

COSMIC MASQUE



DOCTOR
WHO
APPRECIATION
SOCIETY
CM XVIII

EDITORIAL

By Nick Smith

What is it to 'be a fan'? That is what Cosmic Masque is about.

This year I attended the IPRRC, an international conference for public relations professionals and academics. I'm not a PR person but I did have plenty to say about DC Films and the many fine messes they've got themselves into – canceling Batgirl, trimming the litigious Amber Heard from Aquaman 2, building a blockbuster around the allegedly itinerant Ezra Miller. My presentation reminded me of the importance of role-model stars and astute producers.

Through the weekend, amongst all the talk of social data analysis and audience reaction polls, there was time for us to chat about where we were from, what we did for living and our favourite TV shows. Of course mine was Doctor Who. I was glad to discover how fond the PR people were of the show, specifically the Tenth Doctor's tenure.

Wherever you go, however you travel, there are Doctor Who fans and viewers who speak the vernacular – TARDIS, Gallifrey, Bannakaffalatta. Look at the humans around you – chances are at least one of them has Whovian blood burbling under their skin.

We're about to see our show's PR go into overdrive as we get closer to the 60th Anniversary. While Richard Rhodes looks forward, John Lane looks back at the hits and misses of the Thirteenth Doctor's tenure. Ryan James and

Dave Chapman cover Doctor Who gaming and Jordan Shortman takes a typically in-depth look the Fugitive Doctor's comic book adventures. Matt Rose revisits the Gallifrey One convention and I chase Colin Baker through Pensacola, Florida! Plus we explore a fan film series starring Nick Scovell, try a new mobile game, check out an online annual event devoted to Death's Head and delve into a treasure trove of Big Finish audio stories.

Speaking of stories, Stephen Hatcher presents five excellent tales from the Land of Fiction. Special thanks to Stephen, who provided a great deal of help with this issue.

Nick



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Published by the Doctor Who Appreciation Society

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60 YEARS AND COUNTING

by Richard Rhodes

Welcome, dear reader, to the year 2023.

It's 100 years since Howard Carter opened the door to Tutankhamun's tomb. 70 years have passed since the first James Bond novel, *Casino Royale*, was first published. JRR Tolkien passed away 50 years ago and, a few weeks later, Concorde first flew across the Atlantic. It's 90 years since a camera-shy Nessy was first photographed and ten years have passed since Nelson Mandela left us while, 250 years ago, the political protest that was the Boston Tea Party heralded the coming of the American Revolutionary War.

Something missing from the list? Well, probably lots of things. Ah yes: JF Kennedy and the grassy knoll. 60 years: November 22nd 1963. Dark days indeed.

The day after? I imagine the world's news crews would still have been having a field-day and, yes, you're right, it probably would have meant that radio and television schedules the world-over were in disarray. It's not every day that the leader of the free-world is gunned down...

So, there we have it, dear reader: no mention of Doctor Who. Unthinkable! Well, certainly on the pages of Cosmic Masque. No Doctor Who, no Cosmic Masque. QED. End of discussion.

But, just imagine it. For whatever rea-

son, Doctor Who never was. Perhaps, Sydney Newman had a better idea for an early-evening family slot on BBC Television. Maybe, the powers-that-be at the BBC revolted against his Canadian enthusiasm for modernising the venerable Corporation and showed him the door before his ludicrous idea of a time-travelling, educational show took its first breath. How different the last 60 years would have been: no Doctor Who, no Daleks, no hiding behind sofas or weird electronic sound courtesy of the Radiophonic Workshop (its output limited, after a brief burst of experimental musique concrete, to various sound effects for period dramas: revving car engines, footfall in gravel and the occasional squelch of mud for The Archers); there would have been far fewer Target books (the imprint failing around 1975) and the world would have been denied Terrance Dicks and his wheezing, groaning sounds; Tom Baker – and others – wouldn't have been household names, a whole mountain of plastic would never have seen life as merchandise, let alone Autons, Michael Grade would never have become a byword for shattered dreams and wanton cultural vandalism; the wilderness years would never have been as you couldn't miss what you never had.

Horrifying.

Equally, the show could have made it to the screen but floundered with its second serial, when the Daleks – or the Luxor robots – failed to capture the pub-

lic imagination, perhaps when young firebrand designer Raymond Cusick was drafted to Dixon of Dock Green and the resultant mechanicals looked more like lumbering cereal packets rather than gliding pepper pots. Such failures of design and the ability to induce nightmares make the difference between a barely remembered run of 13-or-so episodes and a 60 year legacy; still, skating on culturally thin ice has always been the Doctor's thing: surviving for the first 20-odd years while dodging the axe and suffering the waxing and waning whims of public popularity was quite something when you consider how many other programmes rose, fell and disappeared in the same timescales.

In other words, just imagine how empty our lives and a corner of British culture could have been if Doctor Who never was or it had failed after gasping a few hopeful breaths way back when, not after its first quarter century as it was beginning to evolve into something more than a mere television programme and not, now, after its 21st-century rebirth and imminent reiteration. Doctor Who is now up there alongside Sherlock Holmes and James Bond as an enduring bastion of the cultural landscape – not just British anymore but an international icon. Yes, it will change and adapt but, such is its longevity, in one shape or form, it can (almost?) be guaranteed that it will never quite go away. There would be so much lost without it, including – possibly – a whole generation of creatives in sound, drama and design who would never have been inspired to their art in its absence.

So, here we are, in 2023 and we have Doctor Who in all its forms: there's the TV show itself with a multiplicity of

Doctors; multitudes of side-kicks, villains and allies abound; licenced and unlicensed merchandise is plentiful and, frankly, we have it all, don't we?

Well, we certainly have a lot: the archive of footage, books, audios, et al – even if not one more second of Doctor Who was produced, ever – would keep the average human being occupied, if they chose to plough through everything, for a significant chunk of their lifetime to consume. Whether anyone could actually work their way through anything and everything ever produced as Doctor Who, across all media, is another matter. There are so many wildly differing styles and traditions in the pantheon, some inevitably delight and others, frankly, appal, depending on personal taste. Not everything to have appeared over the years with the Doctor Who logo on it has been, even putting it charitably, 'good'.

Those who have ever watched Doctor Who with a degree of regularity, regardless of whether they append themselves with the label 'fan', do so – have ever done so – because they are enthralled and entertained on one level or another. Once multi-channel television entered the world, no-one had to sit through Doctor Who, they could always see what was on the other side. So, that Doctor Who has held on to viewers (not always the same ones, tastes ebb and flow – both for the producers and performers as much for the viewers) for as long as it has (with ratings which also ebb and flow) is testament to the show's inherent creativity and that it can go pretty much anywhere, anywhen to tell its tales.

And what of Doctor Who's loyal view-



ers, its fans? Are they unified in their praise, consuming all aspects of its media, from the pilot episode onwards? Nope. Not on your life. Fans are a joyful, supportive and delightful bunch – at times. At others they are carping and downright destructive. But has it always been thus or are things becoming more polarised now, fuelled by social media conflict, where the desire to consume the new is matched by a desire to tear things down, to disparage those with differing opinions?

Certainly, if you follow Doctor Who, and its fans, on social media, you would think that fandom will implode sometime very soon, the warring factions causing the whole system to collapse in on itself. There seem to be as many divisions between fans as there are Doctors... no, companions... make that stories... possibly episodes. A glance at Twitter or Doctor Who groups on Facebook reveals Doctor Who fandom as an extension of the political and social di-

visions that divide the wider, real world. Those who embrace the Thirteenth Doctor and the notion of a relationship between her and Yaz, the inclusion of LGBT and, especially, trans characters (in Redacted and the forthcoming anniversary specials) and greater inclusivity and diversity, as evidenced by increasing numbers of non-Caucasian cast and crew, are denounced in certain quarters as 'woke' and those who rail against the same things are put up for 'cancellation' and denounced as illiberal, racist, terfs, et al. Such is the degree of polarisation, it seems that common ground between some fans is hard to find, just as it is beyond fandom, with many democracies increasingly polarised between those who are left- or right-leaning.

Fandom has always had its factions: as soon as there were separate stories and different Doctors, everyone had a preference and, by implication, a dislike. Certainly, once entering their arrogant teenage and twenty-something years,

many fans – if not identifying with the current era – have railed against it, arguing it's not what it used to be (while privately thinking they could do it better – a case in point being a youthful Chris Chibnall railing against JNT's version of the show in the 80s, when, decades on and given the freedom to produce the show as he wanted, he aligned it, stylistically and tonally, with many of the tropes of the period he once criticised).

So, what has this to do with Doctor Who in its 60th year? Everything and nothing. Ultimately, fans are a small part of the viewership of any programme on broadcast television, their numbers (and their arguments) are drowned out by the wider audience. However, the UK and Eire aside, Doctor Who isn't going to be a broadcast show anywhere else in the world: it will be joining Disney+ as a streamed programme and, as with anything in cyberspace, small vocal minorities do matter as they influence the ebb and flow of others.

When Doctor Who returns in November 2023 it risks becoming a focus of those who denounce wokery. When Russell T Davies first took the helm of Doctor Who, in 2005, he was a gay man, out and proud and, faced with this news, back then, the world was pretty much indifferent. As a franchise, Doctor Who has (always?) attracted significant numbers of gay men, as viewers and in its production: allegedly because the lead character was surrounded by young women but remained asexual and aloof (John Nathan-Turner, its 80s producer and another gay man, was oft quoted as not allowing any 'hanky panky' in the TARDIS). In those terms,

RTD was just another gay man in the Doctor Who fold, a surprise for no one. Equally, in political terms, the landscape of the early 21st-century, in Britain and much of the western world, was far less polarised than it is now. Social media and instant global praise and denouncement were yet to become as commonplace as they have become. Effectively, Russell T Davies was able to take the reins of the TARDIS without feathers being ruffled and, although LGBT themes in the show were heightened, they came along simultaneously with a heightened heterosexual dynamic (Rose had sexual relationships and her mother was sexualised), levelling out their impact.

2023 is a different world compared to 2005. It's post-Trump, post-Brexit and those intolerant of change, of inclusivity and diversity, are emboldened. The BBC, a long time football in political terms and used to being kicked around by various factions, on the left and the right, has been threatened by a right-leaning and anti-wokery Government that, at its next Royal Charter review in 2027, it will lose the licence fee and will have to become a subscription service. The deal with Disney+ means there is not only funding for new Doctor Who programming (and its spin-offs), there is potentially life beyond the Charter review for Who, if the BBC itself cannot continue in its present shape and size. Obviously, we are not privy to the terms of the Disney deal or for how long it is planned to continue but we can only hope that there is stability of funding for many years to come. However, nothing exists in a vacuum, not even Doctor Who, and with it fast-becoming one of the BBC's most important international titles – if not the



most important titles if viewed in terms of finances and reach, the scrutiny on the show is likely to be more intense than it ever was.

'Too much' wokery-cum-political correctness, allegations that the show is delivering LGBT propaganda to children, could make it a target of the right while failing to deliver on the diversity and inclusivity agenda, which has been in much of the show's direction of travel for the last 17 years, will disappoint and anger the progressive (and often left-leaning) elements of fandom and the wider audience. Much will depend on whether any of this gets any further traction on social media and in the real world. Certainly, in the UK, at the time of writing, the issue of trans rights has become prominent with the Scottish parliament legislation in opposition to the views of the UK government with it seeking to overturn Scottish trans legislation: it's into this increasingly febrile atmosphere that the 60th anniversary specials will land with the new Rose, a trans character, in tow. How this will

play out, come November, against BBC sensitivities remains to be seen, as does the extent of Disney's editorial influence. Russell T Davies says he feels 'a lot more free' in what he can write (in the terms of the improved Who budget allowing him to do 'more' on screen) – but will that freedom be paid for by the show's funders requiring it to walk a fine line where the content (some scares and thrills aside) upsets no-one?

So, how will returning showrunner Russell T Davies be likely to play things? Gloriously, I hope and imagine – but with a heavy dollop of pragmatism. Doctor Who isn't It's a Sin, Davies' successful 80s AIDS drama, originally broadcast on Channel 4 in the UK (and, interestingly, now available to stream on Disney+) – and no-one knows that better than Davies himself. While Davies is on record defending Channel 4 against privatisation from an anti-arts UK government and is a staunch defender of minority rights, he knows well enough that a careful balancing act has to be played with Doctor Who; yes, he

will want to advance the equalities agenda and, I imagine, will do it carefully with tact and discretion. Either the new Rose's identity will be a non-event in the specials (the character just happens to be played by a trans actress) with nothing much more done than giving her a moment of visibility, or the circumstances will be addressed head-on with the complexities of the situation played out to give balance and to allow a degree of discussion by the audience: Davies is the kind of nuanced writer to make this work, whether in his other material or in the Whoniverse™. I don't know whether this is the case but, if Yasmin Finney's Rose does turn out to be Donna's daughter, it might help the wider audience deal with the situation by having Donna express her own confusion and concerns for her child while coming to terms with the reality.

As one of the most popular companions in the revival era, Donna already has capital with viewers; her engagement with the issues that have arisen around trans people in recent years could help both the audience and fandom see the wider, human picture. Ultimately, in these terms, I chime with the Twelfth Doctor in his final moments, wishing that people would be kind and that those around Rose and the anniversary specials will be too.

Equally, and in no small measure, I hope that incoming Doctor number 15 (I'm still not convinced on that score, there are shenanigans afoot around Tennant's return and I wouldn't be surprised if the numbering changes by the time Gatwa is actually seen in the role) will be received with kindness and not dismissed as another example of equality gone mad or token casting. I fully accept

what Davies is on record as saying: Ncuti Gatwa blew the producers away at his audition and is simply the best actor for the job. This is regardless of gender, race, nationality, age, sexuality or any other criteria that might be bandied about. If there's anyone who hasn't yet seen Netflix's *Sex Education* you really need to, especially if you're 'not sure' about the Doctor-designate. Gatwa's portrayal of Eric Effiong is, simply, superb. In the space of three series, he has made the audience laugh and cry (for all kinds of reasons) and his portrayal of a young, gay man is searingly joyfully and relentlessly authentic. He has the range that the role of the Doctor, when well-written, needs and, hopefully, will bring with him the *Sex Education* audience: a younger, inclusive (social) media-savvy audience to boost the existing viewership.

As for Gatwa himself, he is already acting as a stalwart ambassador of Doctor Who, appearing in various promotional announcements in recent months: his own casting, the announcement of the Disney+ deal, the casting of Millie Gibson as Ruby Sunday. At every turn, he's there, beaming with delight at his involvement and carrying himself with urbane charm when publicising the Doctor's new, tweedy, outfit. Sharp and classical seems to be the order of the day and, in the moments of his appearance in the coming-soon trailer, not shy of demonstrating he has a temper. It seems the new Doctor is going to be a force to contend with. I am hoping for a Doctor who can turn on the head of a pin, all smiles one moment, searing intensity the next.

In those terms, Gatwa's 15 could be seen as potentially in the mould of vari-

ous Doctors – classic and new – while the show's new producers, Bad Wolf, seem to be heightening the classic themes by bringing back the 'diamond' logo from the 1970s, not only for the sixtieth anniversary but, apparently, beyond. The logo lasted for seven years, back in the day, and has strong associations for fans of a certain (Davies') age as it was the first to be used prolifically when branding the show: it appeared on books, board games and the packaging of action figures; it endorsed the birth of the Doctor Who Magazine – under its initial guise as a weekly publication – and, after a very brief dalliance with the neon-tube 80s logo, was carried on all the initial VHS releases of Doctor Who, into the wilderness years, until the McGann/Pertwee logo became the *de facto* logo once archive footage releases swapped ropey old VHS for the slickness of DVD. The diamond logo carries with it a whole barrel-load of associations: predominantly Tom Baker's Doctor, the Sarah Jane Smith years and the programme – arguably – at its darkest and most frightening, as well as at its lightest and funniest. All those associations are hardly accidental in the choice to resurrect the diamond logo: my guess is that, if you want an indication of the tone and range of the latest version of the show, look no further than those stories that carried the logo. To people of Russell T Davies' generation (mine, incidentally), that logo is the gateway to a particular version of Doctor Who and I wouldn't be surprised to see that period being evoked a lot once Gatwa's Doctor is firmly ensconced.

Then there's the Whoniverse. Without a shadow of a doubt, we are getting

spinoffs – another benefit of Disney's money, the BBC being unable to afford such extravagances on its own. This is not something that Russell T Davies and his Bad Wolf colleagues are shy of, as we know. The reboot of Doctor Who in 2005 was rapidly accompanied by the Torchwood and Sarah Jane Smith spin offs; both were in-universe and both were integrated with the parent show. During the pandemic lockdowns, when the watch-alongs resparked his public interest in the series, Russell T Davies spoke enviously of other (American) franchises, with their proliferation of series, and – recently – has highlighted the new versions of Star Trek as an example of how to do things, where the different series bring new episodes of the franchise practically year-round. Is this what we'll get from the Whoniverse?

Maybe.

I suppose there's every chance that Torchwood could be resurrected as it's Russell T Davies' own creation and, I imagine, easiest for the appropriate clearances to allow it to re-enter production. However, the 'cancellation' of John Barrowman, in some quarters, for his inappropriate on-set – and much apologised-for – hijinks of yesteryear leave a question-mark over any possible inclusion of Captain Jack Harkness. Given how the rest of the show's core characters were killed off, leaving only Gwen, her husband and a few incidental characters, it would have to be a complete reboot and would, probably, need to introduce a new central cast via the parent series before any new series could thrive.

If you want to know what spinoffs

might be hitting your screens in the next year or so, it's probably safe to say that you could start by looking at Big Finish's output. This would be in terms of those series that have worked for the licence-holder but also for writers of any new series: several have developed a reputation for delivering tight, well-constructed dialogue and ingenious plots. It would be a surprise if the Whoniverse ignored their talents.

Big Finish has, effectively, been piloting spinoffs for years (and have singlehandedly kept Torchwood afloat too). There have been some inevitable spin-offs: the Daleks and the Cybermen have had their own series and, while Skaro's worst have had several series and the Cybermen two, they both boil down to the same thing: robotic monsters don't have a lot of character and they work best when put up against a group of humans that the audience can identify with. In fact, monsters on their own haven't got very far to go in dramatic terms once the invading and ranting is done – they need the Doctor or close substitutes to be the protagonists to their villainy. Which is, probably, why Big Finish's output, in terms of spinoffs, uses Doctor Who monsters as the parent series does: not as the stars but as supporting characters – they're more interesting that way.

So, what could we get, if you're into making a few predictions? Well, McGann's Doctor is popular on audio, showing the potential of the character through threads such as the Time War series and Stranded – and all fans are completists, they want to fill the gaps and could Russell T Davies resist showing us what really happened to Doctor 8? But, would that interfere too much

with the parent programme, there being two or more 'current' Doctors out there? Equally, when talking about previous Doctors ripe for development, there's Jo Martin's Fugitive Doctor and her involvement with Division: maybe Bad Wolf will see what Big Finish do with her first on audio?

Then, there's the Master: the War Master has been one of the most enduring incarnations on audio, due not insignificantly to Derek Jacobi's mellifluous portrayal of the Doctor's enduring nemesis. Missy has also had her moments. I, for one, can't but hope that we haven't seen the last of Sacha Dhawan's Master but, again, he's headed into audio, so I guess we will just have to wait on that score.

One of the most impactful elements in the recent Power of the Doctor, was the inclusion of Tegan and Ace. As with the Sarah Jane Adventures, they demonstrated how former companions can engage the audience. While Elisabeth Sladen's untimely death robbed us of Sarah Jane's return, there are those who could carry on her legacy, which Rani Chandra and Clyde (again on audio) seem to be about to do, but their return to TV wouldn't be much of a leap and they already have a connection with the redoubtable Jo Jones. The 'companions anonymous' scene at the end of Power of the Doctor told us there are other possible contenders for spinoffs with former companions in a contemporaneous setting.

Of the lot, I would imagine that UNIT stands the most chance of having its own series: Kate Stewart is an established character with an established team and is looking to recruit the Doc-

tor's former companions. Moreover, we already know that Kate Stewart is appearing in the next series, a good indicator that the character and UNIT have a place in the wider Whoniverse – the UNIT audios are also one of the most enduring spinoffs in the Big Finish range.

2022 also brought considerable dismay, for classic Who fans at least, when it appeared that the range of animated lost episodes ground to a halt with the release of The Abominable Snowmen. Equally, the release of original series Season 2 in the Collection range on Blu-Ray had the two missing episodes of The Crusade completed with telesnaps only: there was no surprise animation of those episodes to fill the gaps. So, early 2023 rumours that two more lost stories were to be animated (and other complete monochrome episodes colourised) came as a welcome if, to date, unfounded surprise: were Disney's animators coming to the rescue? Possibly not.

I always felt that Big Finish's involvement with the animation of missing episodes was a precursor to them then animating certain of their audios. Whether or not this happens is yet to be seen but, if you look at both Star Wars and Star Trek on their respective streaming platforms, both have animated series in their collection of spin-offs. Animation also has the benefit of hiding the aging of the actors behind the voices so, for any elements of classic Who in the new Whoniverse, I wouldn't be surprised if animation is the answer, whether of existing Big Finish audios or newly recorded material.

Talking of the missing episodes, would-

n't it be nice if Doctor Who and the Whoniverse become, together, a truly worldwide phenomenon, equally as popular as the worlds of Star Wars and Star Trek and that this sparks the recovery of some more of those missing stories from the 1960s? We can hope. And the existing 60s material itself? Will it really be colourised to open it up to a new generation? Would it really work beyond being a curiosity? A lot of work would be needed to upgrade the video quality and effects to make the shows appealing to 21st-century audiences, used to seeing cinema-quality HD at home. There would likely be a lot of editing involved to boost the pace of stories which may be seen as making glacial progress to a conclusion by people today. We would always have the originals anyway and, without bandying around allegations of sacrilege, is such a move really necessary?

When it comes to wish lists of what the forthcoming era of Doctor Who will bring, I do hope that the release of Target novelisations of televised stories becomes more than an annual event and that the range steps beyond being a touch of nostalgia for those fans with bibliophilic tendencies. With more scheduled this coming July, it would be nice if tie-in books could return to being more prominent than they have been in recent years. In fact, it would be nice if the whole merchandising of the brand was more impactful.

The good news is that Russell T Davies is very mindful of how the show is marketed and how anal fans can be in their attitudes to it: he has said that the Collection Blu-Ray box sets will retain the 13th Doctor's logo so that sets look consistent on shelves (very nice, not that

the wider public will care) and, more importantly, the show will be made with the expectation it will be aired at prominent times, such as on Christmas Day (still a date on the British calendar when you have a captive audience at home and festive specials on 25th December can muster decent audience numbers). Putting Doctor Who, front and centre, in the public consciousness is a 'good thing': it's also what investors like Disney will want, they have an interest in their investment making serious returns, so expect a multitude of toys and lunchboxes emblazoned with the new/old logo to proliferate, coupled with many more cosplay opportunities, conventions and, yes, (social) media presence.

It won't all be halcyon days from now into eternity: it never has been for Doctor Who. Its peaks and troughs were and are many and varied. There'll be a misstep or two along the way (but, hopefully, nothing huge – maybe the fans will notice and bicker amongst themselves for the rest of eternity but that will be it). However, despite or because of the knockbacks, Doctor Who survives; it endures cast and production changes because its central conceit never varies: take a time-travelling box that's bigger inside than out, include a few interesting and, hopefully, sympathetic characters and introduce them to the good and the bad across all of time and space; have adventures, go home (if you can), repeat. It's worked, in one format or another, for 60 years and has every chance to be doing it for another 60 more.

So, don't worry that Doctor Who never existed or that it could now wink out of existence. No matter how uncertain the

times (or is that, in the words of the old Chinese curse, interesting times?), there's always a Doctor out there who fights the monsters and makes things right. While the Doctors aren't real, their inspiration could be said to be very real indeed. If one little family show from the 1960s has evolved to encourage us to greet every day with kindness and optimism, to inspire some into creative careers and others into the service of others – not for self-gain, but just because it's the right thing to do, to help others when in distress, to care – then Doctor Who's legacy is huge and enduring.

Thanks to everyone who contributed their part – big or small – to make the whole (crazy and contradictory though it can be) over the last 60 years and here's to those who are picking up the baton now, carrying it into the future, until the next batch of creatives comes along. Each has earned a little bit of eternity.



