilling.

Once Yrcanos is freed of the bubble, he is dis-

traught at the results of the operation and fires wildly, seemingly killing Peri. The Valeyard insists that the interference of the Time Lords was to prevent a greater disaster befalling the universe due to the mistakes in the Doctor's actions. The Doctor insists that the far-far-go of a trial is serving an ulterior motive, and resolves to determine exactly what it is going on.

Episode four really is an absolute stonker, I have very specific memories of it to this day. I watched it in a hotel near Aldershot where I'd been part of the crew filming a charity parachute jump fronted by Colin Baker and supported by DWAS which was in aid of the Foundation for the Study of Infant Deaths. The video *Time-Flight* was released by Betel Video Pictures in 1987.

Earlier that week, and I genuinely can't

remember how, a copy of the script had reached me. So I knew about the shock of Peri's death in advance, indeed I spoke to Kate Easteal, JNT's then secretary, about it. She was, shall we say, surprised that I'd got the script but I said my lips were sealed and that proved to be the case. And knowing what was to happen didn't spoil things for me at all, indeed the realisation was far superior to what I had expected.

All these things and more have helped shaped my love of *Mindwarp*, I feel a certain vested interest in the story. As I said earlier, it could have been one of the greatest stories ever if it weren't for the muddled thinking, but it still remains one of Colin's finest.



## TERROR OF THE VERVOIDS

Review by Tim Gambrell

Terror of the Vervoids is my favourite Sixth Doctor TV story; the one that, when I watch it, gives me most pleasure as a viewer. It is bright, colourful and energetic, with an uncommon air of positivity about it. But I'm by no means blind to its shortcomings. The story is gloriously oxymoronic. Many of its positive aspects can simultaneously be seen as negatives.

Thanks to the Season 23 Blu-Ray boxset, Terror of the Vervoids can now be viewed in two distinct ways: as it was in 1986 (parts nine to twelve of The Trial of a Time Lord) and also as a separate and complete four-part story in itself, unencumbered by the Trial season arc. Whichever way you choose to watch the story, it's a hint of what could have been, but alas never followed. The cards had already been dealt. The hand was already lost.

Terror of the Vervoids, as a piece of evidence for the Doctor's defence, opens by introducing a new companion: Mel, or Melanie (Melanie Bush, in fact, as confirmed 36 years later in The Power of the Doctor). Vervoids is her story as much as the Doctor's. Not that the narrative revolves around Mel at all, but the character is such a positive, energetic and proactive presence throughout. It is impossible not to be picked up by her and swept along. The introduction of Mel is a complete revelation for the Sixth Doctor and his tenure. Right from the off the character is a breath of fresh air after the previous combative rela-

tionship between the Doctor and Peri. Immediately there is humour, a mutual fondness and a positive energy which hits the viewer like a sobering slap. The same thing happened in 2010 when Bill joined the Twelfth Doctor.

The problem that many viewers will have had in 1986, though, was Bonnie Langford. Or rather their attitude towards Bonnie Langford. She was by a country mile the highest profile companion casting within the show's history at that point, and it should have been a coup. Alas, Mel's character was clearly drawn up on the back of a postage stamp: a computer programmer and fitness fanatic from Pease Pottage. The 'computer programmer' part was clearly thrown in to be a bit 'sci-fi', not with any practical or narrative intent. On the face of it, Bonnie Langford had been brought in simply to play Bonnie Langford. She was ticking all the boxes in everyone's list of expectations.

One only needs to watch her in the Season 24 Blu-Ray boxset trailer to see how wonderful an actor Bonnie is, and how subtle and layered her performance can be. I don't think the production team in 1986 had the slightest clue how to get a performance like that from her. I don't think they wanted to, either. JN-T wanted what he got: Bonnie Langford – the name and the brand. She gave it her all and was wonderful.

Conversely, then, Colin Baker is much more relaxed in this story. There's plenty



of energy there – it's in no way a laid-back performance – but there's none of the pent-up frustration and aggression that had dogged his persona up to that point (and which continued to do so in the trial scenes). That may have been a conscious decision to help cement the impression that this story was taking place sometime in the future. Having lost the anger and cynicism, we find a charming Doctor, erudite and amusing without the need for blustering pomposity. Colin makes it all look terribly easy and he's an absolute joy to watch. It is, I'm sure, his finest TV performance in the role; relaxed and amenable. Oh, to have seen more of this!

And where does the Doctor get to be erudite and amusing? On a luxury space cruise liner, the Hyperion III. Commissioned as an all-studio story, Vervoids succeeds in this aspect. There is no pretence at studio interior exteriors, it knows its boundaries and keeps to them. But what do you do when designing a futuristic luxury cruise liner from a thousand years hence? Give it pokey corridors, Yale locks, a lounge with space invaders and some garden centre furniture. Oh, and the least convincing gym

ever. Rather like Mel being a computer programmer, setting the story in 2986 feels like it was thrown in arbitrarily. Apart from space travel and mixing with aliens, there is very little about the story's setting that isn't recognisably 1986 (I love the crew clipboards). hilariously, Laskey tells us Bruchner was trained as an astronaut – not a starship pilot or some handy slang term. Very advanced.

At Eric Saward's request, Pip & Jane gave us an Agatha Christie-style whodunnit in space. Yet it's not just a murder mystery. It's a base under siege story – a classic Doctor Who tradition dating back to 1966 but rarely used in the 1980s. It's also a revenge story, a hijack story, and a moral integrity versus science and imperialism story and a... and a... It's lots of things all bundled together. Virtually everyone in it has their own individual story, their own hidden agenda. They all intertwine perfectly to create a multi-layered narrative with enough mystery to keep the audience guessing what's really going on.

The Doctor's agenda is that he's unwilling to get involved – which makes it perfect as evidence for his defence. It also breaks with convention not having the Doctor as prime suspect for whatever crimes are committed. Ordinarily, he'd have to 'out' the murderer or villain to absolve himself. But Pip & Jane followed their brief very closely. The Doctor is placed in the detective role, with the support and backing of Commodore 'Tonker' Travers, who knows him of old. Yes, such a plot device is convenient, as is the Doctor being summoned aboard by another old friend the viewer has never met. Yet these conveniences allow the story to progress without getting beleaguered by introductions and explanations first.

By the same token, it also lowers the stakes for the Doctor, since he doesn't have to struggle to clear his own name. So much so that he's doing his best not to get involved, for fear that he's being used. Mel, on the other hand, is throwing her all in and getting plenty of the action because she's considered less conspicuous. Let's just think about that: a woman from 1986 is less conspicuous than the Doctor on a luxury cruise liner in 2986. It shouldn't be the case, but it is – simply because the show itself looks and feels so very 1980s. Mel seems more at home on the Hyperion III than she has any right to be.

From a storyline perspective, I think Terror of the Vervoids is great. From a dialogue perspective, I can find little to defend. There are simply too many words spoken. And too many unfamiliar polysyllabic words, at that. After a while the viewer sinks into a kind of lexically induced stupor. It's not educational. It's not highbrow. To be complete, the syllogism only requires its grim conclusion: it's daft! Agronomist and thremmatologist are terms thrown about with such reckless abandon they become merely bromides. But words aside, there really are too many extraneous lines of dialogue. Characters keep talking after a point has been made or an action established, often just to tell the viewer something they could work out for themselves, or which could be delivered with a look. And, frankly, this sort of thing should never happen:

Laskey: 'I must have been blinded by professional vanity.'

Laskey should not be self-evaluating. No character should. Blinded, yes – but if the qualifier of 'by professional vanity' was required it should have been given

to someone else to state.

I appreciate Colin Baker loved Pip & Jane's scripts and they did write well for the Sixth Doctor. But they wrote the same type of verbose dialogue for almost all the characters. The audience don't automatically think 'ooh, this is an intelligent script.' They lose interest, or feel they're being patronised.

This is director Chris Clough's first time working on the show – we assume a reliable safe pair of hands, as he got the 6-episode return gig for the next two seasons. One has to take into account the 'factory' method under which these shows were made, and very few mavericks ever got to direct more than one story in this era. Clough is, alas, another in a long line of safe, workmanlike directors who get the job done well and on budget, but without much signature style. There are some interesting Vervoid POV shots to break from the



basic norm, and the shots in confined spaces – which were presumably handheld camera work – are great. But the overall finished product is largely unremarkable.

Maybe it was Clough's lack of technical experience, but there is some awful CSO work in the story. It seems very strange by 1986 that this was still acceptable, or unavoidable. The fringing around characters on the lounge balcony, with the starscape in the background is dreadful. Considering both Colin and Bonnie have big hair it's a shame they couldn't take more care not to pull the viewer's focus with this.

