

COSMIC MASQUE



EDITORIAL

By Nick Smith

Some of my earliest memories of Doctor Who feature monsters – a wirrn husk, a groping zygon, mummies with a man crush. Those iconic, disturbing creatures thread indelibly through the Doctor's adventures, providing foes for him to oppose, filling the dark corners of our imagination.

This issue of Cosmic Masque opens with a celebration (but not a carnival) of monsters and digs deep into their origins asking, what makes them so monstrous?

Kyle Jones, co-host of the Discussing Who podcast (not to be confused with Kyle Jones the professional bull rider) says goodbye to the Thirteenth Doctor in his article, Here We Go Again. Sticking with the podcast theme, Craig Johnson takes Literary License. Craig wishes it to be known that his Uncle Richie Gee did the motorbike stunts for HAV-OC in The Mind of Evil in 1971. Definitely a connection to be proud of!

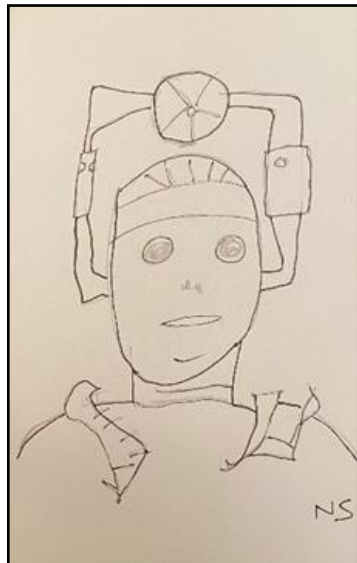
Iain McLaughlin, creator of Fifth Doctor audio companion Erimem, graciously describes her origin and development. Dave Chapman catches us up on the latest Doctor Who games. Legend of the Traveling TARDIS broadcaster Christian Basel, recently described to me as 'Mr. TARDIS,' puts on his velvet jacket to champion his favorite Doctor.

We meet Chris Phillips, director of the exhilarating fan film series Velocity,

BBC Sounds' Redacted gets a last look and Richard D. Rhodes shares his views on the BBC Centenary special. All this plus oodles of creative tales from the land of fiction, lovingly compiled by Lad of Fiction Stephen Hatcher.

Special thanks to artist Walter Pond for providing our front cover, and James Christopher Hill who created the 3D rendering detail on the back cover. 'People always think it's the TARDIS interior,' he says, but there's an important component missing... can you spot the difference?

Nick



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COSMIC MASQUE XVII

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MONSTER ENERGY

by Nick Smith

Doctor Who without monsters would not bear thinking about. Monsters are what the hero defeats. They help the audience focus on who the hero is. But what makes a monster? Tentacles? Mandibles? Bug eyes? Weird bumps?

Monsters are menacing, otherworldly and ugly – at least on the inside. Galaxy 4 showed us that not all hideous aliens should be judged by their appearance, with the attractive Drahvins causing mischief. We've seen helpful Sontarans (Sarg and Strax), and devious Cybermen mistaken for faceless friends and family members (in *Army of Ghosts*).

Looks can be deceiving and monickers more so. Doctor Who takes great lengths to examine what being monstrous means.

The Latin *monstrum* referred to an evil omen and the verb *monere* meant to warn, remind or instruct, from the root *mon*, which has survived to this day in words like admonish. In Ancient Roman

times, an animal with a birth defect was considered a bad sign, a monster. There is a theory that the goddess Juno Moneta protected treasure and warned about economic instability.

Some monsters just can't help themselves. They're amoral. Murder – or worse – might be in their nature but they don't plan on it. Erago is a misunderstood monster, trapped in a pit; without the Great Intelligence, the yeti are cuddly furballs.

The Weeping Angels feed on people's lost time. They're hungry. To let them starve would be monstrous. Likewise, the giant spiders in *Arachnids in the UK*. Unlike their wicked piggy-back equivalents on Metebelis III, these earth spiders are simply being spidery. By this definition, size is important since we don't regard regular-sized spiders as monsters unless you walk into a web with your mouth open.

DAVROS AS DEADBEAT DAD



Other, classic monsters are mean but they mean well. The Daleks are convinced that they are the only life worth existing in the universe. We can blame that on poor parenting – thanks Davros. In the book *Doctor Who and Philosophy*, Courtland Lewis contends that the Cybermen are altruists, acting in the interests of others. ‘Altruists consider the desires and needs of others and act in such a way to make sure these needs and desires are met,’ he writes. Coming from the ‘nanny state’ of Mondas, the Cybermen know what’s best for us – the eradication of pain, suffering and death through cybernetic modification. Are they bad? The Doctor thinks so, since our mortality is part of what makes us human. Since he can regenerate and does not share the mortal concerns of us earthers, does that make the Doctor more human or monster?

A monster in a story is the one that unsettles the status quo, disturbs the peace, upturns everything and leaves death in its wake. Sound like the Doctor, especially when he’s in meddling mode. He hasn’t always been kind (just ask the Tribe of Gum or the Family of Blood), especially in his first, sixth and twelfth incarnations. Yet he is a hero.

IS THE DOCTOR A MONSTER?

In a sense, a hero is also a sort of monster: possessed of super-human powers necessary to defeat the enemy. Much has been written about the Old English folk hero Beowulf and his parallels with the murderous creature Grendel. When Beowulf returns from a raid in Sweden, he brings the armour of 30 Swedish warriors. Grendel drags off 30 victims on its first raid as well. As Victoria Symons points out in her essay *Monsters and Heroes in Beowulf*, human and

monstrous qualities can be found in the protagonist and the antagonists.

‘Beowulf’s supreme strength brings his character uncomfortably close to Grendel’s,’ says Symons, ‘but it also makes him the only one capable of standing up to the monster... the line between hero and villain comes down to a matter of perspective: one person’s Beowulf is another’s Grendel.’

MALICIOUS MINDS

Despite possessing some extra-human abilities, the Doctor is no villain. We have seen humanoid characters perform monstrous acts. The Master’s desire to destroy the universe is monstrous. Shrinking people to the size of an Action Man is terrible. So what’s the difference between a monster and a villain? Despicability is a part of the range of emotions that make us human. Does that mean we’re monsters too?

A villain can be focused on or perceived as villainous by just one person – consider, though you’d rather not, the devious ex-boyfriend who everyone adores but you, or Sutekh, who is worshipped despite having that whole good-evil thing all turned around. Villains create tragedy on purpose. Writing *On the Sufferings of the World*, philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer posited that life with no pain had no meaning, or at least would be terribly dull. ‘...A certain amount of care or pain or trouble is necessary for every man at all times,’ he wrote gloomily. Doctor Who’s greatest villains are ambitious, sadistic and psychologically unsettling. They are, as Schopenhauer would put it, a ballast providing stability and direction to a ship. They are not chaotic and/or mind-

less monsters, creating tragedy by accident.

AARGH! REAL MONSTERS

One thing we can count on is that in the Whoniverse, monsters exist. Once the back end of that perilous plunger was revealed in *The Survivors*, we have seen proof that hideous alien creatures are as real as Prehistoric Man or a 1960s schoolteacher. While this helps the show to cut to the chase and build a world where such creatures are a given, it also removes the potential for the main characters to doubt their own senses – a key component of monster fiction.

'Doubt, scepticism, and the fear that belief in the existence of the monster is

a form of insanity are predictable foils to the revelation (to the audience or to the characters or both) of the existence of the monster,' writes Noel Carroll in his essay *Why Horror?*. However, thanks to its regular dose of peripheral characters, Doctor Who can have its cake and eat it too. Humans who've yet to meet the Doctor don't know what's hit them, is hiding from them, or why the earth is hungry sometimes.

MONSTERS AS METAPHOR

'The dragon is a literal threat to the safety of Beowulf's people,' writes Symons, 'but in the way it behaves it represents a moral danger, too.' The way the people react to the monsters they face is as important as the threat itself. If they lose their heads or take their fears out

on each other, it doesn't really matter if the monster eats them or not. By upsetting their apple cart, the chaotic dragon risks spreading a rot. It is a destructive force like harsh nature, widespread illness or old age. By defeating it, the hero holds back those forces.

In Doctor Who, some monsters have obvious parallels – fascism, warmongering, an over-reliance on machines. Others are homages to or celebrations of creatures from Gothic literature or classic movies. Some of the greatest monsters prey on our phobias: the dark, loss of identity, the ravages of a virus or losing precious time with loved ones. While irrational fears can never truly be vanquished, monsters can. And that is why they continue to fascinate. We can't conquer the weather or anything that scares us at a primal level. But the Doctor can and will defeat



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HERE WE GO AGAIN

by Kyle Jones

Well, here we go again. This phrase, originally in Part 6 of Planet of the Spiders (first airing on the 8th of June 1974), is said to be an ad-libbed line by Nicholas Courtney. Now, almost fifty years since, I chose it as the title for this article. Why? Here we go again perfectly describes the dual realities of Doctor Who – that of the story that evolves during a regeneration and the sadly exciting cycle for fandom when we say goodbye to one incarnation and hello to another. (Or, just maybe, hello again!) Here we go again is a nod to the change and signals the beginning of a new era.

As of this writing only a few weeks remain before The Power of the Doctor bids farewell to the Thirteenth Doctor. And, with the departure of both showrunner and lead actor, Doctor Who will

once again regenerate in such a way not seen since 2010. Looking back on Chibnall's tenure, I wonder if his interpretation of the show did more to harm the franchise than it did to help? But times change. A new tomorrow awaits and may be past when you read this. Or, as I said before, here we go again.

Let me be clear before I continue. Opinions for this article focus on Chris Chibnall's direction and vision – or seemingly apparent lack thereof. I think Jodie Whittaker is an amazing actor, and I think she truly loved being The Doctor. Unfortunately, the Chibnall Era didn't "click" with me. It didn't connect just as some of the John Nathan-Turner years didn't connect. And, in the end, that's OK. I can't like everything, right? Maybe just 95%!?



The ability to regenerate the show presents those behind the scenes with opportunities to remake, revise, reinterpret the story for a new generation. New decades bring new takes. Changes in culture bring different companions. Susan Foreman was a product of the 1960s just as Yazmin Kahn is of the 2020s.

My first response to the early 2016 news that Chris Chibnall would replace the departing Steven Moffat as showrunner was excitement. Chibnall's cleverly crafted and intense Broadchurch gained critical and fandom acclaim on both sides of the Pond, leading me to believe that his vision of Doctor Who would fit with what had come before. In fact, we discussed this very topic in the very first episode of Discussing Who.

Excitement quickly turned to disappointment. Lackluster plots, forgettable foes (Tim Shaw), and almost forgettable companions (Ryan) plagued Chibnall's time as showrunner. Then, with the last episode of Series 13, something happened that had NEVER happened before with our review. Our team decided to re-record our review because our response to the finale slanted too far to the negative – something we try very hard not to do.

But, for me, there were two unforgivable acts that bothered me the most.

The first was the Timeless Child retcon. Yes, I realize that story canon must be revised from time-to-time, especially with a history as rich as Doctor Who. Both Moffat and Chibnall introduced previously unknown incarnations of the Doctor. Moffat's War Doctor allowed

the Eighth to remain the Eighth and the Ninth to remain the Ninth by using the idea of an incarnation who did not believe himself worthy of the name. Chibnall's instead chose to not only rewrite the Doctor's history but that of the entire race of Time Lords.

This choice made the Doctor the very base of Time Lord society and introduced incarnations that preceded William Hartnell's First Doctor. Regardless of how much I enjoy Jo Martin's Fugitive Doctor (and I do very much indeed), William Hartnell's incarnation should always be the FIRST INCARNATION. Chibnall did not add an added layer to the tapestry. He, instead, ripped it asunder and reworked it into something different. (I still hope that the Power of the Doctor will bring with it Chibnall's brilliant "gotcha" moment where he cleverly wraps up the story in a way that gives us all a satisfying end to his run. We can hope, can't we?)

The second was Chibnall's failure to provide Jodie with an incarnation who not only rivaled but surpassed earlier incarnations in popularity. Imagine the win for the Doctor Who franchise if the first female lead's popularity soared! There are fans of the Thirteenth Doctor, but I would have liked to see her universally loved. Imagine how great that would have been!



Chibnall chose to spend Series 11 focused on the companions and less on the Doctor's rediscovery of herself. Chibnall never gave us what I like to call "The Doctor Moment" when the new incarnation solidifies themselves as The Doctor. (Think back to Capaldi's speech in *Flatline* or Smith's speech in *The Eleventh Hour*.) More characterization was given to the Fugitive than to the Thirteenth, and Jodie deserved better. I wonder, had Jodie Whitaker's Thirteenth Doctor arrived in the RTD of Moffat Eras, would we have seen an incarnation that resonated more than what we saw?

My excitement about Doctor Who returned with the announcement that Russell T. Davies would return for the 60th Anniversary and for Series 14. With his return comes a showrunner who loves to tease the audience and generate excitement on social media. The announcement of Ncuti Gatwa as the Fourteenth Doctor serves as an excellent example.

Now we have questions: Will we see the return of the annual Christmas Day special? What characters might return for the 60th Anniversary special? What Doctors might return? Will Murray Gold return?

For me, I'd like to leave you with a bit of speculation. While Ncuti Gatwa's Fourteenth Doctor will take us on new adventures in 2024 and will likely appear in the 2023 60th Anniversary, I think something else will happen when Thirteen regenerates. After all, the Doctor never forgets a face and, in the future, might revisit a few – but just the old favorites, eh? I might be wrong but, let's just say that when the Thirteenth

Doctor regenerates I will hold my breath and count to TEN.

Until next time, here we go again.

About Discussing Who

[Discussing Who](#) is a long-running bi-weekly Doctor Who podcast hosted by Kyle Jones, Lee Shackleford, and Clarence Brown.

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LITERARY LICENCE PODCAST

by Craig Johnson

The Literary License Podcast celebrates their sixth year as they cross the 200 episode benchmark. Dealing with books, interviews, television and films, they have built up over an 8 million subscription to their monthly newsletter and dedicated listeners.

The brainchild of Dr Keith Chawgo, editor, producer and director, the Literary License Podcast started out as a show about books to screen. The main premise was to read a book and then watch a film and have a discussion. Keith stated, 'the first two episodes were extremely rough but fun. Jon Wilson, writer and scriptwriter, and I had two other co-hosts that were not a very good fit. One would eat and the other droned to the point where editing would become a full-time job in itself.

September 2022 marked the launch of the Doctor Who retrospective podcast where, starting from an Unearthly Child from 1963, each episode is reviewed from start to current day episodes of new Who. This will be hosted by Craig Johnson, Keith Chawgo and Matt Rose on a monthly basis.

Tuesday 17th October covered Doctor Who and the Daleks from 1963 with William Hartnell playing the Doctor, with his assistants Ian and Barbara and granddaughter Susan.

Co-host Matt Rose with Fifth Doctor Peter Davison

Jon Wilson said, 'we tried different formats [for the Literary License Podcast] and by the fourth one, we decided to bring in Vickie Rae who resides in Texas. What was unique about Vickie is that she gave her own spin on what we were covering and became a great asset. When she came on board, we started to find our stride.'

After six months, the show went through some changes when they were approached by international radio stations who wanted to air their broadcast. 'This was quite exciting but scary at the same time,' says Keith, 'as we were now under contract to do 52 episodes a year. The good thing was that we ensured we had backup in case we fell behind.' Since this time, the show has expanded to 26 international radio stations encompassing Japan, the Philippines and Brazil, amongst others.

From this point forward the show decided to change its format to still do



their book-to-screen episode but to do a monthly theme, and then within the four week monthly plan, each week would have a theme. The Literary License Podcast did a yearly season of Alfred Hitchcock films, European Horror, Edgar Allen Poe and Classic Novels. Because of the huge undertaking, we added on new co-hosts which included Leandro Ghezzi from Argentina, Will Millar from Utah, Tom Diamon from New York and Jesse Fultz from Connecticut. Our co-hosts have their own individual interviews that they do and that they feel passionate about. For our fifth season, we have some new co-hosts joining us such as Craig Johnson and Dayvid Grant from London and Joe Randazzo, scriptwriter and writer from Chicago, who started off as guest co-hosts and have become a permanent fixture for our 80's Horror season.

Keith stated, 'we were quite fortunate because every year we have guest co-hosts who join us for different episodes and every year they come back and the numbers grow. We keep adding to our roster each year, which includes artists, writers, producers, directors and just fans of the work that we are covering. We also have done interviews with Laurence Hyman Jackson (Shirley Jackson's son), Dinah Manoff, Jennifer Salt, the cast and crew of Anna and the Apocalypse, Ellen Foley, Dark Shadows interviews and some exciting ones coming up which will include LVCRFT, Elizabeth (EG) Daily, David Shelby, Kristy McNichol, Deborah Foreman, Barbara Crampton and some surprise coming your way.

'We cover all types of films,' says Keith, 'though our passion seems to be settled in the classic horror section. We try to

bring back films that people forget about and in an era of reboots and re-makes, it is important that we remember the originals. We try to do this with the books we cover as well. It is very interesting how many people didn't realise films like Ringo or Battle Royale were books first. We cover everything from musicals, cult films, science fiction, documentaries etc. and we enjoy listening to each other's views. No matter how different or opposed to my views, I respect their views. I may not agree but I respect them and nothing is better than communication, because each of the guests and co-hosts have made me look at things from different angles, enriching my pleasure and enjoyment of our programming.'

The Literary License Podcast 5th season will include their Book to Screen: Kings of Horror, where they will cover the books of Stephen King, Clive Barker, James Herbert, Dean Kootnz and others; Bewitched, the classic 60's television witch sitcom; Two for 1: The 80's, the cult horror films of the 80s; Dark Shadows, classic 1960's daytime vampire soap opera and SOAP, the 1970's classic from the mind of Susan Harris (Golden Girls, Benson and Empty Nest). We were also asked by Spotify to put together a soundtrack of the show, with iTunes following in November 2021. You can sign up at www.lpodcast.com for our monthly newsletter or look at our merchandise at www.store.lpodcast.com. The show is available on iTunes, Spotify, YouTube, Amazon Prime and other podcast platforms. Craig Johnson's artwork can be found at his etsy store [craigsworld](https://www.etsy.com/shop/craigsworld), on Instagram [@craigsworld2](https://www.instagram.com/craigsworld2) or at craigsworld.org

EDUCATING ERIMEM

by Nick Smith

Big Finish's Eye of the Scorpion is set in Ancient Egypt just as Pharaoh Amenhotep II has died. His reluctant successor Erimemushinteperem (Erimem for short, played by Caroline Morris), Daughter of Light, does not have a reign in the history books and her life is in danger – her brothers are all dead. The Doctor (Peter Davison) and Peri (Nicola Bryant) foil an attempted assassination but there's more than mere political shenanigans afoot; Egypt is threatened by aliens with enhanced psionic abilities.

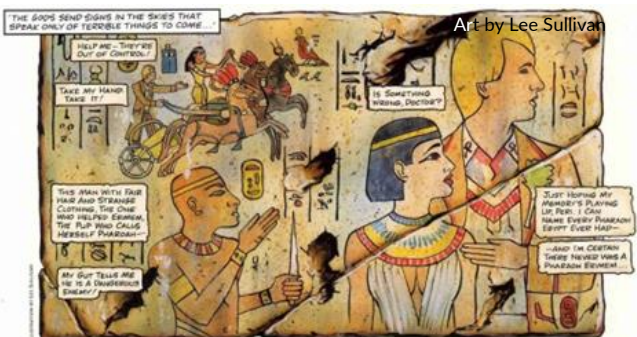
The Fifth Doctor spends part of this adventure knocked out by poison, which gives Peri and Erimem time to get to know each other and investigate the otherworldly plot against Thebes. Egypt's capital city comes to life in this audio story, highlighting Erimem's status in her society – whether she likes it or now. It's no surprise that she decides to join the Doctor at the end of the story, itching to explore space.

That innate sense of curiosity adventure helps to make Erimem a great companion. Rather than limit her view of the world, as with Katarina in The Daleks' Master Plan, she is given the opportunity to grow and learn during her travels, standing up for herself in stories like The Kingmaker. Her roots are not forgotten, however, and she applies her cultural standards to different situations; for her, death has very different connotations in comparison to our

own. Alarming, she considers suicide to keep history on the right track.

In The Roof of the World, Erimem explains how Amenhotep's guards would clear the streets of beggars before the royal family, so as not to offend their eyes. Now that sheltered existence is gone and she rarely gets the royal treatment she's used to. Her culture shock is fascinating to listen to, at times funny and others thought-provoking. Caroline Morris brings extra layers of emotion and intelligence to her role and we become genuinely concerned for the character.

Beyond her travels in the TARDIS, the character of Erimem has been developed in a series of books. She makes an engaging lead character with her own cadre of friends. But it's as an audio companion that she truly reigns, bringing out previously buried facets of the Doctor – something that only the best-written characters are capable of.



A GUIDE TO ERIMEM

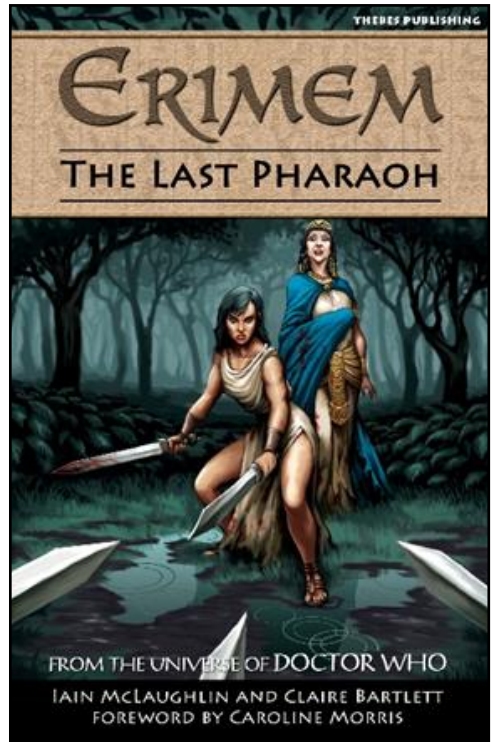
by Iain McLaughlin

When the Fifth Doctor arrived with Peri in ancient Egypt, he had never heard of the Pharaoh Erimem. Even now, just over twenty years after that first meeting, some Doctor Who fans (I will not use the word “Whovian”, I hate it and always will) have still never heard of Erimem.

If you don't go in for audios, that's fine. Each to their own. What I'd say is that is that the audios provide some of the best Doctor Who you'll ever get, and it's also in these audios that Erimem first appeared, in the Eye of the Scorpion. She was 17 and though she had still to be crowned, she was Pharaoh of all Egypt... but she didn't want to be. She knew she didn't belong, she knew she wasn't a living god and she had no interest in sitting on a throne she had never expected to inherit.

Erimem was never intended to be a companion. She was never intended to be Erimem either. She was initially going to be Hatchepsut, who was a real female Pharaoh, but I changed it to give a bit more freedom. In the writing, what became clear to me about Erimem was that she had a good deal in common with the Doctor. She was intelligent, brave, inquisitive, moral and eager to leave a cushy life behind to go and explore the world. That really started to come through in the writing – and in my head – as I wrote the script. My initial notes had her dying at the end but in writing the script I realised that was

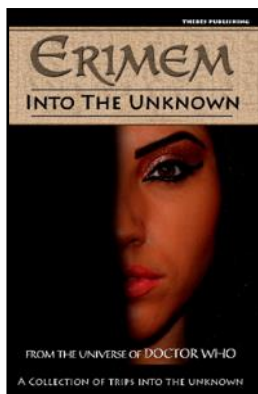
wrong, given the strength of friendships she had built with Peri and the Doctor. I also just didn't want to kill her. I just plain liked her, and I thought the audience would too – meaning they wouldn't take to her dying – so I played up all the way through that she was as doomed as a doomed thing and then had them whisk her off at the end, intending to drop her off at a university somewhere. Things didn't go that way and Gary Russell at Big Finish gave her a bunch of adventures with her new chums. Caroline Morris was fabulous as Erimem in those stories. In fact she was



fabulous from her first scene.

And then she left, in an ending that worked perfectly for Big Finish.

Even after she left the Doctor, I found Erimem was still wandering around in my head. I'd become very attached to her over the years, so around 2008 I started looking at her again and I had a feeling that her story wasn't quite done. She had been left in a position of a ruler and I always had a feeling that should be what she was railing against. In my head she is a leader not a ruler. I think there's a difference there. The contract with Big Finish reverted all rights of Erimem back to me after a time and so I started thinking about what I could do with her. I popped her into an episode of the radio mystery series *Kerides the Thinker*, which Claire Bartlett and I wrote for Imagination Theatre. That left me sure that she worked fine without the Doctor and Peri. From there the question was, what next?



It had to take her away from Egypt in the past and I felt a contemporary setting as her base would be alien for her but relatable for the audience. It would be interesting to see how she could fit in. There have been some

comparisons between her and Leela because they're both warriors but that's a pretty superficial similarity. Erimem was educated in a royal palace, speaks several languages, understand art and dance (SPOILER: she is a big Strictly

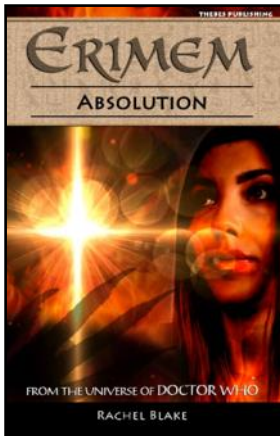
fan) and has studied astronomy, philosophy and sciences. She just also happens to have been trained as a warrior, and has led Egypt's armies in battle. So, dropping her into contemporary London seemed like a solid place to start.

I was working for DC Thomson, writing comics, doing work on radio and TV shows for them as well as having a stint as Beano editor. I was busy for a few years and didn't think much about freelance work for a while, but by the end of 2013, I had more or less pulled a long-term plan together for what I wanted to do with Erimem.

The heart of that plan was a series of books. I wanted her to have adventures in space and time (catchy titles, somebody should use it) but there should be a real emotional connection within the books, with all of the characters being genuine and relatable and living lives. They might fight a space monster in mid-afternoon but they may also have to get fish fingers, chips and beans cooked for an annoying kid brother's tea a few hours later. It needed to be grounded in reality.

I spent a lot of time walking and thinking about Erimem's close group of friends – her Scooby Gang – and working out who they should be for story purposes, and who they needed to be to work as people. Who are they? What's their history? How do they relate to the other characters? And sometimes, how do they really relate to the other characters?

Initially there were five main characters: Erimem, Andy (Andrea Hansen), Ibrahim Hadmani, Tom Niven and Helena (soon to be Helena Hadmani). Every one of



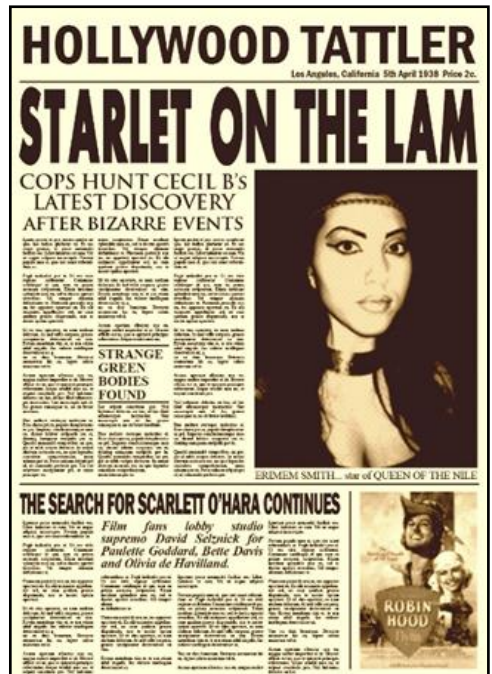
them got a backstory that filled out their lives up to the point where we meet them, but they were also planned out for where they were going, what their relationships were going to be, what their major

moments would be and in some instances, how they... well, let's not get into "Spoilers Sweetie" territory. However, the important beats for Erimem and her friends are planned out to around ten years in for them. And if some of those beats don't make you cry, you have a heart of stone.

It's the characters that have made this series a real joy for me. I knew that we'd get a positive response to Erimem putting on her adventure boots again, but the reaction to her relationships with the other regulars and the positivity for the other characters has been gratifying. Erimem is a bit lost when she arrives, and Andy is also at a bit of a loss in her life. That lets them bond and become very good friends quickly. Ibrahim turns out to be a distant relation of Erimem and Helena... well, that takes us back to Spoilers territory. Reaction to these four has been really good and we got such a positive response to Andy coming out that we knew the characters had hit the mark. The characters have adventures but they also have families and lives – and that's why we care about them.