DOCTOR WHO FAN FILMS

THE NICK SCOVELL ADVENTURES

By Nick Smith



Who is Nick Scovell? He has played the Doctor on stage, audio and in films that are a heart-felt tribute to the show that has encouraged so many actors and filmmakers. Cosmic Masque had a very pleasant chat with Nick, Mark Harold



(showrunner, writer, director and monster player) and Adrian Cranwell-Child (social media, graphic designer and videographer), three of the industrious fans behind Doctor Who: The Nick Scovell Adventures.



COSMIC MASQUE: We're thoroughly entertained by your audios, films and videos, so thank you.

Mark Harold: Thank you very much. Thank you for listening and watching.

CM: Please tell us a little about yourselves.

MH: I'm a wellbeing practitioner. It's a kind of unqualified counselling and psychotherapy work with students. I'm also trying to make it as a writer as well. If I never make it as a professional writer, I'm very proud of what I've achieved with everyone in the last decade. It's a

body of work to be very, very proud and pleased with.

Adrian Cranwell-Child: I've known Nick now for a considerable number of years, since 2006, when he was doing some promotional work for [the stage version of] *The Evil of the Daleks*. In 2007, I was involved by being one of the Dalek operators for *The Dalek Masterplan*. And it's just gone on from that, not just with the Doctor Who stuff, but I've done some other plays with Nick



because he's a highly accomplished writer, director and actor. He's sickening with all his talents! In my day job, I work for part of the NHS as an IT trainer and with regards to the Nick Scovell stuff, I do all the social media and create all the behind-the-scenes videos. I do some of the graphic design work as well. I usually end up cursing Mark when he says, 'I've got this great idea for a cover for the next audio.' [laughing] They send me a photograph of a sketch with stick people on it

and I have to try and interpret it.

MH: They're slightly more than stick people!

Adrian Cranwell-Child

CM: What about you, Nick?

Nick Scovell: I don't know what I am really.

CM: Why Doctor Who and not, say, 'Last of the Summer Wine? Nick Scovell in Wellies'? Why do you think you're fascinated with this particular show?)

NS: Because [Last of the Summer Wine is] drivell.

ACC: Doctor Who has always been an ingrained part of my life since childhood, so it's always felt right to continue to embrace that. And there are so many stories you can tell within it.

MH: This particular show strikes a chord like no other. Feeling different than other kids my age at school – There I am 8 years of age and I discover this non-violent hero. What a role model! Inspiring. Brave. Standing up for what's right and kind even when that's difficult. It is the best franchise ever created in my opinion and inspires people across the world every single day. Me included! So although I'm a part of many fandoms; Planet of the Apes, Columbo, Batgirl. Nothing beats Doctor Who. Nothing comes close! I've got to tell this story of how Adrian and I first met. Adrian came to train me on website editing software and he said, 'you can add any number into this, it could be 1,2, 3 or even the number fnarg.' And I said, 'Oh my God, you're a Doctor Who fan.'

ACC: That's a reference to Steven Moffat who said [paraphrasing], 'Is this Series One, is this Series Five? We're

referring to it as Series One, although it could be Series Fnarg.' That's when Mark realised how much of a geek I was.

CM: This series is a lot of work for you.

ACC: Yeah.

CM: Why do you do it? Are you crazy?

ACC: Well come on, we're Doctor Who fans. Of course we're crazy!

MH: Crazy in love with the show.

AH: Mark's right, it's something we do out of love.

NS: How did The Nick Scovell Adventures begin?

ACC: Nick started playing the Doctor back in 1996. He wasn't the only new Doctor in '96! In 1997 he did *The Millennium Trap*. Then they started to do stage productions of some of the missing Troughton stories. That kind of then morphed into *Power of the Daleks*. That then morphed into the ongoing audio adventures which Mark has been showrunner of for 10 years now.

MH: I approached Rob Thrush originally, the producer and production director for *Power*. And I said, 'I've got an idea for a short film. Would you be up for it?' And he was very polite but said, 'after *Power*, I'll give you a polite no thank you,' because it was a huge undertaking.

NS: It was a Herculean labour.

MH: It was.

NS: It took a long time to get going, and Rob did it with a professional crew. We're very proud of it, but it was, 'Oh my God, I'll never do that again unless...'

ACC: Yeah. I think Rob said at the end after it was released that if he costed it as a professional production, it would have cost about £75,000 to make.

CM: Wow.

ACC: Basically it was just people putting £25 each in the kitty. Everybody who was involved, the Dalek operators, didn't get paid. They had to build their own Daleks.

MH: Going back to your question, that's why we do it, because we love it so much and I think there's an element certainly for me when I was, you know, trying to woo Nick into saying yes. I said, 'I've got this enormous, originally three series, plan for audio dramas for you.' With short films in there, if there was the capacity to make them. It's that fan stubbornness that kept us all going. It's, 'yes, let's do more., let's do more.'

ACC: Mark, what's the kind of routine do you have for devising a story, devising a season?

MH: Um I think Season One, it was a bit of a Blake's 7 Series One. I wrote the whole thing myself. I just thought, 'I know what I want to do to set it up to properly introduce your Doctor, Nick, and that Alexandra is the companion, Jade Davenport, and introducing Ewan Wharton as Miles Fountain. That's always been my favourite [dynamic], the Doctor and two companions, like Ben and Polly, Jo and the Brigadier or something like that. So that's why I've tended to stick to that through most of the time we've done the audios. The routine is, sometimes an idea would come



from something I see on the news. I'm constantly absorbing news feeds and thinking, yeah, that would be a good thing. We did the one in the clinic with the wasps with the yellowjackets. That's something I've read. And I thought, 'what if alien wasps were burrowing into people's skin?' I wrote the first draft in about three days. I was excited and it just took over. And then by the second series, I thought, 'I want guest writers, I want to give other people the opportunity as well.' That's the same for Series Three and then Series Four bookends it because half of it's come out already, the next half started at Easter. That wraps up a lot because that's the last of the series that I'll be doing before the series of 60th specials.

CM: Going all the way back to your first film, why is *The Millennium Trap* in black and white?

ACC: That I can tell you. I got this from talking to Rob Thrush, who was the creative force behind it. He had seen Nick in *The Planet of Storms* - correct me if I'm wrong on this Nick - and then approached you shortly afterwards to do a film, didn't he?

NS: That's right.

ACC: But the reason it was all shot in black and white was purely practical. Rob was using different colour cameras and couldn't get a proper colour sync between them, so it looked different between angles. So when he was editing it, he knocked out the colour to do the whole thing as black and white, which kind of fitted with it as well, especially as Nick's Doctor was very much a Troughton Doctor, which is his favourite Doctor anyway. But there's some bloopers and behind the scenes footage that we've got on our YouTube

channel that actually shows some of the footage in colour.

CM: It seemed like an aesthetic choice, and I really liked it.

ACC: No, no, it wasn't. It was anything but.

NS: It did have a better 'UNIT' feel to it.

CM: The sound effects are very effective in your shows. What kind of process is behind them?

ACC: Certainly for the stage shows and for the earlier films, it was always a case of digging out the Doctor Who sound effects LP and any other BBC sound effects. I'll hand over to Mark, because he can talk a lot more about the audios.

MH: I'll be honest, I find the hardest part of the process is gathering the sound effects. Is this right? Does this fit with what I want? Does it sound alien enough? Or if it's a door closing, does it sound like the right kind of door and my amazing sound engineer Neil Elliott, who works in the Old Blacksmith Studios we use, he gets a little frustrated every now and then when I say, 'OK we're gonna use "walking five"' and then he says, 'OK.' It's that intricate... because I have an eye for detail. When we put the music on, which is Martin Johnson's amazing scores from *Evil of the Daleks* and *The Dalek Masterplan*, it brings it to life. Neil gets excited, even though he's not a Doctor Who fan, and then I get excited. The music heightens the experience and really pulls you in.

ACC: We try to use authentic Doctor Who sound effects. Mark will sometimes message me and say, 'look there's this video on YouTube, can you get the audio off it for me because that's the effect I want.' One example is the audio I wrote, *Connections*, which is the one set on a train. There's a flashback se-

quence where you revisit some stuff the Doctor's done in the past and in the script I wrote, 'it sounds a bit like the time explosion in *Dimensions in Time*.' Mark said to me, 'well, why don't we just use that?' So I got a copy online, because there's plenty of copies of *Dimensions in Time* on YouTube. I ripped out the sound effect bit and then Neil worked magic so that it kind of sounds like the original but he's tweaked it enough that it's different. That's the genius of Neil. He's a professional sound engineer, he's fantastic and he's fully committed to making it the best that we can. Mark is so fortunate to have found him.

MH: Yes, true. You pay for quality!

ACC: Yeah, that's basically the only expense.

MH: Yeah, and it's completely worth it for the products we turn out. I think they are professional quality. We use some professional actors in a professional studio. The audios sound very polished.

CM: Nick, you're a great lead. You definitely anchor the show. What kind of relationship do you have with all the other actors popping up, and what's their reaction when a film or audio comes out?

NS: We rarely get to listen to them together. We often have a read through before recording, which is quite a luxury really. Mark's got a knack for casting. Everyone seems to enjoy them. No one's contacted me and said, 'oh God.' They'd be mad to do so. I always enjoy listening to them. But the nice thing about audio is, it's full blown. We can really focus on what we're doing because we haven't got the stress of everything else. It's stress-free but enormously satisfying way of acting.

ACC: A lot of the actors that we've used have been people that Nick has worked with in theatre productions going back years. That's quite nice because they've already got a rapport with Nick. So when they get into the studio that's already there. Mark's done amazing with the sourcing of new voices for us to use as well. Some of the people he's chosen for the different productions have been inspired. Mark's been very gracious and let me direct a few, and I got to choose my casts for those. I deliberately chose, again going back to *Connections*, some people that Nick had worked with on previous Doctor Whos and previous stage productions that he hadn't actually worked with for a long time. We had Danny McCrohon in it, who Nick hadn't worked with for years. I got Francesca McCrohon in that as well. Nick hadn't worked with her since *The Three Musketeers* in 2009. I wanted some new voices as well. A lot of the established actors we have are professional, they can do a vast range as well, which is great. We've had some actors do three or four characters and they're all totally different. It all goes back to Mark being able to choose the right people.

MH: Just to add into what Nick and Adrian were saying, most people are from the local theatre scene because I've been a part of a good two or three local amdram companies. Even if they're not Who fans, they enjoy doing something different, just focusing on their voice, and it's very, very fast-paced days. They zoom by, there's a lot to squeeze in. As Adrian has said, there are some people who are such character actors already. There's a couple of younger cast members that I keep thinking, 'what else can I have them do?' because they are so versatile. They



are gonna have a career ahead of them if they want to pursue acting.

CM: How they are to work with?

NS: We share a sort of common camaraderie. I like that we're all on a similar wavelength because we're in a creative environment and also because what we are working with is good. It always starts with the script and Mark and everyone always write very good scripts. If you get someone who knows what they're doing, be it an amateur or professional, you respond to that.

CM: What are the biggest production challenges you're willing to share with us?

MH: Money and time and availability.

CM: There's never enough time, right?

MH: I would also say that getting a date that every single person you need can do. For me, particularly on the audios, that's been the biggest challenge.

ACC: I won't forget to come to the last studio recording day Mark! I'll be there tomorrow to do my five lines.

MH: Yeah, your cameo for the 60th special. You heard it here first!

CM: An exclusive!

MH: Yeah, an exclusive. Domain of the Doctors is full of cameos from loads of people over the years.

ACC: But I think Mark's right, the biggest challenge is trying to get as many of the cast for the audios together in the studio on the same day. Mark has had to do pickups when somebody's only free on a second recording day, so they've had to do their parts for two stories on that day and then obviously Mark and Neil knit it all together in the edit afterwards. Scheduling is the biggest challenge for the film projects. It's the same thing, time, money.

NS: With Power of the Daleks the post-production that took a lot longer [than expected]. You're gonna premiere Power at a convention in December, we finished shooting in June or July, and it took that long to get all the stuff together. The biggest challenge is when you get to the day of the technical rehearsal and we've got to get this all coordinated in eight hours. All the lighting, all the sound stuff done. I had the actor's nightmare where we had our Daleks, and we've been rehearsing with them, but I had this dream where the Daleks were made of floppy card and everyone was saying it would be fine. I was going, 'No, no, look.' And I pushed them. It just went like that [motions falling over]. 'Oh, someone will stand up inside it.' I remember waking up in a cold sweat. That's the level of stress.

ACC: I think because we knew Masterplan was gonna be the last stage show. We'd invested a lot of time, a lot of money in it and basically the theatre was sold out for every show, for every evening and for the matinee. It was the first time that theatre had had a complete sell-out in years.

CM: So were these plays fan productions or official stage versions of the show? How do you figure out the rights? Did you just do it?

NS: They were made with the full permission of the BBC. The first one we did was Web of Fear when it hadn't been found back in 2000, and then we followed that up with Fury from the Deep. The big plus for us was when Doctor Who was coming back. In 2004 I contacted the BBC and they knew we were gonna do it till 2006 cause I was tied up the following year. The BBC said, 'well, we know you, we've got no problem with that.' I said it is coming back on telly. You do know that it is coming back on telly? I knew the [stage] show would go on the year after Doctor Who was back on telly. There was nothing to stop it. I thought, 'we're going to try and do another one.' I remember contacting the BBC again, the usual lady who I contact. Well, now the Doctor was in. This was the early part of 2007. The lady said, 'it's not up to me anymore because of BBC Worldwide. Doctor Who is now big business again. If it was up to me it would be fine. I'll pass this to the top.'

I'll never forget this. I got this very curt generic e-mail back from BBC Worldwide saying we had to stop at once. But then I thought, 'no, I'm just going to try once more'. So I found the lady's superior and contacted him and he was very nice. He said, 'you've done these before, haven't you? All for charity, I think?' Yes, not for profit, all for charity. 'Leave it with me,' he said, 'and I'll see what I can do.' The lady at the BBC contacted me back, said, 'I don't know what you did but you've got the licence to do the show.' I said, 'really?' My request was sent to the production office and Russell T. Davies said, 'oh, don't be

so bloody silly. Let them do one more.'

ACC: So technically we can also say we were cast by Russell T Davies!

NS: They did say you can do it once more, but only once more, which is fair enough.

CM: That was a good cut off for you.

NS: You have to go out in a blaze of glory because you know this was during the build-up after David Tennant's first year, so it was biggest thing since sliced bread. It's great. We all felt part of the resurgence in a huge way.

ACC: We were lucky on Masterplan as well to have Nick Briggs doing the Dalek voices live every night. He was up in the gods with his voice mod, switching between the different Dalek voices. That was a lovely touch as well that we actually managed to get him involved. Nick [Scovell] has worked on Big Finish in the past, so he knows Nick Briggs and that's how we were able to wing it.

CM: I do want to ask what your favourite episode is. It could be audio, it could be video.

MH: I know mine. It's very clear for me. For the audios the first part of Series Four, it was the first four-parter I'd written, and that's for Nick's Doctor. It's called Lost Archive of the Orion Element. So much came together. Amazing performances. One of the best performances I've ever heard in anything ever, which is Nick's Doctor versus Geoff. Geoffrey Pye is the Master, battling on top of this vessel that's growing exponentially and oh my God, the argument between them both! It was phenomenal. So yeah, that stands out. I've cast two other Doctors as well, and I'm really pleased with what they've been doing with the Doctor. My favourite of Clare Plumridge's is Sewers of the Copper Cadaver, which is the Rani in Victorian London using the copper shortage

just before the mines went out of business in Cornwall. It was through my research that I came up with the idea to make Cybermen out of corpses from London's dead. I love that. Then from Gareth Billington-Ryan and his Doctor was one called Pest Control, which was the most ridiculous episode of anything ever. It was really silly characters, but it's just brilliant and such good fun to do and to hear afterwards, because the actors had an absolutely amazing time in that one as well. So those are my favourites. Mine are all the audio ones.

CM: That's fine. Adrian, how about you?

ACC: Film-wise, it has to be Power of the Daleks. Just because of what we achieved on nothing. Basically three weeks of principal photography on that and then months of editing for Rob. And look at what we achieved! It's probably the most highly acclaimed fan film, which means it's beaten The Millennium Trap because for many years that was classed as the ultimate fan film. So yeah, Power of the Daleks, which I was involved in on lots of different things. I was a Dalek operator. I played Kebble at the last minute, which interestingly enough was originally offered to Toby Hadoke.

CM: No way.

ACC: I know, I know. Unfortunately, he wasn't available for the dates, but he was the first choice to play Kebble. I was the art director on it as well, so I had to do all the art and production design, with other people helping me. Audios wise it's got to be the one Mark allowed me to write, cast and direct, which is Connections, a season three story. He basically said to me, 'you've got four people maximum. I want it in an enclosed space.'

MH: That was your shopping list.

ACC: That was the brief. That's all he gave me and I came up with, 'wouldn't it be great if they were stuck on a train and something's killing the passengers?'

CM: Nice.

ACC: I took my inspiration from Horror Express, which is a fantastic film which ties in with Nick's love of Peter Cushing. That's why there's about three Peter Cushing references in Connections. My proudest thing is the fact that I was able to write from scratch and direct it and cast it and I love what came out of it. There's a fantastic two hander scene between the Doctor and Jade Davenport where we suddenly explore Jade's past more as well.

NS: For me, I would echo what Adrian said. Rather, what we did with Power. I sit down and watch that and it does feel like you're watching an episode. I was very pleased with everyone who was in it. I love doing all the audios. They can blur into one because we have a routine doing those. Like Mark, I'm particularly fond of the Lost Archive of the Orion Element, because it was so dramatic. You get some really good character moments and a good story. That scene with the Master and everything. The one I watch most is Power.

CM: I'd like to know what your hopes are for the future of your series. Obviously, you're focused on the 60th celebration stories. But beyond that, what do you want to do? You want to do this forever?

ACC: I think Nick would probably want to play the Doctor for the rest of his life if he could, as I know he loves being the Doctor. He recently performed on stage as Poirot, which is one of his dream parts. But I'll let Mark explain

what plans he has for this year.

MH: As I mentioned earlier, starting Easter is the rest of Series Four. And this is said a lot by showrunners, but actually things for certain people will never be the same again. I think that's a good thing because a lot of what I tend to write, I've noticed... is quite morbid. Mine is about grief and bereavement and how we as humans deal with it, and I think. Goodbyes come into that. I'm saying thank you everyone for following me for 10 years. I'll stop leading the way now and you can all do what you want and I'll enjoy it as a fan. So yeah, to Nick and to Adrian and to Alexandra and Clare and Gareth and so many people, they've been absolutely amazing. And they're all in the 60th special Domain of the Doctors. There's some other bits we're doing as well - there's an epic two-parter with Clare's Doctor set in modern day London with something buried underneath the Thames, which is exciting. And then a bit of a timey wimey story set in modern day Pompeii for Clare's Doctor. Then we head into the 60th specials, which ties up everything I've wanted to do, any monsters or aliens that I'd really like to see or hear. We've got people playing Dracnians and Adipose and lots of other things, After that, I'll be focusing on non-Doctor Who, unofficial productions; last year we released a Jurassic Park audio which was feature length. Nick was in that one. Not as Gerard Butler. Gerard the Butler.

CM: That sounds fun.

MH: Next year, Sapphire and Steel and Knightmare. I don't know if you're if you've heard of Knightmare, but that was a very popular.

CM: Nightmare with the K.

MH: Yes, nightmare with a K. We've recorded those already under my other label, which is Sound I Like Productions. They're coming next year, plus some other bits. I'm staring at a couple of props now that are a bit of a clue: shark repellent bat spray and a little statue of a buried Statue of Liberty. Just a couple of hints as to what's coming in 2024.

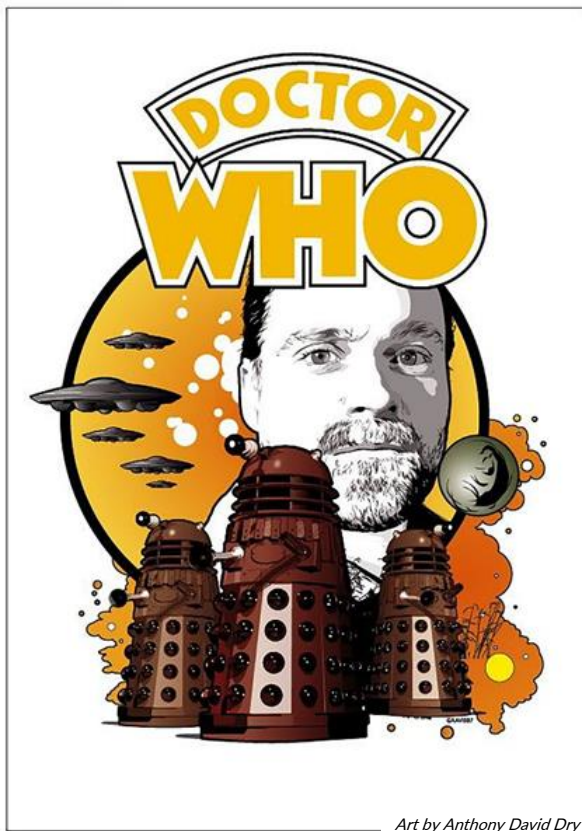
MH: I just want to say one point Nick, that I forgot to make earlier, which I think is really there's a couple of very poetic moments. I wrote it down in my aide memoire that our first episode at Easter is our 42nd episode of audio drama, which is amazing, and the 60th anniversary special Domain of the Doctors is our 60th episode of audio drama. So 60 episodes for 60 years, which I think is blooming impressive.

NS: That's very.

CM: That is perfect, yeah. Nick, do you have anything you'd like to say about the future of your Doctor?

NS: I'm happy to keep going as long as they want me to. It's a lovely thing to be able to do, to be a part of as a performer. I've been fortunate to play this part for a long time, and lots of different ways. It's part of what I am now, which is jolly nice and it's other people's hard work. People seem to like listening to my slightly perky tones now that I'm a bit older, so I'll just keep going. It's not the only thing I do. I keep myself busy. I've just finished the Poirot part. I've only just shaved my moustache off! I'm just about to start a stage production of The Three Musketeers. I have a very dull job that I've got to do in the day-time. I spend most of my days thinking about [our series].

CM: What would you like to do if you



multi-Doctor story starring Nick, Clare, Gareth AND Paul McGann, Sylvester McCoy and Colin Baker with guest appearance by Whoopi Goldberg as a brand new incarnation of The Doctor!

CM: Any advice for emerging Who fan filmmakers?

MH: Make the story you want to see. But keep an eye on what you believe is a good strong story that will entertain people other than yourself. Focus on really identifiable characters who have clear reasons for doing what they do. And be kind and friendly to people you're working with. You'll build excellent working relationships and maybe even lasting friendships!

NS: Just start making. Doesn't matter what you start with, just start doing it. It's the same with writing - just start writing. You'll not make the greatest thing ever on your first attempt, but you will

only learn and grow the more you do it. Get cracking!

ACC: Have a great idea, but don't be too ambitious to start with. Get people you can work with on the same wavelength as you. Above all, no matter how much hard work it is, have fun doing it.

CM: Nick, Mark and Adrian, thank you so much for your time. We really appreciate it.

You can find out more about The Nick Scovell Adventures at:

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had an unlimited budget?

ACC: Another film production, maybe something new. I'd like to pick up from the end of Power where the Doctor is in the TARDIS with the Daleks, trapped in there and see what happens next. It would also allow us chance to film some of the original ending that was written.

NS: Oh, I wouldn't want one! Creativity is born out of limitations. Limitations are dictated by age and circumstance - and they very much contribute to art, in any form. If Van Gogh had access to all the creative tools we have today, his works may have been very different, and maybe nowhere near as wonderful! Who knows? It would be nice to HAVE a budget...!

MH: Ooh that's an easy one: I'd film a

ORIGINS

Review by Jordan Shortman



him and his gang back to Division, but not before the kids get a chance to show the Doctor how beautiful the Earth can be. Then recalled once again, the Doctor finds herself given a temporary assistant, Taslo, to help her keep an eye on some other civilisations that seem to have Gallifreyan origins.

The Doctor knows that the mission she has been given is dodgy, the agents assigning it know too. The only one who doesn't is the brand new agent Taslo. If you've been watching the Thirteenth Doctor's series, then you'll know that this could very well be the story that sees the Doctor go on the run from Division given some character introductions at the end, but more on that later along with a couple of nice cameos.