One aspect Chris Clough delivers on, though, is the cliff hanger, and there are some great examples in this story. Alas, though, Vervoids episode 3 (Trial episode 11) and JN-T's 'house rule'. The titles should have screamed in on Bruchner's eerily lit face, staring out impassively at his fate. That's the dramatic highpoint. It's then lost completely when we cut to the pointless (and, again, overly verbose) dialogue outside the bridge so the episode can end on the Doctor's face.

In keeping with Agatha Christie adaptations on TV, Clough gathers an experienced cast featuring some well-known names and faces. Top of these is Honor Blackman, who is great value as Professor Laskey. The viewer's eye is always drawn to her and she's clearly relishing lording it over everyone. But, on reflection, neither the script nor the direction allows Blackman to show that Laskey is an accomplished scientist. We are told, not shown. She spends her time between the gym and the lounge, working out or making her way through Murder on The Orient Express (a large-print ver-

sion, judging by the size of the book!) She doesn't even look at home in the hydroponics centre. That's a real shame, because it seems like stunt casting, which the era did a lot, but Honor Blackman is far better than that.

Laskey stepping forward to her inevitable death at the poisonous hands of the lumbering Vervoids is a prime example of where the direction lacks impact. I've noted Andrew Cartmel level this criticism at Chris Clough on other stories in his book Script Doctor. There's no drama in the moment, no punch. It's simply shot as another activity in an ongoing sequence. For the audience to care, we need close ups, momentary pauses, reaction shots from the Doctor and Mel. But it just happens, and we move on. It's the same with the deaths of all the story's villains, they're dispatched swiftly and perfunctorily. It could be seen as cold, matter of fact, not dwelling on the event. But it doesn't come across that way. As a viewer I never feel I'm being allowed inside these characters, I never get to see them close-up, to read their expression, consider their thoughts. It's all surface. Everything is told or stated or given (like Laskey's self-evaluation). The viewer just has to sit back and be spoon-fed. It may be fun to watch, but it's not engaging.

There is always more that could be said about Terror of the Vervoids as a standalone story. Like how the Mogarian death scene on the bridge is there purely to manipulate the viewer into suspecting Janet, and how horribly awkward the farewell scene is outside the TARDIS. And I haven't touched on the excellent Vervoid design. But what I will mention is how good Malcolm Clarke's incidental music is. It does more to create drama and atmosphere than Chris

Clough's direction. It's also fitting that Clarke should deliver the final Radio-phonetic Workshop score for Doctor Who, having delivered the first one back in 1972 for The Sea Devils.

But what of Terror of the Vervoids as parts 9-12 of The Trial of a Time Lord?

Trial part 9 doesn't open auspiciously. 1980s Doctor Who doesn't pick-up well after companion departures. The scenes at the beginning of Time Flight and Planet of Fire, mourning the absence of Adric and Tegan, are cringeworthy. The scene here regarding Peri is slightly better but it all still feels rushed and out of place. It's a quick mention, then straight on with the next adventure please, before the audience get bored and switch over.

The trial scenes continue to be, in the main, unwelcome interruptions, although the death of the fake Mogarian is one of the few times the pause, comment, continue set-up really works in the whole season. If you're not showing edited highlights as evidence, then the

viewer has to be periodically reminded that they are watching the trial room watching evidence. The trial is at once the primary story and at the same time a background framing device while the evidence plays out.

The Inquisitor makes a valid point when she asks the Doctor if he wishes to stop his evidence. On screen, an appeal has been made for him to become actively involved in the situation. She's clearly satisfied with it as evidence in his defence at that point. Job done. The trial narrative has achieved its defence goal. But no, we can't stop there because we're not watching clips or sample evidence, we're watching a story within a story. And until the Matrix has finished showing us, and the Courtroom, Terror of the Vervoids, the trial narrative has to take a backseat for the benefit of the viewers at home.

The trial drama and the 'epistopic interfaces' (thank you, Valeyard) are constantly at odds with each other. Integration is almost entirely through interruption; occasional instances of concealed

or falsified evidence are never resolved for the courtroom so there is consequently no pay-off for the viewer at home. From a practical perspective, with later scripts still being written as the season went into production, no confirmed ending in place and then no script editor, how was the trial ever going to feel anything but a limp framing device for three standard 4-part adventures?

Terror of the Vervoids is a fun, energetic, engaging and ultimately frustrating section of The Trial of a Time Lord, contributing to the overall disappointment of the season arc. It does the job with which it was tasked within the framework narrative, and many of its faults or shortcomings are also the faults and shortcomings of that framework narrative. Thus, as parts 9-12 of The Trial of a Time Lord it should not - nay, cannot - be isolated from the rest of the

season and must share in its overall critical appraisal.

Terror of the Vervoids is also fun, energetic, engaging and garishly 1980s as a standalone 4-part yarn on the Season 23 Blu-ray set. Colin Baker's Doctor is at his most charming, thought-provoking and accessible. Mel is a wonderful partner for him, adding brightness and energy to every scene. And Honor Blackman is having the time of her life in a puce tracksuit. It's not the height of television drama for its day, but it does the job with which it was tasked - verbosely if never particularly stylishly - and highlights both the positives and negatives of day-to-day television production at the time.



## THE TRIAL OF A TIME LORD

# THE ULTIMATE FOE

Review by Bedwyr Gullidge

We have been presented with all the evidence. Now it is time for the verdict as the Trial of a Time Lord reaches a dramatic conclusion. Shocking revelations abound as we discover the orchestrator of events is The Ultimate Foe; the Doctor himself!

One of the drawbacks of Season 22's Trial Season is the hopping back and fore between the main 'evidence' story and the courtroom proceedings. This is still an issue in this final two-part concluding segment, but a lot needs to be established before we can venture outside the courtroom. Debate rages regarding the Matrix. The accuracy of the evidence is called into question. The mystery of Ravalox also has implications for Gallifrey and the Time Lord High Council. There is a lot to unravel. Apart from the repetition of the stunning spaceship model shot and the corridor outside the courtroom itself to signal the arrival of Glitz and Mel, it takes more than 10 minutes for the action to depart the courtroom. Never fear, we'll be back in the courtroom again. Lynda Bellingham's Inquisitor clamours for order as all about her falls apart. Even when the protagonists have left her jurisdiction, her only recourse is to return to the courtroom with Mel and the Keeper of the Matrix. With revelations regarding the fact that the Matrix can be physically entered and that the evidence can and has been manipulated, one would assume that the principle of a fair trial would fall apart. But The Inquisitor remains true to her task,

or at least tries to despite the absence of the defendant and the prosecutor.

Adding further to proceedings is Anthony Ainley who returns as The Master and is simply wonderful. Both character and actor are thoroughly enjoying the role of popping up on the Matrix viewing screen and lobbing plot point hand grenades into the mix. The gleefulness in Ainley's delivery is revealing. The Master's motivation to cause the overthrowing of the High Council is simply delightful. For instance, the renegade chuckles at the prospect of "causing ripples which will rock the High Council to its foundations." It's a shame we don't see more of the overthrowing of the High Council on Gallifrey and the developing insurrection which all occurs off-screen. Given the blandness of the Time Lords seen in 'Arc of Infinity' and 'The Five Doctors', it seems unlikely that any of them would be tossing sofas around the pristine corridors of the Citadel!

The Master also casually alludes to the Valeyard's true identity which provides a significant moment in the classic era of Doctor Who. Steven Moffat enjoyed revealing a previously unknown incarnation of the Doctor with John Hurt as 'the War Doctor' in 'The Name of the Doctor'. Similarly, Chris Chibnall with Jo Martin as 'the Fugitive Doctor' who first appeared in 'Fugitive of the Judoon'. But Robert Holmes got there first. As with all previously unknown incarnations of our favourite Time Lord

the premise is intriguing. The Valeyard is described as a distillation of all the Doctor's negative attributes between his 12 and final incarnation. Given that we now know which faces were Doctors 12 and 13 it is even easier to place the Valeyard, although the War Doctor and Meta-Crisis incarnations do muddy the water slightly. However, following 'The Timeless Children' who knows anymore!

Anyway, given that the Doctor is an individual who changes personalities with each regeneration there is of course the possibility that there are darker traits in each of them. An amalgamation of all those negative traits makes for the perfect villain. The clue was in the name really as a Valeyard is a Doctor of Law, although it doesn't seem to be a term used that often these days. The concept of the Valeyard is also intriguing in the context of the Sixth Doctor. His era of course began with a new Doctor disturbed by the dramatic regeneration caused by the events on

Androzani Minor. Whilst a darker side to the Doctor didn't appeal to viewers it remains an interesting prospect. It was revisited again with Peter Capaldi as the Twelfth Doctor in 2014. Again, this was met with indifference from the general audience, resulting in a character shift that saw the Twelfth Doctor enter his second series playing guitar whilst stood on a tank like a real crowd pleaser. A darker version of the Doctor is clearly not our hero. But it works very well here when that individual is cast as the villain.