We also have a few other regulars like

Tom Niven and Trina Barton, who have travelled with the gang but found the experience a difficult or very negative one. Adventuring in space and time is not for everyone. And then there's Detective Sergeant Adam Docherty of the Met, who becomes Erimem's boyfriend. How is he supposed to react when he finds out that the murderer he's chasing is an alien shape-shifter from a distant planet, and his girlfriend is an uncrowned Pharaoh from 3500 years ago, who travels in space and time, communes mentally with the grandfather she never knew and who has fallen in love with chips... while working and studying at a London university and



living in a cupboard which is actually a portal to an artificially created dimension where she has Woolly Mammoths in her gardens? Probably the way you did while reading that last sentence. And the same way he reacted when he found out Erimem had also accidentally

become a star in half a dozen black and white B movies in the early 1940s. Well, accidents do happen don't they? The arcs for the characters mean readers get most from the books by reading them in order, but we make sure that there's enough explanation that the books can be enjoyed in isolation.

One of the things I always loved about Doctor Who is that it's such a flexible format. You can have a serious historical show followed by a space opera and then a light comedy episode and then a full-on horror – and every one of those genres fits perfectly because the format is so adaptable. I've gone for something similar with the Erimem books. Our first was a fairly serious historical but we followed that with a dystopian near future tale, a war story, a Quatermass-style sci-fi horror, a swashbuckler, a space opera and an H Rider Haggard style adventure. We've had a 1940s detective noir and a 1930s Agatha Christie pastiche, some alien world sci-fi and a James Bond style 1960s spy story is next up with (I hope) Jim Mortimore's A Pharaoh of Mars out soon, too. The pandemic slowed things down, as did my health going through the floor for a long while but things are moving again with Erimem. We've got the books planned, there are three audio adaptations of early novels available from BBV and she's got a few interesting things on the horizon for next year which will be announced in due course.

Two projects that won't be seeing the light of day are an animation which was to be done in conjunction with a University and a comic. I'm afraid Covid saw both of those off, for now at least. Whatever the medium, the important

thing for me as the editor of the range is that the audience enjoys spending time with these characters and really feels what they're going through, whether it's adventure, relationships or ridiculous bad jokes (look to Andy for those). These have to be people you look forward to spending time with.

If you are interested in dipping into the books, the best place to start is with the first novel, The Last Pharaoh. You get most from the series if you read them all in order but you can dip in and out, because I make sure there's plenty of quick exposition there for what needs explained. You don't really need to have heard any of the audios either, but I would recommend listening to The Eye of the Scorpion, not because I wrote it but because that's where she started. The Church and the Crown, The Kingmaker and The Son of the Dragon are all very, very good (and not by me) and have interesting insights into her character. The Kingmaker also has the funniest broken arm ever.

After twenty-two years in my head, Erimem feels like part of the family. Her adventures are far from over. Some will

be ridiculous and fun, some will break your heart – and they might not do her heart any good either. Whatever those adventures are, I'm looking forward to spending the time with her.



Iain McLaughlin

ERIMEM CHECKLIST

Erimem's everywhere! Her adventures are so far-flung, it's hard to keep track of them all. They span audio stories, novels and anthologies from multiple publishers.

Below, we chart Erimem's journey from audio siren to prose heroine. May her reign be long and filled with victory.

BIG FINISH

The Eye of the Scorpion
The Church and the Crown
Nekromanteia
The Axis of Insanity
The Roof of the World
Three's a Crowd
The Council of Nicaea
The Kingmaker
Son of the Dragon
The 100 Days of the Doctor
The Mind's Eye
The Bride of Peladon
Doctor Who Specials
No Place Like Home
The Veiled Leopard

KERIDES THE THINKER

Return of the Queen

Telos Novella

Blood and Hope

BIG FINISH NEW WORLDS NOVEL

The Coming of the Queen

BIG FINISH SHORT TRIPS BOOKS

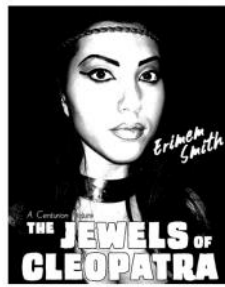
Past Tense (Graham Dillee Saves the World)

Repercussions (The Gangster's Story)
The Ghosts of Christmas (Far Away in a Manger)

THEBES PUBLISHING

The Last Pharaoh
The Beast of Stalingrad
Angel of Mercy
Prime Imperative
Buccaneer
Churchill's Castle
The Three Faces of Helena
Return of the Queen
The Egyptian Falcon
The Death of Empire
The Way of the Bry'Hunee
Death on the Waves
Absolution
The Jewels of Cleopatra

But wait, there's more! 'One of the things we do with the books is add little extras at the end,' says Iain McLaughlin. 'Sometimes they're short stories, other times they're something a bit more unusual and related to the book, like Erimem's studio 10 by 8 glossy or a movie poster from her accidental career in 1940s B movies.' See below for a couple of examples...





"I LOVE MATT SMITH! HE'S MY FAVOURITE THIRD DOCTOR WHO!"

By Christian Basel

To understand what it is about this headline, I want to take you back a little bit. Before the pandemic, I was on the convention circuit in the southeast USA. I was brought in by the likes of MegaCon, Florida Supercon, etc. But enough about that, you're wondering about that headline.

One day, I made my way to the podcast booth. I had just finished up a Doctor Who panel and some of the audience members came by to continue to geek out with me. One kid in particular started talking. As he continued to keep talking, I kept listening. You see, my goal at conventions is to make people Whovians. I aspire to inspire people to fall in love with the show I grew up with, Doctor Who.

I continued to listen attentively. I could tell he was shy. He was pouring his heart out right in front of me. He loved Doctor Who. His eyes, his demeanour, his passion, gave it all away. And then, he said those words:

'I Love Matt Smith! He's my favourite Third Doctor Who!'

Many times, I've heard of statements like this and just tend to brush it off. Do I say he's not correct? Is this the point where I intercede and possibly trigger a bad reaction? After all, this poor boy is geeking out body and soul in front of me, and I know any course correction on my part would break his heart.

I tell people, when I was growing up, I was a 'creature of PBS.' I watched it all, Sesame Street, Electric Company, Mr. Rogers. Then later Doctor Who would come on. All I knew was Tom Baker. That's it. My journey as a kid Whovian would entail watching Robot all the way to Logopolis, watching Tom fall off the tower, turn blonde, and start all over.

Then, I assumed, my PBS Station had a better pledge drive one year. They had purchased The Five Doctors. FIVE DOCTORS?! You mean, Tom was number four? When did this happen? How did this happen? My mind blew up five times over. MY Doctor was the fourth. What wizardry was this?

After that moment, I was a little bit wiser. I still didn't comprehend at first, but I began to accept it. I'm always curious if that revelation dawns on the generation growing up today, that there were others before their Doctor. But the great thing is, I feel it bridges the gap between generations. I tell them the story of MY Doctor as they tell me about theirs, and you begin to see the kid inside start to geek out with the kid in front of me.

'I Love Matt Smith! He's my favourite Third Doctor Who!'

'That's awesome, after you're done, let me tell you about my favourite Third Doctor, Jon Pertwee.'

Follow Christian's online adventures at TheLegendofTheTravelingTARDIS.com

DOCTOR WHO ROLEPLAYING GAME
FIFTH DOCTOR SOURCEBOOK REVIEW
by Dave Chapman

I mentioned this in my Sixth Doctor review, and I feel it's even more important to bring up here as well. Several months back Celestial Toyroom published an article I wrote, titled 'Classic Who is Best Backwards'. (issue 526). In this article, I talk about how I'm working my way backwards through the Classic Doctors, as I write these sourcebook reviews. With the Fifth Doctor, I am experiencing something that is evidently rather unique. I really like Peter Davison's Doctor.

Davison often gets a mediocre rating by fans, simply because of now basically traditional "not my Doctor" effect. In North America, Tom Baker was the Doctor. Period. He is also one of the longest serving Doctors with 41 stories (172 episodes) over seven years. So this young, baby-faced, upstart was a drastic change for many fans who had simply never experienced a regeneration before. But for me, I was experiencing a kinder and gentler Doctor, after going through Colin Baker's infamously brazen Sixth Doctor. I was also experiencing a caring but level-headed Doctor after Jodie Whittaker's sugar rushed Thirteen. To be clear, both Six and Thirteen's runs were marred by poor writing, and both performances deserve to be respected. Nevertheless, the Fifth Doctor feels like the most traditional Who that I've watched in some time. He just feels right to me and apparently that's unusual.

Five also faced some of the hardest

times of the Doctor's life. His companion, Adric, died in vain. Another companion, Turlough, conspired to kill him. Omega took his face and then forced the Doctor to kill him (himself?) in order to prevent disaster. That wasn't the first antagonist this Doctor shot, or encouraged to be shot either. He seemed to have a much deeper connection to his past selves, managing to work with his previous hims to survive the perils of the Death Zone. Even his own death and regeneration was tragic.

As for the sourcebook itself, that also has a bit of an unusual feel to it. All of the sourcebooks that I've reviewed to date have had a very encyclopedic feel to them. The Adventures section would present the plot descriptively, even dramaturgically, but largely with minimal guidance on other directions, a GM could take. Instead, they would restrict such advice to the Running the Adventure and/or Further Adventures sections. But for some reason, it isn't uncommon to see that sort of aside in the Synopsis itself in this volume.

One complaint I frequently have with the Doctor Sourcebooks is that they tend to assume that a person will have them all. So even though Sabalom Glitz (for example) appeared alongside both the Sixth and Seventh Doctor, his stats are only included in the Sixth Doctor Sourcebook. This becomes even more problematic in larger stories with returning characters as in *The Five Doctors*. This story includes four other doc-

tors, four other companions, and The Master. None of whom have details listed in this book. To make matters even worse, this story replaced the late William Hartnell with Richard Hurndall as a noticeably more spry First Doctor, and a fully adult Susan Foreman. I don't yet have the First Doctor Sourcebook, so I can only assume that neither iteration of these characters have specific stats there either. The Second Doctor has clearly been Time Scooped from some point in between his trial and subsequent exile and forced-regeneration. (A point in his timeline generally referred to as Season 6B.) Again, I can only assume this visibly older Second Doctor has stats identical to the 14 years younger Patrick Troughton, even if he probably shouldn't and I also don't have that Sourcebook. But you can see the problem here. A GM should never have to assume anything as important as these characters. They don't even give a reference point saying where these stats are hiding, so hopefully you just know your Who.

Don't get me wrong, this is still a very good Sourcebook to have. There is some great suggestions about using the Black and White Guardians as plot devices, including a lovely new mechanic for Black Guardian Points. The GM can assign these story points for mischief, or a player can just use them as regular story points, anytime with no questions asked, but The Black Guardian could come to call in his debt using those Points to cause problems for the players. Rather than run that particular risk, players can spend them to purchase disadvantages for their character, which amounts to getting to pick your own poison.

Completionism aside, Cosmic Masque Magazine editor Nick Smith asked me what about these sourcebooks keeps bringing me back to them. I review boardgames in general, and TableTop RolePlaying Games (TTRPGs) specifically, as my regular work. If I decided to never review another Doctor Who Roleplaying Game sourcebook, I would professionally still have a constant stream of games coming across my desk. With so much new material coming out of so many different places, why do I keep going back to review these comparatively older books? The answer isn't terribly exciting. The answer is that these sourcebooks are exciting. They are well researched and can give you an interesting perspective on each Doctor's character. I think it was my Twelfth Doctor sourcebook review that I said if someone asked me for reference material to use in writing a biography of a fictional character, these sourcebooks are where I would tell them to start. Even if you don't play the Doctor Who Role Playing Game, or any TTRPG for that matter, you can pick up one of these books and free read it for fun. You can just ignore what little game mechanics and rules are in them, and just immerse yourself in the world of the Doctor.

This book isn't the strongest in the set, but it's still a terrific look at an underrated era of Doctor's lives.

You can find [Cubicle 7 online](#) and at [Facebook](#).



TEMPORAL LOGBOOK III PREVIEW

By Nick Smith

In a perfect world all the missing episodes would be found, our favourite show would have a regular season every year and all the problems of the world could be solved with a screwdriver. You might call this imaginary world a Whotopia.

While we're far from such an idyllic existence, there is a fanzine that goes by that very name, steered by Bob Furnell and published by Pencil Tip Publishing. For the past seven years, this scrappy Canadian publisher has been pulling out every possible stop to celebrate Doctor Who and other cult TV shows, with books about Sarah Jane Smith, Torchwood and Target novelizations. Pencil Tip has also issued a series of Who-themed anthologies called Temporal Logbook.

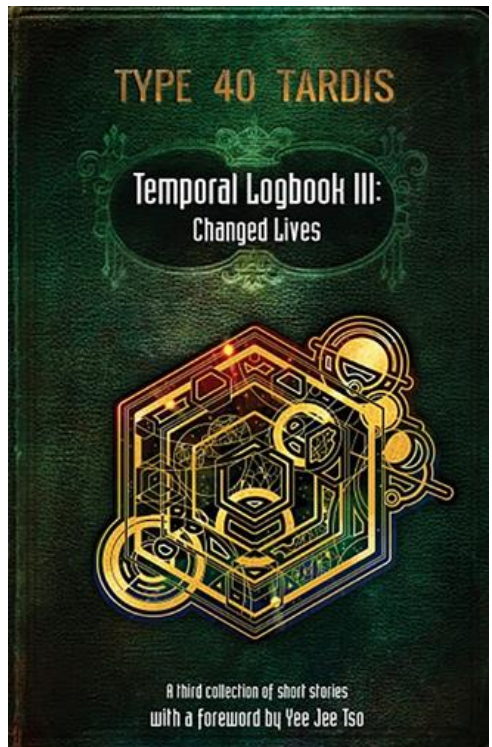
Their latest release is The Temporal Logbook III: Changed Lives, an anthology with stories by Kevin Mason, R. Morgan Crihfield, Matthew Kresal, Russell McGee, Luke Dyer, Greg Maughan, James Silvester, Hamish Crawford, Shaun Collins, Richard Peevers, James Hornby, Alison Winter, Paul Burns and Rob Nisbet. The foreword is by Yee Jee Tso, who played the Eighth Doctor's companion Chang Lee.

McGee's story, Kiss of the Dybbuk, concerns a ghost ship from a real-world mystery. Peevers' A Night In Santa's Workshop is a Ninth Doctor tale set in New York. In Technical Advisor by Matthew Kresal, the Third Doctor and

Liz Shaw dodge death on a film set while investigating leaked information about an alien invasion.

R. Morgan Crihfield's The Harvesters takes us hundreds of years in the future with the Second Doctor, Jamie and Zoe; in present day London, the 13th Doctor flags down a time-freeze involving a black cab.

'This is the first time the collection has a theme' he said in a recent interview with Pencil Tip. 'This time the stories all have a particular subtext which is, how does an encounter with the Doctor,

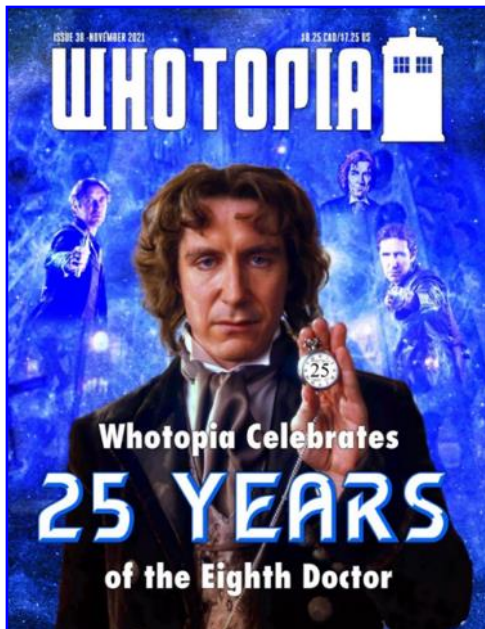


change a person?’

I wanted this installment of the TL series to have a theme,’ editor James Silvester told Cosmic Masque, ‘reminiscent of the hardback collections that Big Finish used to do. We chose “Changed Lives” because it gave scope for us to take the reader on a real emotional journey - meeting the Doctor is something we’d all love to do, but we shouldn’t kid ourselves that it would always be a positive experience. The Doctor might save your life but you might well get killed in the crossfire too. The theme also complimented the charity we chose to support with this installment.’

Proceeds from the Logbook will go to Settled, a charity providing free and trustworthy information, advice and support to EU citizens requiring Settled Status in the UK.

Most if not all of the writers for this



volume are fans, whose lives have been influenced in a small way – if not transformed – by their brush with Doctor Who.

‘I’ve worked on a few books now,’ says Silvester, ‘but this is the one I’m most proud of. We’ve brought together a great mix of new and established writers, and the involvement of Yee Jee Tso and some of the Big Finish alumni like Alison, Russell and Rob has lent a real credibility to the book, I think. Our authors have written some thought-provoking, emotional tales and I hope readers love them as much as I do.’

To download copies of Whotopia and find out more about this and other books, [click here](#).



DOCTOR WHO RPG 2ND EDITION REVIEW

By Dave Chapman

The era of the Thirteenth Doctor is over. Series 13 gave us the six-part story arc "Flux" (which I naturally spell "Fluxx" in my head every time) and three specials, concluding with The Power of the Doctor airing days after the centenary anniversary of the BBC. While I am writing this beforehand, by the time you are reading it, Jodie Whittaker will have taken her last bow and a new Doctor will be redecorating the TARDIS. In a few months, Whovians will be celebrating the 60th of the franchise, and what better way for gamers to celebrate than with a Second Edition of the Doctor Who: The Role Playing Game.

For the 50th Anniversary, the First Edition of Doctor Who The Roleplaying Game (DWTRPG) got 11 separate Doctor sourcebooks over the course of the year. If you ever see me on a live stream you'll notice that as I add each of those books to my collection, the spines collectively form an image of the logo used for the game at the time. I've received no indication that something similar has been planned for the 60th, but I'm sure there will be some surprises coming out of the Cubicle 7 offices in 2023. But we are getting a new core rulebook, featuring a Jody Whittaker look and focus. That particular design element of the game is one of the few things about this game I'm not a fan of. There were four editions of the first edition core rulebook. The final edition giving focus to the 12th Doctor, but since the book came out early in Capal-

di's run it is missing a ton of information and images that simply didn't exist while it was being written. It can be argued that no other Doctor has had as unsettled a character arc as Twelve, and that made things feel even more incomplete after the fact. Now, they of course released a full sourcebook on the Capaldi era, but that doesn't change how the core book felt. Thankfully Whitaker's run was, if little else, consistent with her character. So when Cubicle 7 made the decision to move to a second edition, I was afraid they would miss the opportunity to move away from the constant need to refresh the core book. Thankfully it was an opportunity they chose to take to a certain extent, although I suspect we will still get new editions of the Core Rulebook as we see new Doctors. Just because I don't love the approach they've chosen with that, however, doesn't mean I don't love the overall graphic design and updated rules.

One important thing to note is that unlike many game's Second Editions (and third, and third point five, and whatever else editions) this is mostly still the same



Vortex System that powered the original game, it's just more streamlined. The biggest change is the removal of Traits, with many of the character driven parts of them rolled into the new Concept, Focus, and Distinction mechanisms and any mechanical bonuses or penalties that might pop up being applied by giving characters a more general Advantage or Disadvantage in situations. But beyond that, most of the changes are actually pretty minuscule which is a credit to the original design.

When you are designing a new Character the first thing to determine is the Concept you want to develop. Are you a warrior? Are you an artist? Are you a doctor? Are you *The Doctor*? Your Concept is who you are and what you do in the world. After determining your Concept you'll come up with a Focus that informs the why and how of your Concept's who and what. After that, you'll start filling in the details, starting by assigning 18 points among your six Attributes: Awareness, Coordination, Ingenuity, Presence, Resolve, and Strength. Next, you also have 18 Skill points to assign among 12 possible skills. These skills are kept intentionally broad while leaving room to add Specializations in areas that a character is exceptionally skilled at. Finally, you check if any of the previous steps changes your starting Story Points and add in any Finishing Touches like a background story.

If you're in a hurry or just want a place to start from, there are a bunch of side boxes with some example scores for all of this throughout the chapter, or you could just download or photocopy the previously generated character sheets for the Doctor and her fam.

As for playing the game, the third chapter has you covered. There are more rules, obviously, but the Basic Rule for any action that has a chance of failure is $\text{ATTRIBUTE} + \text{SKILL} + \text{TWO SIX-SIDED DICE} = \text{RESULT}$ (While trying to match or beat the Difficulty of the task set by the Game Master.) If you roll two sixes, you almost always succeed. If you roll two ones you almost always fail. But it's not just a binary pass/fail system. There are levels of success that work a bit like that improv game, "Yes, and..." by often taking the yes or no and adding something good or bad on top of it. The levels of success are Brilliant (yes, and... something else good happens), Success (Yes), Barely (Yes, but... it didn't go as planned somehow), Almost (No, but... it could have gone worse), Failure (No), Disastrous (No, and... now things are worse). You can also spend Story Points to adjust the level of success or failure that you rolled if you need a bit of a boost, or straight up bend the laws of the universe.

Another important set of rules (in any game) covers how conflict is handled. Specifically of interest here is the initiative order the characters act in. Many games are all about hacking and slashing as a solution. But while Malcolm may solve his problems with a chainsaw, and Malcolm may never have the same problem twice, Malcolm is probably not playing as *The Doctor*. The order of initiative is not determined by dice, but by the actions you intend to take: Talkers, Movers, Doers, and lastly Fighters, with the GM determining where in the sequence NPCs act. This method of figuring out initiative is so perfectly in line with the values of *The Doctor* that it was imported into *Doctors & Daleks*, *Cubicle 7's* other Doctor

Who RPG that otherwise uses traditional Dungeons & Dragons Fifth Edition rules. Social and mental conflicts are every bit as important, if not more, than the physical ones, but regardless of the type, they are all handled in much the same way. By using different Attributes to make the checks and when you take fail or take damage you don't lose abstract hit points, but rather you lose points from a relevant Attribute. This loss is often temporary but can result in longer term conditions being applied to your character until whatever it is can be fixed or healed.

Of course, it wouldn't be Doctor Who if you couldn't just jump into a TARDIS and explore all of time and space. Unless you happen to be Jon Pertwee, whose Who got the short end of the BBC budget stick but at least got a fun car instead. The TARDIS is more than just a vehicle or gadget in the game. The TARDIS, or more accurately *any* TARDIS, is treated more like a character. In fact, one is created almost exactly like a character including the same Attributes, Story Points, etc. Another change that seems to have flown under a lot of people's radars in conversations comparing the First and Second Editions is that your TARDIS is treated even more like a character now than it already was. Previously, a TARDIS's stats included the Attributes of a Character *and* the Armour, Hit Capacity, and Speed stats of a vehicle. Those vehicle stats have been removed entirely in the Second Edition with the TARDIS treated entirely as you would a Character. I'm curious to see how this change will impact how The Doctor's TARDIS will be presented in future sourcebooks. Until now, the TARDIS has been given a full page with an NPC-style stat block.

The last version of the First edition core rulebook also had a full page on the Twelfth Doctor's TARDIS. Thirteen's TARDIS is presented as a sidebar example, barely more than a quarter page long. I'm going to chalk it up to stripping out much of the specific Doctor specificity in the book and that her eventual sourcebook will include something more substantial.

The fifth chapter is all about being the Gamemaster or (in what may be the best toss-away reference in the whole book) Gamemissy. Doctor Who The Roleplaying Game can very much be a challenging game to run. With 60 years of source material across every imaginable medium, there is an overwhelming amount to draw from. Thus far every Doctor-specific sourcebook has walked through each televised story as if it were being played as a game, and published adventures have a more generalized format than I am personally comfortable running. I'm extraordinarily excited to dig into the new multipart adventure *Secrets of Scaravore* since it will be released for both DWTRPG and Doctors & Daleks and I want to see how each system handles it. But I digress. *Cubicle 7* is great at encouraging new Gamemasters or Gamemissys. (They only use that latter term one time, but I'm running with it from now on.) This chapter is great, but for anyone wanting to run a game I can't recommend the first edition Game Master's Companion sourcebook enough.

The sixth chapter is framed as a history of the universe, but it also functions as an introduction to dozens of NPCs and antagonists for your adventure. It's a terrific way to cover two massive info dumps at the same time, and I love it.

But it's a hard chapter to summarize without just doubling the length of this review. Speaking of the length of things, I found it interesting that the Second Edition core book is a few pages longer than the last First Edition book, despite being organized with fewer chapters and having removed the sample adventure. There is a sample adventure available as a separate PDF download, *The Einstein Engine*, that clocks in at about the same length as the *Stormrise* adventure that was part of the last core book. So you don't have to lose out on that completely.

Finally, there is the Appendix, fittingly titled "Remember All The People You Used To Be", that walks through converting Characters from your First Edition game to Second Edition rules, along with pregenerated character sheets for the Thirteenth Doctor and her companions Yaz, Graham, and Ryan. I'm not sure how they will handle this in the print edition, but I recently received an email notification that the PDF version, via DriveThruRPG, had been updated with a character sheet for Dan, who joined Team TARDIS during the Flux storyline and after this book went to print.

I love just about everything about the First Edition of Doctor Who The Roleplaying Game. That said, I can't believe how just a few small tweaks were able to so drastically improve it. The removal of Traits is probably the best thing they could have done, as they were so arbitrary as to be functionally meaningless. I'm excited to see how these changes adjust the format and presentation of future sourcebooks, as well as how the releases for Doctors & Daleks will further comple-

ment this game the way DWTRPG is complementing it. I'm also a bit interested to see how fast the logo gets changed out for the new one. It's entirely likely that this book and the Twelfth Doctor sourcebook may be the only two that were forced to use the Thirteen era logo. I know that is just how licensing works with the BBC, but I hate it so, so, so much.

You can read all of our Doctor Who reviews at TheRatHole.ca/who.

You can find [Cubicle 7 online](#) and at [Facebook](#).



FROM THE LAND OF FICTION

by Stephen Hatcher

Welcome again to another Cosmic Masque Fiction Section. Our members and readers send us all manner of stories of different styles and lengths and featuring various combinations of Doctors and companions. This month's stories, by coincidence, all happen to be shorter than many we receive. This has the happy result that we are able to present, not the usual five or six stories, but nine whole tales for your enjoyment.

Also by coincidence, only two of this issue's stories actually feature the Doctor – although their presence is very much felt in perhaps all but one of them. This time around, our contributors have for the most part, chosen to concentrate on those whose lives are touched by the Doctor – for good or bad. Once more, I am delighted to say that we have a nice mix of stories by writers new to Cosmic Masque – including one star of the show – and regular contributors.

Let's begin with that star. Of course, we all know Terry Molloy for his enduring portrayal of Davros in three stories in the 1980s and subsequently for Big Finish. In Davros – Conviction, Terry together with Chris McAuley, lets us in on a key moment in the creation of the Daleks. Chris is an increasingly well-known writer of horror fiction, so be warned, this one is

not for the faint-hearted.

Mark Jones returns for the first time since CM XIII to bring us Never Truly Forgotten a touching story of the Brigadier, in his final days, being reminded of times and people he has known.

We have two stories that feature the Master. In Master of All He Surveyed, Alan Darlington allows us a glimpse into a universe in which the Master has triumphed – but now what does he do? Then in The Vicar of Devil's End by Cosmic Masque and Celestial Toyroom stalwart Ian Wheeler, the Reverend Mr. Magister receives a visitor.

Karen Dunn is a Doctor Who fan of many years' standing, who is well known as one of the hosts of the excellent Staggering Stories Podcast. It may well be that she has contributed fiction to Cosmic Masque before, but if so, it will have been many years ago – which is downright odd, because she's a terrific writer. Waiting For Evil To Show is a great little story, in which Karen explores the unintended consequences for others of a somewhat throwaway romantic gesture by the Doctor.

Once more we have two stories, which previously appeared in the

short-lived charity anthology, which I edited a few years back, *Time Shadows: Second Nature*. In the first, *You Know the Drill*, Anthony Wilson considers that a visit from the Doctor may not always be a happy occasion – particularly for one of those despotic rulers that he is wont to come up against. Our other TS2N piece is a delightful Second Doctor story by Simon A. Brett, *The Spinning Dancer*, in which the Doctor and Jamie investigate the connection between a mysterious young girl and an apparently inert Cyberman.