The main strong point for this story and indeed much of Titan's Doctor Who output continues to be Jodie Houser's writing. Her take on the Doctor, any of them, always seems to be pitch perfect. You can clearly hear actor Jo Martin saying the lines she gives to her Doctor. Her Doctor is given a cunning wit and an assertive attitude which matches her incoming incarnations. But despite her missions, Houser makes sure this Doctor isn't as morally bankrupt as those around her, this is still the Doctor we've always known and loved, even though it could have been much easier to take her down a darker route.

Houser also makes sure to drip the series with a sense of unease, I said above

Whether you like it or hate it, it seems that the Timeless Child plot is here to stay, at least for a little while, with Big Finish giving the Fugitive Doctor her own spin-off this year. But Titan Comics have continued their Doctor Who output with Origins, a four-part series, now collected in a paperback, which explores just one of the Fugitive Doctor's many unseen adventures.

The story opens with the Doctor on a mission for the Division, hunting down Monstario the Devourer, who is hiding on Earth, taking in by a Stranger Things like gang of kids. Of course the Doctor finds him and captures him and takes

that the Doctor knows her mission is a dodgy one, and that sense of wrong almost permeates every page, including those supposedly in the safety of the TARDIS. There is a sense that this created world isn't safe, that the Doctor has to be careful who she trusts, with Weeping Angels, Division Agents and Taslo to look out for.

The last of those is one of the weaker points of the story. Maybe Taslo wasn't completely designed to be a companion and we've had morally grey companions in expanded media before. Unfortunately, they have been given more material than poor Taslo. I wasn't even sure why she was there or what her character motivations were, even the reveal at the end that she has been working for the High Council of Time-lords to destroy the civilisations seems to come out of the blue since we've never actually seen her do anything wrong. I didn't buy that she was an evil character and although she redeems her actions at the end, I'm not sure Houser had to really worry about that given she hadn't written her to be seen doing anything wrong in the first place. And I'm not sure I liked how she seemed to be another 'Rose' type companion, looking the same age, height and even blonde. There were other companions than Rose, some are arguably more influential than her, and given how Taslo fits into the plot at the beginning of the book, then maybe Romana would have been a better fit to make her look like. I've read a lot of Titan's Doctor Who comics and they seem to rely on the model of Rose Tyler far too much.

Another aspect of Houser's story I wasn't too sure on, simply because it wasn't

given much room to be explored was that each of the civilisations that the Doctor and Taslo visit are supposed to be Time Lords. All of these people have at some point fled Gallifrey but when has it even been established that Gallifrey once upon a time had blue people and lizard people amongst its inhabitants. Of course this is a fictional show so Gallifrey can have whoever living on it, but the final reveal that all of these characters are somehow Time Lords comes so far out of left field in the final issue that it only serves to confuse things even more than was absolutely necessary.



But Houser does continue to impress with her character work and also is never against giving us some pleasing cameos including one with the First Doctor and Susan returning to Earth having just stolen the TARDIS. Susan asks the Doc-



tor why he chose Earth, the Doctor seems to vaguely remember the children at the beginning of the book and how kind and helpful they were.

Of course no Jodie Houser book would be complete without the pairing of her with artist Roberta Ingranata. And she again proves what a talented artist she is, with pages exploding with energy and excitement, even those in dingy corridors look expertly compiled and illustrated. Unfortunately though, Ingranata always seems to rely on existing poses thanks to photographs to design the Doctor and companions.

Her take on the Fugitive Doctor is excellent but her reliance on stock photos isn't. Doctor Who comics have always done this and in most other cases it's a fun game of trying to work out which episode or story this particular pose is supposed to be from. Unfortunately here though, it doesn't seem to work as the Doctor can be seen in exactly the same poses just with slight alterations, sometimes even on the same page. Of course there are arguments that reusing available assets is a good thing and no doubt it does save time, especially in the case of single issues where there is usually a month's wait between issues. Collected into book form, the repetition becomes overdone and it's so clearly obvious that it does distract you from the story.

As a result Doctor Who: Origins feels like a mixed bag. I did read it all in one go and I did enjoy it, despite how this might sound, but there were more negatives than positives. But that's fine, not every Doctor Who comic can be excellent. No writer can get things right off the bat and no artist can continuously create new poses and expressions for their characters.

The plot does feel like it's going to be canon fodder for future writers in upcoming spin off media, but it gets muddled in its telling and as a result feels like it should have been one draft away from being excellent. However the Doctor still comes across well and doesn't feel like a completely new character we've never met before. And the art is good, despite an over reliance on copying and pasting images. While this might not be an essential read, it's still and enjoyable one all the same.



[Find our more and buy 'Origins' at Titan by clicking here](#)

[Buy from Amazon UK here](#)

GALLIFREY ONE: A CONDENSED REVIEW

by Matthew Rose

Greetings dear readers. It is March 19, 2023 and I am writing a small retrospective of Gallifrey One. Due to so many amazing wonders of the convention, I am breaking it down into my top 5 highlights.

1. The guests, reuniting and meeting so many faces was a thrill. To meet Jodie Whittaker, Chase Masterson, Chris Chibnall, Jamie Magnus Stone, Lauren Cornelli, Stephen Noonan, Jon Culshaw, Daniel Anthony, Daisy Ashford, Bill Blair, Gigi Edgley, Richard Price, Patrick O'Kane, Sue Cowerly, Alfie Shaw, Peter Anghelides, Lisa McMullin and Gary Russell was a delightful treat in my LA holiday, as well as reuniting with Katy Manning, Colin Baker, Bonnie Langford, Janet Fielding, Sophie Aldred, Michael Troughton, Mickey Lewis, Craig Els, Tim Treloar, Frazer Hines, Wendy Padbury, Joseph Lidster, Jeff Cummins and Rob Morris were an utter delight.

2. Cosplay – Out of this world, seeing a drashig in the elevator, seeing cybermasters, a Matt the Kylo Ren/day shift manager, aliens from The Muppets, the famous meeping angels, as well as meeting Josh Coy, Katie Haynes, Dominic G. Martin, plus seeing in person a few Jodie costumers, meeting Steve Ricks, who tailored for Peter Davison on Power of the Doctor. It was wonderful to see the banana splits, retro cybermen, people dressed as Tennant from his 10/14th Doctor incarnations, quite a few Catherine Tate Series 4 and

60th Donna's. One retro cyberman and a few Daleks were out in force. Plus, I met one of the most unique cosplayers, someone dressed as the Sir Lenny Henry, 7th doctor incarnation.

3. Props – seeing the TARDIS and Daleks roaming around is also a treat of any convention, but the one regret I had was not getting a photo with the console that worked that moved like the series one, that would have been splendid to pose with.

4. The atmosphere – absolutely wonderful time, all the cosplayers and guests were friendly, I thought it was breathtaking, plus many activities, sadly I missed that part on the trip as was busy photo opping and getting autographs done.

5. Would I do it again? – absolutely yes!

TOP TIPS FOR GALLIFREY

Save your money, pre-order photo opportunities for Friday and Sunday the most, as then you can relax on Saturday and take the convention in.

Hydrate, with so many people coming in. Always pack waters in a bag to bring down stairs into the venue.

If the food vans are full, do what I did, leave the convention and go to the lo-

cal Jersey Mike's or Z Pizza, which are only a few minutes' walk away stationed in another hotel, which has a Starbucks.

Final thoughts: it was an amazing experience. I have done the 50th at London's Excel and Dimensions in Newcastle but Gallifrey lived up to its reputation with ice cream socials, friendly faces and drinks on the Friday night to round table fun. Plenty of activities so you are not short changed.

Gallifrey, I miss you dearly and if I am not back next year, one day I shall be back.

I hope you enjoyed my retrospective on Gallifrey, it's about the friends, the fun, the guests and here below are some of the photo highlights of my experience from a great convention.

Thank you for reading, and if you would like to book onto next year's Gallifrey One, tickets will soon be available at www.gallifreyone.com



CHASING COLIN BAKER

by Nick Smith



Pensacon is a fantastic locally grown, 10-year-old pop culture, movie and cult TV convention that celebrated Doctor Who's anniversary in style this year with multiple Doctors and companions landing in the beach town of Pensacola, Florida. I have fond memories of the con, where I usually host or attend a panel or two.

Back in 2019, my eyes are as big as saucers for 45 minutes, mesmerized by a Q&A in the historic the Saenger Theatre with Peter Davison and Colin Baker, the fifth and sixth Doctors respectively from Doctor Who. They make a great team – Baker is simultaneously humble and gregarious while Davison is more

reserved and paternal. The actors and the audience have a blast.

'We'll stay after this for autographs,' Baker wraps, 'in case anyone got a photo with us earlier and didn't get the chance to have it signed...'

Wait a minute, I think to myself, I got a photo with them earlier and didn't get the chance to have it signed. The Doctor's talking about me! But no, I couldn't even dream... I mean, these guys' performances helped buoy my spirits as a broody teenager. They were a bright constant in my greying grown-up world as I faced what Winston Churchill called the 'black dog' of melancholy. Later, as an actor and filmmaker, I learned from their hard work and candour.

My accommodating girlfriend Dana whispers at me to hurry and I leave the theatre as fast as the shuffling, exiting audience will allow. A few blocks away in my car there's a photo of me with the two Doctors, the TARDIS behind us. All I have to do is grab the pic, take it back to the theatre and get it signed by my childhood heroes.

It's the climax of an eventful weekend at this six-year-old convention, a labour of love for the local organizers. I've explored the vendor floor in a crowded stadium and encountered an Ewok (Kiran Shah) and a prop-making veteran – the humble Bill Hargreaves, posing by a speeder bike, describing himself as a nosy kid working on the original Star

Wars trilogy.

I've attended panels devoted to Doctor Who series 11; another on Star Wars novels, with Timothy Zahn (Heir to the Empire) and Claudia Gray (Bloodline). I expect to be jealous of fan-turned-Star Wars author Gray but she and Zahn are so damned nice and approachable that I warm to them in seconds and they give solid info about the pressures of writing for Lucasfilm (Bloodline was written in 40 days).

I'm really in Pensacola because the short movie I produced, X's and O's, has been selected for the film festival portion of Pensacon. The film is a Twilight Zone-type yarn about disappearances in a creepy Florida forest, perfect for a convention that celebrates otherworldly storytelling. It's exciting to think that some of the celebrity guests will see my little film.

William Shatner knows a thing or two about storytelling or as he calls it, rambling. He commands the stage in his own Q&A, the audience Laughing Out Loud at his cracks about his country album, the birth pangs of the Star Trek movies (what was the name of that second one again, he asks?) and the time he invited Rush Limbaugh to watch Monday Night Football with Henry Rollins. Shatner's famous ego is quashed by the man himself and he has fun in the process.

Another big draw is Jonathan Frakes, equally self-effacing, equally playful. He's willing to compare directing Star Trek: Discovery with The Orville (he likes them both!) and rattles off anecdotes about The Next Generation, poking fun at Patrick Stewart or as Frakes

likes to call him, Sir Great Baldie. Mainly he pokes fun at himself and that's one of the big draws of the convention – to see the genuine versions of our heroes and find out that they put their trousers on one leg at a time just like us. This has a twofold purpose: first, we can relate to them on a new level. Second, we know that their success is attainable.

One star-studded panel is devoted to Indiana Jones, where we see Karen Allen (Marion Ravenwood); a lionhearted Julian Glover, who sadly does not rip his skin off to reveal a green underface; Paul Freeman (René Bellog); Wolf Kahler (Dietrich) and John Rhys-Davies (Sallah). They talk about the hardships of filming abroad and Harrison Ford's focus. I close my eyes for a moment, hear Allen's smoky voice and Rhys-Davies' booming one and I'm transported back to a magical movie night in 1981, watching Raiders of the Lost Ark for the first time. It's another magical teary-eyed moment for me.

A less magical moment: I've run to my car to grab the photo of the two Doctors and myself. Now I have to get back to the theatre. I'm running out of steam – I'm not in shape, bigger on the outside – so I slow down. I don't want to turn up to the signing a heaving breathless mess. In my panic, I take a wrong turn and have to walk an extra block. Dana texts me – the autographs cost \$50 to sign. I text 'ew' and slow down some more but then speed up again. Five hours working at my day job for a quick visit with my fave physicians. Worth it!

Getting the initial photo was a more sedate experience. Before the photo op



I sit with a bunch of convention-goers old and young, one dressed as Tom Baker, another as Matt Smith, the latter taking constant selfies. They discuss the merits of scarf-knitting, which tickles me greatly. I'm with fellow fans!

All weekend the atmosphere is light and fun. On the first day, the lines to pick up passes are an indication of Pensacon's growth. Dana gets a picture with The Walking Dead's Lew Temple and tells Catherine Tate, "we love you!"

I run up to the front doors of the Saenger Theatre like Dustin Hoffman at the climax of The Graduate, except instead of chasing a cute girl I'm chasing Colin Baker. The security guys are locking the front doors.

'I'm here for the signing...' I pant, 'my girlfriend's inside...' 'They've gone,' says a guard. 'You should try round the side.' I go to the stage door but one of the Doctors is leaving, not by blue box but in a white SUV with tinted windows. Dana meets me on the steps and says sorry.

No worries. I determine to put the \$50 towards producing my next X's and O's-type project. I'll keep making movies. Maybe one day I'll get to work with Peter and Colin and I'll be able to thank them properly for the little bit of cardio, for giving me a run for my money, for helping in a small but important way to make my life worth living.

This article is adapted from a blog that appeared long, long ago on the Generation Star Wars website.

WHY I RPG IN THE DOCTOR WHO UNIVERSE

By Ryan Blake

Not everyone gets to write Doctor Who.

Most Doctor Who fans have a strong opinion on the show, whether that's the characters, the plot, the politics. Just as importantly most Doctor Who fans also have a sense of wonder and an imagination. They also have ideas on what they would do if they were in charge of Doctor Who.

When I first discovered Doctor Who as a kid, the second thing I did after talking to anyone who would listen about was write my own Doctor Who stories, mostly crossovers with Star Wars or Trek, my other abiding sci-fi loves.

So, everything was in place for me to embrace role-playing games when I stumbled upon them.

There were of course a few interim steps – when I found RPGs the original FASA RPG was long out of date, and the Virgin publishing game Time Lord was yet to be (and was ... less than impressive when I did get to it, an article for another time).

Circa 2009 Cubicle 7 release what will eventually be called the Doctor Who RPG – it was originally Doctor Who – Adventures in Time and Space – the difference was purely perceptual. Imagine opening the door of the TARDIS and going on your own adventures across the skin of infinity, moreover imagine you ARE the Doctor going on

these adventures (if that's your desire). This is the promise of the Doctor Who RPG, getting to have adventures in the everything, writing your own tales, creating your own character to fight evil, save the day and give the Doctor cheek (if THAT's your desire).

I won't go into the ins and outs of the mechanics of the system, (again an article for another time), suffice to say it's simple, elegant and quick, no real maths other than adding three numbers together. Just trust me when I say, it totally conveys the flavour of the show in every important aspect, including rewarding talking and intellect over fighting and violence.

If you take any joy in Doctor Who and want to create or participate in that universe (multiverse?) then this is the way. You can create whole civilizations and then put them in jeopardy and then save them all in an evening spent with your friends. If you think the show is going in a direction you don't like, it's therapeutic fun to write your own episode and see what happens.

Perhaps best of all it is collaborative, just like the Doctor surprises his enemies with some bit of improvised genius, your players can do the same, and your players will nearly always surprise you.

As the Games Master – the person who sets the scene, writes / runs the episodes, you control the

universe, the villains and to some extent the plot, but just as the heroes in the TV show foils the villains plans, your players will do everything they can to foil whatever villainous plot you have developed in varied and haphazard ways.

You can come up with any and all kinds of Doctor Who plots, from completely original romps through the Vortex, to rewriting TV episodes when you want to see what if? From the darker, adult tones of the Virgin New Adventures to the lighter tones the TV show occasionally dipped into. If you are inclined to put the work in, you can most certainly craft long detailed season arcs (or novel arcs, again like the BBC 8DA or TV seasons such as the Key to Time or Season 6 of NuWho). Of course, if you are a Doctor Who fan but just want to take part and don't want to write an adventure, the game comes with plenty to run and loads more are available to purchase (as well as a fair few shared by a thriving fan community).

My own campaign is currently on its third season, with a party that has seen people leave, come back, get married, destroy the universe (well, allow Sutekh to destroy the universe), become a Silurian Forest and kickstart the evolution of a species and then be reborn in space as an egg (yep).

So, anything can happen, you can MAKE it happen, gather some friends, make up a story, roll some dice and step out of the TARDIS.

I love it so much I even host a podcast on Doctor Who RPGs called [Wibbly-Wobbly Dicey-Wicey](#) (click to visit) where we talk about every aspect of

the game, how to run it, how to write and run adventures, we even convert characters from other universes (such as Dan Dare, The Prisoner, V, Firefly etc) so they can be included in your game.

You have all the options, all the time and space to do it in. Just imagine...



Image Ryan Blake

Produced by Alfie Shaw for Big Finish Productions. Released February 2023

Alfie Shaw brings the curtain down on his long tenure as producer of the Short Trips range with this eclectic set of six stories, that don't appear to have much in common other than the fact that they mostly feature twenty-first century Doctors and are mostly written by authors either new to Big Finish or whose contributions have been limited, up to now.

Salvage by Max Curtis, read by Adèle Anderson is an intriguing story set during the Time War, which allows us another chance to hear the Eighth Doctor in the company of Bliss, as they visit the mysterious Salvage, a place where all lost things go. But is even this a safe haven from the all-encompassing war.

In AWOL by Angus Dunican, the Third Doctor has run off in a hissy-fit and it is down to the Brigadier to track him down in South America and to persuade him to return to UNIT. This is a delightful little character piece exploring the relationship between the two men, which becomes truly memorable due to the perfect performance of Jon Culshaw in the roles of both protagonists.

The Three Flames by Sophie Iles shows us the softer side of the Twelfth Doctor, as he helps a family of refugees from a dying world, who have crash landed on a strange planet. Dan Starkey is given the chance to give his fabulous interpretation of the Capaldi Doctor in a terrific reading.

Jacob Dudman brings out as flawless a Ninth Doctor impression as the impersonations of the Eleventh and Twelfth Doctors, for which he is better known, in former Paul Spragg Memorial Opportunity winner Eu-

DOCTOR WHO: SHORT TRIPS VOL 12

Review by Geoff Stephens

genie Pusenjak's excellent Identity Check, in which the Doctor and Rose are caught up in inter-species tensions surrounding a vast engineering project.

In Table For Two, Dinner For One, written by Jennah Dean and read by Ayesha Antoine, the Tenth Doctor investigates a sinister Italian-style restaurant in London, where the management have come from somewhat further afield than Napoli with the intention 'to serve humans'. This is a smashing little story – probably the strongest of the set. Great fun!

No less great fun is the final story of this collection, The Galois Group by Felicia Barker, in which the Eleventh Doctor and his companion Valarie Lockwood meet nineteenth century mathematician and revolutionary Évariste Galois. Attempting to save Galois from the death that history has in store for him (in a duel, aged just twenty), Valarie falls foul of the laws of time. Things get out of hand, resulting in multiple copies of Galois, the Doctor and Valarie herself. It's an engaging tale, which prompted me find out a little more about the real-life Galois – always a sign of a good story.

Doctor Who: Short Trips Volume 12 is a set of well-written and performed stories, which couldn't be more different from each other – so much so, that one is left with the impression that these are the stories that just hadn't found a home anywhere else. But then, there's nothing wrong with that, so long as the stories are worthy of being released. These ones very much are. Indeed, any one of them would be worthy of a place in any collection. Very much recommended.

[For more information visit Big Finish here](#)

THE NINTH DOCTOR ADVENTURES: SHADES OF FEAR

Review by Geoff Stephens

Produced by David Richardson for Big Finish Productions

Starring Christopher Eccleston, Frank Skinner, Susan Penhaligon

Directed by Helen Goldwyn

Released February 2023



Christopher Eccleston returns to the role of The Doctor for three stories, all of which might come under the banner of 'base under siege'.

Lizzie Hopley has been contributing to the output of Big Finish for many years, initially as an actor (most notably as the Eighth Doctor's nearly companion Gemma in 2005's *Terror Firma* and as strange housemaid with a killer bunny Sue, in Seventh Doctor story *Night Thoughts* from 2006). In recent years it has been Lizzie's writing that has come to the fore, and she has developed into one of Big Finish's most interesting and reliable contributors.

In *The Colour of Terror*, Lizzie takes the Doctor, travelling alone, to a small town high street in the Midlands, where an ordinary charity shop with a distinctly uncharitable owner becomes the centre of an alien incursion by invaders who have an affinity for the colour red. It's a terrific story, in which the Doctor rallies an assorted group of locals to resist the invaders.

Eccleston has slipped so easily back into the role of the Doctor in these Big Finish releases; and he recreates what he did in 2005 to perfection here, well supported by a fine cast, including *The Time Monster*'s Susan Penhaligon as charity shop proprietor Mrs Bevell. However, the star of the show is undoubtedly Frank Skinner, whose lonely neighbour Pete - the Doctor's chief ally, is as likeable a creation as his Perkins was in *Mummy* on the *Orient Express* on TV. For the second time at the end of a story, Skinner left me wishing that he would jump aboard the TARDIS and fly off for more adventures with the Doctor.

The Blooming Menace by James Kettle is a delightful mixing together of elements of P. G. Wodehouse and John Wyndham. Set in *The Fellows Club*, a London gentlemen's club in 1923, an unprecedented number of members have been falling in love and getting married. Toby Entwhistle is determined that he will not be next,

especially when his new valet, The Doctor discovers that the women the members are falling for are actually alien plants who can take on human form, and are abducting young men via seduction.

This is such a fun story, which perfectly demonstrates this Doctor's ability, through sheer force of personality, to insert himself into an environment where he just doesn't belong. It's also an example of one of Big Finish's greatest strengths, the ability to blend comedy and drama into something wonderful.

The final story of this collection, *Red Darkness* by Roy Gill is something we never saw during that single Ninth Doctor series on TV, a story set on a distant planet - albeit on a human research station. Dr. Iona Lennox is researching the special properties of the sunlight from Solis Kallya, which she believes could revolutionise farming on the colonies. Unbeknown to her, her research has enabled the invading Vashta Nerada to merge with a species that the Doctor has met recently (the clue is in the title), to become even more deadly. Fortunately Dr Lennox's partially sighted son Callen and his seeing (and talking) dog Doyle, aided by the Doctor, are uniquely equipped to face the invaders.

Red Darkness provides a terrific ending to this trilogy of stories, with Eccleston once more on great form, well supported by Adam Martyn as Callen, Leah Whitaker as Dr Lennox and Harki Bhambra as Doyle.

The Ninth Doctor Adventures: Shades of Fear is an absolute triumph, boasting three stories each of which will stay long in the memory. Great credit must go to writers, Lizzie Hopley, James Kettle and Roy Gill, director Helen Goldwyn and to Christopher Eccleston, but particularly to producer David Richardson. In his capable hands, Big Finish is achieving for Christopher Eccleston, what in years past they did for both Colin Baker and Paul McGann, taking a Doctor whose TV incumbency was all too brief, and bringing him new life; moving their stories forward; developing their character; while still remaining true to what we saw on TV all those years ago. That's some achievement.



[To hear the trailer for this product at the Big Finish website click here](#)

[To buy from Big Finish click here](#)

[To buy from Amazon UK click here](#)

DRAW DEATH'S HEAD DAY

by Alies Meerman

Wisecracking bounty hunter Death's Head was created as a supporting character for Marvel UK's Transformers comic by writer Simon Furman and artist Geoff Senior. When the mercenary with a mechanical mouth tangled with the Seventh Doctor, he was brought down to human size and transported into our universe. Many readers and artists have a soft spot for Death's Head, as evidenced by an annual #DrawDeathsHeadDay held on March 22nd. - Cosmic Masque



I was born in the Netherlands at a very opportune time in the seventies, making me just the right age for now-classic '80s toy properties like Transformers.

The cartoon drew me in but the comics kept me hooked, particularly the ones that were written by one Simon Furman. I became more broadly interested in comics when I discovered ElfQuest in my tweens but ElfQuest, Transformers, and a wacky little comic about mutated turtles remained the mainstays throughout my life. While only ever got the US Marvel Transformers comics in the Netherlands, once we got internet access I was pleased to discover a veritable treasure trove of archived UK Transformers comics online and that was my introduction to the character of Death's Head, as he was originally created to play a role in that series.