Opposing the Valeyard is Colin Baker's Sixth Doctor and it is quite right that his speech regarding "power-mad conspirators" is lauded and showcased in his incarnation's highlight reel. Baker delivers it superbly with genuine gravitas and authority. It is a shame that these final two episodes would prove to be Baker's final onscreen outings in the role. Whilst the Sixth Doctor was initially hampered by a garish costume and brusque personality, Colin Baker's per-



formance remained impressive throughout, fully committed to the role in spite of the creative choices, which with the benefit of hindsight ultimately proved misguided. Even in the face of behind-the-scenes difficulties Baker gives nothing short of a true performance.

Much of the plot of these two episodes also centres around truth. Is the evidence presented by the Matrix true or has it been manipulated? For instance, the Master reveals that Peri actually survived the events on Thoros Beta and the evidence presented by the Matrix was false. More of this later. We are also presented with the Doctor being sentenced for genocide of the Vervoids. This is again a false reality, which the Doctor knows because he wants to face the Valeyard, but how is the viewer supposed to know? Everything about these two episodes is designed to, at best, wrong-foot and, at worst, confuse the audience.

Ultimately the experience for the viewer is one of discombobulation. Not least because once we are in the Matrix nobody can be clear about what is reality and what is not. The viewer is also forced to doubt the content of the previous twelve episodes as well. Much of this is by utilising the Matrix itself as a venue for the action. Exploration of the Matrix offers an opportunity to be unnerving, to be abstract and surreal. The cackling laughter of the Valeyard and the ominous bell tolling for thee, or rather the Doctor. These elements of the surreal are most notable with the cliffhanger for episode 13. Of course, Robert Holmes had written and been Script Editor for 'The Deadly Assassin' which introduced and developed the idea of the Matrix so the presentation

of it is far better than the floaty, ethereal nothingness that the Fifth Doctor entered during 'Arc of Infinity'. A creepy, Victorian London setting where anyone or anything could suddenly emerge from the shadows to cut your throat creates a nervous atmosphere. References to the real case of Jack the Ripper were phased out during the initial scripting.

Within the Fantasy Factory, we meet multiple incarnations of Mr Popplewick, wonderfully played by Geoffrey Hughes. I'm sure there is some deeply philosophical message regarding trying to impose order and procedure within the Matrix, but it goes over the head of this particular viewer. Perhaps he is an archivist trying to catalogue all the Time Lord's knowledge so that it can be utilised by other users besides the Keeper? Anyway, we then get to enjoy a brief sojourn onto a beach for the purposes of delivering a particularly successful cliffhanger.

This cliffhanger is very much in keeping with that devised by Robert Holmes for Part Two of 'The Deadly Assassin' and is a particular triumph of the visual effects department. Despite hearing the stories of how it was achieved, it still remains difficult to comprehend how



visual effects staff could immerse themselves beneath the surface with their hands reaching out to pull the Doctor down into the murky depths. It is brilliantly realised and very effective.

Unfortunately, things begin to unravel after the cliffhanger. Unsurprising given the original script was suddenly withdrawn and an alternative had to be constructed at short notice. As a result, we are treated to Mel's exclamation on discovering "a megabyte modem" which is cringe-inducing given our modern sensibilities. A megabyte, as we all know now, is a unit of measure for digital information, specifically one million bytes. A modem is where my internet connection is but it's mercifully a lot smaller than whatever occupied the cupboard. However, by definition a modem is a piece of computer equipment which converts data from one format to another. Not exactly something to worry about but could plausibly be a weapon of some kind?

Fortunately, the Doctor offers a definition of a MASER; Microwave Amplification and Stimulated Emission of Radiation. Basically, it's a big laser weapon, equivalent to a particle disseminator, aimed at the Gallifreyans in the courtroom. Why? Because the Valeyard has the names of those in attendance on his hitlist. Up until this point the Valeyard's motivation was to acquire the Sixth Doctor's remaining regenerations to prolong his existence, given he may not be able to regenerate as a being between the Doctor's Twelfth and final regenerations. So why does he have a hitlist? Maybe they also mocked him and called "the Graveyard"? Or made fun of his hat?

Anyway, a bit of jiggery-pokery by the Doctor, which the Valeyard simply observes, and a feedback loop is created that'll send the energy back into the room. But the energy also explodes the Matrix viewing screen within the courtroom. Good job the Master was in his TARDIS escaping with the secrets of the Matrix and not still peering down on everyone in the courtroom from that vantage point. We never learned anything more regarding the mysterious secrets of the Matrix which is a shame given the prominence it is given here. But aside from that, the Valeyard has been defeated and all charges against the Doctor are dismissed. Cue the celebrations!

With the action now concluded the Inquisitor informs the Doctor that Peri did not in fact die on Thoros Beta but lives as a Warrior Queen with King Yrcanos. A revelation which irked actor Nicola Bryant but did create an opportunity for a trailer featuring Peri to be used in the promotion of The Collection box set for Season 22. But how does The Inquisitor know that the information provided by the Master is true? Is The Inquisitor simply taking the word



of the self-confessed renegade? He may have been in the Matrix, but could we honestly say that he is trustworthy enough to blindly accept his word on the matter as the gospel truth?

It is however difficult to be too critical over the final episode of 'The Trial of the Time Lord'. As all of us interested in such things know that the intended plan went out of the window when Robert Holmes tragically died and Eric Saward walked out as Script Editor, necessitating that Pip and Jane Baker completed the story and the season. They clearly did an admirable job in the face of significant obstacles such as having the locations and filming dates already booked, but more of that elsewhere in this annual.

Overall, the version of 'The Ultimate Foe' which we are presented with on-

screen provides a reasonably satisfactory conclusion to Season 23's story arc. The Doctor is victorious, heading off into the TARDIS with his new companion for brand new adventures. Unfortunately, the concluding dialogue of "carrot juice, carrot juice, carrot juice" fails to provide a triumphant exclamation point at the end of the Trial Season. However, with Mel now in tow it feels like a new beginning and after the negativity of the Time Lord being on trial for his life, both on and off screen, The Doctor is now free to return to exploring the universe and battling against the evils he spoke about. Sadly, this positivity would not last long, especially for the incumbent actor as Colin Baker would not reappear on our televisions as the Doctor again until 'Dimensions in Time' in 1993.



## THE TRIAL OF A TIME LORD

### TIME INC.

Review by Ian Wheeler

Nearly 20 years ago, I had the privilege of interviewing Michael Jayston for Celestial Toyroom (issue 320 if you want to look it up). Michael kindly bought me lunch in a greasy spoon cafe (a lovely lamb casserole if I recall correctly), and I remember him telling me 'If you haven't been in Doctor Who, you haven't lived.' And I can fully understand him saying that, because the Valeyard must have been a fun role to play. Parts 13 and 14 of The Trial of a Time Lord must have been particularly satisfying for Michael, finally giving the Valeyard the chance to get out of the trial room and into the Matrix (and from a production point of view, out on location). On the basis of the script, Eric Saward's original Part 14 (based on Robert Holmes' notes) would also have been good fun. On balance, however, I think it is perhaps not as good as the transmitted version and, although containing some very good ideas, is somewhat cliched in parts.



Wrapping up 14 episodes of plot development was never going to be an easy task, whether the scripting duties were

done by Robert Holmes, Pip and Jane Baker or Eric Saward. But in Saward's case, you could argue that the problems were self-inflicted because, as Script Editor, he had played a key part in shaping the season and developing the previous three stories, particularly the trial room scenes.

As many of my fan friends know, Eric Saward is my favourite Doctor Who writer. Childhood memories of The Visitation, Earthshock and his two Dalek stories are forever etched into my mind. In theory then, an un-transmitted Eric Saward script should be manna from heaven to me. But The Trial of a Time Lord Part 14 is not his best work. Maybe it's because of the pressures of working in a production office that was a less than happy place for Eric by 1986. Or maybe I'm unfairly comparing the script to Pip and Jane Baker's version which does, after all, have the unfair advantage of actually having been made! It is hard, after all, to compare sixty-odd typed pages of script to a fully finished episode of a BBC TV show. That said, the Saward version does have many interesting elements and is one of the many 'roads not taken' that form part of a fascinating alternative history of Doctor Who.