A Relic of Before the Destruction, apparently by someone called Sti Venatcher, was written for a fanzine project with a 'What If?' premise, which never came to fruition. I was quite pleased with it and it's only short, so here it is.

David X. Brunt is a Doctor Who fan, well-known in and around the Manchester area. We've been friends for a

while, but it was his beautifully crafted tales taken from his daily life, posted on Facebook, that made me want to approach him for a story for *Cosmic Masque*. The result is *Stars Fading* in which a crewmember on a generational starship is awoken from stasis by first one, then another strange little man. It's a terrific first story – I hope David can be persuaded to contribute more over the coming months and years.

And those are our stories for this issue - the fiction for next time, CM XVIII, is already pencilled in, but don't let that put you off. If you have a Doctor Who story that you want to tell, get in touch. It might take a few issues before your story appears, but rest assured we want to read it, and if at all possible, to include it in *Cosmic Masque*. Keep telling your tales and keep them coming in.

Steve



DAVROS: CONVICTION

A Special Story for Cosmic Masque from the 'Davros Diaries'

By Terry Molloy and Chris McAuley

A volley of concentrated laser fire directed at the black-uniformed soldiers caused them to scatter. They took refuge among the rubble of the ruined city. Their attackers had the advantage of an elevated position and continued to fire. The onslaught of the heavy fire caused parts of the weathered concrete to disintegrate. It would only be a matter of time before the soldiers had to move. The atmosphere crackled with electricity as the barrage intensified.

Captain Kreel swore into his voxcom unit. "Damn, how the hell do the Thals still have laser munitions?"

Sergeant Goth's answer gave voice to the growing fear among the Kaled troops. "Maybe our intelligence was faulty sir?"

Kreel gritted his teeth and steeled himself. High command would never authorise a retreat so there was only one option given to him. A direct assault upon the fortified position. Slowly Kreel began to issue orders to his squad. They had a limited amount of ammunition but with enough covering fire they could attempt to suppress the Thals. Then, if they could get close enough...

The Thals fired blindly as the Kaled troops directed their bullets towards them. The laser cannons cut several of the advancing soldiers in half. When his men got close enough Kreel ordered Goth to toss a few grenades towards the Thal position. The resulting explosions took care of the laser gunners and an eerie silence descended upon the battlefield. One of the young privates

began to sob, he was covered with the remains of his best friend.

Goth did his best to comfort the lad but to no avail. It was apparent that the recruits mind had snapped under the strain. Goth looked toward the deep red hues of Skaro's night sky and shook his head. How could they have been ambushed like this after a routine reconnaissance mission? The Thals were never known to venture this far out into the wastelands. Did they know that the Kaled patrol was going to be passing by?

Kreel sneered in disgust at the liquified remains of the Thal gunners. One of the plasma grenades must have imploded in the middle of their nest. He ordered his men to collect the parts of the laser cannons, not as trophies of war but as valuable resources.

Unknown to Kreel's squad their progress was being monitored. Through micro-cameras of his own design, Davros witnessed the ambush. Indeed, it was he who had engineered it. He allowed Kreel's troops movement patterns to leak to Thal command so that he could gauge the combat efficiency of the Kaled soldiers. The blueprints that he had sent to the Thals' military science division had been an added bonus. He replayed the recordings over and over again. Within the darkness of his room, the only sound that could be heard was Davros' fingers tapping periodically. As he operated the playback controls housed in his chair.

He watched the scene from various

angles growing increasingly displeased by the hesitancy displayed by Kreel and the fear displayed by those under his command. This was unacceptable! Kaleds should reign supreme, they should not be afraid of anything.

Davros hissed his frustration as he turned the screen off. It was clear that if the Thals achieved technological superiority they would win the war. Something would have to be done before that happened. Changes in military training would only go so far to resolve the problem. There had to be a fundamental change in the Kaled mindset. Perhaps... even in their biology. As he sat in the solitude of his chamber, Davros began to think of a possible blueprint for perfect warriors.

Initially the images of the great mythological figures came to mind. Like other Kaled youths he had been instructed in the classics and was familiar with the heroic deeds of his ancestors. While this notion could be culturally appealing, this form of 'superbeing' was driven by ego. They strove not for the betterment of their race but for vainglorious praise. This was unreliable. The weakness of the Kaleds came from their inability to devote themselves to the total destruction of their enemies. They still clung to aspects of the old world talking of art and poetry while their irradiated world slowly poisoned their lungs.

If it were possible, he would craft a being that was not driven by aesthetics or cultural enrichment.

They would only be motivated by the most primal and authentic force in the universe, hatred. He would tamper with the adrenal glands to accentuate aggression. This would help remove the weakness of fear. These would be the creatures that would be worthy to inherit Skaro. Perhaps even take their place in the universe as galactic leaders. Davros flexed the fingers in his usable hand as his intelligence played out twisted fantasies. The Thals being burned and tortured by a new Kaled race, their flesh being twisted and scarred by a new planetary power which was under his command. In all his duplicitous dealings with the Thals there was one thing he hated the most. He despised their physical perfection. It was only in this, that they could claim any superiority over him.

Davros' chair moved over to the recharge unit. It was time for the great scientist to sleep. Before he fell into the hands of dream he came to a startling realisation. Only he was fit to rule. His advances in cybernetics and strategy had kept the Kaleds alive. If it were possible to create the perfect being,



there would obviously have to be some element of himself present.

If it were possible...

Lucretia screamed, her long blond hair was matted with sweat and clung to her face. As her face twisted in agony, the nurses secured steel manacles to her arms and legs, securing her to the gurney. The doctors buzzed around her like mayflies, they were excited about the event which was about to occur. Not without sympathy, some had requested that the subject be given some medication to assist with the pain. Davros had refused, he was concerned that the drugs may affect the outcome of the experiment. He watched the action take place behind the glass window of the observation bay like an expectant father. It was evident that the birthing time had come. It had been a long three years since his moment of inspiration after watching Kreel's disappointing display. Now would come the moment of truth. He clicked a button on his travel chair and zoomed the camera in on the girl. She had been selected from good breeding stock, a noble and ancient house of Skaro. Once inseminated, she had been subjected to a series of injections. These were explained away as inoculations rather than chemicals designed to mutate the foetus' DNA. The Kaled chief scientist had arranged the drugs composition himself. Although projections had extrapolated what the child would look like, Davros knew there were also a multitude of possible variances. For the first time in his career, he was looking at the unknown.

Lucretia went into several convulsions as her face set itself into a permanent contortion of pain. The nurses screamed as two sharp lobster claws began to cut their way out of Lucretia's

womb. Blood erupted from the young girl as the abomination forced its way out of her body. Davros sighed as something which looked like a blend of a Kaled baby with a misshapen head and an eel emerged. This was most unexpected. The Kaled mutant trailed some of its mothers' intestines out with it as it crawled to the end of the gurney. It raised its head to the glass and let out a sorrowful mewing sound. Davros' mouth twitched with pleasure. The creature knew who and where its father was.

The doctors were interrupted from attempting to save Lucretia's life by the shouts of their chief scientist coming from the room's speakers.

"The girl is no longer important. It is her offspring that you must care for. Take it to containment chamber B without delay. I shall join it immediately."

Over the months which followed, Davros watched the mutant creature grow stronger. It had initially developed some trouble breathing but with the help of some cybernetic enhancements could filter the harsh air tolerably. Davros noted that it had remarkable visual acuity for a creature with such small eyes. It seemed to operate on a form of heightened instinct. Always able to find its food source even in the dark. This indicated a superb hunting instinct, vital for survival. Its aggression was heightened by the constant sub sonic frequencies pumped into its cell. These were encoded to produce thoughts of violence and rage.

On the sixth month of the creature's birth, Davros decided to test its ability to defend itself. A large rodent creature had been captured from the wastelands to serve this purpose. These beasts had grown from the irradiation of their food sources. They were the size of a large

dog with bright green puissant nodules emerging from the hair of their back and stomach. The rodents were known as dangerous and vicious scavengers. In large enough numbers they had been known to kill an adult, well-armed, Kaled trooper.

As the rodent was led into the Kaled mutant's cell it shrieked with the anticipation of a new meal. Gifted with a sense of night vision, it easily found the mutant even in the darkened room. Assessing its prey, it noted a lack of legs and that it had strange deformities. The rodent charged towards the mutant, snapping its teeth and confident that it was the superior. The Kaled mutant turned its tiny eyes towards the approaching creature and burned with hatred. How dare this thing attempt to threaten it? Using its tail, the mutant propelled itself forward to meet the rodent head-on. Grasping the creature by the throat with its powerful claws, the Kaled mutant began to apply pres-

sure. It did so, slowly and with great care. It found that it enjoyed the experience of inflicting pain to the rodent creature. It savoured the fear which exuded from it. This was more than just a pleasing distraction. This was an exercise in domination.

After a few moments, the Kaled mutant slashed the midriff of the rodent open with its other claw. The creatures hot, stinking insides smashed to the floor like vegetable soup.

Davros had been monitoring the telemetries attached to the Kaled mutant. Unlike his experience with Captain Kreel and his men, he was pleased by the creature. Clearly this was one step further in the Kaleds' evolutionary process. There was much to study and learn but once that was accomplished, Davros would continue to perfect the genetic design of these new Kaleds. He would not stop until they had become the ultimate weapons, their name spoken in fear across the galaxy!



NEVER TRULY FORGOTTEN

by Mark Jones

At precisely 4.00pm Kayleigh knocked on the door of the Brigadier's room and without waiting for an answer, entered with a cup of tea and a slice of lemon drizzle cake. The old man was sitting in his favourite chair staring out of the window, his gaze focussed on the distant hills on the horizon which shimmered in the late afternoon sunshine.

Ever since he had arrived at the nursing home, he had been a model resident and he had developed a grandfatherly fondness for the young carer who now stood before him.

"Here's your tea, Brigadier," she said as she placed the cup and saucer on a side table next to two empty whisky glasses.

"Sorry, there's no Victoria sponge today. I know it's your favourite. I've brought you a slice of lemon drizzle cake instead."

At these words, the Brigadier felt a pang of anxiety, of sadness. He didn't know why. What was it she had said that caused this unexpected reaction?

Kayleigh left the room, closing the door quietly behind her. The Brigadier reached for his tea and took a sip. Earl Grey if he wasn't mistaken, he mused. A far cry from the foul concoctions that Benton used to brew in years past!

Lethbridge-Stewart ignored the slice of cake and instead picked up his copy of The Times. To keep his mind active, he liked to tackle the crossword every day. This morning there had been a couple of clues which he was convinced he could solve but the answers had refused to come. He studied them again:

'Twelve across: Name of a Roman Road running east to west across Great Britain (7 and 6).'

The answer came in a flash: Watling Street.

And with the answer came another pang of anxiety, another wave of unexplained sorrow.

He filled in the clue and moved on to the next one:

'Nine down: Christian name of a dragon in a den (7).'

Again, the answer came in a flash: Deborah.

And again, as the name entered his head, so he experienced another wave of emotion.

He dropped the newspaper to the floor and returned his gaze to the view outside his window. In his heart, he knew he was living on borrowed time.

Kayleigh and a couple of male nurses helped him into bed at 8.45pm. It was more regimented in the nursing home than in the military! The Brigadier often thought of the indignity of his current plight and the care he needed. Old age didn't have much going for it and although his mind was still relatively sharp, his body had certainly seen better days.

He settled back in bed and attempted to plump up his pillows, an action which immediately sent a spasm of pain across his shoulders and down his arms.

"Damn it!" he grunted through the pain.

He lay back and closed his eyes. He was feeling very tired and yet these days he found sleep hard to come by. The doctors had told him this was common in old age – they had an answer for everything!

It was still light outside although the thick velvet curtains darkened the room sufficiently for sleep. At his request Kayleigh

had left the window ajar, letting in a gentle summer breeze which brought with it the sweet smell of the surrounding countryside. As he willed sleep to come, the old man heard the clock of St Michael's church in the nearby village of Aldbourne begin to chime the hour. He counted each toll of the bell hoping it would help him to drift off, but he was still wide awake as the ninth chime faded away.

Many years ago, the military psychiatrists had trained him in various mind techniques. With everything he had seen and experienced it was surprising his mind could ever rest and every now and then visions of Cybermen, Yeti and Zygons would intrude on his thoughts.

A friend had once told him to count sheep, as this would focus his thoughts and the repetitive nature of the exercise would help him off to the Land of Nod. Unfortunately, he found that every time he thought of sheep it reminded him of Wales and that in turn brought back memories of giant maggots and that imbecile, Private Gwynfor Evans.

The Brigadier now thought of Evans again. The chap had come good in the end, but he had certainly tried his patience during the Great Intelligence's attempted invasion of London using the robot Yeti, which he and his men had fought in the dark tunnels and stations of the London Underground.

During the invasion, Lethbridge-Stewart had had to familiarise himself with the Tube network and it was knowledge that had never left him.

The church clock struck the half-hour, and he realised his mind had been wandering for the past thirty minutes. He turned over in his bed, trying to find a comfortable position and trying to ignore the pain this caused his arthritic body.

An idea came into his head. Instead of counting sheep, he'd trace the London Underground network in his mind. This was a technique he'd been taught many years ago as a method of resisting interro-

gation and torture. He decided to follow the route of the Circle Line.

The Brigadier's mind focussed on the dark tunnels and settled at Hammersmith. Seeing the route clearly as the yellow line on the Underground map he began the process.

'Hammersmith; Goldhawk Road; Shepherd's Bush Market...'

The minutes ticked by and the only sound in the Brigadier's room was of his gentle, yet wheezy breathing.

Twenty-two stations later: 'Embankment; Westminster; St James's Park; VICTORIA.' And there was that intense emotion again. The Brigadier almost cried out and was at once wide awake again. The old man regained his composure.

'Victoria, what was her surname? Waterfield, that was it. A lovely girl. How had he forgotten her? She had been there in those dark Underground tunnels, fighting the Yeti with as much pluck and gusto as his soldiers.'

The memories came flooding back. The Doctor, Victoria, and Jamie. What a team they made. The Scottish lad had the true warrior spirit and Victoria, well, she was timid yet totally faithful to and trusting in the Doctor and Jamie and in her own way was brave as a lion. He suspected she was one of the Doctor's favourite companions.

The old man sighed. What had happened to her after the London Invasion? Off she'd gone with the Doctor and Jamie in the Doctor's ridiculous blue box... off to who knows where? Well, he thought. Wherever she is now, he knew she'd be alright, and he thanked God that he had had the pleasure and privilege of knowing her, albeit briefly a long time ago.

The blue box span through the starry cosmos taking another of its many occupants on their final journey - on to their next adventure...

MASTER OF ALL HE SURVEYED

by Alan Darlington

He heaved a sigh as he fitted the last figure, a small child, face twisted in grotesque agony, into the final slot of the display stand. What did you do when you completed your collection? The last special variant of the trading card set. The last postage stamp of a country. The final Van Gogh. (Here, of course, you time scooped Van Gogh and got him to paint some more – you could even get someone to hide them throughout time and space for you to find.) Or, in this case, the last (or, rather first) incarnation of the Doctor.

Since he had come to power, achieving his ultimate aim of conquering the universe, the Master had set himself the challenge of locating, capturing, torturing, and killing all incarnations of the Doctor. The fact that he had to work in sequence, from the most recent, added an extra twist – taking a Doctor too soon might eradicate a whole set. So, there was the flibberty-gibbet girl, the grumpy one, the one who thought everything was cool (but not after two hundred years on the ice world of Krun). When it became obvious that this would occupy a mere few millennia, the Master had added the Doctor's travelling companions to his collection. So, losing an incarnation would mean losing a whole shelf full of companions.

He turned and clicked his fingers. The room moved around him, his collection receding into the distance, until he was positioned before his throne. Why move yourself when you could command the universe to move around

you? The throne was positioned on a podium atop a mile high flight of golden stairs. He was surrounded by a transparent dome looking out on the majesty of the heavens, his heavens. He surveyed the galaxies laid out before him, galaxies that he ruled absolutely. He peered into the upper right quadrant, spotted something and bellowed, "Jeeves!"

Jeeves was the Master's factotum, or, rather, his current factotum – at any time. The Master could not be bothered with learning a new name when the servant had to be replaced – that happened far too often – so he just called them all the same thing. This Jeeves was the six billion, eight hundred and twenty-three million, six hundred and first Jeeves. He was a six-legged, eight-armed Maldusian. He scurried up the stairs as fast as he could.

"Yes, Master," he panted.

The Master pointed. "Up there, sixth galaxy to the right. There appears to be a flicker of some kind."

Jeeves quickly pulled out a computer pad and jabbed at it. "I believe it is the Doradiin Confederacy. The third sun is going nova. Ah, we're just received a request for aid. It is anticipated that there will be a vast loss of life. They wish help with the survivors."

"Isn't your home planet in the Confederacy?"

"The third world, sir."

The Master considered it for a moment and nodded. "Tell them that I am sending assistance."

"Most generous, Master."

"Fire a neutron star at the second sun. That should cause an even bigger nova and put them out of their misery."

"Yes sir," Jeeves replied, unsurprised by his employer's response and fighting back his grief. Any other reaction at the loss of his family would only produce a harsher response. He jabbed at his pad and a streak of light sped towards Doradiin.

"Dismissed."

Jeeves backed off and hurried down the stairs. He was nearly at the bottom when the Master's voice summoned him back. He turned and hurried up.

"Jeeves, two quadrants along."

"Sir?"

"There's a speck of dust on the window. Have it cleaned."

"Yes sir."

"And then disintegrate the cleaning crew – I cannot abide sloppiness."

"Yes sir."

The Master watched him leave, pondering on the numbers that he had just had killed. A shame, but there were plenty more to replace them. One commentator had remarked that the population of the universe had been reduced by seventeen percent since the Master came to power. The Master had not been pleased. By his reckoning it was nearer nineteen percent, so he added to the number by destroying the commentator and his planet. He sighed though, even such fun acts were losing their charm.

He contemplated changing regeneration. It was a skill he had developed a few millennia after taking over the universes. Bored with the same body, he found a way to slip back into previous incarnations at will. One day, he wore a different body every hour. That really confused whichever friend of the Doctor's he was torturing at the time. He

produced a mirror and looked at his handsome features, the ones that he had worn when he first ruled England as Harold Saxon. Who should he be tonight: the suave cultured one he had used to taunt the Doctor during his exile? the thin redhead? the woman? No, Missy irritated even him. He almost felt sorry for the Doctor spending all that time with her. Mind you, her tastebuds were particularly discerning when it came to having a cup of tea. He moistened his lips. Tea, yes. He called for Jeeves again.

Wearily, the Maldusian climbed the golden stairs again. The Master ordered a cup of Earl Grey and sent Jeeves away. Of course, when the tea arrived, it would have started to cool. He contemplated reducing the size of the staircase but decided it was more fun to execute Jeeves instead. He mused on which race to select next and decided on a Dalek – it was always fun to paint an apron on its casing and have it fawn to a superior being.

That evening, he straightened his velvet Trakenite suit and admired himself in the mirror. He pondered on why this incarnation rarely seemed to change his clothes, except to wear stupid disguises, when other bodies had such a high regard for haute couture. At least he now had a planet full of identical outfits. He stepped into his TARDIS where Dalek Jeeves was waiting; set a course; and was soon stepping out onto the majestic quartz plains of Zorgoth. He looked up at the Great Mountain of Jeldac – a sheer rock-face a mile high. When he had come to power, he had carved a 'to do' list onto the ancient monument, one of the seven hundred Wonders of the Universe. Now, each task was crossed through except for one, the first "Eliminate the Doctor".

He had later added “+ make him suffer,” when he was in a different body. Now, with his collection of miniatures complete, his list was finished. He stepped onto a levitation disc, rose to the top of the peak, pulled out a laser and obliterated the line. Rather sadly, he returned to his TARDIS. What now?

After all those regenerations and centuries of trying, he had finally gained mastery over the universe. Every planet, every race bowed before him. All resistance was crushed. Daleks, Cybermen, Sontarans submitted to him. Then, with one universe at his command, he had spread his gaze further, out into the multiverse. Disappointingly, it became easier as it went along. If you had ten universes at your command, an eleventh could hardly stand against you. Next, he reached back to the dawn of time and seized control seconds after the Big Bang. He had left a single universe with its established history just so that he could put together his unique collection of matter condensed Doctors. Now that task was done, what else could he do?

Someone, in one of the universes, had warned, “Be careful what you wish for, you might just get it.” Someone else commented on getting things and then having nowhere to put it when you’ve got them. Where do you put a universe? He’d wished for conquest and domination ever since he gazed into the Untempered Schism, but now, where was there to go? What else was there to do? He played solitaire with planets, patience using playing cards made from real kings and queens. But who could you play against when everyone obeyed you? He discovered that no-one dared defeat him. Then, when he ordered some to do so, he felt that they were just humouring him, making the

game appear to be a challenge. Of course, it didn’t help that he had got into the habit of killing anyone who did beat him.

The Doctor was the only one who played properly. He spent a few millennia playing chess with the one with the stupid umbrella until he had lost his temper and disposed of the irritating little man – served him right for taunting him to look him in the eyes and shoot. With that incarnation gone, none of the others were as much fun – especially that sanctimonious third Doctor – even reverting to his own Spanish Ambassador incarnation hadn’t helped. Now, of course, he had worked back through all the other incarnations – including those that the Doctor reckoned not to know about. Now, the original, that so-called Timeless Child, was shrunk and in his collection.

As a diversion, he’d experimented with using other Time Lords – Borusa lasted a mere five hundred years, the Monk even less. After the Rani lasted a miniscule fifty-seven minutes per regeneration, he gave up. He had toyed with wakening the so-called greats like Rassilon and Omega but suspected that their egos would be just too annoying. So, that evening, he had tortured the whole population of the Greater Cyrhennic Empire instead.

As he dematerialised the TARDIS, he decided to try something like that again. He looked to Jeeves, “Pick me a species that isn’t dead yet.”

“The Thals, Master,” the Dalek replied.

“Predictable as ever,” the Master responded, even more bored. He opened the TARDIS doors and pushed the Dalek into the vortex.

Eventually, he settled on the Martians in all their confusing forms. Dismembering them one by one distracted him for

a couple of weeks but he bored and left the job half done, asking the latest Jeeves to clear up the mess.

Wearing that decidedly benign Professor Yana body, he selected the greatest actors from across the universes to read the greatest works of literature but that stopped when he disintegrated Laurence Olivier halfway through a recital of The Ode of the Zygon Imperator that had reduced the rest of the audience to tears.

He travelled back to the Australian outback in the body that he had worn there whilst pretending to be a secret agent. He turned the whole continent into the venue for a banquet designed by the greatest Androgum chef; but this ended when he decided that he would try eating the Androgum Chef rather than the canapés.

Missy hit lucky and found one of the Doctor's friends that she had forgotten about but discovered that even the Doctor had got bored with him and had left him back on Earth with a cybernetic implant in his forehead. Really, if the Doctor couldn't bother with him, why should she?

For some masochistic reason, he spent a decade as the decayed creature that he had become on Tersurus. He tried visiting his favourite worlds until he realised that he had already wiped them out of space and time.

Finally, he stood before his throne again, atop the mile of golden stairs. He looked out into the universe, Master of all he surveyed. Reaching into his jacket he pulled out a blaster and fired at the dome. It shattered. The air began to flow out into space but nanites instantly repaired everything. He

was about to try jumping into a sun when he recalled that he had rewritten the universal laws to make it impossible for him to come to any harm, anywhere, anywhen.

He returned to his display cabinet of Doctors, his unique collection. Angrily, he reached up and pulled it over, crying in rage. "Stop staring at me like that! Why can I never beat you?" Even then, his foe's voice seemed to whisper back, quoting that old piece of doggerel from Rassilon, "To lose is to win and he who wins shall lose."

He came to a final decision and returned to his temporal manipulator room. He triggered a time scanner. The screen showed himself – he'd lost track of which incarnation – standing triumphantly with the Doctor at his feet. He was holding aloft the Key to Time, "I have it! Finally! The universe will bow before me, Doctor. I am the Master, and you will obey me!"

"No," his older – wiser – self sighed. He touched the controls and erased that moment from time as he had erased so many others. He glanced outside into the cosmos as all history began to adjust, no longer Master of all he surveyed, but no longer bored.



THE VICAR OF DEVIL'S END

by Ian Wheeler

The Master was attending his first meeting of the Devil's End Church Finance and Events Committee and he was finding the whole experience infuriating. Sitting at a table in a small meeting room at the back of the church, he looked on as the rather pompous chairman, the bald-headed Mr Waldhorn, dominated the increasingly-dull proceedings.

"The question is," said Mr Waldhorn, "do we want to do a traditional nativity again this year or do we want to try and do something different?"

The rather boring Mr Fleet, who sat at the table looking somewhat hot and sweaty in his garish V-neck jumper, was the next to chip in. The Master sighed. He had quickly ascertained that Fleet was the waffler of the group.

"I say we keep it traditional!" declared Fleet. "No point pandering to new-fangled ideas!"

The elderly Mrs Smith murmured her agreement, never once looking up from her knitting. Mr Peacock sat shaking his head and Mr Bluthal was silent as he scribbled away, frantically writing up the minutes.

"I think we may need to return to this next time," said Waldhorn. "Now, regarding the recruitment of new members, I was thinking of asking Bert..."

"My dear friends," interjected the Master. "I suggest we try and resolve some of these weighty issues the next time we meet. Until then, I propose that the meeting is adjourned."

"Fair enough, Mr Magister," concurred Waldhorn. "I've got to ring back a chap

from BBC 3 anyway. Until next time..."

As the attendees milled out of the church, Garvin the verger entered the room via another door. "Mr Magister," he said, "there's a man to see you. He's waiting in the nave."

The Master raised an agitated eyebrow. "Did he ask for me by name?"

"He just asked for the vicar," replied Garvin. "Never seen him before. Don't think he's local."

Somewhat irritated, the Master walked into the nave. He stopped momentarily, looking around him. He liked this space with its stained-glass windows, majestic stone columns and antique pews. It was quiet and gave him the chance to think. Or at least it did when he wasn't being bothered by uninvited visitors.

Sitting at the end of one of the back rows of pews, his back to the Master, was a man. He had mousy brown hair, wore a rather drab grey suit, and looked to be in his mid-thirties. He was ordinary, conventional, and mundane – the sort of person who was of zero interest to the Master. As the Master walked towards the pews, the man turned to face him. His face was benign and unthreatening and the bags under his eyes suggested that he was somewhat tired. "Penny for them?" asked the Master, trying his best to sound concerned.

"I was just passing," said the man. "I'm not from 'round these parts..."

The Master smiled thinly. "I am aware of that. I am familiar with my own flock."

"I'm a salesman," said the man. "I was in the area, and I just wanted to be in a

church. Thing is, I always go and see my own vicar when I need advice. But I'm a long way from home and as I drove through the village, I saw this church. It seemed to draw me in."

"All lost souls are welcome here," said the Master. He sat down on the pew across the aisle from the man. "My son," he said, "if there is anything I can help with, you only need to ask. I am Mr Magister and my time is yours. Time is the one thing that I have in abundance." The man smiled. "Thing is," he said, "I'm having a few problems. With the wife." The Master looked sympathetic. "Such a common problem," he said. "I hear this so many times."

"We get on..." continued the man. "I mean, we love each other. But there are so many things we end up arguing about. She wants to have a baby, I'm not so sure. I want to go out for a meal, she wants to stay in because she's tired. Then there's times when I'm tired and I can't give her the attention she deserves..."

The mundanity of it all, thought the Master. These humans are so insignificant, so... boring.

"And there's something else," said the man. "Or rather, someone else. Another man. I don't think there's anything going on. But she seems to like this man. He makes her laugh. Sometimes she seems more at ease with him than she does with me."

The Master raised an eyebrow. Something about the man's words had struck a chord with him, stirred a memory. His thoughts drifted to a time on Gallifrey long, long ago. A time when he too had been in love. He remembered the good times when they had lain laughing in the long red grass, not a care in the world. And he remembered when his lover had also been distracted by an-

other. The other had been a friend of his, a very good friend. The friend was attractive and charismatic, and his lover had been tempted, of that he had no doubt. Then one day...

"You'll have to forgive me, I'm talking about myself too much," said the man. "What about yourself, Mr Magister? Have you been here long?"

The Master was relieved to be distracted from his thoughts. "Not long. I used to be the vicar in another village."

"Oh, where was that?"

The Master paused. "Hobb Vale. A small place. I doubt you'll be familiar with it."