During my student years, I became ill with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and I had to drop out. I've been living on disability ever since. With so many doors closed to me with regards to work and social contacts, hobbies became more important; comics and art in particular. I started contributing to various ElfQuest fanzines and even was editor-in-chief for one of them for a while, but interest dwindled after a while and I returned to Transformers. In 2009 I joined the now-defunct IDW Forum, a place where both fans and creators hung out and that is how I got introduced to the UK Transformers community, a friendly, tight-knit bunch. I got to meet some of my childhood heroes in the flesh - people like Simon Furman, Geoff Senior, Andrew Wildman, and Stephen Baskerville - and I made some very good friends there - my best friend, even. The pandemic put

a cramp on my traveling but hopefully we'll be able to meet up again soon.

The Origin of Draw Death's Head Day

I found both Death's Head collected trades at Roll Out Roll Call, a joint Transformers/GI Joe convention in... I'd like to say 2010? (One of the trades I even bought from the man, Simon Furman, himself) and devoured them on the journey home. I was already familiar with the character through his appearance in the UK Transformers comic, but I found myself enjoying his solo stories even more than I thought I would. They were wild and fun and adventurous - totally my jam!

Draw Death's Head Day came about a few years later, in 2014. I think what happened was that there was some discussion about the character online and we were lamenting the fact that Marvel - who owns the rights - was doing so little with the character at the time. So I decided to organise a little community event, aimed to serve multiple purposes: to draw attention to the character and show Marvel how much love his fans still had for him, to give artists a platform to showcase their talents, and last but not least - to serve as a little

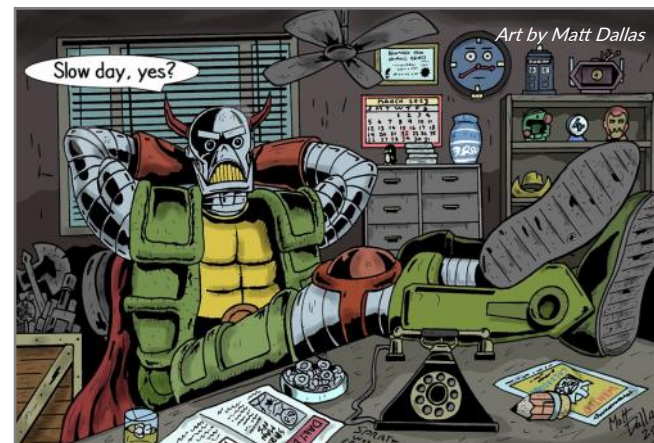
Originally I only planned it as a one-off - but the next year people were asking about it, so what can you do? I organised a second event in 2016 and now we're on the ninth one and we'll be celebrating our ten-year anniversary next year. Wild, yes?

Death's Head is obscure but loved! That's actually what makes it fun; given that the character has been rather underserved over the years, there's not a lot for the people who remember him fondly to latch on to. I'd like to think of Draw Death's Head Day as a central hub for those fans to express their love for him. For fans of popular characters, every day can be Goku Day, or Iron Man Day, or Wonder Woman Day - but Draw Death's Head Day is special!

I could envision a modest UK-based meet-up happening some day, likely in London, with maybe a small "History of Death's Head" exhibition on the side. I love visiting the UK, and it would be worth popping over for such an event.

COOL DRAWINGS

A couple of times now I've seen comments pop up from participating artists along the lines of "I had no idea this character existed but he looked cool so I had to draw him". It's wonderful to see that Death's Head has the strength to pull people in based on appearance alone - it goes to show that we have something special there. I hope it'll also compelled people to seek out the stories. If the event actually leads to the creation of new fans that would make me very happy.





so that's a good sign. It's definitely picking up steam as it's chugging along through the years. I hope Marvel will take note and do more with the character in the future - maybe even a movie? Hey, a person can dream...

I'd like to give a shout out to artist Simon Williams, the first person ever to draw me a Death's Head commission. He has a deep love for the character and it really shows! Fans of

Oddly enough, for such an unusual character, most takes I've seen are pretty straightforward. But one that stands out in my mind is a mock comic cover by an artist named Kelvin Green entitled "Death's Shed", depicting Death's Head as, well, a shed. It gave me a chuckle. I can always appreciate a good pun.

My introduction to Death's Head was via Transformers, so I never even knew there was a Doctor Who connection until I read the stories in the Death's Head trade collections. It makes sense though; Doctor Who is one of those rare sci-fi properties that allows for a wide range of stories with the only limit being the writer's imagination (and Simon Furman has a lot of that!) so Death's Head fit right in. It's just a darn shame we'll probably never see them meet on the screen - what an episode that would be!

DAYS OF THE FUTURE

I am certainly determined to organise Draw Death's Head Day for years to come. But it is my fond hope that it will be eventually successful enough that people will continue it without me. This year and the previous one already saw people writing articles about the event and reminding people it was coming up

the character may know his work from the title page illustrations in the 2006 Death's Head collected editions (if you've ever seen the Death's Head Heroclix figure, that's based on one of them) or the Hulk vs. Death's Head comic story in #33 of Marvel Heroes. I have a deep love for traditional inking and Simon's clean, bold lines never fail to blow me away. His Death's Head has



always been a definitive take on the



ly get all this deep devotion to the character 35+ years later - it's really gratifying. There's just something pleasingly straightforward about DH that people warm to. No arcs, no discernible character progression or evolution. He just does what he does and weirdly people love him for it. He's unreformed (unreformable) and all the better for it. Draw Death's Head Day demonstrates what a wide range of eclectic roles and situations you can drop him into without losing the simple joy of the character and I'm always amazed at what people come up with. Now I want a To The Death or Five Points crossover.

character to me. He is an active contributor to Draw Death's Head Day, so be sure to check out his work!

We asked Death's Head's creators to comment on his continuing popularity. Here's what they had to say about the pun-loving peacekeeping agent.

SIMON FURMAN

I'm very proud to have (co-) created Death's Head. So when you subsequent-

GEOFF SENIOR

It's great to see Death's Head is still out there. People are drawing amazing tributes. As with Simon I'm happy to see DH still around and just wish the publishers would give Simon and I the opportunity to work on a story. May DH continue to seek bounty for many years to come.

FROM THE LAND OF FICTION

Editorial by Stephen Hatcher

Welcome once more to the Cosmic Masque Fiction Section, in which I am delighted to present another selection of some of the best Doctor Who stories in prose, written by you, our readers.

This issue we have five stories, all but one of which have not been published before, featuring, by my count, nine Doctors, ranging in length between two very short entries to the first instalment of a three-part serial. What all these stories have in common is the breadth of imagination shown by their writers and the sheer quality of their execution.

Gary Merchant's *Déjà Vu* is a three-part multi-Doctor novella, perfectly timed to celebrate Doctor Who's 60th Anniversary. In this first section, entitled *History Repeating*, Time Lord President Romana is alarmed to discover that time has been altered. Meanwhile five incarnations of the Doctor find themselves dragged back to a chillingly familiar setting, to re-enact one of the most terrifying episodes of five of their earlier lives. The story will continue in *Cosmic Masque XIX* and *XX*.

Back in 2016, Joshua Wanisko was the first ever winner of the Big Finish Paul Spragg Memorial Writing Opportunity. I am delighted to bring him to *Cosmic Masque* with a fabulous story that was originally published in the charity short-story anthology that I edited, *Time Shadows: Second Nature*. In *I Know My Name Is Susan* we find the Doctor's granddaughter struggling to adapt to life as Earth recovers from the Dalek invasion.

Michael Crouch's excellent story *The Oyster Pirates* was featured in *CM XVI*. He returns for this issue with *Ley Of The Land*, a terrific tale, in which the Third Doctor and Jo Grant are sent to investigate an enthusiastic scientist, whose theories about an ancient British mystery have been met with derision by the

scientific establishment. Jo falls under the Professor's spell, but the Doctor is less convinced by his conclusions.

Matthew J. Gleason is a new writer to *Cosmic Masque*, but if the evidence of *Squeelim*, his first story for us, is anything to go by, I hope we will see a great deal more of his work. I was absolutely delighted when he submitted this short but impactful story of an encounter with the Thirteenth Doctor in a pet shop. I'm sure your reaction will echo mine.

Paul Burns is one of my favourite writers and one of our regular contributors. In *They Just Pop Into My Head*, a writer named Paul Burns meets the Thirteenth Doctor and discusses where the inspiration for his stories come from! Make of that what you will!

And so there we are; five terrific stories of the Doctor and his friends, told by five of our readers, which I hope and trust will thrill, delight and intrigue.

Remember, the fiction section, like all of *Cosmic Masque* relies on your contributions. If we get to a situation where you notice that I seem to be writing all of the stories, you'll know we're struggling. Thankfully, we are a long way off that and stories keep arriving in my in-box. But come on – you'll have a story to tell! Now is the time to get in touch via the email address at the front of this issue and either send me a story, or tell me about your ideas. Whether you are a newbie or an experienced writer, it doesn't matter. Together we can make your idea work. Just think how much you will love reading your story, with your name on it, in *Cosmic Masque*. You know you want to.

Steve

DÉJÀ VU: PART ONE. HISTORY REPEATING

by Gary Merchant

Prologue

The hidden door slid open, allowing light into a darkened chamber where a control room had been left undisturbed for many years. A lone figure stepped forward, examining the dusty panels for any signs of damage. But there was none. This chamber, and the machinery it housed, had been shut away, its knowledge forbidden. Officially, it didn't exist. The technology ought to have been broken up, destroyed, with no possible chance to be reactivated. And yet, it had survived. Waiting.

As a gloved hand moved to sweep the dust from an instrument bank, the panel suddenly became Active. Of course – each console was sensitive to localised movement. And that single action had triggered the reactivation of everything else in the room. Though there was no obvious light source, the room was now illuminated from all sides. More consoles flickered into life, and in the middle of the chamber stood its centrepiece – a gaming board divided into five sectors, with the model of an ancient tower at its heart. After a moment's hesitation, the figure passed its hand over the tower. From the rear wall came a slow grinding of long unused mechanisms, as the wall split in two, opening out and revealing a larger chamber beyond the existing one. The myths were true, the figure realised, stepping into this chamber. At last, the plan could be implemented. A plan that would either fulfil a great destiny, or perhaps signal the end of this world.

Rose stared at the Doctor from across the console. After a moment he looked up at her. "I could feel your eyes boring into me," he said. "Something on your mind?" She wasn't sure how to broach the subject. "You know when you changed – became who you are now?"

"Ye-es?"

"Well, I was walking 'round the TARDIS and found the wardrobe room. Loads of stuff there, and it got me thinking – if you've got that many clothes, then you must have been a different person loads of times over." She knew she was on shaky ground. The Doctor didn't usually like talking about who he was, much less about the person he used to be. "I mean," she persisted, "that scarf, for instance. You must have worn that a long time ago."

He looked at her, saying nothing. For a moment Rose wondered if she'd gone too far. "The past is a tricky thing," he said finally. "Not everyone wants to be reminded of it, but you're right. I have been around a long time, and not always in the same body." He began to warm to the subject. "You see, Rose, it isn't just the body that changes when a Time Lord regenerates – there's a change in personality too."

"So, how do you cope with it?" she asked. "All those different bits of you inside your head. Must get a bit crowded in there."

"Yeah, you'd think so, wouldn't you?" He laughed briefly. "It just sorts itself out, really. Once a regeneration settles down, the personality adopted by that body becomes the dominant one, and all the other bits get stored at the back of the brain

– filed away until needed... crumbs, that was a bit deep.” The Doctor turned back to the console. “Tell you what. Why don’t I find us somewhere quiet and peaceful for a while? Somewhere to clear out the cobwebs.”

She knew when he was trying to change the subject, but Rose’s curiosity had been abated for now, and she’d learned some more about her time travelling friend, which would do for now. “OK,” she agreed. “Anywhere in mind?”

He grinned. “I know the perfect place. You’ll love it!”

Rose stared out at the vista before her, as a sense of calm overwhelmed her. “OK, I’ve got to admit, I’m impressed.”

“Not bad, is it?” the Doctor agreed. “I’d always meant to come back here, but I never seemed to find the time before now. I think it was well worth the wait.”

Rose nodded, as the rolling hills stretched out in front of the two friends. “It’s just so peaceful here. What did you say it was called again?”

“The Eye of Orion,” he replied. “The most tranquil place in the Universe.”

The figure was now seated at the main console. Readings fluctuated until the chosen target had been selected. A monitor screen flared into white, as an image of a figure in a multicoloured frock coat came into view.

“There’s something familiar about the air,” Rose was saying. “What is it?”

The Doctor smiled. “Like Earth after a thunderstorm?”

“That’s it, yeah.” She laughed. “So, you’ve been here before, then?”

He nodded. “Just the once. I looked even younger then than I do now,” he remembered. The memories came flooding back to him – Tegan and Turlough were travelling with him then. And it had been the

precursor to yet another adventure. The memories were so clear, he could almost feel the twinge in his chest from all those years ago – except that he wasn’t imagining it! He gasped in pain. “Rose!”

She was at his side immediately, her arms around him. “Doctor, what is it?”

There was a look of uncertainty in his eyes. “It’s OK, Rose. Just a twinge of... aah!” He fell to his knees, his legs unable to support him. He felt the strength ebbing from him, as Rose stopped his upper body from falling to the ground.

He was only dimly aware of Rose supporting him, but as he blacked out, the Doctor knew that there was something very wrong.

Like a sense of déjà vu.

Something Wicked This Way Comes

The ripples from the line of a fishing rod broke the gentle flowing of the stream. The TARDIS was perched on top of a hill, from where a young woman stepped out to join the Doctor. “Caught anything yet?”

“The act of fishing isn’t always connected to the netting of a prize fish,” he said. “It can be just as enjoyable without that requirement.”

“So that’s a no, then.” She grabbed his Panama hat and placed it on her head.

“It’s a nice day though, Professor.”

“Yes,” he agreed. “A spring day, blue skies, and sunshine. Heaven.” In this, his seventh incarnation, the Doctor had been so caught up in staying one step ahead of his foes, and manipulating various scenarios, that he had almost forgotten how to relax. So today was a special day. A time for relaxing, with no immediate worries on the horizon.

Ace reached across and switched on the tape deck. The sounds of jazz did little to disturb the water, as the two friends lay back on the grass verge. “Oh, such a perfect day,” the Doctor mused. Presently two sets of eyes flickered shut. The Doc-

tor and Ace didn’t have a care in the world.

It was gradual at first, but the music from the tape deck became fragmented, uneven. Ace was the first to notice. “Something’s blocking the transmission.” The Doctor joined her, twiddling various knobs and switches. “It isn’t the deck itself, nor the tape,” he told her. “Which means...”

“Something outside,” Ace realised. “But where from?” Then her eyes fell to the water, and she caught her breath. “Professor, I think you’ve got a bite. And from the look of it, it’s a big one.”

The Doctor followed her gaze, to see a dark shape silhouetted upon the water. He didn’t share her enthusiasm. “That’s only a reflection on the surface,” he warned. “Look above the waterline and start moving back toward the TARDIS.”

Noting the tone in the Doctor’s voice, Ace began to back away, looking up as she did so. Above her was a huge black obelisk, slowly rotating above them, and moving closer all the time. “What is it?” she whispered.

“A memory from my past,” was his grim reply. “Now run, Ace!”

She didn’t need telling twice, abandoning the tape deck for the safety of the TARDIS. But the obelisk gathered speed, swooping down and enveloping the time travellers. Ace felt herself frozen in mid step, unable to move, as the obelisk departed planet Earth, its task completed.

In the chamber, the figure smiled. Just a few more to locate. In fact, there had already been another arrival.

“Well, I’ve seen a few dreary places during our travels, Doctor, but this really tops the lot. It’s no wonder you’ve never thought to bring me here before.” Her cheery manner masked Evelyn Smythe’s concern. Since their abrupt arrival, the

Doctor had barely spoken, his face displaying recognition and dread at the same time.

Finally, he turned to her. “Sorry, I wasn’t listening.”

“Oh yes you were,” she chided, gently.

“You just didn’t want to worry me.”

“Believe me, Evelyn, there’s plenty to worry about.”

“So, you have been here before?” she realised.

“Once, a long time ago,” he answered. “It’s not the most welcoming place, I grant you. And given the choice, I would have steered well clear of it.” He stared at the bare winding trees and the patches of green overrun by the craggy footpaths. “We’ve arrived on Gallifrey, Evelyn. More specifically, on a vile backwater known as the Death Zone.”

“You mean the Time Lords have summoned you? But why here?”

“Ah.” The Doctor placed an arm around Evelyn’s shoulder. “It’s not quite as simple as that.”

She sighed. “It never is. Go on, tell me the worst.”

Rose had managed to half drag and half carry the Doctor back to the TARDIS. Before she could stop him, he had set the controls for dematerialisation and then his legs finally gave way. Rose cushioned his fall, the two of them collapsed on the floor. “Did you have to set the TARDIS going?” she said, extricating herself from underneath him.

“Did I?” His brow furrowed in concentration. “Suppose I must have done. Must be a race memory, or something.”

Rose shook him. “Doctor, you’re not making a lot of sense. What’s wrong?”

“Sorry.” He shook his head, as if to clear it. “All of this has happened before. Well, not in quite the same way, but the effects are the same.” He looked at her, hoping to make her understand. “Whenever there’s a disruption in my own timeline, I can feel

it inside.” He tapped his chest. “Like an early warning system.”

“You’re not dying, are you?” Rose asked, fearing the worst.

“No, just a bit weak,” he replied. But his face was grim. “Someone’s messing around with time, Rose. Only this time, it’s personal.” With an effort, the Doctor pulled himself to her. “I’m going to need your help. I’m not much use at the moment.”

He was relying on her, and she would not let him down. “Just tell me what to do.”

“I’ll need you to keep alert, Rose.” His smile belied his weak state. “I daresay the TARDIS will be landing soon - the scanner’s already keyed to my brain print, so watch out for some... energy readings...” he passed out before he could say any more, leaving Rose to wonder just sort of mess what the Doctor had landed them both in this time.

In another part of the Death Zone, two figures pulled themselves to their feet, dusting themselves down. “What happened?”

“I’m not sure,” the other replied. “It felt like we were being pulled out of time. How do you feel?”

“A little disoriented,” his friend admitted. “Other than that, I’m well.”

He smiled. “Good.” A light breeze brushed against his face, and he turned left. “This way, I think.”

“Doctor.” She caught his arm. “We have no knowledge of where we are. How can you make such an arbitrary decision with no facts to base it upon?”

He turned to face her. “Because whatever brought us here did so for a reason. And I get the feeling that whatever direction we take, we’re bound to find some clue – possibly where we are, for a start.” He took in the bleak landscape around them. Not the most inviting of places. He shrugged, reaching for her hand. “Coming?”

Princess Jabe, representative of the Forest of Cheem, sighed, accepting the inevitable. One moment they had been in the machinery ducts of Platform One, the next they were here – wherever here actually was. But in the short time she had known the Doctor, she instinctively knew he was someone to trust. “It seems we have no choice,” she replied, accepting the proffered hand.

He grinned. “That’s my girl.”

Gloved hands hovered over the instrument bank once more. There was only one more to find. As the screen flared into white, an image formed of a man dressed in a green velvet frock coat...

At that moment, the man in question was tied to a sacrificial stone altar, with no obvious chance of escape. As for his travelling companion, she had been feted as the reincarnation of a tribal goddess, and was now wearing a formal headdress, which only served to weigh her down. And nothing she said could persuade the worshipping tribe to release her friend.

As far as they were concerned, he was a defiler of their customs, while she was currently the best thing since sliced bread. “Sorry, Doctor,” she said. “I did my best.”

“Well, given the choice of a long lingering sacrifice, or being put to immediate death for heresy, I don’t think you did too badly.” He struggled in vain against his bonds. “At least it gives us time.”

She stood over him, supposedly giving the Doctor the last rites, while trying to think of a way out of their current predicament. But no solution came to her. If only she hadn’t agreed to travel with the Doctor again after all these years - after that business with the High Inquisitor and her plans for a Universal Collective, then things might have been different. And her being the spitting image of the Inquisitor had complicated that particular situation.

And now, here she was, having been taken to be a goddess, and forced to comply with this tribe’s tradition of sacrifice – against the Doctor.

Not for the first time, Jo Jones realised that being older didn’t necessarily mean being wiser.

“Cheer up, Jo,” the Doctor rallied. “Worse things at sea, and all that. I’ll find a way out of this for both of us. I’ll admit I haven’t worked out the finer details, but...”

Jo wasn’t listening. “Doctor, can you hear it? A sort of rushing wind.”

He strained to listen above the tribal chanting. “Yes, there is something. Sounds familiar, though I can’t quite place it.”

At that moment the tribal chief raised his arms, and the chanting stopped. “The moment has come, defiler of our lands. You must be sacrificed to appease our goddess.”

It was at that very moment that a dark shadow fell over the altar from above. The chief and his tribe fell to their knees, bowing down before this sign from the heavens. But as the black obelisk swooped down to envelop the Doctor and Jo, she could have sworn she heard the Time Lord mutter, ‘out of the frying pan...’

When the tribesmen finally rose to their feet, the altar was bare, and their goddess had vanished.

Borusa sat in the council chamber of Gallifrey, Chancellor Flavia and the Castellan waiting on his words. It was clear he was not happy about this turn of events. “Involving this... person does not please me. However, since the Council chose to invoke a majority decision against my advice it seems I have no choice in the matter.”

The Castellan gave a grim smile. “Desperate times call for desperate measures, Lord President. There was no

other option.”

“And the Council were in full agreement,” Flavia assured him.

“Overruling the President.” Borusa offered no further argument. “Very well,” he decided. “Have the renegade enter.” If the Castellan noted that the President’s latest regeneration had not helped his stubbornness, his opinions were not voiced.

Instructions were inputted into a comm. link, and after a moment, the double doors of the chamber opened, allowing entry to one who had long ago left Gallifrey behind, to fend for itself. Now, as the figure stood at the top of the small flight of stairs, it seemed events had come full circle. “Well, well. Lord President, the Castellan and Chancellor Flavia. Quite a reception committee.” A smile played across the face of the newcomer, who took the remaining chair at the oval table. “So, what can I do for you?”

Borusa leaned forward. “You are one of the most despicable individuals this Time Lord race has ever produced. Nevertheless, we are prepared to overlook your past indiscretions in exchange for your help.”

“I’m intrigued. Go on.”

“We would be willing to offer you a free pardon,” the Castellan suggested. “Surely that would be preferable to your renegade existence?”

There was a pause as this was digested. “Such an offer would only come at a price. What would I have to do?”

Borusa hesitated before continuing. “We need you to rescue the Doctor.”

“What?” The woman known as the Rani fell back in her chair, a look of genuine surprise on her face.

The current President of Gallifrey watched as the archive recording of this

scene was played out on a vid-screen. "That is not as it should be. Records clearly indicate that it was the Master, not the Rani, who was approached."

"And yet the recording tells a different story. You are sure, then – that time is being altered in some way?"

"I've no doubt of it." Romana switched off the screen and turned to Leela. "That episode in Gallifrey's history is well documented, but the evidence taken from the Matrix has been altered. Nothing vital or damaging, but enough to concern the High Council, if they knew about it. And there's something else – the Death Zone has been reactivated once more."

Leela had heard of the Death Zone, and of how the Doctor had been instrumental in saving Gallifrey from a political uprising. This prompted her next question. "Could this be the work of the Free Time activists?"

Romana shook her head. "No, not this time. Even they would steer clear of something on this scale. No, whoever is involved in this is operating from inside the Capitol. And that's why I need your help, Leela. Your instincts give you an edge, letting you see things that a Gallifreyan would miss."

Leela nodded. "What would you have me do, Romana?"

"Go about your usual business, instructing the students in their work, but keep a look out for anything that doesn't seem right. I'm not even sure what we're looking for, but if there's anything to be found, I want you to report only to me, and no one else. Until we're sure of our facts, I want to avoid any false accusations."

"I understand." Leela paused before leaving. "And what will you do in the meantime?"

"Worry, mostly," Romana replied. She smiled as she spoke, but the unease in her

manner was clear for Leela to see.

Ace kept step with the Doctor as he strode along the grey, rocky plains. "So, we're on Gallifrey, right? In the Death Zone?"

He nodded. "Correct on both counts."

She grinned. "Oh, this is well wicked. I never thought I'd make it to Gallifrey."