The script begins, naturally, with the Doctor in the predicament that he faced at the conclusion of Robert Holmes' Part 13, with grasping hands pulling him into the quicksand. In the original script, Glitz attempts to rescue

the Doctor who then rises from the quicksand.

In Saward's Part 14, as the Doctor is being pulled down, he tells the Valeyard that he will never give him his remaining regenerations. As with Pip and Jane Baker's transmitted version, the cliffhanger is resolved by the Doctor denying that the situation he is in is real.

There follows an interesting discussion as the Doctor and the Valeyard (the Valeyard communicating with the Doctor from his TARDIS control room) discuss the nature of reality, with the Doctor saying that illusion belongs in the theatre and the Valeyard saying 'it is an honoured Time Lord cult.' One can certainly forgive the Doctor for being dismissive of illusion - he has certainly been on the wrong side of it on more than one occasion, The Mind Robber and The Deadly Assassin being notable examples.

The Valeyard seems gleeful about the prospect of inheriting the Doctor's remaining regenerations and seems to relish the thought of seeing the Doctor die - 'I wish to savour the moment of my death. After all, how many people survive successful self-murder?' This shows a genuinely sadistic side to the Valeyard's character, in stark contrast to the pantomime villain that the character has sometimes been accused of being. You'd have to be pretty unhinged to take satisfaction from your own death - even the Master has never been quite that twisted!

The conversation between the Doctor and his adversary continues for quite a while as the Doctor continues to sink

into the quicksand, and to be frank it all seems a bit wordy and drawn out compared to the transmitted version which resolved the cliffhanger quite quickly. Ultimately, the Master shimmers into existence and it is he who rescues the Doctor. It's a nice twist to have the Doctor's greatest enemy rescue him and makes a welcome change from the Doctor being hauled out of trouble by his companion or his own initiative. It's a bizarre set-up when you think about it - an aspect of the Doctor's own personality is his deadly enemy and his old foe the Master is (to some extent) his friend. It makes for an interesting dynamic and a genuinely new approach for the series.

The Doctor and the Master materialise in an alleyway, filled with swirling fog. The Master reveals that he cannot immediately help the Doctor to escape as the Valeyard is still controlling reality and the Master is having to use huge amounts of energy to maintain his presence in the Matrix. The Master says that the Doctor must find his own way to escape but that he will do what he can to help. The Master disappears.

The Doctor contemplates the irony of teaming up with his old enemy to fight an aspect of his own personality. It's a nice variation on the situation shown previously in The Five Doctors. In that story, the Time Lords send the Master to help the Doctor and the Doctor is reluctant to believe his old enemy. Here, the Doctor is ready to accept the Master's help, such is the desperation of his circumstances.

On the space station, the Keeper tells Mel that he fears the Master is working for his own ends. The Inquisitor reveals

that the High Council have resigned but expresses relief that the Council does not know of events within the Matrix - if it was known the Matrix has been violated, turmoil would ensue. As with the transmitted version, there's obviously a lot happening in Time Lord society which happens off-camera. It would have been nice to have actually seen some of this, but constraints of time and money presumably prevented it.

The Valeyard continues to observe the Doctor and brings Glitz, who is with him in his control room, out of the trance he has put him in.



In the alleyway, the Doctor encounters Popplewick, dressed in the habit of a monk, beating Nardole to the punchline by 30 years. Popplewick tells the Doctor that Mel has followed him into the Matrix and asks the Doctor to go through a door.

Popplewick takes the Doctor down a dark circular walkway. 'What a depressing place,' says the Doctor, which might have reflected the mood of the audience by this point if this episode had ever been made. Mel appears in front of the Doctor, disappears and reappears again behind him. 'It doesn't real-

ly matter which way you go,' says Mel, 'as you always finish up where you started. This place is circular.' It's a nice Castrovalva-type vibe which works well within the context of the Matrix. The Doctor and Mel have a wordy conversation about a jagged scar on the wall, prompting the Doctor to say 'We're getting very long-winded.' Again, I think the audience might agree.

As they try to find the entrance, Mel speculates that it may have been moved. The Doctor asks what the point of this would be and Mel, in a line worthy of Pip and Jane, says 'Not unless someone wants us to think we're not orbiting this circulation of a circumference in a peripatetic mode.' Yes, she actually says that. This is however a clue that Mel is not quite what she seems rather than an unnecessarily wordy line of dialogue.

After more technobabble and more discussion about circles, during which Mel sounds ever more mechanical, she fades out of view and Popplewick returns. The Doctor and Popplewick return to the alleyway and Popplewick tells the Doctor that Mr Chambers will want to have a word with him. The Doctor grabs Popplewick's robe and Popplewick disappears.

Meanwhile, the Inquisitor is concerned about the havoc which is occurring in the Matrix. The Master reveals that the Valeyard has materialised his TARDIS around a time vent within the Matrix. The Keeper advises that if the vent is opened, there will be terrible consequences, akin to the effect of matter mixing with anti-matter. The Inquisitor and the Keeper agree that it will not be possible to destroy the Valeyard and

that it may be necessary to give into his demands. They turn to the Master for advice and he laughs an evil laugh.

Back in the Matrix, Glitz warns the Valeyard not to open the vent. Outside the Fantasy Factory, the Doctor encounters the Master. The Master tells the Doctor that the Inquisitor and the Keeper want him dead in order to destroy the Valeyard, but he is reluctant to carry this out as it would ruin his 'anti-establishment' image and, besides, he does not think it would actually work. The Master disappears. Some of the dialogue doesn't seem quite right for the Master, such as when he refers to the Doctor's 'naughty future self.'

Addressing the Valeyard through the TARDIS screen, the Doctor offers his adversary his remaining lives if he promises not to open the vent. The Valeyard allows the Doctor to enter his TARDIS. The Valeyard realises that the Doctor's offer was not genuine, and he slams a lever, opening the vent, which the script describes as being like the opening of Pandora's Box. There is blinding white light and 'a massive primeval roar'. The Doctor pushes the Valeyard towards the open vent. The two Time Lords struggle on the edge of the vent before falling in...

Back in the trial room, Mel screams. Appearing on the screen of the Valeyard's control room, the Master tells Glitz to close the vent. This brings relief in the trial room and the Inquisitor says that the Matrix must be secured. The Master and Glitz emerge from the Matrix, exhausted. The Master says that with the Doctor and the Valeyard out of the way, the universe could be theirs but Glitz declines, saying that the Mas-

ter is welcome to his half. All Glitz wants to do is go home. Mel asks the Inquisitor to return her to her own planet and says she will miss the Doctor. The Keeper reveals that the Doctor and Valeyard are in fact still alive, but if they are to escape, it must be using their own ingenuity. If they don't, the vent will be their prison for eternity...

As many fans are aware, producer John Nathan-Turner felt that using the Saward script and leaving the Doctor and the Valeyard's fates unresolved at the end of the episode would only encourage the BBC to axe the show. This led to Saward leaving the programme, taking the script with him. Pip and Jane Baker hastily wrote a new Part 14.

As I mentioned above, I do think the transmitted version is moderately better. It's not perfect by any means and a 2013 review of the transmitted version of Part 14 in *The Guardian*, remarking that the story 'makes little sense', is typical of many people's view of the episode. To be honest, though, neither episode makes total sense or, at the very least, they both fail to offer a truly satisfying resolution to the story. Both versions achieve the main thing that they need to achieve - a final confrontation between the Doctor and the Valeyard. But neither really builds on the narrative developed over the past thirteen weeks. In his infamous script notes for the first four-parter of the series, *The Mysterious Planet*, BBC Head of Series and Serials, Jonathan Powell, commented that 'it is difficult to grasp the relationship of this story to the trial... it never seems clear to me what evidence this story offers to the Valeyard or indeed the viewer as to the Doctor's culpability for any particular

transgression of the Time Lords' codes... we are never really aware of what it is that the Doctor is on trial for.' For my money, these were fair comments and the issues highlighted by Powell continued to be problematic throughout the season as it was ultimately made. The final two-parter could have gone some way to tying the whole narrative together and explaining the link between the evidence as presented on the trial room screen and the events of the trial itself, but it never really does this. This is, however, somewhat understandable as there is a limit to what can be done in two 25 minute episodes and having to tie up the events of the trial and present a dramatic stand-off between the Doctor and the Valeyard, whilst also trying to explore some of the exciting story possibilities presented by the Matrix, was quite a tall order.