"Hobb Vale!" exclaimed the man. "I used to live there! How long were you the vicar there?"

The Master grimaced. He had not anticipated being cross-questioned. Vague statements about his past history had, up until now, been enough to satisfy the curiosity of the Devil's End parishioners.

"About three years," said the Master. "A charming parish."

"Three years? So, you must have taken over from Reverend Holmes?"

"Reverend Holmes. Indeed. A lovely man. So dedicated to God."

This man asks too many questions, thought the Master. What if he returns, asking more questions? Or raises suspicions by talking about me in his own parish or in Hobb Vale? I could hypnotise him, but the effect would be temporary. Natural curiosity will always resurface...

The Master placed his hand in the pocket of his suit jacket where he could feel his Tissue Compression Eliminator - familiar and reassuring. I could kill him, he thought. Put an end to any questions. After all, only Garvin had seen the man arrive...

The Master's thoughts were interrupted by the sound of someone else entering the nave. An elderly woman walked into view. Clad in a frumpy brown trouser suit, her grey hair was tied back in a bun and a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles looked ready to drop off the end of her nose. She was carrying several bunches of colourful flowers and had more than an air of Miss Marple about her.

"Begging your Pardon, Mr Magister," said the woman. "I hope I'm not interrupting. I just want to sort out the flowers at the back of the church."

"Of course, Miss Walters, by all means. Please be my guest."

The woman went to the rear of the nave and began rearranging the vases of flowers which were resting on the windowsills. After a couple of minutes, she turned to leave.

"I'll be off now, Mr Magister," shouted Miss Walters, her voice echoing around the church. The Master acknowledged her departure with a weak smile and watched to ensure she had closed the door behind her.

"You were saying..." said the Master, returning his attention to the man.

The man hesitated. "Just thinking about my wife. She nearly died a while ago, you know. She was very ill. Made me reassess everything..."

The Master frowned. His thoughts once again drifted back to his past life on Gallifrey. Memories of his lover again filled his mind. They too had come close to death. The regenerative process had failed to happen as it should. He had looked on in desperation, helpless...

His thoughts returned to the present. The man continued talking but the Master wasn't listening. 'Focus', thought the Master. 'The past does not exist. This man is insignificant.' His hand

hovered once again over his TCE.

'Kill him!' said a voice inside his head. 'Do it now!'

The Master reached for the TCE. Then he paused. Killing the man might provoke more unwanted questions - police investigations, coverage in the press. His plans were so near to fruition...

"I'm sorry," said the man. "I'm burdening you with my problems. I bet you didn't have to do marriage guidance counselling at Hobb Vale! Did you know Mr Jackson who ran the Post Office? He always used to make me laugh..."

'Kill him!'

The Master reached for the TCE...

Then something quite spectacular happened. Outside, the sun emerged suddenly from behind the clouds. The early spring sunlight shone through the large stained-glass windows above the altar. The whole of the church interior was bathed in bright, beautiful light, bringing a warmth and glow to the whole room which was almost heavenly. The images and colours in the windows seemed to come vividly to life, angels and saints shimmering magnificently as though they had become almost three-dimensional. It was like someone had switched a light on in heaven.

The man smiled. "Beautiful," he said. "Absolutely beautiful." He gazed at the windows. "You know, a similar thing happened to me once in my own church. I was just a lad, forced to go to church by my parents. Then one day, after a service, I was tidying up the prayer books for the vicar. I was staring at the windows, thinking how wonderful they looked. And as I looked, the sun shone through them, just like it has now. It was like heaven was opening up to me. And at that moment, I knew that there was good in the world and that it was powerful. More powerful than any-

thing that evil could ever throw at me. I suppose that's when I became a Christian. But it gave me more than just religion or belief in a specific God. It made me realise that the world is a wonderful and magical place."

The man seemed lost in his own thoughts and the Master was certainly lost in his. He too gazed at the windows. The power of the sunlight, the beauty of the images and the warmth that enhanced the room... they reminded him of something. A depth of feeling that he had not felt since... since he was a boy. He thought back to his childhood on Gallifrey. He too had stared in awe at a magical vision before him. He had gazed into the Un-tempered Schism, a gap in the fabric of reality which had allowed him to see the Time Vortex. It was a wonder the like of which he had not seen before and would never see again, a miracle of nature. It was at that moment that he knew the path his life must take. The schism caused him pain of the highest degree. But it was a pain that gave him purpose and focus. He would go on to channel that pain, to utilise it in the pursuit of the one thing that really mattered - power.

The Master turned to look at the man and then realised he had gone. No matter, he thought, I doubt he will return to these parts. He is simply not worth the bother. In any event, within a few days my plans will have reached the point where I will be unstoppable.

The Master stood up and walked towards the vestry. He stopped momentarily, chastising himself for his hesitation in killing the man. Could it be that he was actually becoming sentimental? As he walked into the vestry, he saw Garvin sweeping the floor.

"Garvin," said the Master, "I no longer

wish to be disturbed. If anyone asks to see me, you're to tell them I'm not here."

Garvin looked up from his work. "They won't like that, Mr Magister. Canon Smallwood used to..."

"I don't care about Canon Smallwood," replied the Master. "I am the vicar, and you will obey me..."

"Very good, Mr Magister. Whatever you say."

Garvin returned to his sweeping and the Master stood silently in thought, planning and preparing for the momentous events to come.



WAITING FOR EVIL TO SHOW

by Karen Dunn

I like your ship.

No, no, there's no need to panic, I'm not going to hurt you. Please. Put the weapon down – it won't affect me anyway. I just want to...

See? Now you've made a mess of that control panel. Primitive technology really can't cope with being shot at. Let me repair it for you. There. I mended your life support system, too. It was about to fail.

You're welcome, Mr...?

Terril? That's a nice name.

Oh, I see... a name to strike fear into the hearts of your enemies. Well, that's nice.

No, there's no point in telling you my name. Evil is on His way, and I'll soon be dead - but I have a tale to tell, if you'd care to listen.

No? Well, I'll tell it anyway.

My people were born when the universe was young. We learned to walk among the stars whilst the stars themselves were still forming; and we jump-started life into more planets than you could count.

I remember Earth. No, seriously, I do. Tiny little rock of a planet about to break its orbit and plummet into the sun – which would have been such a shame considering how interesting you turned out to be. We nudged it back into place and watched it bloom. It was easy; like guiding an infant away from a hot stove and then amusing him until he forgets the stove is there.

So many species. If you'll forgive my rudeness, humans barely registered as a

tickle on our consciousness, but you were still important, and we protected you until you learned not to play by the stove anymore.

No, I'm not bragging; how can I make you understand? You are nothing to us. Less than nothing. It takes an effort of will, to even register your presence. I doubt you could comprehend how far ahead of you we are – and yet you are the one sitting with me at the end.

Yes, I know I didn't exactly give you a choice, but you'll thank me in the end...

All right, I won't count on it...

He'll be here soon. It's almost time.

What? Oh, that's very kind of you but we can't 'deal with Him' – this has to happen, we've always known it would.

You see that star out there? Well, no, you're right, you could hardly miss it. My planet orbits that star and my people learned to breath and walk and fly in its nourishing light.

We built mighty cities and unravelled life's secrets as it watched over us. We created masterpieces of music and art and literature that will never be matched no matter how many civilisations come and go. And when we ventured out into the universe that star was a beacon in the dark, guiding us home.

You're right – there are no planets there. Not yet. It hasn't formed yet. And it never will once He gets here.

No, I can assure you I am not 'off my head'. I do love your language. It fascinates me and I regret that my death will prevent me studying your colloquial-

isms further.

It won't be long now.

Ah, Mr Terril, you are the perfect host and I appreciate your efforts but no matter how 'shit hot' your security systems, your delightful ship will not be able to save me.

He will arrive and then I will die.

Or to be more accurate, I will never have existed.

Don't frown.

I take it you have heard of the Time Lords? Yes, it was sad, wasn't it? Well, my people made them look like children.

We indulged their forays into the Time Vortex because we knew they showed it the respect it demanded. For millennia upon millennia, we watched them grow and learn. They were one of the few species' we never felt the need to guide - they were doing wonderfully on their own.

No, they were not gods, nor did they wish to be. And their passing is all the more tragic because we had hoped to leave the Time-lines in their care once we were gone. Well, of course they need caring for! Without guidance and guardianship, the Vortex is at risk from any unscrupulous race which

happens to stumble upon the secret of time travel.

I fear for history once He arrives because there will be no one left to act as watchmen. My race will die before it is even born because of Him and you and I will be the only witnesses.

That's a very good question, Mr Terril, well done - but I'm afraid you will never understand the answer. No, I'm not treating you like an idiot. You really shouldn't slam your fist onto that control panel when you're angry - there are some very delicate circuits in there.

Very well.



We have always known that He will cause our destruction. We have monitored His deeds and tracked His progress since the day He was born and, were it not for the fact that He is our death, we would consider Him to be a good man.

It's not really His fault and I know He would be horrified to learn that an entire civilisation despises Him as the personification of evil, but the reason He killed us is beneath contempt and beyond understanding.

His grief is not an acceptable excuse. A novice would know to make basic temporal checks before doing what He did, but His thoughts were turned inwards, and His selfishness condemned us to oblivion.

We were unable to stop Him from doing what He does because Time has already told us that He will do it.

And Time is everything we are. If we were to attempt to stop Him, Time itself would unravel.

And that would be a bad thing.

I told you, you wouldn't understand...

No, I am not as heartless as I appear; I have merely accepted the inevitable. Tell me, do you have a family, Mr Terril? A daughter? How nice. How would you feel if you knew she was going to die and there was not one single thing you could do to stop it?

Exactly. That's how my people have felt every day of our lives.

No, it's no way to live at all. But we did it because we had to and when I was born, I was tasked with returning to this point and bearing witness to the end of days.

Yes, I suppose it does suck. But at least I will be able to look evil in the eye and understand why.

There's a little light flashing on your keyboard. It's very pretty. Oh, a proxim-

ity alert. I've always found it extremely sweet that your people rely on technology to tell you what your eyes are more than capable of seeing, if you would only look out of the window once in a while.

You swear far too much, Mr Terril. Surely, it's easier to ask, 'What's that?' without inserting those other words.

Yes, it is a very odd reading.

No, I don't think you've seen anything like it before.

Because that's a TARDIS.

He's here.

Yes, He's a Time Lord. Did I not mention? The last of the Time Lords – or so He would believe. The most evil being to have walked the corridors of Time.

Yes, it does look like a tatty old box, doesn't it? But the legends are true – you could lose yourself for months in its cloisters and passageways.

Look at the star. Look at what He's doing.

It's dying, Mr Terril. You're watching something no one else will ever see.

He's killing us before your eyes.

You need to set the engines to full now. You may have to get out of the blast range rather quickly.

No, I have to stay here. It would make no difference if you did 'get me out of here so fast my arse catches fire'. But thank you for the thought.

This is the end, Mr Terril, thank you for staying with me, for acting as my witness.

Don't hate Him for what He's doing, my friend – grief has made fools of much lesser men.

He's burning up a sun to say goodbye – and now I'm dead.

YOU KNOW THE DRILL

by Anthony Wilson

It came as a surprise to no one, least of all myself, that I spent the first few weeks of my exile ignoring practically everything but my drive to escape. It was not that I wished to be somewhere else specific, and, in other circumstances, I would have quite happily stayed for some time. It was being told that I couldn't leave that made me so very determined to do so.

I tried every trick that I knew. I rigged and de-rigged and re-rigged the ship but nothing could compel it to work. I tried self-hypnosis, shock therapy, an alleged, and, it transpired, fraudulent telepath, anything I could to get my mind to function properly again. I even sent distress signals in the direction of benevolent friends or ex-enemies, but somehow, they never heard my call. Oh yes, my captors had my exile sewn up as tightly as could be imagined; they knew exactly what they were doing and exactly what I would try. No friends came, no sign of anyone who might have helped me.

All of which is not to suggest that the planet on which I found myself was utterly isolated from the universe at large. Indeed, the opposite was almost true. For whatever reasons, the tribunal at my trial had coincided the time and place of my exile with a sudden and inexplicable increase in attempted invasions. I think they felt that they knew what they were doing, that they knew how I would act. And, of course, they were correct.

Within days of my arrival, the first of these had begun. I could scarcely help becoming involved. I flatter myself that,

in my travelling days, I had done some good. There were and are, of course, corners of the universe which breed the most terrible things. And I believe that evil, wherever it is, and however it manifests itself, must be fought. You know the drill.

So, as the meteorites fell, bringing the first of a series of alien intelligences to this tragic, blue-green planet on which I found myself, there really was nothing I could do but to offer and provide my aid. The challenges that these invasions posed were not difficult to overcome. Dangerous, certainly - and being attached to a quasi-military operation was always useful in that respect - but there was nothing difficult, nothing intellectually challenging about what had to be achieved. The alien menace came from beyond the stars, or beneath the ground, or from a parallel world, and it was defeated. There would be an inevitable and highly regrettable loss of life, and then the case would be closed and, amidst trying - with increasing desperation and despair - to rescind my exile by my own hand, we would move on to the next attempt to destroy us.

It was some time, I think, before I finally decided that escape was not going to be possible. I feel that one has to accept the nature of the universe sometimes, otherwise one runs the risk of insanity. I felt myself drawing closer to such a state in my frustration, and, logically, there was only one decision to take. I do not recall exactly what I felt the day I closed the door on my ship for the last time. It may have been regret, but it equally may

have been release. That is strange, now I come to think of it; I am normally so perfect in my recall of events. I wonder why that particular feeling eludes my memory.

Exile is as much a state of mind as it is a state of existence. Having finally decided to accept it, I began to refer, in my mind, to the planet on which I abided as 'home'. It was not an easy mindset to adopt in the circumstances, but I am nothing if not fiercely willed, and very little diverts me from my decided course when I put my mind to it. Perhaps I was just a little stauncher in this planet's defence, now it was my home and not my prison. Perhaps I put myself on the line that little bit more, was prepared to risk just a little more daringly, or dangerously - to go that little bit further - than before. But that is what you are supposed to do for your home, your friends, your adoptive family: you know the drill.

Through it all, with alarming regularity, the hordes continued to come. Sometimes they came promising gifts, sometimes they returned after thousands of years away, sometimes they tried to manipulate time for their own ends. All of them were defeated, turned back, destroyed. They were getting cleverer, though; that I have to allow them. The early attacks often involved hypnotised agents, a fifth column of unwilling volunteers, trapped into doing their masters' biddings, but easy to locate and neutralise. As time went on, the invaders seemed to realise this, and so they chose their agents more carefully. Instead of heavy-handed mind-control techniques, they chose the far more obvious course of tapping into that most basic of instincts: greed. Now, the aiding and abetting of the alien would-be conquerors was done by men and women who had no need of control, because they had relinquished their own self-control

years before. These - I cannot call them 'people' - creatures enjoyed their betrayal and would often profit handsomely from it.

There was a dispiritingly high number of them. And they deserved their fate. I do not regret what happened to them.

I remember my thought processes very clearly at this point, like crystal. I had adopted this planet as my home. Albeit unwillingly at first, I had come to love it dearly, to see in its hills and valleys, towns and cities, something that I would long for if I left. And, by contrast, there were those who were born here who seemed not to see its inherent beauty, who had no love for their land or its people. To protect the good and the obedient, it became necessary to stop the bad and discontented. To tell these two groups apart, I needed information. And thus, the inception of the Finders.

It seemed like poetic justice. I took those who had betrayed their world and I electronically improved their brains. I am proud of the system that I developed. The traitors were returned as productive members of society, watching, listening, filtering the relevant information, and returning it to me. They forgot nothing that they heard or saw. Neither did they forgive.

There were only a few - seven or eight - at first, but even with that small number, I was able to find several thousand potential traitors within a month. I did nothing but continue to monitor their activities, waiting until one or the other of them was contacted by an invading race. None were, but this did not seem to stop them committing crimes. Most were petty, but some were astonishing in their extravagance and violence. My Finders were preventing fraud and larceny, rape and murder. The world - my world - was a safer place.

Not everyone was happy. There were

those who believed that the continuing conversion of criminals into Finders impinged upon the rights of those individuals. I, respectfully, disagreed. They had no rights, I argued: they had voluntarily rescinded their citizenship of their race by their actions; and were worthy of nothing but contempt. Certainly not rehabilitation or second chances. You go through life but once, and if you get it wrong, there is no opportunity for forgiveness. You know the drill.

I found the reaction of those in authority unhelpful, insidious, and traitorous. When I had begun to assist in the defence of my new home, I garnered unquestioning assistance, infinite resources. Now, this was being removed from me. Authority figures, formerly so helpful, became obstructive, less willing or less able to listen to reason. Equipment, once easily available, became the subject of questions about its necessity and efficaciousness. It was never a direct challenge to what I was doing; because the public, the people I had sworn to myself to protect, were happy with the results of my efforts, but this creeping sabotage of my work was becoming evident. I could not, in all conscience, allow it to continue.

Ironically, as my Finders' activities were increasing, the alien desire to invade seemed to be wilting away. This had been my success: I had been here for nearly ten years and had protected my world from without. Was I now going to have it destroyed from within by the pig-headedness and high-mindedness of those who claimed to have principles? Naturally, I would not. It was certainly not difficult to send my Finders to those in governance who disputed that I had the right to do what I wished. There was always something to find, some way to remove them from their undeserved positions of power. And if there genu-

inely was nothing there, then people could be made to say whatever it was that I wanted them to say. No one really has as high a pain threshold as they would like or believe. Electricity, heat, invasive surgery, or, as you know, the drill.

By the time I was finally invested as ruler of my adoptive home, there was a Finder on every street corner, planet-wide. The world was safe, and the people - the good, law-abiding citizens for whom I had given everything - were happy. Or, at the very least, given what I saw through the eyes of my Finders, they were smiling. The traitors, the criminals, those who could not contribute to society, were, slowly but surely, being expunged. No invaders whatsoever came here anymore; maybe there was less here now to interest them, maybe I had destroyed them all. I do not know, and nor is it important.

It had taken years and cost me so very much, but I had, at last, succeeded. My world, my home, was finally fully under my protection.

It was in the seventh year of my rule that the five hundred millionth criminal was recycled as a Finder, and returned to productive life. And it was the day after that milestone passed that the Doctor came.

I knew nothing of him before he arrived. I know only a little more now, although I gather from some things he said, that he, too - and more than once - had been trapped for a time on a planet that was not his own. I would have liked to have been able to explain to the Doctor the decisions that I had made, but I was not afforded that chance. I genuinely believe that he would have understood.

It took the Doctor precisely twelve minutes to utterly dismantle my empire. To this day, I have no idea how it was achieved. Suffice it to say that, upon his

arrival, there was a sound as of the universe being torn asunder and, only moments later, it seemed, the same thing happened to the safe, protected world that I had built.

Much of the time, he seemed barely to know what he was doing, as if his mind had been scattered to the nine winds. Or as if he had spent too much time in the company of my Finders. At times, it seemed, his friends were his nursemaids - the soft girl, the jagged man - and sometimes he even appeared to forget who they were.

But he did not forget his purpose, his drive, his... reason to be what he was, where he was, when he was. This ludicrous avenging angel, this champion of so-called justice. He knew nothing of me, nothing of what I have given, sacrificed, become to protect that which I love; and lacking that understanding, he destroyed me nonetheless.

I loathe him. I hate him with a passion deeper than anything anyone could possibly imagine. I would have him torn apart with an atom-thin blade, molecule by agonising molecule. I will burn into his brain every feeling of pain, hunger, love, despair, frailty so that he knows only suffering until the end of time.

I do not fully understand why there is a part of my mind which envies him. So very much.

I remember our only conversation. I replay it, on an endless loop, inside my mind, over and over, even though it was but moments long. I know every nuance of his voice, every minute tilt of his head. This broken vessel of a man stood before me, held out his hand, and offered me forgiveness. I told him that I had done nothing which required it, and then he took my world apart.

I do not need to bore you with the details; you have seen the like on countless occasions, numberless worlds. The order

comes to rejoice, for the tyrant is no more, and no one notices the irony. Weapons are beaten into ploughshares, castles and fortresses are razed to the ground, and emperors and empires are locked, deep, deep below, in dark and fetid rooms where scarcely any come. And there is joy throughout the land.

It matters less to me now. My jailors - the new order - have serviced me well by hiding me here, for it is easier to bear the shame and stigma of defeat away from the prying eyes of the winning side. This is, perhaps, their error, but it is not the only one that they have made. Nor shall it be the last.

I hear rumour still, you understand. Those spectres, electrical impulses still misfiring in their minds, who, on occasion, seek my company tell me that the new regime is changing. Inch by inch, link by link, the chain that starts with the fight for freedom is already being forged. The new order is already seeing enemies at the gate and are just beginning to institute changes for the protection of the public good. Cameras, recording devices, things which... find things, are appearing in the streets and the houses, in the blocks of flats and the beautiful, darkened parks. And that which is heard must, of necessity, be reported back and thus - of necessity of course - there must be a personage in authority to whom this reporting is addressed. And if that person does not like what he hears, well, then, ways must be found to ensure that different things are said thereafter. You know the drill.

And if they continue down this road, then I can see into the future.

I sit here, in the darkness, and wait for the Doctor to return.

THE SPINNING DANCER

by Simon A Brett

The late evening sky cried as the wind cracked at the rooftops, lifting gutters and shuffling slate as it circulated the streets. Gentrus Roman exited his favourite tavern where he had spent the last of his goodwill credit draining one of the landlord's less popular and possibly more evolved ale kegs. Stumbling out onto the cobbles and into the chaos, sobriety wrestled to take control of his bloated frame with surprising urgency as a particularly aggressive bolt of freezing air blasted past. His hands clambered to grip the wooden door-frame for balance.

"Lumpy wind," he proclaimed to everyone and no one, "I hates it! More than I hates this flaming town! Better a consistency of charge than an element that takes thee by surprise," and sensing a lull in the air pressure he moved a hand from keeping his hat in place, instead thumbing the brim upward to get a good look at the heavens. The rain took full advantage of the momentary break in gale and proceeded to empty a minor cumulonimbus directly into his face. For a man such as Roman, this only served to strengthen his resolve that the world was, indeed, out to get him - and that for all the logic the city's scientists repeatedly used to polish fate's faeces while simultaneously trying to disprove the existence of all manner of specific Gods, he was still unconvinced of nature's innocence in the face of life's struggle. At least keeping an open mind about a convenient deity presented the option that there was always someone

to blame.

The wood and stone buildings that lined both sides of each claustrophobic street in Greater Schuw heaved forward towards each other at roof level. Foundations were rarely prioritised by the city's builders as it was generally assumed that sooner or later if a house needed any kind of support, it would be provided by its neighbouring property... eventually.

On any number of bad days, Roman had sworn to himself that he would eventually seek out the singular brick that would bring the whole place crashing down. Until then, blotting out the bleakness of his existence as a small-time religious bookseller via the imbibing of alcohol seemed the most productive policy.

He shook a clenched fist at the sky above, threatening Vocal Mary (a thunderous god detailed in the books that he attempted to sell to unwitting customers) with inferred queries of her parenthood. He removed a surplus pocket edition from his coat and launched it enthusiastically towards the sky. The book flew in a surprisingly efficient manner upwards with no immediate sign of losing altitude. For a moment, Roman thought that it might indeed reach the clouds above where Vocal Mary supposedly gave her raucous opinions of the mortals below; its pages fanning out into makeshift wings that would carry it further upwards towards the beings detailed within its leaves. Then with a sodden crunch it

froze in the air, wedged between the guttering of two opposing houses.

A further curse oozed through his teeth, reforming behind his lips and readying itself for audible release when a sound beyond Roman's experience thundered above, causing the windows, the doors and finally the brickwork of the surrounding houses to rattle enthusiastically. Looking past the lodged book, he noticed the sky changing colour from its usual disgruntled blue to an uncharacteristic, almost enthusiastic simmering orange, growing brighter by the second. For a moment, he saw the burning tail of something plummeting towards a nearby forest directly above his head. As it disappeared behind the trees, the light-show diminished, returning the sky to a reluctant indigo.

Seconds passed in silence with Roman rooted to the spot, until a low sonic boom shuddered through the streets, once again jostling the city. In a surprising turnaround of priorities, the alcohol to adrenaline ratio of his blood did a small tango. His legs forgot their age and past misuse, tricked into thinking that now was a good time to get somewhere familiar. It could have been argued that this wasn't necessarily the safest of destinations as his house was the second-to-last in a long stretch of ageing buildings with only the end terrace in a position to break its slow-motion fall. But for the time being falling objects were a threat, way in advance of the barbed comfort his house provided.

Roman's book, now slightly pulped by the heavy torrent of wind and rain, slipped from between the guttering and flapped to the floor where he had been standing seconds before. The sodden and suddenly sober bookseller was already half-way down the street and uncharacteristically eager to get home.

An immense peel of thunder rumbled through the heavens as Roman reached his front door. The end terrace house to its right looked as unhappy as ever, teetering somewhere between sculpture and rubble. He imagined for a moment that the large family hidden inside must all be huddled in a corner somewhere. But just at this moment, that wasn't his problem - he would leave that to Handy Grimth, the spirit of balanced bricks. He was relieved to find that his door unlocked and opened in its customary complaining but forgiving way and as he closed it again, he took a moment to check a protractor-like design, drawn in charcoal to the side of the doorframe with a dangling metal weight hung by string at its side. No noticeable shift in angle. Not since breakfast, anyway.

He smacked his lips, loudly, and turned his attention to his belly now that his brain appeared satisfied with a workable level of normality. He slumped into his favourite chair, closed his eyes, and concentrated on losing the knowledge that an unidentified object had crashed in a nearby woodland while retrieving the memory of what edible items might exist under his roof.

Summoning up the adrenaline to rise from the chair, he approached the ladder with renewed vigour. There was indeed a small piece of Gross Bessa's green cheese remaining which temporarily lifted his spirits. Its clagging properties were perfect for lining a stomach but with the antisocial effect of congealing in the throat; often giving the diner a voice similar to a duck with anaphylactic shock. However, finding an empty bread bin was an unexpected result. He definitely remembered purchasing a loaf that morning from the bakers opposite his house.

His was the one and only key to the

front door. The local rodents hadn't, to his knowledge, developed the means by which to open cupboards and lift heavy ceramic lids from bread-boxes. His eyes scanned both walls adjoining adjacent properties for signs of recently loosened brickwork, but every crack and loosened area of plaster was exactly as he remembered it. Not even one of the small children from next door could have eased their way through a gap without some evidence of movement.

There was a scuffling noise from upstairs and dust dropped from a far corner of the ceiling. Somewhat shaken, he took a sharp intake of breath. He stilled his lungs again. No sound.

Roman slowly made his way to the stairwell. He had decades of familiarity with them, and in particular the dodgy fourth step which remained in place, shuffled back into one piece for makeshift security. All steps were intact and untouched. Either the intruder had entered via the top window, was light enough to leave the steps in one piece or had an unspecified psychic link with staircases of wooden origin to detect booby traps. Again, the most likely culprit would be a small animal - but again, that same animal would not have been able to gain access to the bread. He really didn't like this. This was too much trouble. He was wet, still technically drunk, and most importantly hungry - wasn't that enough? He desperately started to try and think of an appropriate deity to insult, settling upon rubbing his right elbow and asking Bilious Eric, the god of reluctant heroism for strength.

Elsewhere, an outwardly human male of quite possibly late middle age by Earthly comparisons was carefully navigating a path through woodland towards a very definite goal. Light of step

and low to the ground, he walked an almost dance-like zig zag through the undergrowth, cautious for a moment then scampering between vegetation of varying levels of irritation. His dark flurry of hair rising up and down into a perfect mop as he rose and fell in small skips. Every now and again he held back particularly unhelpful branches with a black umbrella that he held in the opposing hand to a battery-operated torch. He could also be heard uttering one-sided conversation with the forest's greenery and generally seemed delighted to be making its acquaintance for the first time.

Eventually he came to a clearing, freshly carved into a tunnel-like passage down the centre of a usually impenetrable matrix of thick, interwoven trees. A smouldering crater of burnt vegetation, bushes and molten rock fizzed at its end, bordering a smoking bullet-shaped object, half buried in the ground. A steady sizzle punctuated the air as light rain hit the heated stone.

"Oh! Ahhhh... hmmm," he said. "Well, this is all very... something, isn't it?"

The lichen said nothing. The shrubs gave no opinion.

"Yes, that's exactly what I thought," said the stranger, dark, generous eyebrows lowering and suddenly very serious.