"Don't be so quick to judge, Ace," said the Doctor, tapping her nose. "Home isn't all it's cracked up to be. You've said so yourself."

"Yeah, but you can't compare Perivale to this, Professor," she pointed out. "Mind you, I don't think much of this Death Zone. A bit too grey."

The Doctor came to a halt. "The Death Zone isn't usually noted for its use of colour – and I should stay close if I were you, Ace." The steel in his voice was unmistakable. "We have company."

Ace would have walked on if the Doctor's warning tone hadn't pulled her back. She followed his gaze and saw a group of people coming towards them. It was only when they came near enough to make out details, that she realised they weren't people at all. Blank lifeless faces stared at them, as jerky movements from their limbs brought them closer with each step. "What are they?"

The Doctor's reply was not reassuring. "Autons." Before he could explain further, the right hand of each figure hinged down, revealing a gun-like nozzle.

Reunions and Second Chances

The TARDIS had landed some time ago. Inside, Rose watched over the Doctor's prone form. He'd been ill before, she remembered, just after his regeneration. But this was different. It would take more than a cup of tea to revive him this time. The Doctor had drifted in and out of con-

sciousness, mumbling about 'other selves' and something about a tower, but none of it really made much sense.

And now she was dividing her time watching him and the scanner. Over time, it had become one of the few things in the TARDIS that she knew how to operate competently. Viewing the bleak landscape, the immediate area did not look promising, its barren terrain indicating no form of life whatsoever. Now, Rose had switched to a computer-generated grid map of the area, watching out for any possible help.

Rose had her doubts, but in his few bouts of lucidity, the Doctor had said that help was on the way. "They'll come. I can sense them, in here," he'd said, tapping his head. Now, as he lay unconscious once more, Rose began to wonder if she would end her days alone on this planet. She looked down at him, tears welling up. "Don't you die on me, Doctor," she sobbed. "Don't you dare."

The Doctor and Ace were running for their lives, with the Autons in halting pursuit. "They have an affinity for any kind of plastic," the Doctor explained between breaths. "And they're usually guided by a disembodied form called the Nestene Consciousness. I must say, I'm surprised they're functioning at all."

Ace latched onto this. "You mean without this Consciousness thing, they'd just be dummies?"

"There must be some residual intelligence remaining, allowing them basic movement," the Doctor guessed, "but it means they won't be as dangerous – yiaargh!" He leapt to the side as an energy bolt sliced past him.

"Dangerous enough for us! Come on!" Ace took the lead, running toward a valley, flanked by mountains on either side. As they ran, small pieces of stone rained upon their clothes from an overhanging cliff edge high above.

The Doctor looked up at the cliff edge, an

idea forming. "Ace," he declared, coming to a halt. "It's time we took the advantage."

"What sort of advantage?"

He grinned. "One with a big bang. Quickly – I need two cans of Nitro Nine with a ten second fuse."

"Lucky for us I grabbed my rucksack." Ace reached inside and drew out two oblong silver containers. Taking them, the Doctor ran back the way they had come to where the overhang of the cliff was greater. Placing the explosives in a crevice, he hurried back, dodging the energy beams from the Auton handguns.

"Time for a hasty withdrawal," he said, as the two friends moved quickly out of the line of fire. "I just hope I've got my timing right."

Jo shivered in her safari shirt and slacks. While her attire had been perfect for the humidity of the rainforest, the chill of the Death Zone was an immediate contrast. Still, at least the slacks gave her better protection than the mini-skirts she used to wear. If only the Death Zone wasn't so featureless. She and the Doctor had climbed over one rocky crag after another, and yet the Doctor seemed to know where he was going. "It's a bit grey around here, isn't it," she said. "It wasn't like this in the brochure."

"We must have arrived out-of-season," agreed the Doctor. "We haven't exactly caught this part of Gallifrey at its best."

Jo got the feeling that he knew more than he was telling, though he hadn't said as much since their arrival. She felt it was time for some answers. "OK, Doctor." She grabbed his shoulder, turning him around to face her. "Since we got here, you've led me through the greyest and coldest place I've ever known, and in all the travels we've had, that's saying something. But you haven't given me one word of explanation – where are we, how did we get

here, and why are we here?" The Doctor looked down at her, unsure whether to reply. But she had a right to know. "The Death Zone is a part of Time Lord history that shouldn't have been created in the first place," he began. "In the Dark Times, before Rassilon, hordes of alien species were brought here purely for the amusement of the Time Lords, just to see how long they would survive. As you can imagine, given the harsh conditions, not many of them did."

"But that's horrible," Jo gasped. "I thought the Time Lords were a good people."

"Oh, they are, most of the time," he assured her. "But like all families, the Time Lords have their dark secrets. I thought this one had been locked away forever, but it seems I was wrong. I remember when..." The abrupt sound of an explosion cut through the Doctor's train of thought. "What the... where did that come from?"

"Just over that ridge, I think," Jo replied. "See the smoke rising?"

The two friends broke into a run, towards the source of the blast. Stopping at the edge of the ridge, they could see a huge pile of fallen rocks. Peering closer, Jo could just make out a sea of bodies beneath the rubble. "Doctor...?"

"I see them, Jo. Let's see if there were any survivors." He took her hand, helping her down the steep incline to the lower ground. The dust was beginning to settle by the time they had arrived at the scene. The Doctor crouched down, examining what was left of the bodies. "This isn't flesh and blood, Jo. It's plastic." He turned a severed limb around in his hands, as a faint memory came to him. "Mannequins – no, Autons."

"Autons?" Jo stared at the limb and its shiny surface. "Put it down, Doctor. I don't like this."

"I'd follow the young lady's advice, if I were you," a voice called out. "Dangerous things, Autons."

The Doctor let the limb fall from his

grasp, as two figures, a little man and a young girl, stepped out from cover. "I must say," he said to the girl, "that was a rather satisfying explosion."

She grinned. "Nothing but the best, Professor."

"Indeed. Now, who..." he paused, recognising the Doctor. "Oh my."

The dust had at last settled, allowing the Doctor his first proper look at the shorter man and his companion. "It's you – and Ace, if I'm not mistaken."

"Professor?" Ace stepped back. "What's going on? How does he know you – and me?"

The little man drew himself up to his full height. "Ace, this is me – a future incarnation of myself."

"The Eighth, to be precise," the Doctor told her.

"You mean, he's what you'll look like in the future?" Ace took in the taller incarnation of the Doctor. "Not bad looking, I suppose," she decided. "Not sure about the hair though."

"Doctor?" Jo stared at the shorter version of the Time Lord. "Is that...?"

"Me? Yes, it is," the taller one replied, turning to his other self. "You remember Jo, don't you?"

"Yes, of course." The Doctor looked from Jo to his eighth persona in puzzlement. "But you shouldn't be here – with him."

Jo sighed. "It's a bit of a long story, Doctor."

"And this isn't the safest of places to discuss it," said the other Doctor. "I think we ought to move on, don't you?"

"Where to?" Ace asked. "It's all grey hills and mountains from where I'm standing."

Her Doctor pointed to the far distance. "That's where we're heading, Ace." Through the mist, she could just make out the shape of a tower. "The Tower of Rassilon, a great monument to the single most important figure in Time Lord history."

Ace shrugged. "So, what's it doing here, in the middle of this rat hole?"

"It's all part of the Game of Rassilon," her Doctor told her. "Anyone who reaches that Tower will have endured many hardships and overcome numerous obstacles."

"It's a somewhat loose translation from Old High Gallifreyan," the Eighth Doctor said, "but you get the idea. Shall we go?" The little man seemed reluctant to give way to his future self, but under the watchful gaze of Ace and Jo, he fell into step alongside his other persona, with the two women following behind.

"Are you sure you know where we are going?" Jabe asked the Doctor, as they continued their trek across the barren landscape. A heavy mist had now closed around them, so that they could only see a few feet ahead. "I can't see any points of reference to take direction from. And this mist does little to help us."

He nodded. "It's weird, but somehow, I feel I know this place. And it's like I can hear voices in my head, directing me."

"Then you have been here before?"

"I suppose so... dunno... can't remember." He offered a cheerful smile, but Jabe could see the Doctor was troubled. As if there were a missing piece he needed to complete this puzzle. "If we keep going for long enough," he added, "we're bound to come across something familiar."

Jabe was doubtful. "Assuming we're not already going around in circles."

"Ay." The Doctor seemed mildly offended. "I'll have you know that I've got an unswerving sense of direction. Call it a Time Lord gift." He stared ahead. "See, the mist is clearing. Now we can see where..." He stopped, dumbstruck. In the distance, directly ahead, was something he never expected to see. "It can't be. This shouldn't be possible. By all known laws of time, we shouldn't be here."

Jabe stared at the monument before them. "That tower – you recognise it?"

"Oh yeah. I know it all right." There was a tremor in his voice. "Jabe, that is the Tower of Rassilon, something that shouldn't exist – not in my timeline, anyway. Because it was destroyed, along with the rest of Gallifrey during the Time War. But it's here, and we're stood gawping at it like a couple of tourists. How crazy is that?"

Jabe was shocked, recalling the history and understanding the significance of the Doctor's words only too well. "It's not possible. We are talking about an ancient monument and your world, both of them wiped out." She turned to the Doctor. "For us to be here, now, is..."

"Impossible, yeah." There were tears in the Doctor's eyes. "Maybe you should write up a book of incredible facts and put this one at the top of the list." He fell to his knees, his head in his hands. He was crying openly now. "I know it's impossible, Jabe. I know that. But we're here – and I don't know what to do."

Jabe knelt down beside him, her arm across his shoulder. "You said before that it felt as though we were pulled through time. It seems you were right."

"And a lot of good that does us now." The Doctor looked up, his face drained of colour. "I know what happens to this world. I've been dragged back in time for whatever reason, and I can't do anything about the future – I can't save them, Jabe. In the end, they'll all die."

"Doctor, the fact remains that you are here – we both are," she pointed out. "You said we were brought her for a reason. Perhaps this is a second chance for you, to give you something to believe in again."

The Doctor was silent for a moment, staring up at the Tower, the tears drying on his skin. "I thought there was just me, the Doctor," he finally said. "And that's all there was for a long time, until a shop girl called Rose Tyler came stumbling into my life and turned everything upside down. And now there's this – a return home."

The last thing I expected.” He turned back to Jabe, and there was a determination in his eyes. “One thing I do know – we need to get moving. It isn’t safe to hang around here.”

He pulled himself to his feet and set off at a pace, with Jabe hurrying to keep up with him. “Doctor, what is this place? Where exactly are we?”

“A playing field,” he replied. “A very dangerous playing field. And right now, I don’t give much for our chances.”

Rose was dutifully maintaining her vigil on both the Doctor and the grid map on the TARDIS scanner. While the Doctor’s breathing was shallow, at least it was regular, which gave her some hope. She had also folded his overcoat into a makeshift pillow, to provide some comfort. In the meantime, the four life signs currently registering on the scanner were still scattered around the planet’s surface – two of them had apparently met up, while one was still some distance away, and the other quite close.

Switching from the grid map to the main viewer, Rose remembered the Doctor’s words, about the scanner being keyed into his brain print. If that was the case, just what was she tracking, and why?

They had paused for a few moments, to give Evelyn time to catch her breath. The Doctor had to remind himself how much older she was, compared to his other, younger friends who had travelled with him. “Sorry if I’m slowing you down,” she said.

“Nonsense,” he insisted. “It’s not as if we’re in any great hurry.”

“Doctor, I know that tone,” Evelyn reminded him.

His face was a picture of innocence. “I’m sure I don’t know what you mean, Evelyn. I don’t have any sort of ‘tone’.”

“Oh yes you do,” she laughed. “Whenever

there’s a mystery you get all excited, and no matter how you try, you can’t hide the expectation in your voice.”

The Doctor sighed, knowing he was caught out. “Am I really that transparent?”

“Like glass.” She searched his face. “You’re really worried, Doctor, I can see that much. What is it about this Game of Rassilon that bothers you?”

“When I was here before,” he explained, “the Game of Rassilon was being misused, manipulated. The perpetrator turned out to be someone I had known for many years – my tutor, in fact. Anyway, the technology, such as the Time Scoop that brought us here, should have been destroyed, to prevent any further misdeeds. Sadly, that doesn’t seem to have been the case.”

“Obviously, because we’re here,” Evelyn noted. “And we have to get to this Tower?”

“I’m afraid so, because whoever’s reactivated the Death Zone has their own agenda, using this as a diversionary tactic.” The Doctor would have expanded on the subject, but instead his body stiffened. “Evelyn, I want you to move very slowly. Get behind me.”

The edge in his voice was enough to alert Evelyn to possible danger, and she did as he asked. Only then did she look over his shoulder. All she could see were grey trees and fauna. Strange how they looked very much like hands. But she had the distinct impression that the fauna was stretching, almost flexing itself, and looking back at her. “Digitalea Vociferous, popularly known as Finger Plants,” the Doctor informed her, answering her unspoken question. “A dangerous type of foliage, and certainly not native to Gallifrey.”

“And when you say dangerous...”

“I mean very dangerous. Now, slowly back away, Evelyn. We don’t want to agitate them.”

How could plants be dangerous, Evelyn wondered. Then, as she and the Doctor

began to slowly move back, the plants started to ease themselves out of the dry earth and track the two friends. “They must have got our scent,” the Doctor exclaimed. “Run, Evelyn!”

She needed no further prompting, as the Doctor took her hand in his. As they ran, Evelyn could hear a scuffling sound behind them, becoming louder with each hurried step. Risking a glance back, she saw the finger plants scurrying along the ground, their roots trailing behind them. “Doctor!”

“I know, Evelyn. I know,” he shouted. “Just keep running!”

“But they’re getting closer!” Evelyn could feel the plants almost snatching at the heels of her shoes. “We’re not going to make it!” Then she slipped. The Doctor caught her before she fell, but this minor setback was enough for the finger plants to catch them. They began to swarm over their bodies, tearing at their clothes. The Doctor protected Evelyn the best that he could, but the sheer numbers were too much. Despite his struggles, he could feel his strength ebbing from the constant pummelling of this vicious foliage.

History Repeating

The plants were tugging at his hair and pulling at his face as the Doctor fought for breath, but he could feel himself being asphyxiated. His head was pounding as he tried in vain to free himself from the finger plants. But for each one he removed, two more would take its place.

Dimly, he was aware of someone running towards them, but it was impossible for the Doctor to shout any warning. The plants continued to compress against his and Evelyn’s bodies, squeezing the life out of them – and then, the pressure began to ease. At first the Doctor thought he was imagining it, but no. He could feel something being sprayed onto him. Whatever it was seemed to be damaging to the finger

plants, as they started falling to the ground, withered and dead.

Recovering his senses, he began brushing the rest of the plants away from Evelyn, who had almost passed out from lack of oxygen. Someone else was brushing the foliage from his own form. “Thank you,” he managed to say. “I rather think you’ve saved our lives.”

“No problem.” She was a young girl. Blonde, dressed in jeans and a red top, and most definitely from Earth. The spray had come from a nozzle connected to a hand-held cylinder. “Are you OK?”

The Doctor nodded gratefully. “I am, but my friend Evelyn needs some help.”

“I’m just a bit dizzy,” she protested. “I’ll be right as rain in a few minutes.”

“Maybe,” the girl helped her stand. “But from what I’ve seen, this ain’t exactly the safest place around. The sooner we’re out of here, the better.”

“I won’t disagree with you there.” The Doctor’s eyes drifted to the label on the cylinder. “Weed Killer?”

The girl smiled. “Yeah, I know. You wouldn’t believe the stuff we’ve got stored away. And it worked, didn’t it?”

Gazing down at the evidence around them, the Doctor was forced to concede the point. “And do you normally make a habit of coming to the aid of complete strangers?”

She shrugged. “Must be the company I keep. I’ve got a friend who usually knows what to do. It’s just...”

The Doctor noted the girl’s hesitancy. “Something wrong?”

“Well, my friend isn’t looking too great at the moment. He’s had some sort of attack – I can’t explain it properly.” She looked hopefully at the Doctor. “I don’t suppose...”

He gave her his most encouraging smile.

“Lead the way, Miss...?”

“Tyler. Rose Tyler.”

Leela’s investigations had not begun

promisingly. With no immediate suspects to focus upon, and uncertain as to what she was looking for, she was effectively working from a blank canvas. Plus, there was the added hinderance of carrying on with her tutoring. The students were pleasant enough, and they seemed keen to learn. But dividing her time in this way had not allowed Leela to concentrate fully on her teachings.

It was only later that she saw a way to combine the two strands.

"Instead of our normal lessons," she announced to the class, "perhaps we should concentrate our minds on Gallifreyan history." There were a few murmurings of dissent, but Leela carried on. "None of us can learn from the present unless we understand the mistakes of the past."

"And so, understand how our future actions will benefit us?" suggested one of the pupils. It was like a domino effect. As one student accepted the idea, so did the rest of the class. Within minutes, they were now eager to know more.

Now that she had their attention, Leela was more certain of her ground. "As you all know, there have been times when the safety of Gallifrey itself has been threatened. Let us study one of those times," she suggested, "and not confine ourselves to these four walls. We should instead venture out from the classroom and see first-hand the people and places which played a part in that time."

And so it was that numerous Time Lords and former Chancellery Guards found themselves besieged by a host of students wanting to know what had occurred during a particular time of crisis, where emergency powers had been invoked, and President Borusa had mysteriously vanished, resulting in the Doctor being declared President.

Once the desired impetus had been achieved, Leela then moved the class on to the next part of the lesson – the relic room, where many of the items in use at that time had now become museum arte-

facts. Under supervision from official guides, the students were allowed to touch the items, prompting further discussion on how these had played their part.

Leela realised that, purely by accident, she had hit upon a fresh way of tuition that had probably never been considered on Gallifrey. As the excitement of experiencing real history touched every student, she wondered whether future tutorials should adopt this format.

Romana sat back in her Presidential chair, offering her congratulations. "Well, I must say, Leela, your History class seems to have been very successful. I've had good reports from the Academy."

"It seemed the obvious thing to do," Leela replied. "Bringing the past to the students in a different way."

"While allowing you access to people and relics that might have otherwise been denied," Romana observed. "Very clever. So, what did you find out?"

"Nothing certain," Leela admitted. "Much of what we learned was already public knowledge. But there was something not right."

"Go on."

"For the last part of the lesson, I wanted to take the students into what had been President Borusa's personal chambers," she explained. "But this was denied to us. I challenged the guard, and he said it was a..." she searched for the phrase. "A secure area."

"Now that is odd," Romana agreed. "Why post a guard on rooms that have been empty for so long? Let's see..." She searched through her personal database for the information. When the answer came through, she sighed in exasperation. "Now, why am I not surprised?" She turned to Leela. "It seems the order was given by the Celestial Intervention Agency."

The Doctor awoke to find Rose crouching over him, his earlier pain and confusion now fading. She smiled. "Hello."

"Hello." Then he looked past her and saw the man in the patchwork frock coat smiling at him. "Oh. Hello."

"Young Rose was getting worried about you," the man said good-naturedly. He grasped the Doctor's hand in a firm grip, helping him to his feet. "How do you feel?"

"Better now, thanks."

Just through the other man's presence, the Doctor could feel his strength returning. His eyes alighted on Evelyn, who had now recovered from her recent ordeal. He winked at her. "Look's like the gang's all here – some of them anyway." He turned to Rose. "What's been happening?"

"You had some sort of attack," she told him. "You set the TARDIS in flight, and we ended up here – wherever 'here' is." Evelyn piped up, "Apparently, we're in some cheerful place called the Death Zone – or so the Doctor says," she added, nodding to the other man.

"You called him 'Doctor'," said Rose. "And he didn't even blink when we entered the TARDIS." Then the realisation hit her. "Oh my God – no, you can't be. Not in that get-up!" Far from being shocked at this revelation, it was all she could do stop herself from laughing. "You can't be the Doctor. Oh, this is hilarious."

The Doctor in question didn't seem to appreciate the joke. "Now, look here..."

"I'm sorry," Rose giggled, waving her hands helplessly. "It's just, well... you and him, it's..."

Evelyn took him aside. "Doctor, let her get it out of her system," she said, trying to keep a straight face. "It's just a shock for the poor girl, that's all."

"That's all very well," he said, in between fresh bursts of laughter from Rose. "I just didn't expect this sort of reaction." He

looked to his latest incarnation for support.

"Ooh, don't bring me into this," said the Doctor, grinning. "I'm strictly neutral."

By now, the Doctor had recovered his composure, and as they walked, he was telling Jabe all about the Death Zone and the games played there. "It was the worst of times as far as Gallifrey was concerned. When the idea for the Games was first put forward, my father was one of a minority who was dead against it. It wasn't until years later, when Rassilon took charge that things came to a head. As the head of a new High Council, he made sure the Death Zone was shut down, and the use of the Time Scoop was forbidden."

"So why has it all been reactivated?" Jabe wondered. "Surely the Time Lords would not have regressed back to such macabre entertainment?"

"Oh, no. Rassilon was the first of the new breed. The Dark Times were officially over, and that was when the Time Lords started becoming respectable." The Doctor pondered the situation. "The trouble is, that isn't enough for some people. There's always someone with some lofty ideas who needs taking down a peg or two. And it's that unknown someone who's using us – playing us as pawns in a much larger game than this one."

This did not appeal to Jabe. "Then we are on our own in this wilderness. No one to help us."

"Oh, I wouldn't say that", the Doctor replied. "There are probably some of my past selves in other parts of the Zone. All being used the same as me."

"Other Doctors? Is that likely?"

The Doctor nodded. "Pretty much. Y'see, Jabe, something like this has happened before. And I'm not a great believer in coincidence. If I'm here, then others are here too." The thought seemed to fill him with a mixture of excitement and dread, as the two of them continued their pro-

gress toward the Tower.

Co-ordinator Narvin shifted uncomfortably under Romana's gaze. "I ask you again, Narvin. What do you know of the posting of a Chancellery guard outside Borusa's chambers?"

"Strictly speaking, Madam President," he pointed out. "President Borusa is no longer in office. Hence, those rooms are not now attributed to him."

"Which makes the posting of a guard all the more puzzling. Wouldn't you agree?" The co-ordinator said nothing, but Romana pressed him. "I know you have contacts within the CIA, Narvin. Therefore, the logical assumption is that you must know something."

"Or are you in so deep that you dare not speak?" Leela stepped forward, her knife glinting. "Shall I cut him, or have K9 stun him into submission?"

Romana regarded Narvin coolly. "What an interesting choice. Which would you prefer?"

Narvin paled. "You cannot intend me harm. People would notice."

"That would depend on where you were marked." There was no humour in Leela's words.

Narvin looked from President to savage. "I presume this has something to do with the Doctor."

Mention of the Doctor was an unexpected development, and it was to Romana's credit that she retained her composure, giving nothing away. "And what do you know of the Doctor?"

"Only that he no longer exists in any of his incarnations. Apparently, his time traces have vanished from their points in space and time. As you will no doubt recall, Madam President, such an occurrence happened once before, when..." Narvin fell silent, wondering if he had said too much.

Romana leaned forward in her chair. "You were going to say, 'when Borusa was

President.' So, I ask you again, Narvin – why is there a guard outside his former chambers?"

His head bowed forward slightly, as he admitted defeat. "According to the CIA, there were certain facts not presented to the High Council at the time when Borusa's Presidency was overturned."

"This is old news," Romana sighed, remembering the Borusa incident. "The crisis in question was averted, and in time, the details were made part of the public record."

"Nevertheless," Narvin continued, "not all details were made available. Because of Borusa's popularity at the time, it was felt that it would be more beneficial to the public face of Gallifrey if certain facts were held back. The CIA still holds that opinion to this day."

Romana studied Narvin. She didn't necessarily trust him, but he was true to his seal of office, and was basically honest. "Assuming I believe you, just what are these facts, Narvin? And how would they affect Gallifrey?"

He hesitated before answering. "Perhaps, Madam President, you should see for yourself."

The Seventh and Eighth Doctors, together with their respective companions, had covered a great deal of ground, but the Tower seemed only slightly closer than it had appeared an hour before. The four of them were now trekking up a hill with a range of mountains stretching up before them. Ace and Jo were just a few steps behind, far enough out of their Doctor's hearing. "You'd think they'd have stopped arguing by now."

Jo sighed. "Ace, I've seen it all before. I think it's because they're basically the same person. Different bodies, but still so much alike."

"Oh yeah," Ace realised. "I'd never thought of it like that. So, you knew the

Doctor before?"