The transmitted version has some fun visuals which give it the edge, such as the Master's TARDIS being a beach hut and the unmasking of Popplewick. And the scene where the Doctor is found

guilty in the fake trial room and taken to be executed is very strong in my opinion. The transmitted version also gives us a happier conclusion for Peri, and it's very much up to the individual viewer whether this adds to or detracts from the dramatic fate she endured during the events of *Mindwarp*. And, of course, the episode as broadcast gave us 'Carrot juice, carrot juice, carrot juice...' Would we really want to be without that classic line??

The Saward script does have its highpoints. In particular, the relationship between the Valeyard and Glitz is great fun. There's some very entertaining bickering between the two ('Look, you're taking this villain stuff much too far,') and a genuinely dramatic moment when the Valeyard envelopes Glitz in a column of flames. As with all Saward scripts, there's a good mixture of the humorous and the dark but his version of the episode is too weighed down by the rest of the trial and the requirements of concluding a 14 part story to be able to truly fly free and do its own thing.



# THE ULTIMATE ADVENTURE

Review by Nick Smith

Putting a Doctor Who story on stage is no easy feat. In a decade when Andrew Lloyd Webber reigned the West End (Cats! Phantom!) and digital multimedia was growing in popularity, audience expectations were sky high. Mark Furness' 1989 touring production promised them not just any adventure but an ultimate one, featuring Jon Pertwee's return as the Doctor, followed later in the run by Colin Baker.

The storyline, conjured up by word wizard Terrance Dicks, is as epic as the title. Daleks and Cybermen teamed up to ensnare the Doctor in a plot to blow up a peace conference. The Doctor is joined by Jason (played by Graeme Smith/David Bingham), a Marquis plucked from the French Revolution, Crystal (Rebecca Thornhill), a nightclub singer, and Zog (Stephanie Colburn), a server at the Bar Galactica who looks like the sweet snuffling lovechild of Chewbacca and a Tetrap.

Then-PM Margaret Thatcher (Judith Hibbert) tasks the Doctor with saving the conference. The ensuing picaresque journey incorporates chattering insects, mercenaries, an asteroid field, a Vervoid, a Draconian and a low-gravity laser tunnel perfect for a musical interlude.

This tale is told at a breakneck pace, with the TARDIS hopping from world to world with barely enough time to squeeze in a few songs. Yes, this is showtune Who, although we don't get

to hear the Doctor sing. Instead, Crystal solos on 'Strange Attractor' and duets with Jason on 'Sky High'; Bar Galactica owner Madame Delilah sings the memorable 'Business is Business' – she maims to please.

As a teenage lover of all things Who, I caught Pertwee's version at the Bristol Hippodrome, enthralled by the return of the Third Doctor. I felt left out when all the fans except me cheered at his line about reversing the neutron flow but got to enjoy the show with my parents, who enjoyed the nostalgic elements of the show.



To catch Colin's version, I took a bus to Southsea. The Sixth Doctor, natty in a new coat, suited the colourful production. Dicks' take on Six, adapted from the Third Doctor script and polished with a few suggestions from Colin, depicts him as heroic and affable. I sat right up front in the King's Theatre and cheered at all the right places – although this time I was the only one who whooped and hollered at his line, 'reverse the linearity of the proton flow.' To say that I was embarrassed would be an understatement.

From my ringside seat, I could see the gaps in Suffolk Scenery's TARDIS set, the velour spacescapes and the wires that made Jason and Crystal soar as they fell in love. Despite the joins and the scuffs and the reused tropes (hiding in a Dalek!), I never lost my sense of wonder. Colin was magnificent, obviously very at home on the stage. David Banks gave his character of Karl the Mercenary more dimensions than the script offered. And at this time, a Dalek and Cybermen team-up was the stuff of comic book dreams come true.

1989 wasn't a great year for West End musicals – the most notable were Miss Saigon, a modernization of Giacomo Puccini's Madame Butterfly, and an adaptation of another science fiction icon, Metropolis, starring Brian Blessed. Unlike those shows, The Ultimate Adven-

ture relied on knowledge of the source material to be successful. If it had become an intercontinental hit as hoped, it could have been John Nathan-Turner's crowning glory, a memorable mix of clear-cut characters, action, music, flashy visuals and pantomime family friendliness. Instead it's a curio, a bold attempt to expand the scope of a nationally treasured TV show, continuing a legacy of stage productions and helping to pave the way for modern spectacles like Doctor Who Live.

Over 30 years later, The Ultimate Adventure lives on thanks to a Big Finish audio version, complete with sequel, and video recordings uploaded to YouTube. The show is best appreciated as a celebration of Colin Baker's versatility and Terrance Dicks' ability to incorporate multiple elements into a coherent, entertaining story. The plot is gloriously convoluted and the songs belong in the synth-beat bubble-gum era that spawned them. But on stage and audio, the Doctor is the hero we all want to be, the Daleks are satisfyingly evil, and the sense of wonder is always there.



# DIMENSIONS IN TIME

Review by Rik Moran

Dimensions In Time has been written about many times and I'm not convinced that I can really offer anything new, aside from my personal opinion on the production.

Back in 1993, this was going to be the first new Doctor Who since Survival in 1989, and I was very excited for The Doctor's return to TV. I fondly remember the 30th Anniversary of Doctor Who (perhaps with rose tinted glasses) as being a big event, with the monthly publications of Doctor Who Magazine and Celestial Toyroom carrying a special 30th Anniversary Logo, which also went onto the VHS and other merchandise released that year. Dimensions In Time was going to be the crowning glory of the 30th Anniversary Celebrations, or at least that's how I felt in the run up to it. I'm not sure what I was expecting other than a 2 episode multi-Doctor story. Some would argue that's what I got, however upon completion of part 1, I was left extremely disappointed, particularly with the shortness of it, and I hoped that part 2 was going to be full length. However I was soon let down again! I also disliked the rendition of the theme and the sped up titles. It was as if they were trying to make everything as quick as possible. With this and the many other problems I saw (I don't want this to turn into a bashing Dimensions In Time piece) I came to the conclusion that these mini-episodes were not the springboard to Doctor Who's return that I had hoped for. Looking at the positives, John Na-

than-Tuner managed to pull together a huge cast allowing lots of brief cameos. Every member of the cast is playing it straight and deserve full marks for their performances. All the meetings of Doctors and companions are fun, but oh so brief. Towards the end lots of old monsters appear (a Tractator, Tetrap, Sea Devil, Zog from The Ultimate Adventure stage play amongst others).

When I look at this story to review The Sixth Doctor, first off, I am so happy that Colin Baker agreed to return and take part. Back in 1993, I had only recently learned of what had happened behind the scenes during Colin's tenure, so I thought his return for Dimensions in Time showed Colin's character, and made me have a great deal of respect for him. I know if I had been treated as he was, I doubt I'd have returned. So, what did we get for Colin's return as The Sixth Doctor? Well, we got to see The Doctor with Ace, with Susan, and of course The Brigadier. These were all wonderful little scenes, and that's how I look at Dimensions In Time - an all to brief celebration of the first 30 years of the legend that is Doctor Who.



## SIXTH DOCTOR ON AUDIO

# THE SIX FACES OF DOCTOR SIX

by Owen Taylor

"It's great that Colin is back.... especially as I think he was given a bum wrap earlier. It's good he is back in the saddle. And it's also good it's on radio as you don't have to look at his coat!" Sylvester McCoy [Talkin 'bout my Regeneration 1999]

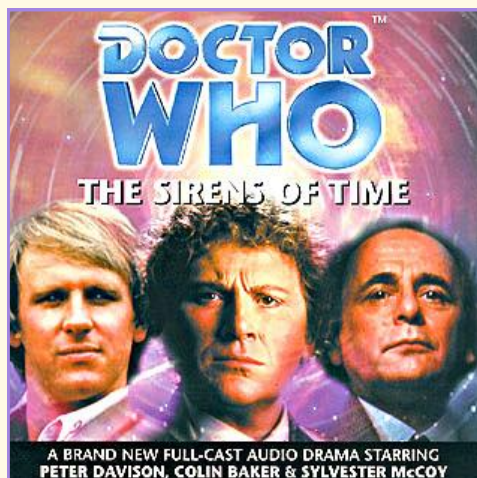
For the last twenty three years the ongoing adventures of Old Sixie, as the man himself refers to the character, have been brought to life across over 160 audio adventures from Big Finish. These have brought various looks at this incarnation ranging from companions old and new, filling in missing seasons, explaining how he met Mel and their adventures beyond the Trial with both her and with a reunited Peri after the events of Mindwarp. In fact they have shown how the character develops and mellows giving the Sixth plenty of time to shine across a range of emotions and arcs. It even led to the agreement of a regeneration story leading into the opening of Time and the Rani. So while not part of the television show the audios have become an essential part of the Sixth Doctor's story. Colin himself said in the same interview in 1999 - "It's a very good continuation of the canon, and the advantage being of course that we have access to the whole product that is Doctor Who." They also give full range to the greatest strengths of this incarnation - his ability of word play from sumptuous flows of language to full moral outrage speeches. We even get him singing in a couple...