Roman always knew there was a reason why he'd kept his mother's floor mop. Standing astride the doom-laden fourth step of his house's staircase, he thrust the pole upwards once more, then waved it back and forth much like a flag bearer. Quite what this was supposed to achieve in the face of some undefined threat he wasn't sure, but there was always the possibility that the mop might appear both bigger and hairier than the bread thief. Besides, the mop was expendable - all of a sudden, he felt like a minor tactician and manipulated it

through the air in a manner he felt was befitting an intelligent and respectable life form.

With aching arms and a waning enthusiasm for tactical puppetry, he took a firm grip of the handle with one hand, a candle in the other and began steadily to climb the stairs, avoiding any that might audibly give his progress away. As he stepped up onto the floorboards, he lit a nearby candlestick and placed his own candle on a shelf nearby.

"Hello?" he called into the darkness. Why in Schuw he was being so polite he wasn't sure, but he ventured that it might be best to head into danger on a pleasant foot. It may well put him in good stead should power shift to the invader at a later stage.

There was a shuffle and then the sudden bang of an undefined object hitting the floor from the other end of the room.

"I'm going downstairs again, now!" he said in swift reply, an octave or so higher than previously, whilst instantly turning and striding back down the stairs, two steps at a time. He stumbled as his foot split the fourth step permanently in two.

Clumsily hitting the ground floor, he called, "I'm downstairs now!" up the staircase, followed swiftly by, "I won't be coming up again! I didn't see you!" then taking a breath and pondering. "You can leave the same way you came in as soon as you like. You can keep the bread! I didn't like it anyway!" Roman winced at quite how instantly fearful he was in the face of the unknown intruder. Any sense of outrage had been replaced with intense dread and wanting the whole thing to go away. At this point no amount of elbow rubbing would get him back up those stairs, let alone curiosity or even bread

products.

The candles now offered a flickering orange glow in the room above. For a moment, the light faltered, and Roman surmised that whoever was resident upstairs had moved across their influence. He listened again, waiting - almost willing the appropriate noises associated with leaving to appear. There was nothing aside from the whistle of the wind outside. The storm had, at least for the moment, calmed.

An hour passed and as the light from the candles flickered and faded, so did Roman's hope for a noisy exit from the thief. The weather had abated, yet still his unwanted guest was finding his modest abode preferable to outside and he assumed was settling down for the night. Roman would take his chances with the unknown at least until daylight. He shifted his favourite leather chair towards the centre of the room and settled as best he could, facing the staircase with the mop perched towards danger like a jousting invalid. Despite best intentions, he was asleep within half an hour.

Sunlight broke through the blankets hung at the windows and between the less confident brickwork of Roman's house. Consciousness returned to him in multiple stages of varying colour and lucidity. It was only at the moment he realised there was a floor mop wedged down the side of the chair's arm piece that he remembered his current situation. He forced all concentration into opening his eyes wide enough to take in the detail that the morning light revealed.

The sound of breaking crockery drew his attention to the larder from which his bread had disappeared the night before. The receding darkness invigor-

ated his resolve to re-take ownership of his home, and he rose from the chair, pulling the makeshift weapon from between the cushioning in which it had been wedged. Eventually, after a small battle, it came loose from its fixing.

He edged towards the larder, slowly easing the door open with the head of the mop. Standing, hunched and awkward, was a young girl. Skin, pale as marble with a mess of pearl white hair and naked as her day of birth. She ravenously scraped at the pots and boxes that populated the shelves, pulling away cobwebs then tipping contents directly into her mouth with no concern for hygiene or indeed, how long the ingredients had been there. With insider knowledge he retched at the prospect.

She suddenly became aware of his presence and turned to flee but found him blocking her escape. For a moment their sight met, both instantly trying to measure the other's intent. Her eyes were wide, watery, and blue as the sea in picture books. Somewhat disarmed by the memory and detecting a fear equal, if not superior to his own, he slowly placed the mop onto the floor and held his hands outward and open. Her eyes moved down to study his hands, seemingly fascinated.

"Who are you? What do you want?" he asked, "By the Goddess Axia, where are your clothes, girl?" He reached for a large, thick blanket that hung over a pole above a nearby window. She was a thief, but only by the grace of the Gods had he not yet fallen to that level himself. He afforded her some dignity.

As he pulled the blanket down, he was unaware that he had just revealed something hidden, something altogether stranger than the female stood in his

larder. The girl screamed words in an unknown language and lunged forward, pulling the blanket from his hands and pushing past him towards the front door. Roman fell to the floor, grabbing at the air to regain possession of the mop. As he turned towards the girl who now sat hunched at the foot of the locked exit, a glint of reflected sunlight drew his attention away from her and back to where the blanket had been.

Silhouetted in the window, haloed by the emerging daylight, stood, to Roman's eyes, a metal man. The figure stood still and upright, almost to attention but with its head drooped slightly forward. Lifeless and statuesque, the creature was clad in shining metal platelets, sculpted to approximate the landscape of a muscular and toned human male body, with ridges and angles that reminded Roman of the armour adorning the city's royal guard. This was where any kind of comparison to human form ended. On the chest was a boxlike construction, grated wire in an aperture down its centre. For a moment he fancied that the three, cavernous dark areas to the front of its head emulated the visage of a skull - yet the shape of the head, with supposed handles at either side also reminded him of his favourite tankard. He decided to focus on the familiar. He prodded lightly at the leg with the mop handle. A hollow toll rang out, vibrating upwards into the chest cavity.

"Just a statue, I fathom," he said to the girl, whose eyes were transfixed on the figure, "I fancied for a moment that it might be alive - a gift from the Gods maybe. Anything to do with you?"

The girl was now on her feet but showed no sign of reaction to Roman's questioning. Besides, she appeared mesmerised by the metal figure and

began to step, tentatively towards it. She stopped for a moment, head cocked, studying it from head to toe. Roman almost detected an element of recognition in her face. Almost a smile. Now that she stood, modesty covered in the blanket, he afforded himself a moment to appreciate her striking appearance. Her blue eyes sparkled, her sun-honeyed hair glistened, and the pores of her perfect skin contrasted into defined relief in the sunlight. In fact, he noticed that her skin was stunningly perfect. Not a blemish. Not a scar. Just pale as if having never seen a day of sun.

"Step... away from it, dear," ventured Roman.

The girl didn't react; instead walking confidently towards the monster. She was now close enough for it to easily grab her, snapping her neck in one movement - had it, of course, been anything other than an empty shell. And yet, with air at its core, it still exuded menace in its silence.

She ducked beneath the drooping head and looked up. At first, Roman thought that she was studying the minimal features of the creature. Joining her in her bravery he noted two round holes, like the coins placed upon the eyes of the moneyed dead with a secondary hole at each outward corner, almost signifying a tear, and a thin, rectangular slot where its mouth should have been. She stayed there for a moment, swaying slightly. There really wasn't much detail to take in, to be fair, he thought. Then he realised that she was looking at something else entirely: her reflection. Distorted and elongated - but hers alone, nonetheless.

She placed a hand, gently onto the chest plate.

A low, broken rasp emitted from the

box on the front of the creature. The girl stepped back. The sound appeared to be slowly increasing in repetition and pitch, then stopped as quickly as it had begun. Roman lunged forward, grasping the girl's hand and pulling her towards the door.

"No good will be coming from hovering round this beastly decoration," said Roman, "I shall be selling this fairground curiosity as soon as I reckon its purpose and how it gotten itself here. This be needing some thoughts and I daresay that thinking could be expedited by a stiff drink!"

Mrs. Googun from the bakery opposite looked down upon the couple as they disappeared around a corner. Unimpressed, she emptied a bedpan onto the street below. She jumped as a sudden loud thump emitted from Roman's house, coupled with a cloud of dust puffing from its windows. Nothing more happened for a moment. Thinking nothing more of it, she began to close the window shutters. Just then, she noticed her husband make his way across the street to Roman's house having been disturbed from his bread making routine. She watched as he tried the door, finding it apparently unlocked by the hastily absent owner, then slowly stepping inside, an oven paddle held aloft in preparation for battle. She bustled with pride, somewhat taken aback by her husband's vigour. There was a pause and then another cloud of dust exploded from the window frame. A fine mist of flour settled onto the cobbles forming cloudy pools of white punctuated with clots of deep red between the stones. She fainted.

An early morning tour of the city afforded the advantage of being able to wander at one's will through the grounds of private properties. Not only

did this give the option to proceed in a virtually direct line to a destination but it also led to easy pickings of clothes lines along the way. A trail of clothes lay like breadcrumbs across a multitude of back gardens and yards and at its head, the girl had settled with a long woollen smock of pale orange, velvet three quarter length leggings brought to a full stop by a large pair of black stained leather farm worker's boots, left outside and caked in mud after the previous night's storm. Roman couldn't help but be amused by the girl's enthusiasm at stomping through the streets, scattering dried clods of earth about the cobbles.

The girl turned to Roman, smiled for the first time, then delicately uttered words that in content meant nothing to him. However, in their shape he was reassured and warmed that they sounded like something good and probably thankful.

"Don't mention it," he replied, smiling back, then checking himself, remembered the state of his teeth. They finally ducked between an archway created by two opposing small cottages, both lost in time to the sprawling hotchpotch of crooked houses. It opened out into a large town square, filled with the early stages of a street market. A multitude of smells permeated the air, from the fragrance of freshly cut flowers, to the beginnings of hot stews reheating from the previous day. The girl sniffed, almost mesmerised by the taunting scent of food. As she lunged towards a fruit stall, Roman grabbed the back of her smock and held her back. He shook his head, holding an open palm to her face. Placing one hand on her shoulder, he wafted the other downwards to try and relax her enthusiasm. Reluctantly, she

nodded.

Five minutes later, they crouched in a small alcove beneath a ramshackle bridge, gnawing at fruit and vegetables, expertly snatched by Roman.

"Used to have a bookstall stall here, meself," he said, sadly, "Till they raised the taxes up higher than Slack Dorca's hemline."

The girl looked at him then smiled, detecting his melancholy tone. She placed a hand on his and offered him some of her fruit. He placed his other hand on top of hers and shook his head, smiling a flat smile.

The market had become busier. Shoppers and stallholders communicated through various levels of aggression and laughter as they traded. The girl listened intently, every now and again showing hints of a grin or a frown as emotions cascaded through the street. Then something lifted above the cacophony, taking the whole of her attention. She leapt to her feet, banging her head on the underside of the alcove. She put her hand to her head, confused, then inspected her palm. She studied a small amount of blood for a moment, then shaking her head wiped it dismissively on her leg before setting off into the thick of the crowd. Roman jumped up, stumbling at first, calling after her to slow down. He swiftly stuffed what was left of his meal into the breast pocket of his jacket, licking his fingers then, following her example, wiping them on his trousers.

He pushed his way forward through the crowd, ignoring rudeness and comments about lineage as he did so. Face upon face upon face greeted him as he forced on, each with their own hurtful, gurning facade. Instead, he decided to listen and seek out what might have enticed the girl away from him. As he

moved on, something became more defined amidst the throng: music.

Eventually he found himself towards the centre of the square and with one big push between some particularly stubborn and stocky Schuwan women, he fell forward out of the crowd and into a space left, almost politely, around a street entertainer. He quickly gathered composure and stood upright to take in what was happening.

At the centre of an almost perfect circle left by the surrounding crowd, stood a small group of musicians, swaying in unison. A rhythmic, shuddering folk tune was being coaxed out of their various tools; an almost machine-like sequence of fluttering notes blown from two opposing wind pieces; a swaying wall of thin chords squeezed from two paddles joined by inflated animal skin; a woman of traveller descent blowing bass notes from a long tube of lovingly carved wood; the whole piece punctuated by the thud of a large-skinned drum, gradually increasing in frequency. Orbiting the performance, skipping, leaping, marching, striding, ducking, turning, reversing, shuffling then spinning in a revelry of pure barefoot joy, danced the girl.

At first, Roman attempted to grab her as she passed, but she was too fast. She was caught up in a trancelike ecstasy, losing herself in the moment. Mesmerised by the drug of glorious expression, she increased with speed as the music did the same. Resigned to standing patiently until the end of the tune, Roman began to notice that it wasn't necessarily the musicians that the crowd were responding to. All eyes were on the girl; all hands clapping along in time with the music, as much to encourage her efforts as enjoy the music. As the melody and tempo lifted, bringing the

tune to a crescendo, coins began to rain towards a box to the front of the band. For a moment there was silence, then a loud and enthusiastic cheer erupted; currency continued to be thrown.

Before Roman had a chance to rescue the girl, a new musician appeared with a very different looking instrument to take his place amongst the minstrels. He placed part of the device under one arm and began to squeeze, methodically. Gradually the strangest of drones began to emit from what looked like a petrified animal. Frozen legs protruded from a round, swollen belly, regularly compressed by a full-figured young man with dark hair, a flared white shirt and what Roman could only perceive as being red patterned female leg-wear. Still, as time moved on, the dissonant sound gradually reached a tangent of its upward curve. The player began to draw out fragmented notes from the cry of the animal; rhythmic and flighty, much like the previous tune. The drummer began to pick out the geometry of the piece and began to thump along in time. Before long the crowd had begun to clap along, once again.

Fearing that things would start again, Roman ran to grab the girl's hand. As he did so, she turned to him, smiling - then as he refused to let go, her expression turned darker.

"Let me go - I need this!" she shouted.

Roman immediately let her go, taken aback at her sudden ability to speak in perfect blessed-tongue. Then, as he regained his senses and reached out once again to halt her in her tracks, a hand swiftly clasped his wrist.

"Now, now, now. Let the children have their fun," said a warm and calm voice in his ear. Roman turned to see the profile of a strong, plummeting nose protruding from under a dark cloak, under-

pinned with a pouty, full mouth, currently grinning broadly with a cascade of white teeth, "She is somewhat interesting though, isn't she?"

The man turned to Roman, allowing him a first look at the face in full. Two disarming and kind hazel eyes met his, each squinted with amusement - possibly slightly awash with tears. It had been so long since Roman had found himself caught up in an emotional moment like this and to find himself in the company of one equally moved left him flailing for reaction.

Instead, words fell from his mouth. The relief was exquisite.

"She's beautiful," he said, "A Gift from the Gods, is as good as any explanation. I is still trying to fathom which of them upstairs would think me worthy to have her appear in my home. All I is usually having delivered is final demands of the tax."

"Ah, so she appeared, you say? Last night, was it? During the storm?"

Roman's disposition changed somewhat, and he suddenly felt the need to be a little more guarded. This was all sounding decidedly more official. People with questions were rarely a welcome intrusion.

"Who the Daevil are you?" he demanded.

"So sorry, Mister, er..." the man replied, removing the hood from his head, "I'm the Doctor - and that

piper over there is my friend, Jamie. Has your friend got a name?"

"I've no idea, sir," said Roman, responding subserviently to the titled stranger, "She's only just started talking in me native tongue, to be fair,"

"Ah, yes. Well, I'm probably to blame for that. Still, it makes things that much easier, eh? And let me tell you, I don't think anything about this is going to be

easy."

Roman's heart sank. Was this stranger going to make this all complicated and take his new friend away so soon? He looked across to where the girl was currently pirouetting around Jamie as he danced a small jig, momentarily losing his place in the music as the girl passed him with a smile.

"Don't tell me. She's an escaped pris'ner. A thief. A demian sent by Gas-eous Jum... just my flamin' luck."

"No, none of those things to my knowledge," said the Doctor, "but to be fair I'm not really sure myself."

"I'm not really thinking anything be makin' sense, Doctor," said Roman, shaking his head, "Firstly, I'm thinkin' the sky is falling in, I see a comet crashes in the woods then I come home to a breadless larder," he elaborated, "Then I'm finding an angel in my bedroom, a metal man in me lounge and..."

"A what?" interjected the Doctor.

"An angel in me bedroom..."

"No, the bit after that."

A scream interrupted the conversation. The Doctor, Roman, Jamie and the girl all turned round trying to get a pinpoint on the direction of trouble, but the chaos that erupted from the crowds only served to muddy their hearing. Jamie went to help the girl to safety, but she immediately made her way to Roman's side and began to pull at his arm to get them away from the area.

The crowd thinned as people ran in all directions for safety. There was a loud crash behind them. They turned to see a large fruit stall tip towards them, scattering fruit across the cobbles. Some small children quickly gathered to collect up the spilt food. Jamie shouted at them to get to safety, scooping up one small girl whose legs were obviously way too small to offer any chance of

speed. Facing the upturned stall, he turned to run, but not before he saw a shape, somewhat familiar, stepping robotically towards him.

"A Cyberman! Doctor! It's a Cyberman!" "Run, Jamie!" shouted the Doctor, "Don't think, just run; everyone!"

Roman, the girl and finally Jamie ran towards a nearby alley. The Doctor momentarily stood with a look displaying concern, fear, and fascination. For the few seconds afforded to him by the somewhat staggered progress of the creature, he wrung his hands in a circular motion, muttering to himself. While the metal man's progress was somewhat slow and laborious, its feet hit the ground with a solid shunt; left, right, left, right; its focus dead ahead and relentlessly aiming directly for the group fleeing down the alleyway. Its stability seemed somewhat unsure as it stepped onto the uneven cobbles. This somewhat fascinated the Doctor. Servos and motors whined, compensating for the lack of flat ground, but with each step, its efficiency appeared to improve.

The Doctor pulled at a nearby abandoned handcart. He swung it into the path of the Cyberman. It strode straight on ahead, the cart spinning off as if lighter than air. Only then did the Doctor react; appearing momentarily to dance on the spot, then stepping backwards, turning to change gear into a full-blown sprint, chasing after his colleagues.

The Doctor turned a corner to find himself looking straight into the face of a large furry creature that reared its head, making a noise not dissimilar to a bear. He looked past to see that the beast was hitched up to a large wooden wagon, the reins held by Jamie who stood, somewhat gladiatorial, behind the animal's head; Roman and the girl sat be-

hind, beckoning for the Doctor to climb aboard.

"He's some weird lookin' beastie, Doctor, but I'm told he's quick!" said Jamie, almost smiling, "I'm thinking we'd best get a move on before that Cyberman gets here!"

"That sounds like a wonderful idea, Jamie," replied the Doctor, grabbing the Scot's hand and allowing himself to be pulled aboard.

As the Cyberman turned the corner, the wagon was already weaving somewhat recklessly down the alley and banking onto two wheels as it headed up a linking lane. The Cyberman paused for a moment, then re-engaged its pursuit with renewed velocity.

"We need to get back to that capsule, Jamie," called out the Doctor. "I think we'll get some more answers now that it's cooled down."

"Cooled down?" ventured Roman, "Are you talking about that comet that hit the forest last night?"

"That was no comet," said the Doctor, now smiling, eyebrows raised, "That was an escape craft. A Cyber escape ship!"

"Ships can't fly, you damn fool," said Roman, scoffing.

"He's right," said the girl, quietly, head hung and visibly shaking, "that thing came from another world." Roman's immediate thoughts were to equate the information to the actions of the Gods - but this girl was offering up evidence of life from above the cloud cover. Quite how this was possible was another thing - but here were these people, talking of things way beyond his comprehension. So not Schuwan in any shape nor form. The Gods of which he sold books, detailing their varied behaviours and powers that kept the world turning, did just that - this

world was their focus. Anything outside of that defied description. Defied categorisation. Defied nature.

"Jamie and I followed the ship here in my TARDIS," said the Doctor.

"Yes, the Doctor managed to fly the TARDIS in a straight line for once, too!" said Jamie, somewhat amused.

"Well... following the energy trail of the capsule did make things somewhat easier I will admit. But I have to say I've rather impressed myself. It's not often you find a crippled Cyber cruiser, firing off escape pods. It's all still a bit of a learning process, you see. You know what they say about the first few hundred years."

As they entered the nearby forest it became impossible for the vehicle to progress. They entered into a more dense area on foot, eventually finding the channel created by the crashed ship.

As they made their way towards the crash site, Roman took the opportunity to ask the girl some questions, especially as she now seem to be able to converse in almost perfect Schuwan.

"You arrived in a... sky ship? With that thing?" he ventured.

She nodded, "Yes. It wants me. It's trying to get me back."

"You were a prisoner then, lassie?" said Jamie, listening in. She nodded. He continued, "But I don't understand, Doctor. How did the girl and the Cyberman get into this man's house? The ship crashed!"

"I can only guess that it was some form of ejector seat, Jamie."

Jamie and Roman looked at each other and shrugged.

"Short range matter transference?" he tried again. Two mouths hung slightly open.

"Before the ship crashed, the on-board

computer used a special energy beam to place the occupant in a place of safety, rather than risk damage on impact. Possibly a place where it can get right on with continuing to propagate the Cyber race,"

"Turn the people into more Cybermen?" asked Jamie, "But that doesn't make any sense, Doctor. That Cyberman is only interested in the girl - its prisoner. It doesn't seem interested in anyone else."

"Yes," said the Doctor, "Yes, that had occurred to me too. The Cybermen don't keep prisoners - not for long, anyway," He turned around to see the girl, hanging back slightly from the group.

They arrived at the crash site. The top half of a small, silver capsule showed above the collected earth. Through the mist of steam and smoke that had gathered around the ship, the Doctor made his way to what looked like an opening in its hull. He pulled a handkerchief from his breast pocket and held it to his mouth, disappearing into the fog.

Out of breath and desperately trying to make sense of the situation, Roman eased himself down onto a nearby levelled tree trunk. He looked at the forest floor, wide eyed and breathing deeply. Then he turned to the girl.

"As I am thinking it, woman, that metal monster is wanting you for something. What are you? A criminal? A deserter? A traitor?" he said, high-pitched and breathless, "That's a machine of battle, make no mistake,"

Not making eye contact, she looked to the ground and replied, "All of those things. And worse."

"A Cyberman's a beastie of nothing but evil," interjected Jamie, "And what I've seen of them makes me think that they're not in the habit of keeping prisoners, just like the Doctor said - you

must be something pretty special if they're keeping hold of you in one piece. Who are you? What did you do?" A lone tear fell from the girl's eye. Taken aback, she lifted a hand to her cheek, feeling the moisture against her skin.

"I did what I had to do. I wanted to help. For the good of everyone," she continued. "That's what you do when you want things to get better isn't it? When there's a war on?"

"Well, yes, lassie," replied Jamie, "I would nae have picked up a sword if I was nae gonna do good wi' it," "Exactly," she said, recognising a commonality between the two. "When you can't stand to see your family suffer; your world to be destroyed at the hands of others."

"I would have done anything for my sisters," said Roman, staring straight ahead, "even making a deal with the Daevil...." he turned to the girl. "Is that what you did, er...?"

"Kastrid," said the girl, suddenly overwhelmed with emotion, smiling a broad grin, and laughing politely. "My name is Kastrid. And yes, I did what I did because I thought that it was the right thing to do. I thought I could protect them. Protect everyone. I signed up for the war effort. Left my family. Said goodbye."

"You fought in the war?" asked Jamie.

"I... I believe so," she replied, holding her head, "It's all so hazy."

Out of nowhere, the Doctor appeared from the white of the smoke.

"Battle not with monsters lest ye become a monster," he said, theatrically. He walked to Kastrid and took a hold of her shoulders, gently, and smiled briefly. "I think you should come with me. This won't be easy, I'm afraid. Not quite looking into the abyss - I can't recommend that - but it's a close sec-

ond."

The Doctor led Kastrid through the mist to a dark hole in the shell of the capsule. She half expected to see an empty cockpit in the darkness, but as she approached, she caught sight of an all too familiar glint of silver amongst a mess of wires and dull, torn metal.

There, in the cockpit was what remained of a Cyberman; distorted by impact and heat - but a Cyberman nonetheless, in better days identical in design to the machine that had pursued them earlier.

"This can't be the ship I arrived in," she said, somewhat confused. "This is a single occupant capsule. This can't be right... how did I get here? There must have been more than one ship?"

She stared down at the helmet looking up at her. Once again, she saw the blurred, pink shape of her face, reflected in its mask. She looked into each hollow, seemingly endless eye - drawn into the black where all emotion seemed lost and meaningless. She felt what little joy she had managed to experience and stored away in the last few hours begin to drain away; warmth and connection with the world replaced with cold function and a predictable, pointless existence.

She realised that she had stopped breathing. She took in a sharp and deep breath; intense morning cold mist mixed with the caustic, metallic smoke still bleeding from the capsule. Then as blood rushed, complaining around her veins and into her ears, the swell of her heart pumping became almost overwhelming. Her focus pulled away from the eye and onto the second, smaller tear-like hole to the side of the aperture. She once again felt at her cheek, still moist with emotion. Suddenly the face of the Cyberman seemed wrought

with sadness and she joined it in its sorrow.

Noticing a jutting crack to the side of the helmet, she reached down, grasping the sheared metal and pulled. The Doctor reached out a hand to her arm, concerned that she might burn herself on the still hot metal, but her determination overcame any sensitivity to danger and a large section of the mask came away in her hand, immediately dropping to the ground.

Kastrid stood completely still, mesmerised by what she saw. Cold, dead, familiar eyes looked straight back at her. The scarring and heat damage to surrounding skin did nothing to diminish the recognition of the once living face within - a face that she had known since before she could remember; keeping her company through her short life; a lifeline to reality and where she stood in the universe. The face was her own.

"You see that nasty electrical storm last night must have played havoc with these Cyber systems," said the Doctor, almost talking to himself in a reassuring and practical manner. "When the safety trans-mat systems tried to get the passenger to safety, I think it got a little confused about, well, flesh and metal and rather cleverly reconstructed them both in full - didn't even have the energy to properly deconstruct our friend, here. It's all rather fascinating, really! Matter transportation has always had issues with living, sentient beings - never a problem with standard matter in general. Tricky for cyborgs; two different algorithms intertwined and... Well, here you are! A perfect reconstruction of Kastrid the Mondasian. Safe and well!"

"Fascinating. Safe and well," she said, coldly.

She turned to the Doctor, suddenly

calm and measured, "But of course, I'm only half of the problem, Doctor." "I can assure you, my dear, that you're no problem at all and that transporter created you back in an almost perfectly recreated whole piece," said the Doctor, teeth bared in a wide and thrilled smile. "You are a little miracle."

"I left anything 'miraculous' about my existence at the door of my family home, Doctor. That dead creature in the ship is Kastrid. I'm just a ghost of her. But I can't pretend that all of the blame for the horrors that she perpetrated aren't part of me. Equally I can't lay all of the blame for that on the machines the scientists created."

"Kastrid," said the Doctor, "All questionable acts; even those we might call evil...are created from the perspective of a righteous cause. It's what we do with the knowledge of the repercussions that matters. So many have committed unspeakable atrocities with the justification of being 'right'. You have a second chance. You can see both sides now. That is a privilege that I would hope you would not dismiss easily."

Kastrid smiled and turned, "We became the very thing we feared, Doctor. In running from death, we became death itself. Walking corpses with only the illusion of life to set us apart from robots, coupled with the illusion of a righteous cause wrapped up in a sub-routine. The arrogance of the Mondasian race, believing itself to be superior in the face of difference, proclaiming, "You will become like us!"

"But you're free from all of that now, Kastrid!" said the Doctor, breathing fast and visibly emotional. "You're no longer part of the Cyber race!"

"But it's still part of me," she said.

There was a moment of silence. Then they turned as a shriek erupted from

within the fog. A flying body appeared out of nowhere, momentarily creating a hole in the mist, and landed, broken at their feet. Kastrid looked down to see the lifeless face of Roman looking up at her.

"NO!" she shouted and made for the direction in which the body had travelled.

"No, Kastrid, wait!" called the Doctor, flustered. He thought for a moment, then ran after her, shouting, "JAMIE!"

They quickly made their way through the blanket of mist, back to where they had left the wagon. As they broke at the smoke's edge, they saw Jamie, cowering as the Cyberman bore down upon him. Its movements seeming far more fluid than before as Jamie scuffled backwards on all fours to hide himself underneath what was left of the wagon, which itself was rotating wildly as the attached beast of burden bucked and struggled to free itself of its bonds. The Cyberman brought a large metallic hand down onto the wood; the beast simultaneously pulled backwards and fell sideways on top of Jamie. He struggled underneath as the animal writhed, attempting to regain purchase on the ground.

Jamie looked up, seeing the Cyberman reach out with both hands towards his head.

"You want me don't you!" cried out Kastrid; silhouetted at the edge of the smoke. The Cyberman froze, then straightened up, adjusting its position to focus purely on the girl.