"I was only a few years older than you are now," Jo remembered. "The Doctor I knew then was tall, with a shock of white hair. He used to wear frilly shirts and velvet smoking jackets – that was when I was attached to UNIT."

The girl from Perivale grinned. "I think you'll find UNIT's changed a lot since then," she said, thinking back to when they had met up with two Brigadiers, knights in armour, and taken a ride in a yellow Edwardian roadster.

Jo nodded toward Ace's Doctor. "So, what's he like then?"

"The Professor? Oh, he's OK most of the time. Trouble is, he likes to play things his own way, like he's got a big plan. I'm always ready to watch his back, but I sometimes wonder what's going on inside his head."

"Sounds dangerous."

Ace shrugged. "You get used to it. Anyway, what about him?" she asked, shifting the focus. "How did you link up with Mr Darcy over there?"

Jo laughed at the comparison, causing the two Doctors to turn back and look quizzically at them. "I'll tell you later," she whispered.

"When you've quite finished dissecting our respective personas," Ace's Doctor remarked, "we have the problem of a steep mountain climb to resolve."

They were now standing on a rock-hewn plateau. Ace took in the size of the mountain before them, still some distance away. "I suppose going around it is a no-no?"

"I'm afraid so," the taller one replied. "And we can't go back either. It would take too long to find a quicker route. Besides, look down there."

Jo and Ace peered over the edge of the plateau. Where before there had been a dry river bed, there was now a free-flowing stream. The group were effectively cut off. "How did that get there?" Jo

protested. "We were walking through that gully just a few minutes ago."

"Just be grateful none of us were caught in the oncoming tide," the Seventh Doctor cautioned. "Otherwise, we wouldn't be here now."

It was the speed of the current that was the most frightening. Just a few moments before, Ace and Jo had been walking through that same gully, laughing and joking. If they had delayed for just a minute... "It's not just the monsters you have to watch out for," the Eighth Doctor warned. "The natural elements here are just as liable to take you by surprise."

Ace's blood went cold at the thought of what might have happened, and she saw that Jo felt the same. "From now on, stay close, both of you," her Doctor advised them. "This isn't called the Death Zone without good reason."

Dark Secrets

The laughter directed at the Doctor's Sixth incarnation had evaporated, and their attention was now focussed on the situation at hand. "So, we're in the Death Zone on Gallifrey," the Tenth Doctor mused. "You know, I had a feeling we might be."

"Which suggests that Rassilon's power is being misused yet again," the other Doctor reasoned. "How far away are we from the Tower?"

"Let's check on the grid map." The two Doctors moved to the console, while Rose and Evelyn watched them. "They're like a couple of schoolboys when they get going, aren't they?" Evelyn noted.

Rose nodded. "How are you feeling now?" "Oh, much better, thank you, Rose – though I don't think I'll look at Sunflowers in quite the same way ever again. You were pretty resourceful out there."

"Comes with the territory, doesn't it?"

The two women settled back to watch their Doctors at work. Evelyn was right; they were like a couple of schoolboys.

But there was something else – at first, Rose couldn't quite put her finger on it, until... yes. It was as though they were in competition with each other, both quietly trying to assert their authority. And it didn't look as though either of them was about to give way.

"Look, if you'll take my advice..."

"Oh, come on. If I listened to you, we'd be here all day."

"Fine! Suit yourself! I'm only trying to help."

Rose smiled, but her head was full of questions. If they were on Gallifrey, then how could she and her Doctor be here now? "Right, ladies," the Doctor finally announced. "The good news is that the Tower of Rassilon isn't too far away. Just a short walk, really."

"The bad news," his sixth persona added, "is that we don't know what surprises the Death Zone has in store for us. Not an ideal situation, I know, but it can't be helped."

"So why can't we just use the TARDIS to get us there?" Rose asked. "Seems the obvious answer to me."

"Good thinking, Rose," her Doctor smiled.

"Except that the TARDIS is trapped in a force field, and it just so happens that the release switch is housed in the Tower. So, we either stay here and twiddle our thumbs, or take our chances out there."

"Well, I'm game," Evelyn volunteered.

"Yeah, me too," Rose agreed.

The Doctor's Sixth incarnation turned to his current persona. "Looks like we're outvoted," he observed dryly.

A familiar figure was already waiting when Romana, Leela and Narvin arrived outside Borusa's quarters. He was a short, portly man who was well known among the members of the High Council – but acknowledged only when absolutely necessary. "Cardinal Mansen," Romana noted. "I suppose I should be honoured that such a high-ranking member of the CIA is here

to greet us."

"The honour is mine, Madam President," said Mansen. "However, you will understand my reluctance to allow you entry to these chambers."

"As I am sure you will understand my basic need for the truth," Romana countered. "The constitution clearly states that all unclassified information should be in the public domain."

Mansen was reluctant. "That rather depends on whether that information is beneficial to the well-being of Gallifrey."

"Except that in this instance," Romana insisted, "additional information has come to light, which suggests that whatever lies behind those doors may hold the key to the safety of Gallifrey itself."

"Madam President, I have no wish to impede any ongoing investigation, but my hands are tied. I cannot allow..." Mansen's objections died in his throat, which was now feeling the edge of Leela's knife.

"Enough of this prattling," she stated.

"You will open those doors – now."

"You had better do as she says," Narvin advised. "She isn't the sort to make idle threats."

At a nod from Mansen, the guard disengaged the automatic locks on the doors. "There are times," said Romana, "when a little persuasion goes a long way." The remark was not lost on Leela, as the small group entered the chambers.

It was clear that nothing had been touched for many years. A thin layer of micro-dust covered the various ornaments that stood in recesses around the living quarters. At a signal from Romana, Leela sheathed her knife, allowing Mansen to move freely. "None of this has been disturbed since Borusa vacated these chambers," he told them. "What could possibly justify your actions?"

"Cardinal," Romana began. "You clearly believe that there are items of great importance housed here. You have sought to protect these, and Borusa's reputation, from prying eyes. That is understandable.

But what if those same items held the key to an existing crisis?"

Mansen stared at her, as if trying to discern some trickery or deceit on her part. "You are strange," Leela said to him.

"Romana wants only the best for Gallifrey, as I believe you do. And yet you oppose each other. Is it not possible for you both to work together?"

"For a savage, she talks a lot of sense," Narvin conceded. "Show them, Mansen."

They all looked to Mansen for his response. "Very well," he agreed. He directed them to a concealed vault, which he proceeded to open. Inside was a casket, familiar from Time Lord legend. Romana hardly dared ask. "Is that what I think it is, Mansen?"

"Yes, Madam President," he confirmed. "Contained inside that casket are the Black Scrolls of Rassilon."

The two Doctors watched the progress of their other selves on the scanner's grid map. "Well, the rest of me seems to be managing OK," the Doctor beamed. "Not that you can really tell that much from three winking lights on a screen."

"Just how many of you are there?" Evelyn wondered. "I never thought to ask before."

"Well, with the two of us in the TARDIS," her Doctor replied, "the other three life signs add up to five in total. Wouldn't you agree, Doctor?"

"Oh yes," Rose's Doctor concurred. "Five. Definitely five." A look passed between the two Time Lords, which didn't go unnoticed by Rose, but for now she let it pass. "Right," the Doctor announced. "I've pre-set the controls so that the TARDIS arrives in the Tower once we've disabled the force field. Are we all set?"

There was general agreement among the group, as they left the safety of the TARDIS for the Death Zone. The Doctor was the last out, locking the door behind him. "This is turning into quite an adventure,"

said Evelyn, as they set off for the Tower. "Have you ever visited Gallifrey, Rose?"

"Err, no. We've just been too busy," she replied. "You know how it is." The Doctor caught her eye with a warning glance, and she nodded. Her travels with him had given Rose an understanding of how fragile the web of time could be. For now, it was enough to know that they were here, on Gallifrey in the Death Zone, which amounted to a whole heap of trouble.

They had only covered a short distance when both Doctors turned as one, looking up at the sky, searching. "You sense it too?" the Sixth one asked.

"Definitely." The Doctor turned to Evelyn and Rose, concern etched on his face. "There's something coming."

Evelyn and Rose shared a worried glance.

"What sort of something?"

"I can't place it," the Sixth Doctor replied, turning to his tenth persona. "But you – you recognise it."

He nodded. "There's something familiar about it – familiar in a bad sort of way."

Rose shivered. "We'd better get moving then."

All around the Death Zone, the other Doctors had the same feeling. It was more an awareness of something, but not in a physical sense.

At least, not yet.

"You seem distracted," Jabe noted. "What is it?"

"If I were in an ironic mood, I'd say it was something in the air," he replied. "But it's more than that. I can't identify it, but I know it's there." He looked down at her and smiled, but it was a smile without humour. "I'd make a rubbish poet. Come on, we can't hang about."

"Yes," Jabe agreed. "I feel as though the Death Zone were closing in on me."

"That means we're getting close to the Tower," the Doctor told her. "Even in

eternal sleep, Rassilon's influence is reaching out." He took her hand. "Once we're inside the Tower, I'll feel a lot happier - though not necessarily safer." Understandably, Jabe was not cheered by this news.

"Borusa realised that the Doctor was close to the truth," Mansen told the assembled group. "He arranged for the Castellan of the time to be falsely accused of possession of the scrolls, whereas Borusa had them stored in this vault. It was a simple matter for one of the guards to infer that they had been found in the Castellan's quarters."

"Leaving the Castellan to become a sacrificial scapegoat."

"Indeed, Madam President," said Mansen. "And the scrolls have remained here ever since."

Narvin stepped forward. "What he hasn't told you, Madam President, is that the casket was removed from this vault just a few days ago."

Mansen rounded on him. "You were told not to divulge that information!"

Narvin waved a tired hand. "They would have found out at some time. Better that they learn the truth now."

"Let me be certain I understand this."

Romana just held her temper. "This casket, containing the Black Scrolls, was taken from this vault without your knowledge, and then later returned. Would it not be fair to assume that the scrolls were read before their allegedly safe return?"

"But that would not be possible," said Leela. "The scrolls were burnt and charred when the casket was opened. That is what happened when the Castellan was accused, or so the official history says."

It was Narvin who explained. "The scrolls are not made of ordinary paper. Instead, the fibres are impregnated with a regenerative solvent, so that once the casket

was closed, the paper would have reconstituted itself, becoming whole again. But as the President infers, under controlled conditions the scrolls can be read - almost as easily as one would read a book."

"Except that this particular book is more deadly." Romana closed the vault and waited as Cardinal Mansen locked it. "We've spent enough time here," she decided. "I suggest we reconvene in my Presidential chambers, immediately." It was an order in all but name, and not one objection was raised.

The Seventh and Eighth Doctors had arrived at the base of the mountain; Jo and Ace following close behind. They had walked up as far as the natural rise of the incline would allow, and now a sheer rock wall barred their way. "Once we're over that peak, the Tower won't be far away." "The difficulty is the mountain itself," the Eighth Doctor replied to his previous incarnation. "It'd be tougher than Everest."

"Yes." The Doctor was looking around the immediate area. "You know, despite its overall vastness, I can't help feeling I know this part of the Death Zone."

"I'd be inclined to agree with you," said his other persona. "We're not exactly going around in circles..."

"...Although we do seem to be repeating ourselves..."

Ace was pointing straight ahead. "Hey, Professor. That looks like a cave just over there. Maybe we could use it as a short cut."

"Yes, and come out the other side of the mountain," Jo agreed. "Doctors, what do you think?" There was no reply from either of them. Instead, they were staring straight ahead, their eyes glazed over, unseeing.

The two women gaped at the Time Lords. Ace stepped up to each of them in turn; waving a hand across their faces, but neither seemed to register her presence. "What's going on?"

Then Jo realised. "It's some kind of telepathic conference, Ace. I've seen this happen before, years ago. The Doctor told me it was a way of communicating masses of information in seconds."

Ace shook her head in wonder, imagining the psychic energy passing between the two Doctors. "You wouldn't have thought they'd have much to talk about - you know, being the same person." She sighed and sat down on a rock. "So, what do we do - just kick our heels until they wake up?"

"Well, I should have thought they'd have finished by now. It never used to take this long." Jo was becoming concerned. "I hope nothing's gone wrong, in there." She tapped her head.

"Maybe they've got more to catch up on." Ace tried to make light of it, but she was now beginning to share Jo's anxieties. She strode up to her Doctor, snapping her fingers in an effort to rouse him. "Come on, Professor. Wakey-wakey." But there was no response. Not even a flicker of an eyelid. It was as if they were statues.

Ace stepped back, Jo at her shoulder. "I don't like this, Jo. This is well weird, even for the Professor."

Unnoticed by anyone, a figure shimmered into existence at the mouth of the cave. Its basic shape was humanoid, its shade of silver rippling through its body as it studied the group before it. The basic intelligence contained within did not distinguish between friend or foe. It did not even recognise whether it was alive, or how long it had served its masters. It only knew its purpose - to protect the mouth of the cave, which did indeed lead though to the other side of the mountain. Not that it even knew that, for such information was unnecessary to its programming.

Armaments were primed and ready, as the Raston Warrior Robot prepared to despatch the trespassers now on its territory.

Possibilities

As one, the eyes of both Doctors flashed open, staring straight ahead. "Raston Warrior Robot!" they shouted in unison, grabbing Ace and Jo as they dived for cover, just as an arrow thudded into the spot they had previously occupied.

The four of them peered out from behind their elected cover - Jo with the Seventh Doctor, Ace with the Eighth. "What is that thing?" she asked, as another arrow speared into the rock in front of her.

"The Raston Warrior Robot is the ultimate killing machine," the Eighth replied, ducking down. "Built-in armaments, with a radar that can detect any movement."

"I couldn't have put it better myself," his other persona commented, as the robot vanished from one point, only to appear in another location, stalking its prey. "And now we're pinned down, with no obvious way out."

"Not even a passing Cyberman as a distraction," sighed the Eighth.

Jo was watching the Robot. "So, why doesn't it just finish us off now, instead of making us wait?"

"Because it likes to play with its victims," the Seventh Doctor explained, his face grim. "It may be a machine, but it has a sense of anticipation built into its programme. You could say it enjoys the chase as much as the kill."

"What a mess." Romana sank back into her chair, Leela sharing her friend's concern. The meeting with Co-ordinator Narvin and Cardinal Mansen had not gone well, with both sides unwilling to give way.

While Mansen had told her all that he knew about the theft of the Black Scrolls - which wasn't much - she felt that he was still holding something back from her. The fact that Romana had said nothing about time being tampered with probably hadn't helped, leaving the meeting to end

on a stalemate.

"Romana, I cannot understand your thinking," Leela complained. "You do nothing about Mansen's stupidity, and you clearly believe the Doctor is in the Death Zone."

"Oh, I'm certain of it, ever since Narvin let it slip that he knew." Romana gave a helpless sigh. "As for Mansen, yes, he is a fool. But if I reveal to the High Council just how foolish he has been, then I leave myself open to ridicule. Think of it, Leela – the Black Scrolls of Rassilon, representing the darkest time in Time Lord history, taken from under our noses, and then returned before anyone can react. Yes, it makes Mansen look a fool for hiding them, but it makes me look even more of a fool for not knowing in the first place." "But Mansen lied about Cardinal Borusa," Leela persisted. "He has presented a myth instead of the truth."

"Sometimes, a myth can be greater than any truth." Romana looked at Leela. "Before you met the Doctor, didn't you believe in a false god?"

For a moment, Leela was back on her own world, remembering the first time she had met the Doctor, whom she believed was the Evil One. Together they had confronted the being known as Xoanon. "That was different," she said. "We were living a lie, until the Doctor showed us the truth."

"But you believed that lie," Romana pointed out. "You accepted what was presented to you as the absolute truth – in the same way as the people of Gallifrey believe what they see as the truth about Borusa. Yes, I know what he did was wrong," she said, before Leela could speak. "The path to immortality is a dangerous one. But sometimes history has to be rewritten for the good of the people. I may not agree with it, but there are times when we just have to accept things the way they are."

Leela nodded, understanding. "As you say, Romana, this is a mess. But you are President of Gallifrey. There must be some-

thing you can do."

Romana considered her options. "There's undoubtedly a connection between the theft of the Black Scrolls and the reactivation of the Death Zone; one leads directly to the other, but apart from Cardinal Mansen, we have no other leads." She rose from her chair, an idea forming. "We can at least investigate Narvin's claims about the Doctor's disappearance – and there's only place he could have found that out."

The Tower of Rassilon was now in plain sight for the Doctor and Jabe. If they continued at their current pace, it wouldn't be long before they arrived outside the main door. "There are three entrances," he had told her. "There's the main door, as well as one deep underground and another above us. Don't know about you, but I prefer the direct approach."

That had been earlier. Now, he stood, uncertain. "I'm not sure if I can do this."

Jabe looked at him and saw the hurt in his eyes. "Doctor, this is your past, and you must face it – Time Lord." She placed her hand in his – a simple act of friendship, but also an understanding of the pain he must be feeling.

He looked down at her. His smile returned, but it was a sad one. "You can see right through me, Jabe. I've been full of talk on the way here, but you knew it was just a cover, that I was still hiding."

"You can't hide forever, Doctor."

"S'pose not." He squeezed her hand gratefully as they walked on. "Maybe it's time to lay some ghosts to rest." He abruptly turned, looking up at the sky, searching. "What is it I can sense out there?"

Again, this feeling of danger from above. "Are you sure what you are feeling isn't part of this place?" Jabe suggested. "You did say that Rassilon's power was reaching out to us."

"No, it's more than that," he said. "Call it a premonition, but it's something far worse than the Death Zone can offer. And that really scares me."

The Temporal Control Room was a hive of activity. Screens were being monitored, readings checked and calibrated. When Romana and Leela entered there was a slight pause in the continuous traffic of Gallifreyans moving from one monitor to another. There was one area where movement was more rushed than expected. As the two women stepped closer, it was clear that this was where Co-ordinator Narvin had gleaned his information. "I understand there is some interest in the Doctor's movements," said Romana, to no one in particular. "Apparently more interest than would be usual."

A technician glanced up from his terminal, a look of apprehension on his face, as Leela and Romana moved to stand either side of him. "The rest of you can go about your work," Leela instructed. "Unless..." The implied threat was not lost on the rest of the Temporal staff, as they hurriedly continued with their duties.

Romana leant forward; her eyes locked with those of the hapless technician. She offered a winning smile, which seemed to relax him. Experience had taught Romana that friendly persuasion could bring more effective results, and a little flattery on her part wouldn't go amiss in this case. "Tell me, um..."

"Rodat, Madam President," he answered helpfully.

"Rodat, of course," she smiled. "Yes, I've heard good reports of your work. Now, I've heard some of the details, but if you could you tell me everything you know about the Doctor's disappearance..."

"But, surely Co-ordinator Narvin..."

"Oh, the Co-ordinator has passed this matter directly to me," Romana explained. "But if you're worried, then why not con-

tact him?"

It had been a gamble, but both women breathed a sigh of relief as Rodat shook his head. "I'm sure that won't be necessary, Madam President," he said, perhaps more quickly than was intended. It seemed that the plan was working, Leela noted.

Romana had sketched out a brief idea of what she had intended to do Before their arrival at the Temporal Control Room. And Rodat was proving to be a willing, if unknowing, accomplice. "So, what exactly is happening?" Romana prompted.

"Perhaps it is better if I show you." Rodat led them to a graphometer screen. "These represent the Doctor's existing incarnations," he began, pointing to eight illuminated lines of varying height. "Those in blue represent his former selves, while the red indicates what should be his current form."

"What of these?" Leela asked, pointing to two lines of green. "What are they?"

Rodat gave an embarrassed cough. "This is what has caused the most concern. These are the Doctor's future incarnations. As you can see, Madam President, they are both active."

Romana stared unbelieving at the display. As far as she was aware, the Doctor she had last met was in his eighth persona. They had met during the Neverland crisis, according to the Matrix, that was still his current form. And yet, the display was telling a different story. "Rodat, are you saying that the Doctor is operating out of his own linear time?"

"I'm not sure." He shook his head. "All I know for certain is that these traces were lifted from the Doctor's time stream and drawn towards the Death Zone."

An active one, Romana reminded herself. "Can we see a display of the Death Zone?" she asked.

"Yes, indeed." Rodat crossed to the rear of the control room, where a topographic map of Gallifrey covered the far wall. Seating himself at a console directly in

front of the map, Rodat began manipulating an instrument bank, changing the composition of the map before their eyes. Some sections became more enhanced, while others vanished from the wall screen. After further enhancements, an aerial map of the Death Zone was now on view. "Very impressive, Rodat," Romana congratulated him.

"Well, topography is a pet project of mine," he smiled. "I don't have the opportunity to use it very often." He turned to check his readings and frowned. "Madam President, this can't be right. The Death Zone should be dormant, but..."

She looked down at the readings, with just the right amount of concern in her voice. "Rodat, I think you're right," she gasped. "The Death Zone is indeed active."

She had spoken just loud enough for everyone else in the room to hear her. The hushed reaction was just what she had intended, with Rodat supposedly having made the discovery, and freeing Romana of the secret that only she and Leela had previously shared. Now, at last, she could be seen to act without any cloud of suspicion hanging over her. It was a good feeling.

"I must say," Evelyn commented, "I'm rather enjoying this. A bit like trekking across the Welsh moors."

"Just be wary," her Doctor cautioned, as they walked on with the Doctor and Rose. "This place isn't called the Death Zone for nothing."

The two Doctors had elected to walk on ahead, with Rose and Evelyn bringing up the rear. But there was something bothering Rose. One of those things that was so obvious, but she couldn't see it. "I wonder what those two are plotting," said Evelyn, breaking through Rose's thoughts. "I've never known the Doctor be so subdued."

"Yeah, mine's the same. Never stops talk-

ing." It wasn't until she'd said those words that it hit her. Normally it was hard to shut the Doctor up. And with two of them around, there ought to have been twice the chatter. So why were they both so quiet? "Oi! Doctors!"

They stopped at the sound of Rose's voice. "Something the matter?" the other Doctor asked, as he turned to her.

"You could say that, yeah." She strode determinedly up to them. "I want to know what's going on. What's the big secret?"

There was silence from both Time Lords. "Come on, I know there's something going on, and me and Evelyn have got a right to know. You two have hardly said a word since we left the TARDIS, and whatever body you're in, you just love the sound of your own voice. So why all the secrecy?"

The one in the patchwork coat looked accusingly at his other persona. "Did you tell her?"

"I never said a word - but now she knows, thanks to you!"

"Oh, that's right! Blame me for your mistakes!"

"Excuse me." Evelyn eyed the two Doctors suspiciously. "I had a feeling something wasn't quite right earlier, and now Rose has brought the subject out into the open. So, come along, Doctors - we're waiting."

The Doctors exchanged an embarrassed glance. Between them, they might have bluffed it out against Rose, but Evelyn was made of sterner stuff. Her Doctor turned to the other. "You'd better tell them."

"You'd touched on it yourself back in the TARDIS, Evelyn," the Doctor said. "When you asked how many of us there were. When we checked the scanner for time traces of our other selves, there were only three life signs. And that's not good."

"You see, Rose," the other Doctor continued, "this is my sixth incarnation. So, there should be five more time traces in evidence."

"All parts of the same person," Rose realised. So, where's the rest of you?"

The Doctor's trial was coming to an end, as the presiding Time Lords gave their verdict. "We accept that there is much evil within the universe, and that you have a part to play in that struggle."

"I say," the Doctor sounded hopeful. "Does that mean you're going to let me go?"

"That is our unanimous ruling," the Time Lord declared. "You are indeed free to go, Doctor."

[-----]

Outside the incubation room, Sarah and Harry waited as the Doctor held a wire in each hand. "Just touch these two strands together, and the Daleks are finished," he said. "But have I that right?"

"We're talking about the Daleks," Sarah reminded him. "The most evil beings ever created. You must complete your mission for the Time Lords."

He nodded, accepting the inevitable. "Thank you for reminding me, Sarah. I just wanted to be sure in my own mind." And the connection was made.

[-----]

The UNIT lab stood empty. Then the Brigadier, Jo Grant, Sergeant Benton and Dr Tyler appeared from nowhere. "We're back," Benton grinned. "Really back," he added, checking outside just to make sure.

"But what about the Doctors?" Jo asked. The Brigadier's solemn expression told them all that he didn't expect to see either the scruffy little man or the dandy who had later replaced him.