So sit back as we explore the Six faces of Doctor Six [please be aware while no actual story reviews are intended, some plot arcs may be referenced incidentally so, Spoilers...]

## New Beginnings

When the 6th Doctor first stepped into the audio booth it was in a crossover with his 5th and 7th incarnations to launch the range. Following that and his first outing with Peri, the Doctor's next adventure would lead to the introduction of a new companion, Evelyn Smyth, eminent historian and an intellectual match for him. This teaming allowed the Doctor to encompass his television journey anew from the seemingly pompous to the gentler ease of familiarity. As the two travelled the relationship changed from a battle of intellects to that of comfortable friends, with Evelyn as the compassionate heart only to be broken by tragedy.

Evelyn was not the only new companion to be had. Phillipa 'Flip' Jackson, crossed paths several times before becoming a crew mate, giving the Doctor a feisty younger travelling companion, before they were joined by Mrs. Constance Clark, a Wren from WW2. Mrs Clark gives Sixie another equal pairing as he is less teacher and more equally met. There are several other recurring friends throughout the series and even old faces including a certain Highlander and Victorian pair of Investigators on several occasions, but these bring out the full range of uniqueness that is the



Sixth Doctor - an apparent intellectual self-arrogance and importance, more than once played upon in several stories, that belies the warmth and gentleness of this character as it progresses. The sadness in this is that, whenever it is brought to the fore with a companion it normally foreshadows some tragedy ahead.

There is also time with another companion. Charlotte Pollard gives the relationship a twist as she is forced to hide her foreknowledge gained from previously having travelled with the 8th. For those yet to experience the series I will avoid spoilers. (It is very timey-wimey).

#### Friends reunited and finally met

One cannot have the Sixth Doctor and not have Peri! The staple of so much of this period is explored in depth throughout the range, but done to convey the change we see in the series itself as we move from the trials of regeneration and change to the familiarity of long term friends. Peri also gets to use her horticultural skills too. The stories also give us a foray into a post Mindwarp and Trial relationship as the two are reunited. While we still hear

those rising tones and gruffness they are more than often interlaced with a softness and camaraderie of companions who've spent decades together.

The same is done with Mel as we move from returning her to her correct place in time and then meeting her again (for the 'first' time). We get to see the evolving relationship introduced in Terror of the Vervoids, and she gets a proper start to her adventures.

#### Old enemies and nemesis

One constant for the Sixth Doctor is Davros. Their sparring lights up every encounter while keeping an unlikely kinship between the two. Within the modern TV show we have seen both the conflict and the inexorable draw between them, but through the various audio encounters the relationship is deepened and the obvious enjoyment both Baker and Malloy have in their encounters is plain to hear. Within these tales the links between the two are strengthened time and again.

Then we have the Nemesis. The Valeyard. While the TV show gave us one whole season the audios take this rivalry forward giving us both an exploration of the character, a "What If he had succeeded in his plans?" thread, and eventually set up the end of days for Old Sixie...

#### Endings - "Change. I feel it, yes, I will regenerate."

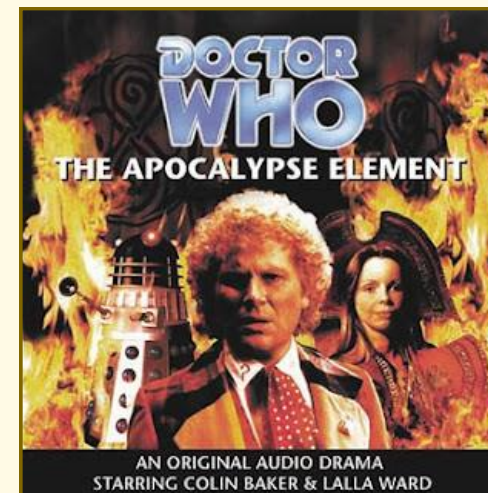
The Valeyard is the perfect antithesis of the 6th Doctor. For all the quick temper, moral outrage and frustration the 6th shows it is a dark reflection of what the Valeyard is. It makes sense that the threat to end the time of this incarnation would be the machinations of this

anomaly. While we progress across four interlinked stories crossing his various companions Baker brings across the hopelessness, bitterness and finally sad acceptance of the end of his tenure and he gives his life to stop the destruction of existence once more. The build up to the finale brings the resolution sadly missing from the TV series and showing the underlying sacrifice once more bringing about regeneration. It leads into the start of Time of the Rani. More than that this production shows the love of this character by the actor and his final acceptance that this regeneration means the torch has been passed on - though thankfully the audio adventures remain often and strong.

As Colin himself put it in the interview for The Last Adventure "I have resolutely maintained, the lie I suppose, that I am still The Doctor and all the rest are imposters because I never regenerated... So It's a tribute to the smooth talking people at Big Finish and the standard of work completed thus far that I have cast aside my reluctance and joined all the other Doctors in actually having a regeneration."

#### Lost Stories, Real Time & Ultimate Adventure

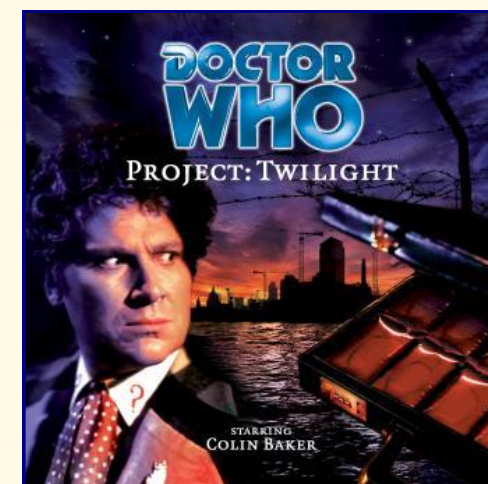
The lost season 23 has been covered elsewhere within this publication but Big Finish have ensured 13 unmade productions have heard the light of day. From the lost season to proposed but unused stories the further TV adventures of Six and Peri have played out with a true feel of being in those lost years. We also recently got the chance to hear Russell T Davies' first ever script written for Sixie. They have also given us a chance to hear a version of the stage play featuring the Sixth

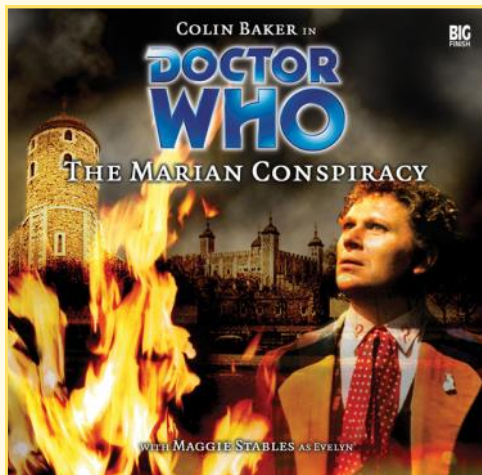


Doctor. The Ultimate Adventure is reproduced faithfully giving yet another snapshot into those lost decades. And.... if you missed the BBC web series Reel Time there's an audio only version with added content as well.

#### At last a Warrior!

One of the side ranges for Big Finish has been the Unbound series exploring the 'What Ifs' of different actors who have played the Doctor. Within its original run we got to see what a triumphant Valeyard would have done with his inherited regenerations. In 2022 the





series returned to explore the consequences of an alternate ending to Genesis of the Daleks. What if those two strands had been touched together? The answer was an earlier start to the Time War and an earlier face for regeneration.

Here we get to explore what having the Sixth [now 5th] as a War Doctor would be like. How would that moral outrage, linguistic word play and quick fire temper be? What we get is a far more focused character travelling from the fire of fighting to the weight of leadership, taking decisions that end lives, to the time weary old man living the end over and over.

This disjointed series while as fractured as the Time War brings out a tour de force of Colin's acting strengths. The conclusion even involves an alternate hunt for the Key to Time where only one companion can help the Doctor succeed - Davros. Here at the end, once more these two are linked as they have been across the years of audio.

The Big Finish dramas have been a quintessential part of the legacy of the

Sixth Doctor. They have allowed the development and depth of that incarnation to be explored as it was originally envisioned before being curtailed by cancellation and the return. That idea of exploring the alien nature of the character through Baker's superb use of language and innate moral outrage and the mellowing of that temper through friendships, show the innate Doctor-ness underneath of the excitement and joy of finding something new to explore and discover.