"You don't just want me, do you, monster?" she continued, taunting the creature, "You need me. Otherwise, you're just a shell. A parasite with no meaning! A gun with no trigger finger!"

Kastrid stood for a moment, considering the creature once again, now sud-

denly calm and accepting. She cocked her head to one side slightly, considering the sight before her.

The Cyberman cocked its head also, mirroring her movements. They both lifted their heads up straight. Then the creature raised an arm, firing a small projectile at the girl.

The dart hit Kastrid in the chest. She shook for a moment, her body movements suddenly disconnecting from her own control. The Cyberman walked decisively towards her.

By this time, Jamie had managed to extricate himself from beneath the animal. He picked up a wooden shard from a split side to the wagon and moved to intercept the Cyberman's movements. Immediately the Doctor appeared, halting Jamie in his progress.

"No, Jamie, wait - this is Kastrid's battle," said the Doctor.

"It's gonna kill her, Doctor! We must do something!" cried Jamie, angry and smarting with the pain in his legs.

"We and Roman already have, Jamie - we bought her a little... perspective."

The Cyberman froze in front of the girl. As it raised its arms slightly upwards, she did the same. But then the machine began to tremble. Slowly, Kastrid stepped back from the machine. Then, a moment later, the Cyberman did the same. She turned round towards the smoke surrounding the capsule. Her counterpart too.

Before long, the girl and the creature were making their way towards the cockpit of the capsule. The Doctor and Jamie followed from a short distance. The Cyberman juddered as it struggled to regain control of its movements. As it did so, Kastrid winced, crying out but gritting her teeth and swearing in a language that the Doctor could only imagine was ancient Mondasian.

The metal man stopped at the cockpit and reached down towards a control panel. Kastrid, to its side, mimed the same. The Cyberman placed a hand onto the control panel, transferring energy from itself into the device. Deep within, an electronic whirring sprang into life.

"Kastrid, I think I know what you're doing... Don't!" called out the Doctor. "We'll find another way!"

"What's she doing, Doctor?" asked Jamie, who had reached Roman's body and was looking for signs of life.

"She's winning is what she's doing, Jamie," he said, "but unfortunately I think there might be a price to pay."

A sparkling glow appeared around both Kastrid and Cyberman. As it did so, she turned to the Doctor and Jamie, giving them a short moment of recognition. Then, in a flash, both glowing bodies disintegrated into pixels of colour... and were gone.

The blurred but familiar ceiling rafters of Roman's house eased into view as he regained consciousness. No-one was more surprised at his survival than he himself. His head and muscles ached. He was bruised in places never before reached in even the nastiest of confrontations with drunken atheists. He wiggled his fingers, then his toes, relieved at some tenuous movement at his extremities, though his arms would not move. He turned to his side to see the Doctor sitting in his favourite leather chair, casually flicking through one of a pile of books while playing sporadically on a small wind instrument.

"That Vocal Mary needs to pipe down a little," said the Doctor, smiling, "Shouting and throwing things around causes all manner of problems, don't you think?"

"I'm alive," said Roman, attempting to

put his hand to his head.

"Oh yes, isn't it marvellous?" said the Doctor, "I do hope you're not going to squander the possibilities of that. Kastrid certainly wouldn't want you to," "Kastrid... Is she...?"

"Gone, I'm afraid," he replied, "It's all very, very sad. But... she redressed things and, well, you and your people are still very much alive, mostly,"

Roman shook his head, trying to place the information in some kind of order. Then he looked to the other side of the room, which looked... different. It now opened widely through to a front room very similar to his own, except this was populated by a large family of a broad range of ages. His neighbours at the terrace end. A small boy ran towards him on seeing him awake and handed him a small cup of steaming tea.

Jamie sat to the side of the gap between the houses, his own legs bandaged and obviously causing him discomfort, but hammering at an arrangement of wooden supports that now held the two houses together in one piece.

"I do hope you like your extension, Mr. Roman," said the Doctor. "We figured that you probably needed some looking after - and that lovely family next door were running out of room. You know, a bit of leaning on each other from time to time is no bad thing, and little Brydo here loves your books." Roman winced, unable to move his arms, now densely wrapped in bandages.

"Both your arms are broken," said the little boy, "But I've been praying for you. Would you like me to rub your elbow for you, Mr. Roman?"

A RELIC OF BEFORE THE DESTRUCTION

by Our Special Correspondent, Sti Venatcher

Excitement was high last Friday, ahead of a showing in the District Central Hall of something rather special that has not been seen in this area since before The Great Destruction.

Back in March, constructors digging in what is believed to be the remains of St Christopher's Parish Hall, in what used to be West London were amazed to discover an object that they identified as a video tape – a pre-Destruction method of recording moving pictures and sound. This particular tape held one of the very few examples of a “television programme” to have survived from before The Attack of 4th November 1966 and The Destruction that followed, which wiped out most of the population of the world and ended industrial/technological civilisation.

Your grandparents, if any were still alive, would have told you that the programme in question, Doctor Who, was a popular science fiction fantasy drama, aimed mostly at young people. Of course, today, twenty years after The Destruction, no one alive will have any memories of this particular ‘show’, nor indeed of television itself; although youngsters will be very familiar with that form of popular entertainment, as it is extensively studied in our network of village schools.

What makes this particular instalment of Doctor Who, (entitled The Tenth Planet, Episode 4), an even more exciting find, is that it is believed to be the very last episode that was shown in the days immediately before The Attack. As such it can give us some insight into the preoccupa-

tions of the people of Britain in their final days. Those fears would seem to be many – ranging from the fairly straightforward horror at the possibility of nuclear war or invasion from space to a dread of mechanisation itself. There is a bitter irony in observing these terrors, given what was to happen just a few short days after the episode was shown. Humanity #1 needed no help from alien invaders in destroying itself.

After the strangest example of recorded music that this reporter has ever heard; music that in itself caused a nervous chill to come over the packed hall; the episode began in some sort of Antarctic military base, with the attempted launch of a nuclear-armed missile; the sight of which, caused a shudder of horrific memory to pass around those watching. The failure to launch is greeted with relief by what would appear to be our heroes – a white-haired elderly man, called “Doctor”, presumably the “Doctor Who” of the title and two young people – a man and a woman, later identified as “Ben and Polly”; and anger by an aggressive military man, who proceeds to threaten everyone with a gun.

There is mention of a “new planet”, (something which might become clearer if other episodes of the serial were ever to be discovered), and “Cyberman spaceships”. The appearance of these Cybermen, a race of alien robots with bizarre sing-song voices, ends these disputes (and provoked some laughter among the audience). With Doctor Who and Polly taken hostage, the rest of the episode

concerns the attempts of Ben and his friends to defeat the Cybermen. The use of radioactive rods in this quest again has connotations for the modern viewer that would perhaps not have been apparent at the time.

Sadly, we were denied the denouement of the episode; the last few minutes having been lost. We see Doctor Who rescued by his friends before assuring them that, "It's far from being all over", and stumbling off towards who knows what. The Cybermen have been defeated and their planet destroyed, but what would have become of Doctor Who and his friends? We shall never know.

Audience members left the hall in reflective mood that night, having been allowed a brief glimpse into an almost forgotten world of technology and adventure; a look at visions from the past of a future that was not to be. The people of 1966 knew that they were living under the ever-present threat of death and destruction on an unimaginable scale. They knew that the terrible atomic Sword of Damocles could fall at any time. What they didn't know was that they had only days left. How could they?

One final curio to take from this extraordinary relic; the opening titles reveal that Doctor Who: The Tenth Planet was co-written by Kit Pedler. This is of course, the very same Doctor Pedler whose work, in the years immediately

following The Destruction, enabled us to survive as a species. Without his achievements in the fields of cybernetics and transplant surgery, in the dying days of technology, it is unlikely that we would be here today.

Next Saturday is the twentieth Renewal Day, when we commemorate the anniversary of The Destruction and give thanks for our survival. Please visit your village clinics beforehand and ensure that both your organic and cybernetic components are in optimum order. Give thanks to Doctor Pedler. Long live Humanity #2!



STARS FADING

by David X. Brunt

"They say you don't dream in Cryo. It must have been a Frequently Asked Question from the way the Fleet Training Programme swiftly offered up an answer, with a link to a specific document pinging onto my Wristcom even before it had finished. I never did read the whole of the article.

But, oh, I dreamt. Sometimes I dreamt of nothing. Literally nothing. Floating in a blankness that was all enveloping. Other times my mind would wander through a jumbled collage of events from my childhood, on the farm or in training for this journey. Sometimes I'd be a child again, running through the dust left behind by my grandmother's crop sprayer. I'd holler and whoop at the chickens in the yard. flapping my arms so much I'd think I could take off. Sometimes I would and I'd soar up into the sky, suddenly finding myself in a flyer with the permanently scowling flight instructor, who had impatiently drummed the basics into me. Other times it would be my grandfather sitting next to me, as scruffy and gaunt as ever but dressed in the makeshift rusty armour of Don Quixote. He'd smile his crooked smile at me like he did that last time, and I would cry.

Other times I would be groggily walking back from a night in the mess hall, tipsy on illicit booze, and only staying upright because I was clinging on to Ilyria. She was no more sober than I was, but we'd somehow manage to stumble along. Just like we always did. That short walk back to barracks seemed to stretch on

into infinity but when I eventually reached the door it never be the right one.

Sometimes it would be the faded pastel blue of my childhood bedroom, other times it would be the door that J slammed in my face the last time I saw them. Mostly it was the door to the Academy learning rooms, but sometimes it would be... no. Sorry. I don't want to talk about that.

Then there were the times when I had what you might call... nightmares. I would be fully awake but unable to move. Immobile surrounded by fellow graduates, the entire crew all equally frozen. I could sense Ilyria standing right next to me, but I was tantalisingly unable to turn to her. The tableau of people stretched into the distance in both directions and seemed to be curving, as if it joined up behind or beside me.

Only my eyes were free to move, and I would scan the rows of bodies hoping to see movement; but my eyes would always be drawn up and away from them. Above us was a sky full of stars, unfamiliar constellations that never seemed to stay the same if I looked away and then back. I never saw them move. I never saw any movement in the black sky. No clouds, no shooting stars. I could never bring myself to look down. The blackness of the sky seemed to stretch downwards, unbroken. For all I know we may have been standing on nothing, but that vast wall of star strewn nothing.

The first time I dreamt this dream I found myself in an unbroken wall of people, as familiar to me as my own family. Everyone I trained with, everyone who was making this journey with me. I would stand there, feeling nothing. No breeze stirred. I never tired. I never hungered. And for the longest time that was how it was. My mind would wander between the patchwork dreams and then be brought back to this strange gathering, and I would scan the line to see if everyone was still in the same place. I found comfort in the fact that everyone was still present. One day that changed.

Oli Laughton was there and then he wasn't. I don't know why it scared me so much, but that sudden gap was terrifying. I couldn't bring myself to even look at the absence, turning my eyes upwards. And what I saw there was equally wrong. As I looked some of the stars were darkening, fading away even as I gazed up through tears. I thought my heart would just about break then, but the blackness swallowed me, and I found it too hard to focus on anything and I drifted away.

More people vanished from the circle over...I don't know how long. Time was hard to tell but it seemed that I had spent years fixed in place. Each time it happened I would look up and see fewer and fewer stars. If there was some connection between what I thought were stars and the situation I found myself in, then it was too oblique for me to grasp.

Only the one time did I see anyone new in the circle. It was in the gap left by Marshall Oh, to the far left of my vision. I had to strain my eyes to look but once I did it was immediately obvious that this person shouldn't have been there. Where everyone else's uniforms fitted

perfectly this intruder's hung off him, like it was three sizes too big and was worn over a full set of clothes instead of the regulation uSuit. Swamped in the unforgiving white Teflon-coated uniform the little man was practically hidden by what he was wearing. His unruly black bob of hair was very much not of regulation length and, most absurdly of all, he seemed to be wearing a battered tie that trailed out of the uniform collar and hung there ridiculously, swaying in a breeze I couldn't feel.

And then he smiled. Eyes still closed, a dopey smile spreading across his face. I was instantly won over by this odd little man. His eyes began to twitch beneath the tight closed lids and then they were open, and he was looking straight at me. I had never felt more annoyed at being paralysed in position as at that moment. I wanted to say hello. That was all. I had been standing here so very long. I wanted to feel like I was alive again. I was just beginning to feel I would go mad with frustration when I was struck by the change in the man's expression.

His eyes were wide open, and a wild terror seemed to have gripped him and he was now shaking, convulsing in the suit. Almost before I could take in what I was seeing he collapsed forwards and then was free. He seemed to be dancing at first. The way he was holding on to the arms of the too large spacesuit made him look like he was waltzing, as he span around and between the figures surrounding us. Slowly, clumsily, he was stripping out of the suit, revealing strangely old-fashioned clothes. A black jacket, checked trousers, and a mismatched pair of shoes.

Finally free, he took the space suit by the collar and stood with it in front of him. He seemed to have some subtle

purpose that was beyond me. His eyes scanned around and then fixed on... something I couldn't see. He braced himself and then skipped nimbly to one side. He danced around again and then took a similar position before sliding sideways out of my sight. When next I saw him, he was still holding the space suit by the collar and was stretching it as wide as he could. He readied himself to do his jig again. This time he took a single step to the side but held the suit out, letting it hang where seconds before he had been standing.

Unbelievably something seemed to rush into the suit, filling it with a bulky moving shape. The strange little man gripped the neck of the suit tightly and fought against his freshly captured combatant. Whatever it was that was he was fighting seemed to have no fixed shape. Sometimes it would appear as if many limbs were fighting to get out, pushing in all different direction. Then it seemed to inflate to almost bursting point and then dropped and shrank away suddenly as if a terrific weight was pulling it down.

All this time the strange man struggled until he clambered on top and with sudden strength managed to tie a knot in the sturdy, flexible material of the space suit. Almost instantly the fight went out of whatever he had been fighting with. He stood panting, and then he made an effort to straighten out his clothes, but looked just as crumpled when he finished as when he started. Then he turned to me and bowed deeply before taking hold of the now unmoving space suit and dragged it out of sight.

And then nothing. The darkness took me again and this time I didn't dream. I did the very opposite. After what seemed like an eternity of dreaming, I

woke.

I was surprised at how sluggish I felt as I came to. It had not been like this in the practice session. My body felt tired and uncomfortable, and I was unexpectedly sweaty. I barely had time to register this, before a banging noise echoed on the door of the cryocapsule that I was sleeping in. The frosted front cleared, and I was face to face with another newcomer. This one was not much taller than the scruffy man I had seen and was wearing clothes that were equally old-fashioned. Instead of the all-purpose uniform suitable for space travel he was in a pale suit with a brightly coloured flash of a waist coat underneath. A straw hat was perched, jauntily on his head.

This stranger was pulling on the capsule door with all his strength. He braced himself against it with first one foot and then another. Before long he was almost halfway up the pod, having shuffled higher and higher, his grip on the handle exhibiting a strength that was surprising. Seemingly almost by accident he managed to knock something with a foot and the door flew off its hinges leaving him trapped beneath it and muttering to himself. With an ungainly wobble he managed to right himself, straightening himself out with his hands and then looking straight into Dayo's eyes and introducing himself.

"Technician, fourth class, Dayo Lennie? I'm the Doctor and this is..." his voice trailed away, and he stood looking blankly at his side as if he was expecting someone to be there. "Ah... never mind"

He leant forwards, hand outstretched to me and helped me out of the pod, and that was when I noticed the debris around us. Some of the capsules had been shattered and were now empty.

Where there should have been a sleeping crewmember was only a ripped and torn out bundle of wires. But there was no sign of Oli or Marshall or a few other people. I was about to ask this Doctor where they were when I caught sight on myself in a piece of broken machinery. I didn't recognise the person looking back at me. Where I should have been was... well. Whoever it was looked more like my grandmother than me. I reached a hand up to the aged face looking back, hoping to convince myself that I was mistaken.

I lost myself then, and without the Doctor I don't think I would have ever been able to find myself again. My cryocapsule had been faulty and rather than freeze me fully as it should have, it had left me in a sort of waking coma. Instead of keeping me young, the device had fed me through the nutrient feeds, kept me healthy, stopped my muscles wasting away but did nothing to prevent me ageing. Decades had passed... I've found that whole time has compressed down into just a few images, unable to process the years I had lost. Still, I was luckier than many of my other colleagues. Something had got into the ship and had been taking other crew members away. The Doctor wouldn't say where to or for what purpose, but I can't help wondering; was it using us a larder? There are some rooms in the deck below where we are now that the Doctor sealed off completely, and gently suggested I didn't try to open. Even though he said it in a casual, throw away manner I could see how seriously he meant it and I have honoured that instruction.

The Doctor said he had stumbled across us in deep space and, upon exploring, had found that we were in need of help. He'd waited in a cryocapsule for what-

ever it was that was preying on us, and then he had trapped it. He used lots of words I didn't understand and made it all sound more complicated but that was the gist of it. He apologised for not being able to help me sooner, at which point I stopped him and asked the question that had been nagging away at the back of my mind. He clearly was not the same man I had seen fight with our predator and yet was talking as if he were the same man.

"Well, it's been a few years. I've changed over time."

"You think you've changed?" I said. "I didn't have a grey hair in my head when I went to sleep last night and now..." I trailed off and twisted a strand of my now salt and pepper locks and the Doctor had a blank face, as if he were unsure what to say to that. And it was probably the shock and stress of the situation I had found myself in that made me laugh so hard. And when I started, I couldn't stop until I was crying with laughter and then just crying, but in a good way. It felt like I was purging myself of something; like waking from a bad dream.

Perhaps I was still groggy from those dreams and maybe that explains why I never thought to ask the Doctor about his clothes, or how he found his way onto our ship. Generation ships like this are supposed to be impenetrable. The shields should have been unbreachable, our passage practically invisible. Nevertheless, here he was and that seemed to be that.

It was thanks to the Doctor that I came to be awake and looking after my sleeping friends. I'm told it will be another few years before we reach our destination and everyone else wakes. I don't know how old I will be by then. Older than my grandmother every got to be,

almost certainly. But I'm not alone. The Doctor presented me with a picnic spread which we ate looking out at the stars in the forward observation deck. This time the stars were familiar, and none of them faded away, no matter how long I watched. As we ate the Doctor explained to me that he wouldn't be able to put me to sleep again. Someone needed to be around to compensate for the damage done by the thing that took my crewmates. 'Would I be willing to stay?' he asked and got up to go for a walk around the ship, while I considered his question. He left me pouring steaming tea from a funny tartan tube with a screw on lid.

"Meet Sheloom!" He cried upon return and held out an arm. A whooshing noise made me start and something flew past, landing on the Doctor's outstretched hand. It was shaped like a button, a heavy figure eight, dull grey and featureless. The smaller upper part bobbing and moving in a way that was similar to the way a bird would. It shivered briefly and a rainbow of colour spread out over its body. It was making a clicking noise somehow. It seemed friendly enough and when I reached out an arm it hopped into my palm. The Doctor smiled like a proud parent watching a child making a new friend. Sheloom, who I have come to love very much, nestled against me and was comforting-ly warm

"Ah! Bilby! You've joined us." The Doctor pointed to a corner of the room and while at first, I couldn't see anyone I slowly began to make out a figure; an almost invisible, pale grey figure. Humanoid but elongated, more like a shadow than a person. I should have been terrified when it raised both hands to its head and nodded to me; but I felt a great sense of kindness for and from

the Shadowman. Sheloom launched into flight, slipping away from me, and zooming around Bilby. I say 'flight' but Shelly has always seemed to me to move through the air like a fish through water, seemingly effortlessly and with just the occasional body wobble to change direction. I raised my hands to my head and copied the shadows actions and for a few minutes we mirrored each other. One second, they would do something which I copied, the next I would take the lead and they would echo me. The Doctor said Bilby would become easier to see over time, as the trust between us grew, and that it was impressive that I could see him at all. And he was right, Bilby is still a stretched shadow of a man but fully there and I can make out the outlines of his eyes and wide, wide smile.

"Are you still hungry, Dayo?" asked the Doctor before adding, "Think of your favourite food."

I closed my eyes and thought of what I would like to eat. My grandmother's biscuits came to mind. Crumbly, and buttery, with a hint of lavender and an almost bitter edge they were like no other biscuit that I have never tasted. When I opened my eyes, I found that there were motes of dust moving between the Doctor and myself. They gathered together and became larger and larger until they were like spinning tiles the size of a fingernail which formed into a yellow and black smiley face. Then they reformed and in front of me was one of the blue and white plates I loved so much as a child, the type that I sobbed over when the shelf fell, and they broke. And on them was the most perfect biscuit. One that I swear could have been made just moments ago by my granny Lula, if I knew that wasn't impossible.

"This is the Model 3 Rinderian Ros-taroosta," exclaimed the Doctor, making a feast of sound out of the rolling Rs. The most powerful nanotech intelligence ever made on Salivar's moon. It solved the food crisis and left everyone to live in peace. Until a terrible mistake was made. Or at least, it will be made there one day... The poor chap was and will be left on an empty planet with nobody left to help. It needs a home.". He told me how Bilby was the sole survivor of his race after a global disaster, and that Sheloom was the last of his species after being hunted to the point of extinction by the apex predator of its home. It was hard to know how to react to that and we all sat in silence until the Doctor picked up a pair of spoons from the picnic blanket and beat out a jaunty tune that was impossible not to tap along to.

I danced with the shadowy Bilby while Sheloom soared up, between, and around us. Roosta created crazy patterns in the air above us, constantly changing colour, shape, and size. And when we became tired Roosta worked his magic to conjure up a large cup of something thick and gloopy for Bilby, exotic berries for Sheloom, sparkling champagne for me. and a cup of tea in a perfect bone-china cup for The Doctor. It is not the life I expected to lead. I thought I would one day wake up, young and fit, on the new colony world and do my part in making a new home for us all. Instead, my strange companions and I have learned to communicate and get along oh so very well. For a fortnight or so the five of us got to know each other, we learned how to communicate, and the Doctor taught me all I needed to know to keep the ship on course. The Doctor wandered off one afternoon and I haven't seen

him since. That night I found a present waiting for me in the medbay that I have converted into a bedroom. A bundle of real paper books! I don't know how he found something so valuable, but they make a welcome addition to the entertainment programmes and eBooks.

A Comet in Moominland, Emma, The Colour of Saying, The Further Professor Howe Chronicles; and best of all Don Quixote. It's battered and beaten by age, held together with tape in just the same way my grandfather's copy was. It even has the same smell of tobacco and old age. If it weren't impossible, I would say it was the very same book he used to read to me when I was little.

But then again, many things that have happened to me have been impossible to explain. I've learned to live with that. They say life is but a dream, after all, and we don't expect logic in dreams.



DOCTOR WHO VELOCITY: AN INTERVIEW WITH CHRIS PHILLIPS

By Nick Smih

Daleks! Weeping Angels! Vashta Narada! Ace! Boggins! They're all in Velocity, a fan-made Who homage that's witty, colourful and charming.

Slick for its budget range and always heartfelt, Velocity has a modicum of impressive special effects, thanks to director Chris Phillips, and an endearing Doctor played by Chris' partner Krystal Moore.

We meet the new Doctor post - regeneration, traveling to earth's past with a gentleman who seems harmless enough... at first. When they encounter witch hunters and the Doctor is threatened with being burned at the stake. Does she dare to survive and risk changing history? Of course she does!

Chris spoke to us from his green screen paradise in Boise, Idaho, describing the how and why of his homemade Who.

Cosmic Masque: How did Velocity take off?

Chris Phillips: I worked for MTV for 10

to 15 years, doing news bulletins, weird odds and ends and interview pieces, then I moved from Essex to America where I'm a video editor by trade, and it ended up being a fun little project. Most people who edit for a living are frustrated movie directors! My partner's American, she's a comedienne and a fan of Doctor Who. I'm British so... we made it happen. It was good to have fun, wacky stuff to do. We took some acting classes and started making the show.

CM: When you made the first episode, what were your expectations for the series?

CP: The plan from the beginning was to make it sustainable. I'd dabbled in short films before; usually they're a one-off thing. These days a lot of people make shorts and there are tons of film festivals. I thought, 'I want to make something a little bit more, build an audience or a regular audience.' Doctor Who seemed to tick a lot of the boxes, including low budget production and only one central character.





CM: An ensemble cast would create more challenges?

CP: If I tried to ask local actors to keep coming back years on end for a web series, people would have come and gone. I might have found one kid who goes to college and loves acting, but then went off to become an insurance salesman. Doctor Who fits really well for a limited cast. Krystal is always there unless she dumps me (laughing)!

CM: From a filmmaking point of view, the attention to detail is really good.

CP: I've learned a lot of new techniques that I put into my own work, for example the broadcast stuff I do for people in London. If I think of a new technique or software I want to try, Velocity allows me to try out something different before I bring it into my professional world.

CM: The TARDIS interior is simple but impressive.

CP: It took us a little while to figure out. The TARDIS interior needs to be as consistent show to show. If we weren't

going to do Velocity for years at a time, building a huge interior wasn't really viable. I didn't want it to be completely visual effects so I went with a white background. Only in a long shot you'll really see the rest of it. We made a centre console with foam board and a glass bit with a purple light then filmed it in a photography studio.

CM: Tell us about your casting process. Somehow, we could tell you were the judge in Episode One!

CP: We went to this local acting class in Boise. The teacher was a lady who'd been in a few sitcoms and teen dramas in the early 2000s. We met a few local actors. There's no real film scene in Boise, it's just a little hobby for most people. A few of them do local theatre, or historical recreations and cowboy shootouts in a wild west attraction called Idaho City. A few actors make a bit of a living from things like that. We got to know them, I'd worked on a few local shorts with them before; we started the first episode and hoped we would do more if it did well.



CM: You have some recurring characters.

CP: For the most part, it's a different story every week. As I'm coming up with ideas I can ask actors if they are available for an hour or two. If not, I can swap it to a different character. We've had a few of the guys back. Jen Potcher, who plays the witch [Agnes Waterhouse] is in a bunch of them, Dylan Wood's been in a bunch.

CM: How long does it take to produce an episode?

CP: From getting an idea to finishing it, nine months to a year. A month after I have an idea, I get script written. A month after that we might start planning how to film it. When we actually do it, it all comes together quite quickly with two to three days of shooting. The first episode's edit was pretty quick. Others have had too many visual effects leaving me thinking. 'Oh my God this is a nightmare.' I have to learn how to make what I want it to look like. I push myself to learning new techniques but it takes some time.

CM: Halloween 2022 marks five years of the show. Happy anniversary!

CP: Thank you, it's been fun! Social media is a weird beast – apps and platforms are self-serving, they want you to make content that suits each one. I realized quickly, before the release of the first episode, that it wasn't going to trip an algorithm. It's very niche content. I asked, 'how can I make it more what they want?' but I decided not to do that, because I work full time making videos, that's my job and I didn't want this it to become a job.

CM: It's easy to fall into that trap.

CP: I know lots of people who have. It tends to happen to younger people. Since YouTube pays people ad revenue, at some point it's an employer. Out of all broadcasters, YouTube is the worst employer. It says, 'I'm going to make you make ten videos a month and you'll get three grand for it.' If you look at the hourly wage to make content for a huge multinational company, then it becomes painfully low and contributors get burned out on a fad that's getting likes.



CM: How do you avoid this while providing popular content?

CP: I'm OK with 1000 views. A few hundred people regularly tune in to watch it, they'll email us or send a message. When you start a fan film you get your own characters turning up and we do have a little solid fan base. The actors enjoy it.

CM: What are your hopes for Velocity in the future?

CP: It's something we could carry on. If I really put my mind to it, I could make an episode in a week. WE have to decide, do we take a massive break or continuously work on it as a background thing, a few minutes a day. It's an ongoing challenge, being a couple and having kids and being creative. We try not to let it become a burden. We will probably continue to make it, we definitely want to do a couple more of them. I've really enjoyed doing them and drama-wise I've learned a hell of a lot. If I was asked to direct eight episodes of Thomas the Tank Engine or five Danger Mouses I could do it. Before, I didn't have those skills.

CM: Have your children taken an interest in the project? Do they come up

with ideas?

CP: In the latest episode they're more involved as actors. They have been in it briefly before, operating a puppet or doing a voice. There's people who make their kids famous on YouTube, that's slightly detestable to me. But now my stepdaughter is 14 and studying drama; our boy didn't want to be left out so Boglins attack him. It's a fun family project.

CM: Wait. Boglins?