Jo fell into Benton's arms, the tears flowing. Apart from Jo's sobs, the rest of the group stood in silence, recognising the Doctor's sacrifice in remaining on Omega's world of anti-matter.

And the corner of the lab where the TAR-

DIS had previously stood remained empty for years to come.

[-----]

Rodat sat back from the vid-screen. "As you can see, Madam President," he said, "the time fractures are becoming more pronounced."

"And when did these things happen?" Leela asked.

"So far, they haven't," Rodat replied. "At the moment they exist only as possibilities - deviations in time which have yet to become reality." Rodat had accompanied Romana and Leela from the Temporal Control Room to the Presidential Chambers, leaving the rest of the Temporal staff to monitor activities in the Death Zone. In the meantime, Romana had been aware of rumours circulating through the Capitol about the time fractures, so it made sense to have a qualified technician available to offer first-hand reports; not that Rodat was able to offer much in the way of anything reassuring.

"Someone is playing with time," said Romana. "And in each case the Doctor's timeline is interlinked with that of Gallifrey, against a crucial nexus point." A grim scenario presented itself to Romana, and she didn't like what it implied. "Every deviation we've seen is from a pivotal event in Gallifreyan history, and with each variation the ripples in the time stream become greater than before. If these possibilities are allowed to become real, then..."

Leela realised the seriousness of the situation. "It means that Gallifrey's history will change. All that we know now will never have happened."

Her words hung in the air like a sentence of death. To have Gallifrey's history wiped out was unthinkable. But the indications were that the unthinkable was now possible. The unexpected arrival of K9 cut through the silence. "Danger, Mistress."

"Oh, what now?" Romana crouched down before the approaching metal dog. "What sort of danger, K9?"

"Temporal trace registering in my data-banks," K9 replied. "Pulse is faint but growing stronger."

"Temporal trace?" Romana repeated. "K9, can you be more specific? Where is it coming from?"

Data was analysed and processed before the reply came back. "Insufficient data, Mistress. But the danger is imminent."

"I don't like the sound of this." Romana hurried to her communications terminal, patching directly to the Security Division. "This is the President," she announced. "Ensure all transduction barriers are at maximum strength and be prepared for possible attack."

"Is that necessary?" Rodat asked. "Based on the word of a metal dog?"

"K9 is a very special dog," Leela told him. "And he is never wrong." Before any further objections could be raised, an unnatural darkness fell over the sky, bringing with it a coldness and a feeling of dread.

Evelyn was the first to see the change overhead. "Are the days normally this short?"

"Not usually," her Doctor replied, looking up at the sky. "This is something different. There's a distinct malevolence in the air."

"Not the way I'd have described it," said the Doctor. "But it's the same thing we sensed before. And there's the cold, too."

Rose shivered. It had been cold enough before, but this felt like... like something she had experienced before. A terrifying memory snapped into her brain. "Oh, my god."

She looked to the Doctor for confirmation, who nodded. "Right first time, Rose. Everyone, get moving," he ordered. "Come on, now!"

The urgency was not lost on the Sixth Doctor and Evelyn as they began to run. The group of four had barely covered a few yards, when the sky splintered into puffs of light. Rose chanced a glance upwards and saw something that might have come from the pages of Greek Mythology. Except Rose had never studied Greek Mythology. She recognised these creatures all the same.

Evelyn and her Doctor looked back, running as they did so. "What are they?" she gasped.

Rose stared at the dragon-like, demonic nightmares that she had never hoped to meet again. "They're Reapers."

To be continued...



I KNOW MY NAME IS SUSAN

by Joshua Wanisko

One week ago, David and I exchanged gifts to celebrate the one-month anniversary of our relationship. Well, to be completely honest, David presented me with a small gift, and I presented him with nothing, because I hadn't been aware of the custom at the time. He gave me flowers, which apparently are traditional, but as he had grown to adulthood as a pragmatic resistance fighter, he also gave me the practical gift of a voice activated recorder, so that I could record my thoughts as I got used to our new life together.

That has proven difficult because I don't like where my thoughts are going.

Where are they going?

To start with, I'm beginning to have some serious doubts. I gave up absolutely everything I have ever known to settle on an alien world with a man I barely know. I love David, but I don't even know if I like him, and he's away from home so frequently in his efforts to rebuild the world that I don't know if I'll ever have the chance to find out.

Day 1

No one knows what year this is, so the dating system in the diary is somewhat arbitrary. We can all agree that the meteors started dropping in 2157, but soon afterward, the Earth was occupied by a hostile alien race and the last thing on anyone's mind was marking off days on a calendar.

So rather than try to puzzle out exactly what the date is, I'm just going to number the days sequentially. If we can ev-

er figure out exactly when it is, I'll go back and correct the date.

I am a time traveller who has no idea what time it is. I am not unaware of the irony.

None of that is important. It's just a way to delay talking about what's really bothering me.

In addition to David's frequent absences, there is another problem. I'm reluctant to say it out loud, even to this recorder. It feels like that giving voice to it will make it real; by naming it, I bring it into being. But it is something that is happening to me and ignoring it will not change that.

So here it goes, dear diary.

I am sick, and there is no name for my disease in any language on Earth.

My people possess some sensitivity to psychic phenomena, and I am sensitive to an unusual degree. At least I was, until last week.

There exist numerous technical terms to describe my condition back home. Its study is, in point of fact, a venerable and well-respected field. But I mean Gallifrey when I say "home", and that isn't true anymore. Gallifrey hasn't been my home for quite some time. Earth is my home now. On Earth, with David.

Earth is my home, but they would understand my condition on Gallifrey. There are doctors and specialists who could treat it.

It's hard to be sick. It's hard to be alone. It's very hard to be both at once.

And I don't mean to be melodramatic.

This isn't like me. But when you're stuck inside your own head, you forget who you are.

Day 2

I greeted David when he returned home after a long day of conferences. We sat down to eat. I had cooked the meal myself, with vegetables from the garden.

As we ate, we discussed our day. I am not strong, and while I am very clever, it is that particular kind of clever that is not good for anything practical. I could expound at length about the nuances of Sensorite social hierarchy or the myths and traditions of the Aztecs but at the end of the day, neither of those will get the crops watered.

So that's why I spent my days learning from a local girl named Sarah instead of toiling in the fields. Also, I just don't think the people around here liked me very much. They were civil enough when David was around, but conversations stopped when I approached on my own.

David was the Regional Council's representative here in Newcastle. There were tensions between his group and the local government. A month after the end of the occupation and people were already jockeying for position. He stopped talking after a short while, but seemed to have more to say, so I urged him on.

"Susan, I have some good news and some bad news. The good news is that Carl has asked to represent our region in a larger convocation. The bad news is that if I accept, I'll be away for a week and quite possibly longer."

My hearts fell, but I forced a cheery tone into my voice and said, "David, you have to accept. "I hoped I sounded more sincere than I felt.

He flashed the smile that I fell in love with then asked, "Do you think you can meet with the local council in town tomorrow?"

"I'd like to tell Sarah before I go, but it shouldn't be a problem. Why?"

"There will be a ceremony on Friday evening to honour the delegation. You'll be sitting with me, and you might be called upon to say a few words."

I pulled away. "Are you ashamed of me?"

It was an appalling overreaction. I regretted it as soon as the words left my mouth.

David looked stricken. "No! Of course not, darling! Never! I only thought this would be a new situation for you and I just wanted to make sure you were prepared."

I relaxed. Of course. That was it. I was so uncertain of myself these days.

Day 3

I became aware of the dream gradually but awoke from it suddenly. It was not, as one might expect a nightmare of Daleks and Robomen, but something more personal, although I couldn't remember any details other than the impression that I had been buried alive a thousand miles beneath the surface of the Earth. The sensation was vivid, and it took my hearts several minutes to fall back into their normal rhythm.

The dream was a metaphor. If I had actually been buried that far below, I would have been surrounded by magma, not the black earth that filled my mouth every time I tried to scream. It was probably a message from my subconscious that my problems were burying me. Which was not inaccurate, but a little too on the nose for my tastes. Thanks, subconscious! I had already worked out that much for myself.

Several cups of tea later, I walked down to the garage to talk to Sarah. I was very fond of her. She was buoyed by a constant enthusiasm for the wonders of everyday life, and in that she reminded me of Jenny, who was now stationed in London with Carl Tyler.

Sarah was dark-haired and her eyes were as green as a sunset on Zolfa-Thura, burning bright and brittle within her beautiful face. She always bore a smear of grease decorating one cheek, directly above the dimple that blossomed when she smiled. I think she put the grease there deliberately. It appeared in that spot with too much consistency to be a coincidence.

She sat on a workbench and listened to me vent my frustrations. I'm afraid my tone of voice crept perilously close to a whine while airing these grievances. Sarah listened patiently, as she always did. After nearly forty-five minutes, I finally got around to my reason for being there.

"I'm so sorry, Sarah, but I can't help out this week. David wants me to meet with the council in town, so they can show me how to act."

She shrugged. "Better you than me. Watch out for the mean girls."

Day 4

The dwindling of my psychic sensitivity wasn't like becoming blind or deaf. It was closer to losing one's colour vision or sense of smell. I know there is a larger world out there and my soul aches that I cannot reach it.

Yikes. Did I really just say "My soul aches"? Get a hold of yourself, Susan. I would delete that line if I knew how, but I don't have the knack of operating this recorder yet. This machine is so primitive. There is no mind-machine interface. I have to operate it manually.

It uses batteries. For most of my life, Gallifrey was all I had ever known. The Tribe of Gum painted murals of the great totemic beast of the mammoth using paintbrushes made of twigs and hair, and paints ground out of seashells. From my perspective, the technology to build this recorder was closer to the tools they used to scrawl their caveman scribbles than it was to the dizzying quantum poetry of the artificers of Gallifrey.

Of course, if the recorder had come from Gallifrey, it would be needlessly complex, semi-psychic and would break down at the worst possible times.

It's funny. I don't think I had ever heard "recorder" in the context of a mechanical device used to make audio records. To me, "recorder" had always referred to a musical instrument. Grandfather once told me that he had been quite the virtuoso in his youth and has hinted that he may yet take it up again in another lifetime.

I sighed. Grandfather. If Grandfather were here, he would certainly know what to do.

I knew what I needed to do as I stood at the entrance to the Cathedral Church of St Nicholas. What I needed to do was go inside it and meet the people who had agreed to train me. The trick was convincing myself to actually do it. I had the terrible feeling that they would take one look at me and know that I didn't belong here.

Still, the church itself was beautiful. At least I had a nice view while I dithered. The structure of the building was much like the population it served, battered but defiant. Some of the stained glass was even intact, which in itself seemed somewhat miraculous.

If the Daleks had understood what it would come to represent, they would

have destroyed it in the initial bombardment. It was fast becoming a symbol of the resurrection of human civilization.

I took a deep breath and entered and then stopped to gawk after several steps. Like the TARDIS, it was even more beautiful on the inside. I heard someone shout, "Make a hole!" and while I was pondering what a strange phrase that was, I was nearly flattened by a messenger pushing a pile of papers on a mail cart.

I stepped aside to avoid it and knocked over an entire shelf of records. Even as a temporally displaced traveller from an alien civilization I knew this was a cliché.

At least I didn't twist my ankle again. Conversation stopped. Everyone in the church looked at me.

A fearsome woman with hair the exact colour of tombstones fixed me with a withering stare.

"Can we help you, young lady?"

I stammered out a reply. "I'm Susan Foreman. David Campbell sent me here."

Her lip curled. "Right. Because we're a finishing school now. But the Regional Council gets what it wants. I don't have time for this. Penny!" A pretty blonde in a tight blue dress stepped forward. "Show Miss Foreman how to hold her teacup! And don't dawdle. I want you back as soon as you're done playing Pygmalion."

The girl, Penny I presumed, nodded her head, then walked over to me. She smiled sympathetically and knelt down to help me pick up the papers. When the older woman was out of earshot she said, "Don't mind Mrs. Sterling. She's under a lot of pressure to have everything ready."

I nodded. We worked together for sev-

eral minutes, and I couldn't help but admire her poise. She was really pretty. It wasn't a contest or anything and it's sort of terrible to compare your friends in this way, but I think she was prettier than Sarah. Her hair was perfectly coiffed, and I certainly couldn't kneel down as she did in a dress like that. I'd fall right over. She was certainly the right person to teach me some social graces. When we had finished picking up, she asked, "Now what can I do for you?"

Day 5

I think I had the dream again, but I couldn't remember the details, just the overwhelming sense of claustrophobic dread. It was all but forgotten by the time I returned to the church.

I liked Penny. She was so nice to me. I was a little worried about the way she talked about people who weren't around. It made her come across as a bit two-faced. I might bring that up when this was over.

In between instructions on who is addressed with which honorific, and which fork to use at which time, we talked about the paths that had led us here. Penny had been widowed in the war and didn't want to talk about her past, but she was passionately interested in mine. She already knew the basics from community gossip, of how I had arrived with Barbara and Ian and the person they knew as the Doctor, and who I called Grandfather. I expanded on that, and I told her that we had adventures and we helped the people we met on our travels through time and space. I'm not certain that she entirely believed the last part, but she, like everyone else on Earth had survived an invasion that would have seemed impossible to their younger selves, so she was

at least willing to entertain the possibility. But it's true. We go up and down and to and fro in the universe and help the people who need it most. That's what we do.

That's what we did, at least. I don't know what I do now.

You see, Grandfather left Earth without me, so I could have a life with David.

So I could have roots of my own.

So I could belong somewhere.

It was now clear that events were not unfolding in quite the manner he had intended.

Penny was comforting and welcoming. "Don't worry. Just remember what I taught you, and when we're finished, everyone will know who you are."

Day 6

That same dream again, only this time I was trapped inside a coffin in addition to being buried deep within the Earth. Not sure if that was an improvement or not, frankly.

Not even a dream like that could ruin my day. Things went swimmingly with Penny! She taught me so much and I was going to dazzle the crowd tonight.

Day 7

Sarah took her now customary seat on the workbench and listened to me vent. I was still burning from the embarrassment of last night. The entire community had been celebrating, and the gala they organised was the fanciest they could manage. Truth be told, it was a simple gathering by pre-war standards, but everyone pulled together and the whole affair had the aura of a historical event about it. I had been at the top table with David and I could feel the gaze of all those eyes upon me. David gave his speech and after the applause

had died down, he asked me to say a few words. I swallowed and I was acutely aware of how dry my throat was, Gallifreyan physiology being identical to human in that respect. I mumbled a few platitudes, with which I'm sure Grandfather would have been disappointed, and then I suggested we all start on our meals. In the process I referred to a utensil by the wrong name. When he figured out that I wasn't making a joke, David leaned over and whispered, "That's not called a dinglehopper, darling. I think someone on the council was just having a little fun with you."

I flushed to my ears, reliving the humiliation. "It wasn't 'fun'. It was mortifying and just another reminder that I don't belong here." I wanted to die on the spot and regenerate into someone less self-conscious. "I'm not stupid, Sarah! I know what a fork is! Penny told me that it was a specific term that applied to a specialized kind of fork." She also told me that it was customary to kiss envoys on the lips, but fortunately David was watching and intervened before I could embarrass myself any further.

Sarah shrugged. She never seemed bothered by anything. "Don't let them get to you. It took months for the boys to warm to me and I grew up around here. It wasn't until the invasion that they accepted me."

"Penelope Bowman! What's her problem?" I demanded. Also, I had been wrong about Penny. Sarah was much prettier.

"She lost her husband to the Daleks."

I flinched. "I knew that he had died, but I didn't know the circumstances."

"It was probably his own fault. Right from the start, there were rumours that he was a collaborator. We're a small town now and everybody knows every-

body and I'm pretty sure that's more or less what was going on. He worked out some kind of agreement with the Daleks. Nobody knows the specifics, but it was probably a deal where he'd provide workers for the camp, and they'd leave his family alone. Mostly he settled scores or gave them the types of people he considered 'undesirable' until one day they decided he had outlived his usefulness and dragged him away instead. I can't drum up too much sympathy."

I swallowed. Perhaps the greatest tragedy of the invasion was how the Daleks turned humans into monsters as great as they.

She shrugged. "Penny has decided that the best defence is a good offence. She thinks that if she gets the mob worked up about other people, they won't turn those torches and pitchforks on her."

That was the flash fire moment when I knew for certain that something was very wrong. I don't read minds or anything so gauche, but I am sensitive to certain mental impressions. The power has been waning, but it was still there. I could usually tell what someone meant when they said something, some kind of psychic subtext. It's the difference between someone speaking to you and you reading the words off a sheet of paper. There are nuances present in the former that are absent in the latter. My power was waning. I already knew that. I couldn't read the crowd last night. I didn't know if they were laughing with me or at me. But I thought that was because I was flustered. Now I saw that the problem went deeper than that, and the difficulties I had been suffering were not something temporary that would get better on its own.

Sarah was blank to me now. I didn't know if that shrug meant that she

thought I shouldn't let it bother me or if she didn't care enough to let it bother her.

I had always liked talking with Sarah. She didn't understand me. She couldn't help me. But she wanted to, and that was comforting in its own way. But now I felt cut off, alienated.

Like the alien I am.

Day 8

I awoke late that morning. No dreams overnight. Small blessings. I ate a quick breakfast, then hurried to the garage as fast as I could manage. I was in no mood to speak to any passers-by.

The front door was locked. Sarah usually had it wide open. There was a note with my name pinned to the door. I removed it and opened it. Printed, in Sarah's almost obsessively precise hand was:

"Susan, called to London. Back soon. So sorry. S."

Sarah had been the only one left. No one was calling me to London unless there was an urgent need for someone who tripped a lot and screamed all the time. I couldn't take it. I sat down on the stoop and started bawling. I was vaguely aware that people were staring, but I didn't care. I cried some more. I was a mess. I cried myself dry, but my nose was still running. I was wearing David's jacket. I wiped my nose on its sleeve. I hoped he never found out about this. I felt absolutely worthless.

A shadow fell across my face. I looked up and saw that it belonged to Penny. That was all I needed.

She laughed to her gaggle of debutantes. "Come on, ladies. It's almost time for supper. Get your dinglehoppers ready! We've got some Fruit of the Loom on the menu!"

I didn't look up. I was too numb to feel

anything from what she said. I wondered vaguely if she hated me or if I simply represented a target of opportunity, but even that thought was abstract, like I was reading about an injustice that had perpetrated upon someone else a long time ago.

Penny continued with her jeering. "Did you know that you can kill two birds with one scone?"

It was bizarre. It was surreal. She was trying to ruin me with malapropisms. And the killer was that I was in such a low place that it was working. Every one of her barbs found a home.

I rose and gathered David's coat and what little dignity I could muster and wrapped myself in each.

I took a step forward and they stepped back. For a moment, I thought Penny was going to hit me, but no. That's not how she hurts people. I kept moving forward and they parted before me. They shouted insults as I left, and I want to say that I didn't hear them, but that's not true. I heard every one of them. I wanted to keep a measured stride as I departed, but I broke into a run before I had taken ten steps. The last thing I heard was the tinkling of their laughter, ringing like tiny silver bells.

I paused to catch my breath in an alley, and I could hear the thoughts of the townsfolk. They were echoing what Penny had said, that I was a failure, stupid, an outsider, a fraud. But in an epiphany that was at once euphoric and heart-breaking, I realized that I wasn't picking up the thoughts of those around me. I had already internalised what Penny was saying. Those thoughts were my own.

I wasn't merely engaged in a popularity contest with a small town mean girl, I was losing a popularity contest with a

small town mean girl. It would hardly be an optimal solution to my problems, but I suppose I could just wait a couple of decades and outlive her.

Which reminded me, the fact that I am a long-lived alien was probably a conversation I needed to have with David eventually.

I leaned against the wall of the building. Speaking of David, what would he do in my place?

I laughed bitterly. David wouldn't be caught in this situation.

What would Grandfather do?

Grandfather would take one look at Penelope with his iceberg eyes and pronounce a single incisive quip that would chill her to the core, whereupon she would fall to the ground and shatter into a million pieces.

My mind scrabbled for someone to imitate, to show me how to act, but there was no one there. I was on my own.

Day 9

I cried all day.

Day 10

I slept all day.

Day 11

There are exercises one may engage in to strengthen a weakened talent, certain esoteric disciplines one may employ. I had not gone down such paths since I had been as young as David, but I returned to them today. I spent the entire day reciting the mantra we knew as "Contemplation of the Eye of Harmony", foregoing food entirely and stopping only to sleep in the evening. It didn't help one bit.

Day 12

I can't continue lurching back and forth between despondency and gallows hu-

mour. The stress is going to destroy me, like a piece of metal bent back and forth until it breaks. And I know that I don't have to hold out forever, just until David returns, but that's not really true either. His presence won't fix things; it will only remove the source of the trouble and I know that unless I make the necessary adjustments within my own mind, I'm just going to fall apart in the exact same way the next time these circumstances arise.

I didn't experience my days. I endured them. I waited for them to be over and then I woke up and started waiting again. I felt numb. Worn out. Used up. I asked myself what David would do in my place, but I had no answer.

The isolation was killing me.

Day 13

That same dream. I was trapped underground, observing myself from outside my metal sarcophagus. It seemed to last forever, much longer than the period I would have been asleep. As I writhed within it, I heard the din of a single word ringing like the echoes of a gong, over and over again: Eight. Eight. Eight. What could that mean? I think that eight was considered a lucky number in some parts of the Earth, but that's hardly what seemed to be implied in the dream. Did I fear that it would be eight years before Grandfather returned, or that he would be in his eighth incarnation when he did? What a dreadful thought. I pushed it from my mind.

I went through the rest of the day like a Roboman, scarcely aware of my actions. The only event that seemed to exist in my universe was the weekend, which would bring with it David's return.

He called today. Ordinarily I don't like speaking on the telephone because my sensitivity does not apply at great dis-

tances, but David's voice was like the first song of Spring. I couldn't feel his presence with my gift, but I'm not certain I could if he were near.

"It's not going well. Who would have thought that saving the world would be the easy part?"

My hearts sank. I didn't need to be psychic to predict what was coming. A delay. Two more weeks at least.

Day 14

The loss of my talent was all in my head. Almost by definition. But that didn't make it any less real. There was occasionally the flicker of a phantom pain in the part of my mind where it had dwelled.

My talent wasn't dead. It was sleeping. However, the only difference was one of potential and if the circumstances that would lead to its awakening never arose and that potential remained forever unrealised, then the distinction between dead and sleeping was meaningless.

I didn't realize until it was gone, but my talent was how I defined myself. I was Susan, who saw into a world that others did not. That was it. That was my identity. That was what I was, who I was, when everything else had been stripped away.

And who am I now that it was gone?

Day 15

The dream again. It seemed to be waiting to pounce on me as soon as I closed my eyes. Eight. Eight. Eight. Inchoate visions of smothering shadows and crippling fear. Eight. Eight. Eight.

I clawed my way back to consciousness like a drowning sailor. The loss of my talent, David's absence, the shunning, this dream. I could weather any of these troubles alone. But they com-

pounded the toll when taken together and the pressure was simply overwhelming. I knew this tail-swallowing cycle of regret and rumination wasn't helping, but I was alone. Grandfather, Barbara, Ian, David, Jenny. Sarah now. There was no-one to anchor me. I was lost.

I awoke from the dream to diamond-sharp clarity. Psychic gifts are most powerful in the twilight realm between sleep and the waking world. So too is the propensity to mistake a psychic sending for a dream or a delusion, which is why I had taken so long to realize what was happening. I was not dreaming. Someone was calling to me.

End of Days

I pulled on a pair of boots and tucked my trousers into them. I found a wide-brimmed hat, sunglasses and David's jacket with the snot stain on the sleeve and dressed in those. I located a canteen and filled it, placed it in a rucksack. The house was still and silent.

It felt like the long morning before a funeral in the afternoon, where the act of dressing has the feel of a ritual. I wondered vaguely if that funeral would be my own.

I left the house and locked the front door behind me, setting forth with the freedom that hopelessness brings. I was not certain of the choices I was making, but they were mine to make. Everything that had led up to this point had been a consequence of someone else's decision, and it was time I made my own. Grandfather's parting words had been the wish that I go forward in my own beliefs. So be it.

Eight. Eight. Eight. It echoed like a drumbeat in my mind. Semantic satiation is the name for the phenomenon where a word loses meaning if it's re-

peated too often in too short a period of time. I walked in time with the words. Eight. Eight. Eight.

Ate. Ate. Ate.

Eight. Ate. Eight.

Eight must have been very hungry.

I giggled. I was cracking up.