Colin put it best himself again in the interview for his regeneration story - "Big Finish have enabled my Doctor, my sixth Doctor, to live beyond its few short episodes... since Big Finish has been in existence the Sixth Doctor has lived and breathed anew and developed in a way that I am extremely happy with and enabled me to do it."



## SIXTH DOCTOR ON AUDIO

# THE EVELYN SMYTHE YEARS

by Stephen Hatcher



Doctor Who fans are often wont to talk about The Classic Series - the original television series, which ran between 1963 and 1989, and the New or Modern Series - the series made by BBC Wales, which launched in 2005 and which continues to this day, as if they were all there is of Doctor Who. Of course, the reality is quite different. Doctor Who didn't go away after Survival, the last story of the Seventh Doctor's run, in December 1989. Yes, for the most part, it left our television screens, but it moved into other media - primarily as novels and comic strips. Nonetheless, between 1990 and 1999, official, performed Doctor Who was limited to the 1996 TV Movie, two BBC Radio serials in 1993 and 1996 and two

brief charity specials in 1993 and 1999.

Then in 1999, everything changed. Performed (as opposed to literary) Doctor Who was back with a bang and has never been away since. A full six years before Russell T. Davies brought his version of the show to our screens, Big Finish Productions a small, independent company, composed largely of fans, many of whom had been involved in the production of well-regarded but unofficial Doctor Who audio plays since the mid-1980s, was awarded the licence to make official Doctor Who in the audio medium, available on CD or cassette. The news was followed by an announcement that three of the surviving Doctor actors - Peter Davison, Colin Baker and Sylvester McCoy, had agreed to reprise their roles and would all feature in the first release, which would be followed by subsequent plays, in which each of the Doctors would feature in adventures set during the timeline of their original TV series.

It's hard to stress enough how central Big Finish was to Doctor Who fan life, during those first six years. Of course, they continue to be important to this day, with an ever-expanding catalogue of hundreds of titles featuring an ever-growing roster of Doctors involved, from both the Classic and Modern Series; but in those early years, Big Finish was Doctor Who and each new release was greeted with as much attention as any new TV episode would be today.

In those early years, great efforts were made to slot stories into 'gaps' in continuity. However, due to the availability or

otherwise of actors, not to mention the sheer number of releases, those 'gaps' soon came to be increasingly strained. This was particularly true in the case of the Fifth Doctor, whose era had little or anything of a real gap between stories and two of whose companion actors did not want to reprise their roles. For the Seventh Doctor, there was that long gap between *Survival* and *The TV Movie* – although there appears to have been some reluctance to explore that during those first Big Finish years.

As regards the Sixth Doctor, the situation was somewhat different. At the conclusion of *The Trial of a Time Lord*, the Doctor leaves Gallifrey with Mel, the companion from his future whom he hasn't met yet, heading who knows where. We've already seen one of their future adventure – *Terror of the Vervoids* – on the screen of the Time Lord courtroom, but of course that hasn't happened yet. The next time we see the pair, they are travelling together when the Sixth Doctor suffers a slight bang on the head and regenerates into the Seventh. But what has happened in between? Did the Doctor take Mel back to Pease Pottage and leave her there, in order to be able to meet her again at the 'right' time? How long is the gap between the two TV stories? Did the Doctor travel alone for a while before 'officially' meeting Mel, or did he meet and travel with other companions? The possibilities were endless.

One thing was certain, both Colin Baker and producer Gary Russell were determined that the character of the Sixth Doctor as heard in the new audio series, would be significantly softened from how he had been seen on TV. The grand plan of starting off with a somewhat unlikeable post-regenerative Doctor, who over time would calm down and become more sympathetic, had been cut-short by Colin's abrupt departure from the role, resulting

in a Sixth Doctor who was not as popular among some fans as he should have been, and no doubt would have been, had that plan played out. For the Big Finish Sixth Doctor, time has moved on and he is more at peace. Whether it be with TV companions Peri or Mel or with new original fellow-travellers, specially created to fill that long gap, this would be a slightly different Doctor – one still fiercely committed to fight against evil and injustice, but a softer, more amenable Doctor.

To accompany this older, more mellow Sixth Doctor, a new companion would be needed. Played by Maggie Stables and making her debut in Big Finish Doctor Who release number six *The Marian Conspiracy* by Jacqueline Rayner, released in March 2000, Doctor Evelyn Smythe, a fifty-five-year-old lecturer in history from Sheffield Hallam University, was the first original Big Finish companion to be created; and came to dominate the Sixth Doctor range during its first six years.

Of the twenty Sixth Doctor plays released as part of the 'Main Range' during the period from November 1999 to September 2005, twelve had the Doctor travelling with Evelyn, only two featured Peri, four saw him alongside Mel (one of which



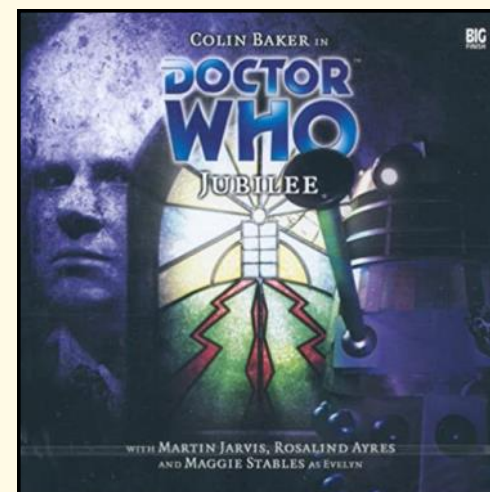
also featured Evelyn), and one each featured comics companion Frobisher and BBC novels character Iris Wildthyme. One story featured no companion. Those twelve stories allowed producers and writers to develop the character and her relationship with the Doctor and create a consistent on-going arc, telling Evelyn's story from when she first meets the Doctor through to a point where we discover she has already left him. Even then, the character would continue, joining the ranks of 'former companions' and cropping up regularly – in another eighth releases.

What we are left with is a near-perfect, almost self-contained little era of Doctor Who. An era in which sympathetic writing and script-editing finally allowed an actor to establish himself as the wonderful Doctor he always should have been – Colin regularly topped listeners polls as their favourite Big Finish Doctor during those years – and to be accompanied by the perfect companion for his Doctor. It cannot be stressed enough how well the character of Evelyn fitted with that of the Sixth Doctor and how terrific Maggie Stables was in the role, which was indeed created with her in mind. Producer Gary Russell who was responsible for creating Evelyn, has noted that Maggie was "well-read and erudite... a female Colin Baker."

Of course, a strong era of Doctor Who requires excellent writing, and it is no accident that this run of stories includes at least six that would rank highly on most listeners' lists of the greatest of all Big Finish releases – *The Marian Conspiracy*, *The Spectre of Lanyon Moor*, *Bloodtide*, *Project Twilight*, *Jubilee* and *Doctor Who and the Pirates*.

The idea of an older companion for the Doctor was far from new. During the era of the Fourth Doctor the characters of Amelia Ducat (Sylvia Coleridge) in *The*

*Seeds of Doom* and Emilia Rumford (Beatrix Lehman) in *The Stones of Blood* both acted as ersatz companions and proved popular both with Tom Baker and with viewers. Later both Todd in *Kinda* (Nerys Hughes) and Jane Hampden in *The Awakening*, were effective stand-in companions for the Fifth Doctor. Both were much younger than either of the two Amelia/Emilias, but were professional women, of an age greater than the typical young female Who companion. All four may be considered to have had some influence on the creation of Evelyn.



In age, Evelyn falls somewhere between these two models – younger than Ducat or Rumford, but older than Todd or Hampden – she is fifty-five when she first meets the Doctor. She is young for her years, lively, playful, and inquisitive, but also thoughtful, considerate, and sensitive; and shows no reluctance in standing up to the Doctor when she considers him to be in the wrong. Although she appears older than the Doctor, she recognises that the opposite is true and treats him as an equal – their relationship is characterised by mutual trust and respect and a shared sense of humour.

Gary Russell provided writers with a character outline for the new companion:

"Think Emilia Rumford meets Angela Lansbury, meets Margaret Rutherford, meets Cameca [The Aztecs, 1964], meets Maggie Stables." Noting also that Evelyn is, "...not as dotty as Amelia Ducat."

The Marian Conspiracy begins with the Doctor investigating an anomaly in Earth's history. He is drawn to Doctor Evelyn Smythe and discovers that she is a nexus point. After examining Evelyn's family history, he travels back in time to find the source of the anomaly in the Sixteenth Century. Evelyn, the history lecturer, bored with the humdrum of academia, convinces him to take her along. The pair become involved in a plot to assassinate the catholic Queen Mary and replace her with her sister Elisabeth, involving a priest, Thomas Smith, who Evelyn deduces is her ancestor, whom she knows to have been burned at the stake. Despite being arrested and thrown into the Tower of London, the pair are able to rescue the Queen and save Thomas' pregnant wife, thus allowing the family line to continue and Evelyn to be born.