CP: I had Boglin rubber puppets when I was young. My mum and dad threw them in the trash 10 years ago. When their creator Tim Clarke started a Kickstarter, 40-yr-old dudes came out of the closet and gave him half a million to make some more. I got one and my son thought it was funny, so I bought a few more to make monster puppets. A lot of toys are fluffy or hard plastic but these are perfect for Doctor Who.

CM: Chris, thank you very much and please make more Velocity!

VELOCITY EPISODE GUIDE

Episode 1 - 31 Oct. 2017

Regeneration and the Witchfinder General

The Doctor regenerates and travels back to the 1500s in a freshly renovated TARDIS, to save England's first convicted witch from a fiery death. Can she overcome the oppression of the Witchfinder General and save the women of Chelmsford?

Episode 2 - 15 Jul. 2018

Davros and the Daleks Return!

On their way to Gallifrey, the Doctor and the Master get taken aboard a Dalek warship, where they learn of Davros' new plans for the human race.

Episode 3 - 31 Oct. 2018

The Master Takes Revenge!

The newly-regenerated Doctor gets stymied by the TARDIS on her way to Gallifrey.

Episode 4 - 1 Aug. 2019

Ace and the Weeping Angels

The Weeping Angels are causing havoc in 1989. Can The Doctor save the planet and will Ace be able to help her?

Episode 5 - 30 Dec. 2019

The Vashta Nerada Return!

Can you imagine being stuck in a Christmas Movie that never ends? The Doctor must save her friend Gloria from a festive disaster and stop an ancient threat lurking in the shadows!

Episode 6 - 11 Sep. 2020

TRON

The Doctor battles against the mysterious forces of the MASTER CONTROL PROGRAM.

Episode 7 - 30 Jan. 2022



The Silence

The Doctor finds herself in 1600s Mexico. Can she stop The Silence from infiltrating the church and destroying the writings of gifted poet Juana Inés de la Cruz?

Episode 8 - 31 Aug. 2022

Doctor Who vs. the Boglins

The Boglins are invading! 1980s rubber creatures return to cause havoc for The Doctor and her local buddies. Can our heroes stop the invasion and make peace with everyone's fave retro squidgy swamplings?



DON'T BLINK GAME REVIEW

By Dave Chapman

Let's start this off with the important part of a review: I want to play Don't Blink a little more to be sure, but it may well be one of my top three favourite Doctor Who games. Now that you've got my opinion I hope you'll keep reading to the end.

Doctor Who: Don't Blink is an asymmetrical tactical game, in which one player controls eight Weeping Angels, and the other players take the roles of the Doctor (Matt Smith's 11th Doctor, specifically) and three of his companions (Amy, Rory, and Clara). The story so far, is that the TARDIS has crashed on a spaceship full of Weeping Angels. The Doctor and his Companions must survive long enough to retrieve four components to repair the TARDIS and escape.

The Angels' player starts the round by secretly selecting up to four Angels to activate that round. Then the Heroes may move up to six spaces, ending their movement facing any direction they choose (this is important) and select either a "Blink" or "Don't Blink" card. The other Heroes are allowed to know each other's cards but they should remain hidden from the Angels' player.

The four chosen Angels are revealed and that player has four Action Points to spend however they see fit. The most common actions are moving up to nine spaces and capturing an adjacent Hero that can't see them. Weeping Angels are FAST, they say Don't Blink for a reason. As long as they don't cross into the Line of Sight of a Hero or another Angel they could potentially move up to 36 spaces, using all four



Action Points and the board is only 18×18 spaces across, with walls and other obstacles along the way. If an Angel is seen they must pause their action, that Hero must reveal if they chose a Blink or Don't Blink card. If they Blinked, the Angel is not seen and may continue their action(s) and the Blink Card is returned to the Player's collective hand. If they Didn't Blink, the Angel is seen and is frozen with any incomplete part of the action forfeited, but that Don't Blink card is permanently removed from the game, creating a sort of ticking clock for the Heroes.

Managing your Line of Sight is probably the most important part of this game. A Hero can see one space to their left and right, and all spaces in their current room in front of them. The cardboard standees have the character image on one side, and a silhouette of them on the back, to clearly differentiate which direction they are facing. They can only see through a doorway if they are adjacent to that door, and can only see the space immediately on the other side of

the door. Heroes can also drag Angels during their movement, and if two Angels that were selected for that turn start in the same room and are in a straight line from each other, they are both frozen and can't take actions that round.

Those are the basic rules, leaving out some of the nuances. The rulebook isn't as long as it looks, as it has lots of example graphics. But it's also slightly unclear on a number of the rules. For example, we played the following scenario: if an Angel starts in Line of Sight of a Hero, that Hero immediately reveals their Blink/Don't Blink card. In that situation, the Angel player must spend an action point and attempt an action before the card is revealed. That makes life MUCH harder on the Heroes. Similarly, we assumed that Angels used similar Line of Site rules, meaning they could see each other in adjacent doorway spaces (nope, same room only) and if they moved into a straight line with another active Angel, they were both frozen (also nope, only if they start that way). That oops made life



much easier on the Heroes, and to be perfectly honest they need all the help they can get. The game is intentionally weighted in favour of the Angels, and that isn't a "bad" thing, per se. The Angels won every game we played but had we not misunderstood that revealing your Don't Blink card rule, it probably would have been much closer. Both sides of the game pose a very different puzzle to solve, and I personally like that.

OK, here's where the eyes of any non-Whovians reading this might start glazing over a bit. The nerdy stuff comparing this to the show's canon.

This game is NOT based on the episode titled Blink. It is more similar to The Time of the Angels, but it's still a completely original story. The one big thing that every fan I've met has asked is "Why Amy, Rory, and Clara?" It's a valid question since technically Clara never met Amy and Rory and certainly never travelled with them. Although there will always be some grey in that, as the Ponds did interact with an "echo" or "splinter" of Clara named Oswin Oswald, and Clara's TARDIS, in the form of an old American Diner, may or may not be the same diner from an earlier episode with the Ponds. (Clara's Impossible Girl storyline covers multiple seasons and Doctors, and is a topic for a different day and a different article.)

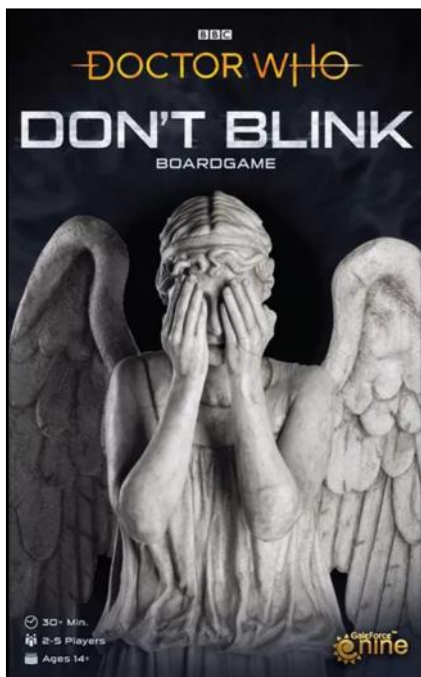
As for specifically why Clara and not River, who is much more closely connected to Amy and Rory, the only theory I've seen is that using Alex Kingston's likeness would have cost more, but who really knows. It's equally worth mentioning that these three are also packaged together in an expansion to another of

Gale Force Nine's games, Doctor Who: Time of the Daleks... WITH River Song. All in all, the rulebook is far from perfect, and the nerdy details are a bit debatable, but the game still has a good level of challenge for both sides of the table and is a ton of fun. The lack of both canon and continuity means that Gale Force Nine could very easily release small expansions or promo characters with new Special Don't Blink cards (something I skipped over for brevity) and I hope they do exactly that.

An uncut version of this review can be read at <https://therathole.ca> Lynnvander Studios developed Don't Blink and can be found at lynnvander.rocks

They are also on [Facebook](#)

Gale Force Nine can be found at www.gf9.com or on [Facebook](#)



DOCTOR CLUELESS: A REDACTED REVIEW

By Nick Smith

The critics have spoken. The BBC Studios audio saga *Redacted* is a hit, even better than the real thing according to some.

The Guardian's Miranda Sawyer found it *fun and engaging*. The Sydney Morning Herald's Stephen Brook wrote that it was an, '*exciting, atmospheric and absorbing drama,*' *proclaiming that the best Doctor Who was on our phones*. The We Are Cult website loved it, calling the final episode, *Salvation, beautiful*.

It's wonderful to have a show about, as We Are Cult pointed out, '*three powerful queer women, in a show led by powerful queer women.*' But take away the commendable diversity aspect and it's a right old mess. There are too many things going on in each episode, which are barely followed up in the next instalment. It's obvious that the series only had two weeks of preproduction

per producer Ella Watts.

Watts and co. had a great opportunity here, to show how talented they are and entertain radio listeners – a little-used outlet for *Doctor Who*, notwithstanding Big Finish's off-air efforts. Instead, we get a crazy-paved, extremely self-referential story about shallow, clueless youngsters without the Alicia Silverstone style.

Beloved characters like Rani Chandra (Anji Mohindra), Petronella Osgood (Ingrid Oliver) and Madame Vastra (voiced here by Doon Mackihan) make appearances that are so ephemeral that they are hardly worth having. I'm also disappointed that, yet again, Jodie Whittaker's Doctor is marginalized, as if the BBC was embarrassed by her or afraid of her haters. The 'redacted' scenario is a clever way to make Cleo Proc-





tor (Charlie Craggs), Abby McPhail (Lois Chimimba) and Shawna Thompson (Holly Quin-Ankrah) the main characters, without the Doctor stealing the show. However, I'd prefer to follow the Doctor, and Whittaker didn't get enough screentime on telly as it was.

Perhaps my expectations were too high; I was excited to hear brand new BBC-created Who material, especially in a year lacking a full season on TV. The first episode, SOS, was intriguing, introducing the Blue Box Files podcast, incorporating references to the show, and a Love and Monsters-esque group of curious friends looking for clues to the TARDIS' existence.

As the above reviews suggest, Redacted has plenty of positives. Anything that brings our show critical attention and adoration is a plus. Cragg's performance is always enjoyable and Cleo is a great quality with a relatable backstory. Cleo gets the best and funniest lines and holds the whole series together. The sound design, effects and music are

all imaginative, slick and contemporary. The guest appearances from Whittaker as the Thirteenth Doctor and Jemma Redgrave as Kate Stewart add essential gravitas to the adventure.

Apart from the lack of good, elegant writing, one of the biggest disappointments for me is the superficial storyline. Doctor Who has such a deep well of themes and ideas to draw from. Ten short, breathless episodes can't hope to do it justice. Let's hope that the BBC tries a similar series, with or without the same main characters, with stronger, more consistent writing in the near future.



Artist:
Rosie

DOCTORS AND DALEKS RPG REVIEW

By Dave Chapman

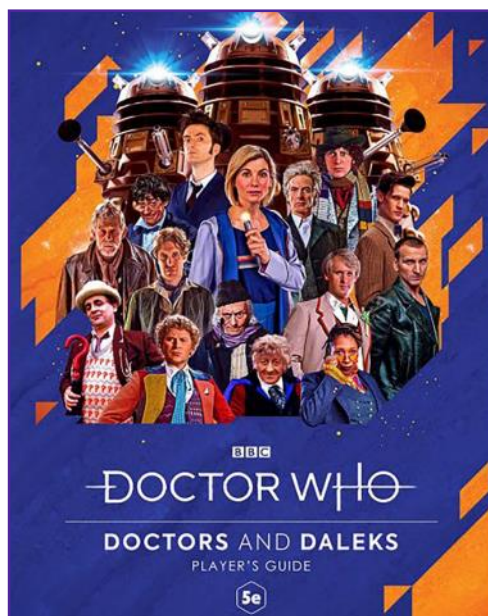
"D&D" is a term known even to non-gamers. Dungeons & Dragons; a game which is sometimes referred to as the oldest or most popular Table Top Roleplaying game. For the record, we're not here to discuss the veracity of that, it's really just a throwaway preamble.

In the 1980s Dungeons & Dragons was one of the largest targets of the movement that would become known as the Satanic Panic. It can be argued that the negative press surrounding that movement helped to increase the visibility, and subsequently the popularity, of the game at the time. Like many others I came into the hobby via AD&D (Advanced Dungeons & Dragon, AKA Second Edition), blissfully unaware of the furore. Although I sure did read a

book my mother had been given talking about kids dying in sewers trying to find Ninja Turtles, and the evil of cartoons like He-Man, Care Bears, and even Disney's Cinderella. Again, this is just framing things for newer or non-gaming readers who may not know these historical tidbits and providing a bit of my own perspective.

Jump ahead to the advent of Dungeons & Dragons Fifth Edition. I played a bit with friends but also started reviewing other game systems for a now-defunct website. I found that I didn't have the time or desire to commit to another scale high fantasy setting. When I launched my website, TheRatHole.ca, one of the guiding decisions I made was that I wanted very little to do with Dungeons & Dragons and several other systems that I often refer to as "Big Box RPGs." As my site grew, I covered several third-party products using the 5E Open Gaming License (OGL). I also added new writers who enjoyed Fifth Edition more than I do, and there's no reason not to let them write about what they know. What I know is Doctor Who, and that brings us to why you are presumably reading this: Doctors and Daleks or Doctor Who: The Roleplaying Game meets Fifth Edition.

From here on I'm mostly going to refer to Dungeons and Dragons Fifth Edition as "5E". It's just easier that way. Another abbreviation that is important to mention is "SRD" which stands for System Reference Document. Historically, one



of the largest impediments to playing a roleplaying game the size of 5E has always been the cost and perceived need for all of the source books. The solution across much of the industry was to create free SRDs online. They have no art or flavour, simply the barebones rules of a game.

Knowing the term SRD is important because there is, and likely never will be, a "Core Rulebook" for Doctors and Daleks. It doesn't really need one. The Player's Guide, which is what I'll be talking about here, has most of the information about how to play the game. When it wants to give the Player more detailed information, or additional options, it refers them to the SRD online. The other place that Players are sometimes referred to is the myriad of books available for The Doctor Who Roleplaying Game. While both games are from Cubicle 7 Entertainment, and are largely written by the same team, I wasn't expecting that sort of direct connection between them. I was thrilled to see that

happen, as well as the acknowledgement that many of the changes made to the traditional 5E ruleset for Doctors and Daleks are adapted from that game's Vortex System.

One of the biggest, and most obvious, changes is actually mechanically insignificant. That is how the game addresses combat. 5E can do many things, but at its heart, it is very much combat focused. The Doctor is very much against violence so that seems very incongruent. Even in their most "action oriented" incarnations, The Doctor would much rather see a situation resolved peacefully. The solution to this incongruity is nothing short of elegant. Even in a sword slashing 5E dungeon crawl, the trail of monstrous bodies left in the Player's wake happens as a way to advance the overall story. It happens to advance the plot. So is there really a difference between beheading a goblin and the goblin fleeing? Sometimes, but generally, the goblin is still gone and there will always be more goblins either way. If you can

THE DOCTOR'S UNIVERSE

The Doctor has travelled to almost every corner of the universe, from the dawn of time to the final moments. It is only fitting to finish this beginner's guide to the Doctor's Universe with a brief glimpse at some of the aliens and creatures that the Doctor has encountered.

After learning about the Time Lords and the Time War that saw their demise, we start the tour of the rest of the Universe with the Doctor's, and the Time Lords', most formidable enemy.

DALEKS

The Daleks originated on the planet Skaro, where the devastating war between the Thals and the Kaleds led to the Kaled scientist Davros developing the genetically engineered variant of his species that he named the Daleks. Placing these mutants within heavily armoured shells, he created the Daleks to wipe out the Thals, but in doing so, he engineered the demise of the Kaleds as well.

The Daleks are feared throughout the galaxy. The word 'Dalek' describes the meeting of mind and machine, created when an alien known as a mutant Kaled pilots a heavily armoured shell. These tank-like shells provide the 'support', protection from radiation, propulsion, and above all, deadly weaponry.

CHAPTER 9 | A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE DOCTOR AND THE DALEKS

Daleks have advanced energy weapons that are capable of disintegrating a person in a matter of seconds, always preceded by the chilling robotic cry of 'EXTERMINATE'. Beside these weapons, a manipulator arm shaped like a plunger allows the Dalek to interact with technology, and in some cases, scan minds for information or suffocate people. The chassis of the Dalek opens to reveal the alien pilot within a mass of fleshy tentacles surrounding a single large eye and a brain. The mutants are vulnerable without their shells, but can, if threatened, move and attack, strangling their victims with strong tentacles.

Daleks are a species that constantly evolve, modifying themselves and inventing to face greater challenges. Some can hover; while others have heavier weapons. The armoured plating of a Dalek's hull is nearly impossible to damage, though the mobile eyestalk that allows the Dalek to magnify and scan its surroundings is more vulnerable to attack. Bewary, though the spheres embedded in the lower part of the Dalek's chassis can act as a powerful self-destruct system. When faced with a Dalek, most people find that the best solution is to run.

Daleks are filled with a deep hatred for anyone who is not a Dalek. An electronic device called a cortex vault is implanted in the mutant to ensure that they do not feel any empathy for their enemies. When it is removed they are capable of learning emotions. They seek to exterminate all other species without mercy or hesitation, even turning on their own kind to punish any rebellion or deviance from the putty of their desire to kill.

Despite the Doctor's best efforts to stop them, they swept across the galaxy, exterminating any other species they discovered and eventually taking part in the Last Great Time War, which left the Daleks weakened and scattered, and the Time Lords seemingly eradicated. Statistics for Daleks can be found on page 318.



talk down a Cyberman long enough to escape, is that any different than finding a way to kill one? The Cyberman is still no longer a threat and there will always be more Cybermen either way. So why not make "Hit Points" into "Plot Points"? That's what they did. So instead of having a measure of physical fortitude, Characters have a narrative measure of success. When a Character runs out of Plot Points they don't die, they are incapacitated, or they surrender (which isn't always bad), or are otherwise taken out of the current encounter in whatever way best suits the narrative at the time.

Two other notable changes are the lack of Alignment and Languages. The Universe isn't black and white, and neither are people. Besides, the Doctor isn't exactly known for travelling with irredeemably "evil" companions. The Translation Circuit on the TARDIS renders most languages understandable. If the GM wants to have that circuit malfunction or whathaveyou, there's nothing saying they can't, but there's no reason to include Language on the Character Sheets. To be honest, I can't think of a single time in any game where the inability to communicate enhanced gameplay.

[Just a side note regarding that comment. It is admittedly ableist and reflects my personal experiences alone. Gaming is super accessible and should always be so. There are great anecdotes of players (especially in school groups) who may be deaf or aren't as fluent in a given language, and GMs can integrate that into the story to the benefit of everyone. The inclusion or exclusion of language rules in a game should never be used to create real world barriers to play.]

There is one other major change that is arguably more extreme than Plot Points. Quips. The Player's Guide describes Quips as "...special abilities that represent the power of knowledge and the strength of words in Doctors and Daleks". They are the analogue to spells in 5E and are handled similarly. Certain classes have access to more quips, but every class has some. Like 5E spells, Quips have limited uses, except for Cantrip Quips which can be used as much as desired. At the end of the section, there is a further list of 5E spells and equivalent Quip names, but without great detail. It is up to the Game Master to determine how it is used within the context of the game. One thing that amused me here is that In North America, the word Cantrip is almost exclusively used in the context of magic in gaming. But one of the dictionary definitions for the word is "artful shamming meant to deceive" with no magical reference whatsoever. Whether that was an intentional thing or just a bleed over in 5E terminology, I think that makes it an even more perfect term here.

Another substantial part of most roleplaying games is Character Creation. You can download pre-prepared characters from the Cubicle 7 website, but many groups dedicate an entire session of play to just creating characters. (Often called Session Zero) I won't go into great detail here, but I will quickly touch on two essential areas: Species and Class.

Since the humanoid form is one of the most common in the Universe, there is a note about Cyborgs, Aliens, and Psychics. Most alien Concepts can be built from a Human starting point. (Let's be honest, we all know that's a BBC televi-

sion budget thing, and an ease-of-use thing in most games, but just run with it.) The Species included in this book are Human, Silurian, Sontaran, and Time Lord/Gallifreyan. Each Species has several pages of detail and diversity on each, with a very long section on Gallifreyan abilities (aka Feats). The Silurian section includes specific details and differences between the Welsh and Wenley Moor Silurians. While it doesn't include Sea Devils, this is one of the places that the book brings up Doctor Who: The Roleplaying Game source-books. Specifically, it notes The Silurian Age (which I've reviewed at TheRatHole.ca/who) and Paternoster Investigations books, with Sea Devils being included in the former.

Your Character Class is basically what your character does and how they fit into the world around them. In 5E and other fantasy games, this tends to be variations on things like Fighter, Rouge, Magic User, Healer, etcetera. In Doctors and Daleks, the Classes are Charm-

er, Empath, Protector, Stalwart, Thinker, and Trickster. When you choose a Class it will impact the character both thematically and mechanically. Mechanically, different Classes have access to distinct Quips, equipment, dice, and add bonuses to your stats. Thematically it informs (not dictates) how your Character may choose to act.

A Character's actions in the game are important and bring us to one of the most meaningful changes imported from Doctor Who: The Roleplaying Game. In 5E, players roll dice and add modifiers to determine Initiative, the order in which they act. In both DWTRPG and Doctors and Daleks, your actions determine the Initiative order, although the rules do allow for using the more traditional rolling method. The initiative order is predetermined as:

- Player Talkers
- NPC/Enemy Talkers
- Player Doers

DOCTORS AND DALEKS | PLAYERS GUIDE

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CHARMER

Charmers enjoy verbally engaging with others, even hostile ones. They believe that they can talk their way through any situation and often offer themselves as the 'voice of the party' or at least, the loudest one. They can cut deals with enemies that would otherwise kill, convince wary creatures that your group is on its side, and when the going gets tough, use their command of language to surround the resolve of hostile enemies.

Despite their name, Charmers aren't necessarily charming; simply those that use words as weapons. Though the archetype of a smooth talker could certainly be a Chamer, many confuse opponents with fast talk, nonverbal arguments, or technobabble. Some use boldness and confidence, and even intimidation to help their group succeed. Others rely on their aura of friendliness and non-threatening presence to coax those they meet into helping them.

Some Charmers make great leaders, whilst others speak only when needed, but they always make their voice heard. Charmers prefer words and actions to planning and thinking things out — They'd rather charge into a situation and rely on their quick wits to get them through it, rather than hold back until a well-crafted scheme can be designed and implemented.

Play a Chamer if:

- You enjoy being the centre of attention.
- You want to discourage your enemies from causing harm with carefully placed comments.
- You like negotiating your way out of trouble.

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CHAPTER 4 | CHARACTER CLASSES

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Level	Proficiency Bonus	Hit Points	Charm Points	Features
1	+2	1	3	Emotional Appeal, Magnetic Personality, Expertise, Quips
2	+3	1	3	Emotional Appeal: Top Heartstrings
3	+3	2	3	Archetype
4	+3	2	3	Ability Score Improvement
5	+3	3	4	Emotional Appeal: Ice-Firewater
6	+3	3	4	Archetype Feature
7	+3	4	4	Command Attention
8	+3	4	4	Ability Score Improvement
9	+4	5	4	Charismatic Impact
10	+4	5	5	Archetype Feature
11	+4	5	5	Ability Score Improvement
12	+5	6	5	Ability Score Improvement
13	+5	7	5	Uncover Secret
14	+5	7	5	Archetype Feature
15	+5	8	5	Ability Score Improvement
16	+5	8	5	Ability Score Improvement
17	+5	9	5	Ability Score Improvement
18	+5	9	5	Ability Score Improvement
19	+5	10	6	Ability Score Improvement
20	+5	10	6	Ability Score Improvement

CREATING A CHARMER

Charmers have the gift of the gab, often accompanied by maternal social acumen that has earned them through life. When developing your Chamer's backstory, think about how their charismatic presence helped them succeed and what shortcomings they may have that their personality was able to overcome.

What was the first challenge that your charm conquered? Were you appreciated for your outgoing personality, or were you constantly put in your place by authority figures who didn't appreciate it? How did your charm make you the person that you are today? What shortcomings do you have that a bold presence, a loud voice, or a quick wit help cover? Are you a natural leader or do you use your voice to undermine those who would abuse authority? Were you invited to join the group because of your personality or did you convince them into letting you come?

FAST APPROACH

When assigning ability scores, Charisma should be your highest score, followed by Intelligence. Select the Deception and Persuasion skills, then double your Proficiency Bonus in these skills with Expertise. Select the Hero or Seeker Background.

CLASS FEATURES

As a Chamer, you gain the following class features.

PLOT POINTS

Plot Dice: 1d6 per Chamer level

Plot Points at first level: 6 + your Constitution modifier

Plot Points at higher levels: 1d6 (or d4) + your Constitution modifier per Chamer level after 1st.

- NPC/Enemy Doers
- Player Fighters
- NPC/Enemy Fighters

This unique system reinforces The Doctor's emphasis on a peaceful resolution to conflict over a combative one. To be perfectly blunt, it is probably the most dramatically elegant initiative system I've ever encountered in any game I've ever reviewed. In talking to some of Cubicle 7 staff who helped test and run the system, this is the change that almost always blows 5E players' minds. It's so wildly different that at this point in the review, it probably qualifies as "burying the lead" in comparison to the other changes.

Obviously, there are way more specific rules that I'm skipping, dedicated to journeying through all of time and space, and a look at some of the Doctor's most iconic antagonists. Since this is a Players Guide and not a Core Rulebook, I'm thrilled to see a Game Master specific section at all. Encouraging and supporting new players to take on the responsibility of a GM is vital to the long-term health of any game.

After praising Cubicle 7 earlier for pointing to existing material, I was surprised and disappointed they didn't men-

tion the DWTRPG Gamemaster's Companion book. You can find my review of that book (and more) at TheRatHole.ca/who but to sum it up, it is one of the best books on how to GM I've ever read. Yes, I've said that a couple of times, and I honestly do mean it. The work Cubicle 7 has done with Doctor Who is amazing.

The Players Guide is the first of three books to be digitally released for Doctors and Daleks. As of my writing this, the digital edition of the Alien Archive and The Keys of Scaravore books are expected before the end of 2022 with the physical releases of all three, individually or as a collector set, scheduled for mid-2023. Sufficed to say, between this, the second edition of DWTRPG, and the entire 60th anniversary, next year is looking to be a banner year for the franchise. Because of the sheer prevalence of 5E in both the gaming market and pop culture, Doctors and Daleks will be an easier game to find players for, and it's going to be hitting tables hard.



THE POWER OF THE DOCTOR

Review by Richard D. Rhodes

"Goodbyes only hurt because what came before was so special..."

And was it? Was the Thirteenth Doctor's tenure and ultimate swansong, *The Power of the Doctor*, special? Now, there's a question and a half: an episode that not only marks the end of one era, with the wholesale departure of cast and crew, it also had the added burden of marking the centenary of Doctor Who's producers of the last 59 years: that bastion of British culture worldwide, the BBC.

Before addressing whether this special was special, let's address me: I've been around for a while. The first time I saw the Doctor regenerate on 'live' TV was back when Pertwee's bouffant locks gave way to Baker's teeth and curls. Way back then, my Dad had told me that Three was on his way out and I remember watching the change with trepidation and spent much of Hinchcliffe's tenure as producer saying that the leading actor and the show weren't as good as they used to be: a familiar cry from parts of fandom in any era of the show, it's the rite of passage for becoming one. It didn't stop me watching and, by the time the *Whose Doctor Who* edition of *Lively Arts* aired in 1977 I was a confirmed 'fan' with a complete – and ever growing – set of Target books to prove the point.

Courtesy of the reissued *Making of Doctor Who* - I missed out on the *Radio Times 10th Anniversary Special* by a

few years - I could list every televised story by title and, indeed, writer. While I haven't maintained this ability (single story episodes did for me in that regard), I have seen the subsequent episodes of the show, both old and new, coupled with most of the earlier surviving ones, along with a fair few of the audios – both legitimate and not – and novels (I prefer the Virgin days to BBC Books but who doesn't...?).

The point being that I am no stranger to this crazy old franchise, regeneration or cast and crew changes. They come and go with alarming regularity, so it seems. Gone are the days of one producer remaining in charge across four incumbent Doctors. Well, for now at least.

This is not to say I am blasé about regeneration and the concomitant change in the show's lead. Done right, it is a massive moment, a talking point that grabs not only the attention of fans and loyal viewers, but the average uncommitted viewer too. It leaves the show being talked about or, at least in 2022, shared widely on social media.

And was the regeneration done right?

Yes, I think it was: *The Power of the Doctor* was watched 'live' by 4.04 million viewers in the UK and, itself quite a respectable figure by modern standards, was boosted to 5.3 million viewers within a week through catch-up viewing. While the show always pulls in catch-up viewers, it's clear that a fair few of the

extra viewers was down to people hearing just who Jodie Whittaker had changed into in those closing moments of the episode. Doctor Who was – is – being talked about again and there certainly was plenty to talk about: the cinematography of the TARDIS sat atop a high craggy coastal rock (Durdle Door, a limestone arch in Dorset – not too far from the setting of Broadchurch and the beginnings of Jodie Whittaker's association with showrunner Chris Chibnall) was absolutely stunning and all the more amazing to consider that it was all achieved with green-screen. The regeneration energies bursting across the sea presented a glorious image and the 'surprise' transformation into David Tennant (10? 14*?) certainly got tongues wagging with it already being debated why the clothes changed as well as the body. Personally, I put this down to expediency on the part of the incoming producers: with three specials coming in 2023, they need to get the narrative wheels turning quickly without the inevitable clothes-changing scenes – there'll be an on-screen explanation for it... probably... but for now we've a year to wrangle over that one.

So, yes, cynical, world-weary old me was suitably impressed by the regeneration itself. But what about the eighty-odd minutes that came before it? Were they as impressive? Was this feature-length Doctor Who special, special?

If nothing else, it was properly feature-length at an hour and a half. While not Hollywood blockbuster feature-length, this was not one of those hour-long, barely longer than a standard episode, specials. This was The Five Doctors feature length. This was proper, celebration-length Doctor Who. At last.

And here I take another side-step into the reality of my world. I have a partner, a Not-We. Someone who quite enjoyed Doctor Who as a child, thought that the initial reboot under Russell T Davies was pretty good but who felt, years on, that the law of diminishing returns had really savaged the show and finds the current production 'not very good'. This is being polite. I don't share the same sentiments and, having seen so many iterations of the show, take the rough with the smooth, trying to see it as a whole rather than picking at its flaws; do that and, yes, the whole thing could unravel. I have enjoyed Thirteen's tenure well enough, but it has – probably, with the exception of Rosa – been an era where I haven't rewatched any episodes. I have slipped, dear reader, from being a committed fan to a loyal viewer. However, I am not a Not-We yet, so all is not lost.

So, there we were, the Not-We and me, on the sofa at 8pm on the evening of Sunday 23rd October 2022. Yes, I know it started at 7.30pm but I have long-since stopped watching anything 'live' on TV. From memory, the only thing I have seen 'live' in recent history was the coverage of the death of the Queen. Which, aside from being deeply ironic in one sense, is neither here nor there except in noticing how even loyal Doctor Who viewers time-shift things around their real lives these days.

The Not-We looked at the screen suspiciously: this was none of the usual sci-fi fare we may normally stream. I admit what it is and there's the ritual face-pulling and complaining. I point out that it's a special episode, marking the BBC's 100th anniversary and Jodie Whittaker's exit from the show. At this news the Not-We perked up: the Not-We had

never taken to the Doctor's gender realignment and was hoping for better (male) days ahead.

Within moments, the Not-We was complaining about the special effects, saying the space train looked cheap. I think that, taken in context against some of the show's more risible attempts at such shots, it's not bad, especially for a pre-credit segment and the whole thing was certainly fast-moving. Space train. Troopers. Cybermen (or is that CyberMasters?). Blaster-fire. All very... familiar. The Not-We

wanted to know whether this was a compilation from previous stories. No, said I – look, it's that bald bloke from Broadchurch. However, as soon as noticed, the moment had passed.

Then, there was the TARDIS crew – or is that 'fam', these days? – shinning down an all-too short ladder in space-suits to rescue the day. Again, all very snappy but... why? The Not-We has also noticed: why didn't they just land the TARDIS inside the train? Height restrictions, I wonder, or just an excuse for breathless exposition and running



around? I began to fear that the Not-We had been influencing my thinking, insidiously, all these years. I was also left wondering – given the short ladder – how they got back into the TARDIS (some kind of super-leap achieved by reversing the polarity of the magnetic boots...? Silly, but with this as it was, probable.)

Then, in the mayhem, the Cybes (apologies for the non-canonical terminology) reached their goal: a child locked in a box. My fan gene was activated – and, doubtless, the same in many worldwide – anticipating a story which would peel back the whole Timeless Child, Fugitive Doctor, Division and early-days of Gallifrey arc – soon we'd be seeing the Doctor with a fob watch (last seen being dropped into the TARDIS workings) and a carefully woven conclusion to the whole Thirteen/Chibnall era (and, who knows, a proper resolution to the whole Flux storyline to boot). A dramatic conclusion that would have us all loose-jawed and amazed to finally see the intricate narrative plan laid out before us in all its perfection.

Not much later, such expectations were thwarted as the potential Timeless Child turned out to be a Qurunx, an enslaved energy being from before the Dawn of Time, or some such expositional place. Equally, fob-watches, the Division and early Gallifrey were all highly conspicuous due to their absence. Suffice it to say that the Not-We was unimpressed at a child being chained up: if it was trying to protect itself by taking the appearance of something vulnerable, something people would care for, why not appear as a baby or a puppy? And why maintain the

ruse once the Cybes had hold of it? What do they care? Why not just (given the story's ending) blast them apart and get on its way? Particularly as the humans on the train had it in a crate, surely escape could have been quite simple at that point? Poor old beings from the Dawn of Time, they don't half make life difficult for themselves, probably why there's so few of them left...

The Not-We made disparaging remarks about the Cyberleader's fancy collar, it being impractical and would probably catch on things a lot when invading planets and the like. While not bringing myself to disagree, and denying the urge to explain how the Master destroyed Gallifrey, converted all the Time Lords into CyberMasters, et al, I was left wondering about the fallen Cybes and their self-repair through regeneration – all well and good from the perspective of the show's continuing narrative, but how did the aforementioned Broadchurch bloke recognise it as regeneration? Is regeneration such a ubiquitous skill in that part of the galaxy? Were these the Minyans of Minyos, last seen in Four's middle-years, familiar with Time Lord tech and destined as an important part of the narrative? Or were they the race the Timeless Child sprang from? No, nothing of the sort, not beyond being canon fodder. However, the trooper's recognition of regeneration still rankles. Not sure why. Perhaps a Big Finish spin-off audio series will explain?

However, I did enjoy the shots of the Cybes gyrating off into space away from the train: my inner ten-year old was lapping up this live-action realisation of Alan Willow's illustration of gravity-frustrated Cybermen, whirling

away from the Moon in Doctor Who and the Cybermen. I saw what you did there, Chibnall!

Then, suddenly, we were in Siberia, 1916. These left-field turns of direction and temporal location were not appreciated by the Not-We so I ignored the mounting complaints as we flitted from there to 2022 and missing pictures in art galleries. Hasn't this all been done before, asked the Not-We, when the paintings were all revealed to have the Master on them. Well, no, not quite: there have been stories with paintings in them and the Master has made the world's populace look like him but, yes, tonally, there was a calling back to something. Later side-steps to St Petersburg brought praise of the sets, particularly of the Winter Palace, so all is not lost on the Not-We. As for me, I can't help but think that, as a celebration of 100 years of the BBC, this should have been 1922, that - maybe - Lord Reith could have made an appearance, as good a character as any for the Master to impersonate? But that would have thwarted Chibnall's sole reason for having the Master appear as Rasputin: the gloriously ridiculous moment of the Master/Rasputin dancing to Boney M's classic 70s hit, to the apparent chagrin of the Daleks and the Cybermen. Even the Not-We was entertained by that.

In fact, the Not-We was particularly taken by Sacha Dhawan's Master - as am I: a complete lunatic, at times, but very studied, meticulously portrayed and with much dark energy behind the madness. While I never warmed to the Simms Master (not in his RTD outings anyway, where he was too much comic-book supervillain for my liking; he felt

more measured and dangerous when he returned in Twelve's latter days), I found Missy and her character evolution fascinating (I see her turning to goodness being down to Munchausen's -by-proxy and the character's return to evil as a 'recovery' from the Doctor's attempted conditioning). Dhawan's version of the Master, while retaining the former's insanity, was, especially, in his quieter moments, deeply unsettling. He was brooding and threatening, capable of anything. It would be a pity if this iteration of the Master is the last we see of him, Dhawan being such a strong actor. However, if it is, he went out on a high with many of the best lines in the special. It was almost a case of greatest hits with dialogue echoing that in Logopolis - cutting the Doctor down to size - and the McGann Movie, 'dressing for the occasion' amongst those lines I spotted. Meta references to the Dalek Master Plan/Master Dalek Plan also played to the fans in us all and provided more levity. Within the narrative of the story, the Master's alleged omnipotence by him supposedly swallowing the Cyberium, didn't really stack up: if he could 'see everything' how come he didn't see how it would all end? Still, as many stories have now shown us over the years, Cybertech isn't all it's cracked up to be, often with woeful conceptual flaws - however, at least they've finally plugged the one about being susceptible to gold, so things must be looking up.

When it comes to the Cybermen - and the Daleks - the Not-We was bored and frustrated. Bored because they're used too much these days and frustrated because the continuity references, or the perception of them, was baffling. To be honest, I finished the episode

feeling the same for similar reasons. I find it frustrating that the show's big beasts were back again and that their motivation felt, well, a bit lame.

Let's take the Daleks: another one in traitor mode (they really do have issues with their idiosyncratic free-thinkers) and a bizarre scheme to flood the world with lava by drilling into volcanos and using a big old pile-driver to disturb the Earth's tectonic plates. Aside from feeling a bit Dalek Invasion of Earth-ish (borderline permissible as this is a celebratory episode when all's said and done), it really is completely illogical if you think about it. The Daleks could have saved themselves the bother and simply fired a few missiles at volcanos from space, surely. It would have also spared me the Not-We bemoaning the fact the humans inside the volcano didn't seem to mind the inevitable heat.

Meanwhile, I was left wondering just how much energy Ace's baseball bat actually absorbed from the Hand of Omega, given its ability to still deliver a lethal charge, when used to attack Daleks, some three decades later. The Not-We simply saw a human beating up Daleks with a baseball bat, sealing the view that modern Daleks were 'rubbish': being unaware of Remembrance of the Daleks was probably also true for most of the casual audience. While moments like this are great fan-service, I do wonder what floating viewers were left thinking and, unless framed carefully for the uninitiated to understand, such callbacks to the show's heritage remain a double-edged sword: great for those who are in on the reference but baffling and alienating for outsiders unless the writers and producers are very careful.

As for the Cybermen, within the ongoing narrative of Doctor Who, their inclusion, alongside the Master was a continuation of what has gone before and, relatively, recently. But they are the Master's heavies, no more, no less (have become incredibly bad shots in the process) and lack any potential of developmental depth. Which is a shame as it devalues both the Master and the Cybermen. Hopefully, after this, both can go their separate ways and we can end the modern era's fascination of the Master with the Cybermen. While not quite as tasteless as Missy's resurrection of Earth's dead as Cybermen (a tone-deaf mistake by the then production team in my opinion, especially with what they did to the memory of the Brigadier) or as audacious as the Simm Master's 'genesis of the Cybermen' exploits, this latest crop of Time Lords-turned-Cybes lacks anywhere to go. The whole destroy/resurrect/destroy/subjugate Gallifrey saga, begun in the BBC Books range, is a narrative cul-de-sac which I wish had been left well alone, particularly as the Doctor's relationship with these ongoing calamities has become one of apparently increasing indifference – maybe it's because she has realised that's not where she's from, so she no longer cares at heart(s)? The much-heralded return of Ace and Tegan – when and how did they become such great friends, calling each other while on their latest missions? – was more fan-pleasing fun and reasonably well set-up with the wider audience. All the Not-We needed to understand was that they were former companions of the Doctor and, as such, performed the role of foreshadowing Yaz's immediate future: life beyond the Doctor. Sophie Aldred and Janet Fielding acquitted themselves well and I was sur-

prised at just how much of the episode was devoted to them: great to see more mature characters – female at that – getting such a slice of the action but it did feel that Chibnall was more entertained writing about them rather than the current incumbents of the TARDIS. With Dan written out as quickly as he was and with the Master taking centre-stage as the main villain of the piece, Yaz and the Doctor weren't exactly sidelined but they weren't prominent either. Coupled with the scattering of other former companions and four 'old school' Doctors, the Not-We was left wondering if this was about celebrating Classic Who rather than the modern era or, indeed, the BBC's centenary.

All these throwbacks were, for me, a delight. By the time Ian Chesterton appeared on screen, I was overcome with my love for this crazy series, pretty much as I had been when Sarah Jane Smith was first reintroduced in the new

series. Where the special was truly special, for this viewer anyway, was with the returning faces. While they are older – aren't we all? – the joy at being part of something exceptional was palpable: when Tegan was reintroduced to Five and Ace with Seven, for those with long enough memories, the emotional impact of those scenes was profound.

The Not-We was left unmoved but with a constant barrage of questions about who was who and how they all inter-related: if nothing else, this huge series of nods to the past sparked a lot of interest. Equally, as with all good things, I was left wanting more: if RTD2 does bring a range of spin-off shows with his forthcoming reclamation of the parent series, it would be nice to see more of these familiar faces and, if rumours are true, at least one of those former time-travellers in Graham's 'companions anonymous' circle will be back with us in 2023. Here's to that future.



It was cheering to see how the Guardians of the Edge celebrated Thirteen's strength of character after the Master's forced regeneration (why not drain the energy of a star rather than kidnapping a Qurunx? Killing the sun would have been much more of a threat to the Earth than Daleks pile-driving volcanos. (Moreover, would the forced regeneration as the Doctor-Master actually be the 14th Doctor, not Tennant?). Not that Whittaker's Doctor needed endorsement by the Classic Doctors, but it was nice to see, as it was to see them. In some quarters, Thirteen has been disparaged (not least by the Not-We alongside me on the couch) as an inconsequential, lightweight Doctor. I actually like her enthusiasm and general geekiness, I particularly liked seeing her gleefully slapping on her goggles and getting down to some kind of engineering job, as she did early on in her tenure and, again, while fixing Vinder's stranded ship – but why his return without mentioning a squeak about Bel or their child? More dropped narrative threads; but, with it, the temptation to announce their child as the Timeless Child has now gone.

What has irritated me with Thirteen, over time, is not the performance, but the lack of any sustained development of the character. While universe-shattering revelations have been made along the way and there has been some mention of trying to track down Division as a consequence, the Thirteenth Doctor has been given little movement and no proper resolution to the events she has witnessed. Her character, costume and portrayal barely shifted since her opening episodes. She remained broadly cheery, engaging in adventures

with her 'fam' and, generally, stalled when it comes to deeper, more emotional interaction with people. While social awkwardness has been a focus of other Doctors, particularly Twelve, it has never quite sat right with Thirteen and was begging exploration. Why couldn't she better engage with Graham over his illness? Why be awkward with Tegan and Ace when she will enthusiastically greet other characters in history? Ace – in her interaction with Seven's hologram – acknowledged there were things the Doctor struggled with, so why couldn't that point have been explored more with Thirteen and, especially, in her interaction with Yaz in their final episode? Legend of the Sea-Devils left them in an uncertain place. By the time The Power of the Doctor arrived, Yaz had become the Clara-type companion, full of daring, an almost-equal of the Doctor – uncertainly and endearingly so in Yaz's case, given the post-it note-strewn TARDIS console as she flew the machine with total accuracy to various destinations – but her relationship with the Doctor was now purely platonic, great friends but nothing more. It's Yaz who is portrayed as the hero of the piece, physically saving Dan and carrying the unconscious Doctor back to the TARDIS.

Ultimately, I am left feeling that the on-screen relationships around the Thirteenth Doctor were somewhat stilted and not what they could have been: behind-the-scenes footage of the cast seem far more energised and vibrant than the on-screen version; the restraint needed exploration and resolution.

The Not-We interpreted all this as a sometimes-uninteresting character be-

ing marginalised on screen. Not something I agreed with but can understand why this was the analysis, especially here. With Dhawan's Master regularly chewing the scenery, Thirteen was left in the shade much of the time and the denouement, freeing the energy creature and using the Cyberplanet to convert the erupting volcanos into metal sculptures, was more about technobabble than a satisfying character-focused resolution and, again, the Not-We piled on the derision.

Wrapped up in all of this was the end of Yaz's travels with the Doctor and, try as I might, I couldn't quite understand why Yaz would leave or the Doctor ask her to go. Other companions have stayed on across regenerations so why not her? On initial viewing, no matter how much ice-cream was consumed, the ending felt very abrupt and, to a great degree, 'cold'. While it was in-step with how the Doctor treated Graham in his later episodes, it felt too much was unsaid. It needed the burden, alluded to by Ace, addressing if only in part.

Later, on reflection, I now 'get' it more but only partially and, even then, am left feeling there's an unsatisfactory superficiality to the characters' motivation for parting: change was coming and they would rather avoid confronting that – by parting – than by seeing it through together. In Yaz's case, she was very humanly in love with the woman she knew, with that person and her image; anyone else just wouldn't be the same and wouldn't be what she fell in love with. Perhaps, the Doctor saw this and let her go? Or perhaps the Doctor just can never commit to anyone

or thing for very long and needed the first excuse to get the latest clingy human off their back? Regardless, what was on screen was touchingly played but the threads of closure needed greater exploration throughout the episode, taking in Dan's departure as that could have foreshadowed Yaz's parting much more so than it did.

So, I'm left pondering the special I'd just seen: something of a curate's egg, I felt. Much of it was fun and often silly entertainment, beautifully shot at times with huge chunks that didn't really cope with any degree of analysis. While it served long-term fans far better than casual viewers or even more recent fans, there were times it surrendered any hope of plausibility. For instance, when Tegan fell down the lift shaft, how did she save herself? No explanation was given. The show may be science fiction, but it still has to operate with some real-world rules. Plunge down a lift shaft and you'll come away with life-changing injuries or you'll be dead. Tegan brushing herself off when staggering through a doorway didn't wash. If you're going to surrender credibility to that degree you will lose the audience's credibility; there has to be a plausible explanation for everything, even if it is technobabble. There is no narrative tension if people can walk away from peril unscathed. Better, in



this instance, that Tegan had kept the parachute on, that she'd been given by Ace, and had deployed it as she fell. Her plunging into the dark, the sound of the chute unfurling, a ripping sound as it snagged on something and Tegan's 'rabbits' oath would have been all it needed to make much more sense. And that aside, the special achieved what it set out to do, to give Jodie Whittaker's Thirteenth a send-off with some memorable moments.

Meanwhile, the Not-We didn't care as that regeneration was upon us, with that reveal and, suddenly, the vibe was positive. Tennant's "What... What? What!" gave rise to a raft of enthusiasm and, suddenly, the Not-We was optimistically engaged, looking forward to the twin treats of Tennant and Tate reunited.

As I hope the general audience are: if nothing else, Russell T Davies knows how to tempt and play with the audience. Since recording of the 2023 specials started, the flirting with fandom and the general public, through social media snippets and wider publicity, has been endemic. Hopefully, with its own sixtieth anniversary just around the corner, Doctor Who has a long future ahead of it and, indeed, will be celebrating its own centenary one day.

It is somewhat ironic that the Doctor Who episode made to celebrate 100 years of the BBC was also the last, for now, to actually be made by the BBC. It is a case of speculation as to how long, given UK Government antipathy towards the public service broadcaster and uncertainty around its funding structure once the current Royal Charter runs out, the BBC will continue in anything like its current form. That

Doctor Who will now be made by an independent production company, Bad Wolf – itself born out of the reborn 21st-century version of Who – is a significant departure from the last 59 years and now that, beyond the UK and Ireland, distribution of any new Who material lies with Disney, we are in new and uncharted waters. To what degree the House of Mouse will demand and obtain creative input in the series remains to be seen but, whatever happens, the future is going to be a very different thing compared to its past.

By resurrecting the 70s diamond-logo (for the 60th only or longer?), the producers are pulling on the nostalgia heartstrings, just as The Power of the Doctor has done and, while the special made no narrative reference to the BBC or its history, the growing separation of Doctor Who from the organisation that developed, nurtured and, yes, at times, abandoned it – a growing goodbye – hurts a little more on reflection as what came before, the 100 years of the BBC and the first 59 years of its enduring offspring, Doctor Who, was so very, very special.



WE ARE ALL CURATORS

by Nick Smith

There was much wailing and gnashing of teeth when the floodwaters came. I'm not talking about the Great Flood but for me, when my shedload of Doctor Who merchandise got soaked and destroyed in 2015, it was an event of biblical proportions.

You name it, it was gone: VHS tapes, Radio Times clippings, fanzines, audiotapes, making-of and Target books, Doctor Who Weeklies and Magazines I'd collected since I was 7.

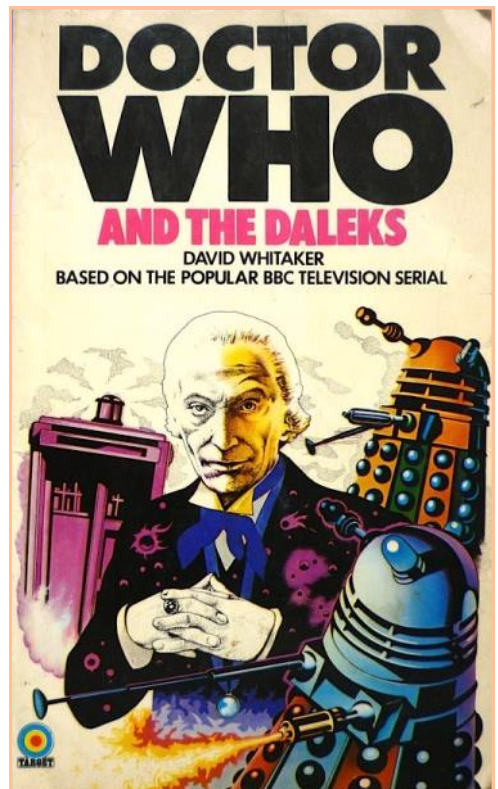
I'd paid about \$1000 for my mum to ship all my goodies from Lincolnshire, England to Charleston, South Carolina so I could have the items close to me. My mum painstakingly itemised the contents of a huge cardboard box and everything arrived in pristine condition. My partner insisted I keep the box outside in the humid shed but now and again I'd sneak some Targets or annuals into the house.

The rains came and so much was lost. I was one of the lucky ones. Parts of Charleston were soaked with almost 25 inches of rain in two days, according to CNBC. Meteorologists called it a '1,000 year event.' The dead rose from their graves as cemeteries were drenched, coffins floating down the street. Hundreds of people were evacuated and 30,000 lost power.

I tried to be philosophical - my family was safe and people are more important than objects - but all the time

and effort I'd spent gathering my treasure seemed like a waste, an evil joke that only the Master would want to crack.

Why do we covet Doctor Who merchandise? We allow ourselves to be bombarded by ads for collectibles and other related merch - I get one from Big Finish at least once a day - and we dream of owning what we see. We love our show and we want to enjoy as many of the Doctor's adventures as possible. But the real reason we collect, I believe, is to feel we are part of a



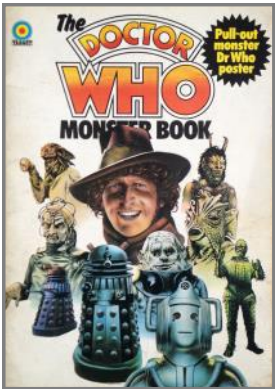
greater whole. While I don't always think of the other people buying a copy of the latest classic Blu-ray of a season but do I think about how Whovians en masse care about that season. We can all share something by buying a piece of it. I don't brag about my collection, post it on TikTok or show it to friends. I'm too busy trying to keep up with the novelizations. I don't care for the BBC but I do want to support Doctor Who like I support my favourite musician or football team. I want to help sustain the show; presumably purchasing merchandise helps with that..

I get that sense of collective enjoyment from social media posts, just as I used to get them from the letter columns in Doctor Who Magazine. I get it from my current girlfriend (who is cool with me keeping my possessions in our house). She cares about specific character relationships and the actors who play those characters. I feel like a mighty hunter-

gatherer when I bring home a book or comic that she wants to read with me. There's also the comfort of what I call nesting. As I rebuild the essentials of my collection, I buy bits and bobs that personalize my home with my own nostalgic touchstones. On a rare occasion, I buy memorabilia for friends as well - giving or receiving a slice of merchandise brings great joy and is a way of showing you care about the other person and take an interest in what they love.

It gives me a little bit of pleasure to look at my collection but causes a lot of stress, too, by the space it takes up and what I'm going to do with it when I move. I can't take it with me when I pass away, but I can will them on to my son. I hope that he gets pleasure from them. I hope they won't become a burden to him, that heavy yet wonderful weight of paper and priceless memories.

Fans want Doctor Who to be celebrated and remembered. As we build our treasure troves we become part of the programme's history, indexing and appreciating as we go. We are part of an amazing hive museum that can be shown to and shared with future generations. We are all curators.



MUSEUM OF CLASSIC SCI-FI

by Mark McManus

The tiny, beautiful village of Allendale is nestled in the rugged Northumberland countryside, equidistant between the two great most northern English cities of Carlisle and Newcastle. The drive there through the spectacular north Pennine countryside is rewarded with a warm welcome and a visit to the fantastic Museum of Classic Sci-Fi.

The Museum is the creation of Neil Cole, a lifelong Doctor Who fan has converted his basement into an exhibition which boasts over two hundred original props and costumes. Displays cover decades of landmark science-fiction movies and TV shows, with an emphasis on Doctor Who. Each of the first seven Doctors' eras are represented in this subterranean Mecca.

On Saturday 29th October Neil hosted an event at the Allendale Village Hall, with Whominaries Sophie Aldred, Graeme Harper, Margot Hayhoe, Keith Barnfather and Adrian Rigelsford as special guests. The day was a huge success, a lovely, intimate convention with plenty of time set aside for the 'meet and greet' with the guests. This was an opportunity to chat with the guests, get some autographs and photos, and mingle with the other attendees. Three impressive Daleks patrolled the village hall, along with a terrific Davros and various other creations.

Tickets included an opportunity to tour Neil's museum, which never fails to delight and impress. I visited last year for

the grand re-opening event following the pandemic and this time spotted some new exhibits even since then, alongside the many familiar favourites. Displaying so many precious artefacts in a striking manner is a masterful use of the space and Neil has skillfully restored many of them to their onscreen glory.

Visitors to Allendale have a couple of nice country pubs and some charming cafes to choose from lunch all within easy walking distance of the museum. Worth noting there is also plenty of free parking around the village.

Later in the afternoon the hall turned cinema for a screening of Reeltime Pictures' Doctor on Display - a documentary all about The Museum of Classic Sci-Fi. Hosted by Sophie Aldred, it tells the story of this amazing place, from disused cellar to space museum. What really comes across in the film is Neil's passion and hard work, and the sense of community in Allendale as the residents rallied around the 'AllenDalek' in





its famous battle against the local council's capricious planning decisions.

As dusk settled over the village, two panels rounded off the event with Neil acting as compere. First up, Sophie shared the stage with Reeltime Pictures' Keith Barnfather and director Roger Stevens. It was quickly acknowledged that as *The Power of the Doctor* had only aired six days previously, most of the audience would be excited to hear from Aldred about her experiences bringing the role of Ace back to the screen after so many years. As fans we are used to hearing behind-the-scenes stories that cover more technical aspects of production, but it was lovely to hear more personal recollections about the most recent episode: Sophie bursting into tears when she got the phone call; how she stayed behind after filming her scenes set under the volcano and ended up reading in lines for Jodie Whittaker and some of the other Doctors for *Guardians of the Edge* scene; and particularly touching was her account of William Russell becoming confused and John Bishop going out of his way to look after and comfort the older actor.

The second panel saw Graeme Harper join Margot Hayhoe on stage for tales

from behind the camera. I was particularly interested to learn that Harper had learned from *GoldenEye* and *Casino Royale* director Martin Campbell and what crucial advice he had imparted. They both talked about the dreaded Producer's Choice and the deleterious effect they saw it have on the BBC. Hayhoe worked on the 1981 BBC series *The Day of the Triffids* and Neil had expertly restored a model Triffid from the show, which stood menacingly on the stage throughout.

This was a lovely event, in a part of the country not well served for Doctor Who conventions. It was small enough to really spend some time with each guest without having to queue for hours. It's well worth a visit to the museum if you're in the area, and hopefully they will host more fantastic days like this one.