Despite the dangers, Evelyn takes to travelling with the Doctor immediately. She later tells an alternate version of him, when faced with the knowledge that an alternate version of herself has died, "You're my dearest friend – still the best thing that's ever happened to me. The places you've taken me; the wonders you've shared. I know that whatever happened to me along the way, even death, it was worth it." (Jubilee, by Robert Shearman).

It says a lot about the immediate impact of the character, that in her next adventure, Evelyn is by no means overshadowed by the Sixth Doctor's first proper meeting with Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart, in Nicholas Pegg's *The Spectre of Lanyon Moor* (June 2000), a *The Daemons* meets *The Stones of Blood* tale of a

mysterious ancient artefact leading to a long-dormant malevolent alien force beneath the moors of Cornwall; and the local landowner and his housekeeper who plot to revive that force for their own ends. It's a terrific, traditional Doctor Who story.

Neither is Evelyn outshone by either the Doctor's greatest foes the Daleks or the Big Finish debut of *Romana*; nor by accompanying the Sixth Doctor on his return to Gallifrey, in Stephen Cole's *The Apocalypse Element* (August 2000), a fast-paced action story, which doesn't stop for breath.

It's back into history for Evelyn's next story, *Bloodtide* by Jonathan Morris (July 2001) as the Doctor takes her to the Galapagos Islands in 1835, where she meets a personal hero, the great naturalist Charles Darwin, not to mention a colony of Silurians, bent on reclaiming the Earth.

*Project Twilight* (August 2001) by Mark Wright and Cavan Scott, a vampire story set in London's gangster-land, introduces us and the Doctor and Evelyn to a number of characters and concepts that will return in later stories – the sinister Forge; their cybernetically enhanced director, Nimrod; and Cassie Schofield, a young girl who falls victim to the vampires and ultimately to Nimrod. Cassie's death in the sequel story *Project Lazarus* (June 2003), will provoke the first real rupture in the relationship between the TARDIS crew.

In *The Sandman* (October 2002) by Simon A. Forward, Evelyn is introduced to the Galyari, a lizard-like race, for whom the Doctor is a mythical monster. Then in December 2002, Evelyn made her one and only appearance in the visual medium, in *Real Time* by Gary Russell, an animated webcast by Big Finish on the BBC Cult website. This brought the Sixth Doctor (in his fetching new blue coat) and his

companion up against the Cybermen and ended on a huge cliff-hanger with Evelyn transformed into a Cyber-Controller. Unfortunately, this cliff-hanger was never to be resolved as no further Sixth Doctor webcast was to be made and the story is usually regarded as something of an 'Unbound' story, apart from the Big Finish audio series

Robert Shearman's brilliant *Jubilee* (January 2003), the inspiration for Rob's 2005 TV story *Dalek*, sees the TARDIS land in an alternate universe 2003 in the capital of the English Empire, celebrating the centenary of their defeat of the Daleks, with the help of the Doctor. A lone Dalek prisoner is being tortured constantly in the Tower of London, but the insane President regards another, wheelchair-bound prisoner, as a greater threat. The Doctor and Evelyn must set history back on course.

In *Doctor Who* and the *Pirates* by Jacqueline Rayner (April 2003), the Doctor and Evelyn return to Sheffield and seek to save the life of a young student, using the 1001 Nights stratagem of telling her the story of when they met a crew of desperate pirates. By episode three, when the story alone is not proving enough to distract the girl, they resort to a full-on Gilbert and Sullivan parody musical, complete with terrific songs. It's a hugely entertaining story, which takes an unexpectedly dark and moving turn at the end.

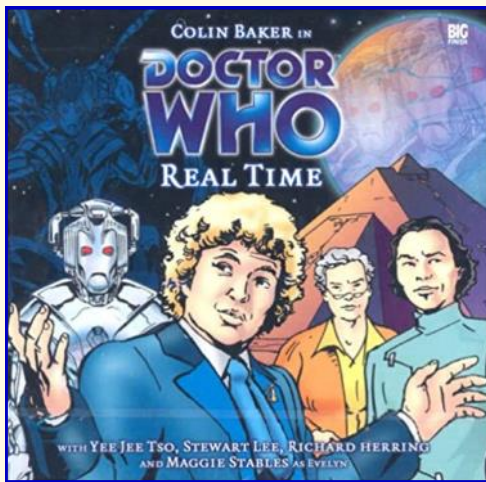
After the events of *Project Lazarus*, discussed earlier, the Doctor takes Evelyn, still blaming him for his apparent indifference to Cassie's death, to the planet Világ, to allow them to spend some time apart, (*Arrangements for War* by Paul Sutton, May 2004). Against the background of a Romeo and Juliet story, involving a young princess, whose arranged marriage will guarantee the peace between two warring nations, Evelyn meets Rossiter, the

peacemaker leader of a third nation and the two fall in love. An alien invasion is defeated, and the Doctor and Evelyn are reconciled, but the princess and her soldier lover are killed. Despite Rossiter asking Evelyn to remain with him, she leaves with the Doctor. However...

After an encounter with the body-snatchers Burke and Hare in 1820s Edinburgh, (*Medicinal Purposes* by Robert Ross, August 2004), in which the Doctor and Evelyn come up against a future time-traveller, who has replaced the real historical figure Dr. Robert Knox; and fail to save the life of 'Daft Jamie' (David Tennant), the latest in a succession of young people who die during the course of their adventures; we skip forward in the Doctor and Evelyn's timeline for *Thicker Than Water* by Paul Sutton, (September 2005).

The Doctor brings his latest companion, Mel, back to Világ to meet Evelyn, who left him to return to marry Rossiter some time earlier. Although she is aware that she may not have long to live, Evelyn has taken on an important role in the government of the planet, which is now at peace and united, but her work brings her into conflict with Rossiter's daughter Sofia over whether or not Világ should use abandoned alien technology from the defeated invasion. Evelyn is kidnapped and collapses, seriously ill, and is saved on the operating table by the Doctor, using his own anti-bodies. While she is recovering, Evelyn is visited by the Seventh Doctor, who reveals to her that his companion Hex is Cassie's son Tommy.

The Doctor and Mel leave, parting with Evelyn on good terms, bringing to an end her travels in the TARDIS. However, over the next six years, Evelyn would continue to appear in the Sixth Doctor series, mostly in stories set between *Medicinal Purposes* and *Thicker Than Water*. She would meet the comedian Max Miller in



Brighton in 1936, in Robert Ross's *Pier Pressure* (January 2006); confront the mystery of a fifty-billion-year-old door in space, in Nicholas Briggs's *The Nowhere Place* (July 2006); meet Julius Caesar's parents, a hundred-year-old Mozart, a cursed family and an intelligent alien virus in *100*, a quartet of stories by Jacqueline Rayner, Robert Shearman, Joseph Lidster and Paul Cornell; and witness the assassination of Abraham Lincoln in *Assassin in the Limelight*, (Robert Ross, May 2008). Then after a period away from the range, during which the Seventh Doctor witnesses Evelyn's death (*A Death in the Family*, by Steven Hall, October 2010), the character returned in January to March 2011 for three final stories which also featured the scheming former companion of the Fifth Doctor Thomas Brewster (*The Crimes of Thomas Brewster*, *The Feast of Axos*, and *Industrial Evolution*).

Maggie Stables' ill health brought about her retirement from

acting in 2013 and sadly, she died the following year. Her presence and that of the character she created is much missed in the Big Finish family to this day, although Evelyn's legacy lives on. Evelyn proved that an older companion could work very well with the Doctor – especially in his sixth incarnation – and a lot of their relationship can be seen in that of the Sixth Doctor and Mrs Constance Clarke, who has appeared in Big Finish audios since 2015 as well as in such characters as Eighth Doctor companion Liv Chenka and the more mature versions of companions such as Nyssa, Tegan and Ace, that we have encountered.

So, Evelyn has been a hugely influential character and contributed in very great measure to the Sixth Doctor Big Finish series. Those years when she travelled with the Doctor make up an era that can stand proud in the show's nearly sixty-year history as being of the most consistently high quality. It is an era that is remembered with great affection by those who followed it at the time and one that continues to delight new listeners. For me, this is, by some distance, the outstanding period of the Sixth Doctor adventures.

L-R Colin Baker, Maggie Stables, Nicholas Courtney



# THANK YOU

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