The signal/sensation/sending from the trapped presence was strongest to the north and I followed it. There was no sense of identity, but a growing sense of presence.

I sent memories to let him know I was coming. I wasn't sure which pronoun applied. Him? Her? Probably not it. I didn't know anything about the identity of the presence. He could be man or woman, young or old. The only thing I knew for certain was that the presence was trapped and afraid.

I sent images of happier times, of quiet Sunday breakfasts with Grandfather. Of Love. My quickened pulse when I first met David. Comfort. The small school room in Coal Hill and the two teachers who cared enough to follow me home. My boots crunched on the gravel. There was a faint glow to the hills in the distance. The land there was probably irradiated. I'm more resistant to radiation than humans are, but I suddenly wished that I'd had the foresight to pack Grandfather's anti-radiation gloves.

Eight...Ate...In...In...In-ate...

That was new. What did that mean? There were few human psychics, but they did exist. I had assumed that the power awakened in the presence had been the result of a mutation borne of the weapons employed in the war, or the consequence of a vile experiment by the Daleks. Was he telling me his power was inborn, innate? Or was it something else? The message was fragmentary, and I felt like I was missing

something important.

...Ate...Ate...Inate...Inate...

Inborn or otherwise, he had reached out to my mind with his and I would not abandon him. I sent forth more memories. The Hidden Palace of Emperor Xanagrin nested like a viper within the poison clouds of Jupiter. How the tempest of the Great Red Spot lashed and raged outside, and how small that eternal storm seemed compared to the echoing vastness of Xanagrin's fury when he realized that that he had been outwitted by Grandfather.

There. That cave on top of the hill.

Ate...Innate...Innate...Innate.

The cave had probably been a coal mine a century ago, but whatever access roads had led to it had long been reclaimed by the wilderness. First, I had to find my way up the cliff face. It wouldn't do to break my leg at this late hour. Find a grip for hand, a solid surface to place my foot. Begin climbing.

The voice in my head rang clearer.

Sturm...Sturm...

Sturm? That was a new one.

What did it mean? I paused in my ascent to see if a "Drang" would follow, but none was forthcoming.

...Innate...

...Innate...

...Sturm...

...Sturm...

I felt an urgency from the presence. I sent it the most calming thoughts I could picture. Cherry blossoms. All that I had ever seen. Cherry blossoms outside the Imperial Palace, the satin blanket of the petals covering the ground like freshly fallen snow and the fragrance wafting like a perfume. Cherry blossoms in Sakura Park in the ruins of Manhattan in the thirty-second century, the grove still vibrant and alive. Grandfather taking a clipping out from under

the watchful eyes of the gendarmes in the Parc de Sceaux, intending to grow it someday in the TARDIS gardens, but never quite getting around to it.

And then I thought of Penny, unbidden, and how she was a victim as much as anyone, betrayed by a man who performed unspeakable acts in her name. Did she love him? Did she hate him? Or was it something in-between, all mixed up between love and hate? Even today, prisoners were still being found in Dalek labour camps. Was she like the Penelope of Myth, holding out hope that her husband would be returned to her after his odyssey? My hearts swelled with pity and with awareness of our common humanity. The seed of nameless night slumbers within us all. Sometimes it takes root, as within Penelope's husband. Sometimes something better happens, and we recognize the cruelty and pettiness within ourselves; and we understand that it is not denying those urges that allows us to transcend them, but rather it is the act of acknowledging and overcoming them.

...Innate...

...Innate...

...Sturm...

...Sturm...

...Innate...

...Innate...

...Sturm...

...Sturm...

I had to concentrate on my climb. I could not afford to let my mind wander. Hand over hand. Up and over. I overreached once and nearly fell into the open air. I twisted my shoulder badly in catching myself. But I would do this. I hope the presence in the cave felt my determination and was buoyed by it.

My universe shrank to the need to climb and the crescendo building in my mind. Innate...Innate...Innate...Sturm...

Sturm...

I did it! I didn't know how. But I was there. I stood at the top of the cliff, near the mouth of the cave, hunched over, panting, with the palms of my hands on top of my thighs. I had ripped the jacket and lost one of David's gloves in the climb.

I had the sudden thought that the presence could be trapped, pinned over something too heavy to move and that all my efforts were in vain. But I dismissed it. I was here. I had done it. I was Susan. I had reclaimed my name. And nothing was impossible for me anymore. I knew who I was, and I knew my place in this world. I gathered my powers to speak with the presence. He would be frightened. The thoughts reached with a new urgency as I ventured within.

...Sturm...

...Innate...

...Ex...

...Ex...Sturm...Innate...

Oh. Oh no. I had misjudged this catastrophically. I rounded the corner and finally laid eyes upon the presence. It spoke aloud at last and the lights atop its dome illuminated the cave walls as they flashed in time with the completed word.

"Exterminate," said the Dalek.

It was battered, beaten, broken. The dome was dented from the rockfall and half the globes across its body were shattered. The plunger hung limply and the eye at the end of the stalk had a crack running right through the centre. Only the gun-stick seemed functional, but that was the only part it needed. A nimbus of blue light like Saint Elmo's Fire played about its edges.

It was dying. It perhaps only had minutes to live. It had clung so desperately to life so it could live long enough

to kill me. Then it would die, content.

What would David do? The question flashed through my mind. What would Grandfather do?

No.

That was the wrong question.

What would Susan do?

But the only question before me was, "How would I die?"

All right. I would die as I had wished to live. I was called by another name on Gallifrey, but I am Susan Foreman and soon I will be Susan Campbell. Your name is the story you tell the world. And my last act would be to tell the Dalek the story of Susan.

It is a terrible thing to die alone. I would not wish that upon anyone, even to this Dalek. When I entered this cave, I thought I would find a frightened lost soul and I had prepared a psychic sending to reassure that victim that I was here to help. With what would be my final act upon this earth, I delivered that message to the Dalek. I sent it a message of love and hate. Of joy and sorrow. Life and death. I sent it the knowledge that the juxtaposition of opposing concepts was simply a rhetorical device, but that they mask a deeper truth. I sent visions of every beautiful sight I had ever witnessed. The silver seas of Venus lapping gently against the prismatic sands of the shore. A public house in Argentina, where the rain whispered softly against the window glass and the ceiling fans sluiced lazily through cigarette smoke, and men laughed and cried throughout the long night. The kaleidoscopic beauty of the garden moon of the Staccul, where synaesthesia reigned, and the flowers sang to you the mysteries of the universe. My visit to Olympus, and the electric tang of the nectar on my tongue.

Visions of Arcadia, Gallifrey's Second City, all invincible glass and lofty spires tapering off into an infinite night. Ethereal, eternal, perfection calculated to the thousandth decimal place. One of the Seven Hundred Wonders of the Universe. Torn from the heart of a shackled black hole, among the grandest achievements of a people who had bent the natural world to their will, it would last beyond time.

Then I thought of Arcadia on Earth. Pastoral, imperfect, impermanent. Precious because it was these things, not in spite of them. Gone already, industrialized centuries ago, and then razed in the invasion. Yet it lived on in the hearts and minds of the people of Earth.

I held nothing back. Everything I had ever seen or done or known. Every joy, every joy, every secret shame. Everything that made me Susan. I would die. Only my murderer was here to witness my awakening and he would follow me into oblivion as soon as he killed me. But I knew who I was and not even death could erase that.

I rose and stared into the eye. The gunstick moved to track me. I was going to die in a cave far from civilization, in a coat too big for me, and my body would never be found. I remembered my Shakespeare, and Claudio's words in Measure for Measure: If I must die, I will encounter darkness as a bride, and hug it in mine arms. I spread my own arms wide. Brave Susan. Courage enough at long last to look Death in the eye.

I felt a movement within its mind, like a great throng of crows taking wing all at once. It seemed to be trying to say something.

The lights atop the dome flashed, once, twice, but no words accompanied

them.

A rattling shudder passed through it. The gun sagged and the Dalek was still. The Dalek was dead.

Had its injuries caught up to at last? Or I had I touched it in those final moments?

I looked at it. There had been a living creature within that casing, twisted and malign, but still a living being. Now it was just a body, a thing.

I felt like I should say something, but I had no words. It had helped me in a way. I knew who I was, and I knew I could make it in this world. I had a home. I had reached the Dalek and I could reach Penelope.

I picked up the rucksack. I didn't know what awaited me, or the people of this world. It could take decades to rebuild. This victory was a tiny thing in the scheme of things. But as I left the cave, I knew, for the first time since I had come to Earth, that I would finally be going home.

*

LEY OF THE LAND

by Michael Crouch

Three events had marked out the defining moments of Professor Declan Finn's life.

One was The Big Book of British Prehistory presented to him on his twelfth birthday by his grandmother, which had ignited a passion for ancient archaeology that had never left him.

The second was the first cigarette he had puffed aged sixteen and which had begun a lifelong addiction that would eventually kill him forty-two years later.

And the third was his discovery of an ancient stone circle in the Brecks, the near-desert landscape that bordered Norfolk and Suffolk. It was a discovery that would be both the pinnacle of his career, and the end of it.

In truth it was not the discovery per se that had brought him humiliation and ruin. In fact, it had initially brought him national fame and great media attention until others of his circle began to cast doubt upon its origins. No, it was his contention that it sat on an ancient ley line and would once have been used by the ancients to channel Earth power that brought him ridicule. He was only ridiculed by his peers, however. The hippies and the drop-outs of the flower power generation worshipped him, almost literally. It was that as much as anything that had seen him fall in the eyes of academia.

"It's a preposterous notion, Declan, old boy," Doctor Miles Roth had observed some years ago as the two archaeologists walked around the Five Angels, five stones in a loose circular pattern, some upright, others fallen or leaning heavily. It was no Stonehenge but if genuinely constructed by human hands, then it was still significant.

"I used to think so too," nodded Professor Finn, "but on reading Alfred Watkins's book and relating them to other archaeological sites, I find myself more and more drawn to the idea. It makes sense."

There was no reasoning with him. Even Miles Roth, Declan's closest friend had failed to draw him away from such fanciful notions as ley lines and Earth power. And when Finn published his first academic paper proposing the idea, the demise of his once illustrious career began. Yet even now, all these years later, he still believed.

Professor Finn coughed hard, trying to keep the rising congestion from throwing him into a coughing fit and to allow as much oxygen as his perforated lungs could take. Despite his poor health, he was happy because once the scientific advisor from UNIT arrived and verified his findings, he would be exonerated and lauded once more.

"What absolute poppycock" the Doctor declared. "The man's a charlatan - must

be,” he snapped as if that was the last word to be said on the matter.

Jo Grant threw him a withering look and crossed her arms grumpily as the little yellow roadster sped along the narrowing country lanes.

“Well, I think you’re being rather harsh, Doctor,” she sulked. “He’s clearly passionate about Britain’s ancient past. He’s written several books about stone circles and burial mounds, you know?”

“I know, Jo,” said the Doctor as the wind billowed through his mane of grey hair and pulled at the ruffles of his flamboyant shirt and red velvet jacket. “Populist nonsense, hardly scientific endeavour. Why the Brigadier wants to send me on this fool’s errand I have no idea.”

Jo shuffled guiltily in the passenger seat. The Doctor glanced at her, his eyes narrowing. “What aren’t you telling me, Jo?”

“I’m a fan of the Professor’s books and his theories about Earth power,” she said, ignoring the Doctor’s loud ‘tut’. “I rather nagged the poor Brig to investigate this stone circle that Professor Finn has found and research the possibility of energy drawn up through the stones.”

“And the Brigadier agreed?” the Doctor exclaimed.

“I did say I nagged,” smiled Jo.

“Oh, I see. Nagged him to death, more likely. We’re here because he just wanted to get you out of his hair for a while.”

“Well, it worked, didn’t it?” she grinned. The Doctor gave up. There were not many people he gave in to so easily, but young Jo Grant had a way and a look that made her difficult to resist, and she certainly knew how to get what she wanted. “Anyway, we’re nearly there now,” she proclaimed. “So, we might as well see what’s what, right?”

The Doctor was about to open his mouth and protest but then he shook his head and concentrated on driving. Really, what was the point?

Less than an hour later the little yellow car and its passengers arrived at their destination. It was no paradise. Nearly 400 square miles of parched, sandy soil, straddling the boundaries of two counties and dotted with little more than a few hardy shrubs and grasses, and tall spindly Scots Pine. The only inhabitants seemed to be the numerous wild rabbits that kicked and flitted about having outlived the ancient Roman people who had brought them here.

“In medieval times there were twenty-six warrens recorded in this area,” Professor Declan Finn said, as he approached the Doctor and Jo. “The fortified lodge at Thetford Warren remains one of the finest examples of its kind.”

“Indeed,” the Doctor smiled. “I remember lunching there with Henry VII on one his hunting sorties. Favoured the black rabbits as I recall. Said the fur was a better match for his nightclothes than the brown or the white.”

“Really?” Professor Finn stuttered. “Was this man really from U.N.I.T? He was either a joker or a madman and he didn’t look like he had a face for joking’. He didn’t want to jinx his chances of professional rehabilitation by saying so out loud though. He ignored the comment and said, “Professor Declan Finn at your service, sir. Ma’am,” he added with a polite nod to Jo.

“Pleased to meet you, Professor,” the Doctor said with a firm shake of the hand. “I’m the Doctor and this is my assistant, Miss Josephine Grant.”

Just call me Jo,” she said.

“I say, what a marvellous little motor you have there,” Professor Finn said as

he looked over the bright yellow vintage car. “It must have taken you quite a long time to get here in that old thing.”

The Doctor began to protest at this slight, but Jo pulled him back to intervene. “Actually, the Doctor has made quite a few improvements to her,” she said. “Bessie can do quite a turn of speed when required.”

“Bessie?” the Professor asked.

“Yes,” Jo nodded. “That’s the affectionate name the Doctor gave her. Men and their motors, you know?” She gave the Professor a knowing wink and smiled.

“Indeed, I do,” he enthusiastically shook both their hands. “It’s the same for men and their stone circles. I named mine The Five Angels.”

“I get ‘Five’ because there are five stones? But why ‘Angels?’” Jo asked.

“Because, like a fool I believed they were visitations from some far-off realm, come to fulfil my life’s wishes. An old man in the twilight of his career on an endless quest to map Britain’s ancient past and reveal the knowledge and powers of her people.”

Jo smiled at his romantic notion, but even as the Doctor huffed away with a snort of derision, Jo detected something in the Professor’s eyes. It was only there for a moment. A sort of sadness, a look of loss. In the blink of an eye, it was gone; and his broad smile returned eliminating any hint of what lay underneath.

“Come along,” he ushered his two visitors away. “I’ll take you to them so you can view them for yourselves.”

He took Jo’s elbow in one hand and guided her off across the Brecklands, chatting and laughing as they went. The Doctor grumpily followed on, a short distance behind them. For an alien being with an infinite amount of time to

explore, he grew very impatient at having his own time wasted and he was in no doubt that that this trip was a waste of it.

Jo at least seemed to be enjoying a day out in the countryside, as the Professor chattered away amiably. From his knowledge of the natural landscape, the archaeology of the region and his evident belief in new age philosophy, the Doctor could see the appeal to Jo. After all the adventures that they had had together, the marvels they had seen and wonders they had explored, he had still been unable to entirely sway his young companion over to the discipline of pure science. It was a fallibility amongst many of the human race. Perhaps that’s why the species appealed to him? They maintained a belief in magic and wonder that went beyond science and kept them exploring. Admirable but very frustrating.

“Do we have much further to go?” the Doctor complained from some distance behind them. “I have some scientific journals and research papers I want to get through before nightfall.”

“No, not much further,” Professor Finn called back. “We’ll have you tucked up before the sun drops.” He and Jo laughed, which just irked the Doctor even more. He did not suffer fools gladly and he didn’t much care for another so-called scientist vying for Jo’s attentions.

“It’s rather barren around here,” Jo commented apologetically. “Nothing for miles but a few trees, grass, and scrub. And the odd rabbit,” she added as one bounded away across the ground at their approach.

“A result of the last ice age,” the Professor nodded. “The soil is so poor that

very little can grow or take hold here apart from a few hardier plants and some orchids. It makes for a very unique and rare habitat. Some of the locals say that the Earth is so hungry that if you stand still for long enough it will gnaw at your feet." Given some of the strange adventures she'd had with the Doctor, Jo Grant could believe it. She stepped up the pace as the trio finally approached the source of their interest.

"The Five Angels," the Professor announced proudly. Jo looked across to the incongruous site of five large misshapen rocks sitting on the barren landscape in what might possibly be described as a circle. It was no Stonehenge, that much was certain.

Keeping his distance from them both, the Doctor slowly began circling the stones, observing closely their positions, the ground disturbance around them and their elevation in relation to the wider environment. He nodded, tutted, hummed and ha-ed as he took calculations and made mental references to similar features he had encountered before. He was present when sites such as Avebury and the Ring of Brodgar had been constructed so he had some inkling of what he was looking for.

Finally, he gave a loud tut and shook his head. "As I suspected," the Doctor said derisively as he caught up with them. "Utter nonsense. This so-called stone circle is no more man-made than those Scots Pine over there."

Jo felt a tremor run through the Professor's arm as he held her and though he said nothing, she could feel his pain at the Doctor's harsh words. She patted a hand against his forearm and said, "Don't worry, Professor. The Doctor can be a bit rude sometimes, but he means well really."

"Oh, that's all right," the Professor reassured her. "I've faced my fair share of critics over the years. A few harsh words are not going to deter me." He sounded convincing but once again she caught that momentary glimpse of sadness in his eyes. There was something more to his passion for the stones than he was letting on.

The Doctor opened his mouth to begin revealing his deliberations but a quick look from Jo told him that now wasn't the time. It mattered little to the Doctor if the Professor wished to maintain some sort of fantasy though it irked him that he might wish to share it with a wider, less-enlightened audience. On this occasion though, he decided that discretion was the better part of valour.

"Look, Jo," the Doctor said. "I have a bit of work to do. I'm going to check in at the B&B. Why don't you stay with Professor Finn and see what you can learn? We can have a proper discussion about it over dinner tonight."

It was hardly an enthusiastic conciliation, but Jo conceded that at least the Doctor was showing some willingness to discuss the matter. Perhaps if she could learn enough and gather some evidence, the Doctor might even take the Professor seriously.

"All right then," she nodded with a cheery smile.

The Doctor shook the Professor's hand and smiled warmly as he bid them goodbye. In the time that she had known him, Jo had found the exiled Time Lord rude, abrupt, warm, charming, fair-minded, difficult, irascible, loyal to his friends, a defender of the defenceless, an intellectual and a man devoted to science. All of this made him somewhat dismissive of anything that wasn't rooted in scientific fact and Jo had always known that the concept of Earth energy

and ancient stones was going to be an issue. She had not expected so much dismissal as he had displayed today but his manners and openness to meeting new people remained intact at least.

"So, tell me more about your discovery, Professor Finn," Jo urged the elderly archaeologist as the Doctor strode away.

Professor Declan Finn became almost a new man as he glowed at the opportunity to talk about his favourite subject - his obsession, if he were being honest with himself. The more he talked, the more his raw, Irish brogue came to the fore. It made him very easy to listen to and his natural storytelling ability was spellbinding. He pulled Jo around the site discussing natural features, man-made changes in the landscape, where the stones came from and how they got here. Much of the area had been under the management of the army for many years which is why so much of it had been left relatively untouched by development. The Brigadier at least would take pride in hearing that.

"I also have an idea that the stones are aligned to the rising sun on a certain day of the year," he went on excitedly. "That could tie in nicely with the theory about lines of Earth power."

"Yes," said Jo, that's something that I don't understand. The idea about lines in the Earth channelling some sort of power through the stones," Jo persisted with her questions. "What exactly does that mean?"

"Ah, well," the Professor coughed, "For a start, the lines weren't my idea. The theory of ley lines was put forward in 1921 by the author Alfred Watkins."

"Ley lines?" asked Jo. "I've read about those in The Times."

"The Times?" exclaimed the Professor.

"The Fortean Times," Jo nodded eager-

ly. The periodical of strange phenomena had become one of her favourite sources of reading material. It was not the sort of scientific journal the Doctor would have approved of but that it irked him was part of its appeal to her.

"Yes, well, one of these ley lines runs straight through Stonehenge and Avebury, the caves at Royston and right through the centre of The Five Angels. It's my belief, as it is others', that the ancient people could channel power from the Earth along these lines with the stone circles acting like a kind of prehistoric power station."

By now even Jo was becoming incredulous though she was at pains not to show it. She thanked her lucky stars that the Doctor wasn't here though. The professor's ideas would have found short shrift. "Then there is the thing that makes these stones so unique," the Professor rounded off his discussion. "Go on, take a close up look at them and tell me what you see."

Jo eyed him suspiciously as though this were some test to try and catch her out, but with the Professor's encouragement, she stepped up to one stone, then another and another. It was hard to make out what was so unique about them. They were after all, large grey rocks, different shapes, a little weather-beaten but otherwise just normal-looking, everyday.

'But wait! There was something! What was that? Something glinting in the sunlight. Something reflective.' The more she looked closely, the more it seemed to cover the stones. The Professor beamed as he saw her realise.

"Flecks of quartz scattered throughout the surface of the rocks," he said. "I first noticed it about three days after I'd found the circle. I came back on the third evening as the sun was setting and

the whole placed just sparkled. It was one of the most magical moments of my entire life."

"And you're sure that these rocks are unique?" Jo pressed him, knowing the Doctor would ask the same question of her later on.

"Oh yes," he nodded enthusiastically, stopping only to cough. "I've scoured the area and examined atlases for a radius of a hundred miles and found no other rocks like them. Proof, if any be needed, that these rocks were deliberately brought here." That was something to report back although she doubted the Doctor would accept it so easily.

"There's something else I have to tell you, Miss Grant," he continued. "You remember I said these stones appeared to be in line with the stars? Well, I've estimated that a quartz crystal positioned where the heel stone would have been, will project light from the sun at a particular time of the year. I'm convinced that this is where the stories of Earth energy come from and what's more, I think I may be able to prove it!"

Jo stopped in her tracks, her mouth agape. "Really?" she asked incredulously. "How?"

"Tomorrow is May the first, the ancient festival of Beltane. Calculating the sun's position when it rises to the stones suggests that tomorrow morning's sunrise will be the moment."

By now the Professor was becoming very excited and animated at the prospect to a degree that even Jo began to feel slightly sceptical. The excitement seemed to make him breathless and grow ruddy-faced. She stepped back from the stones to find the Professor coughing frantically. Jo moved to help but he urged her away as he covered his face with a handkerchief and coughed

furiously for several moments. After taking a moment to gather his breath, he dipped into a pocket, brought out the pill bottle and downed two more.

"That's a bad cough you've got there, Professor," said Jo. "Are you OK?"

"Yes, yes, I'm fine, m'dear, fine. It's nothing for you to worry about." He flapped a hand at her as if eager to dismiss the subject as quickly as possible; but she could see from his flushed face that all was not well. "Come along now," he ushered her towards his Land Rover. "I've kept you busy for long enough and your Doctor friend will no doubt be wanting his dinner soon. Let's get you back to your B&B."

Jo said nothing but went with him quietly. He was right about the Doctor though. He certainly enjoyed a good meal and a glass of fine wine. And unbelievably they had been wandering and talking for almost six hours. The Professor was certainly a charming and engaging man whatever else was ailing him. They drove away from this precious site, the stones behind them sparkling in the late afternoon sunlight.

Maudley was a quaint little Norfolk village near the edge of the Brecks, nestled in amongst a large bank of Scots Pine. Their scent was strong on the breeze as the Doctor and Jo wandered from their lodgings into the pub next door. They found themselves a table and were shortly settling down to a comforting roast dinner and red wine. The Doctor sat quietly polishing off his plate of food and was patiently waiting for dessert as Jo finished relating what she had learnt.

"And so, the Professor has invited us both back to the stones at dawn tomorrow to witness his experiment," she said enthusiastically. "He'll have a chance to

prove his hypothesis to you once and for all."

The Doctor looked nonplussed and shook his head. "I'm sorry, Jo, I just cannot accept Professor Finn's outlandish ideas. I checked the stones closely and I am convinced that they were not placed there by man but by the natural action of glaciation. What's more the five stones do not align to any kind of astronomical phenomenon that I can deduce." He began tucking into the bowl of sticky toffee pudding and custard that had just been placed before him.

"So, what about the ley lines then?" Jo quizzed him. "Isn't there just a chance that these stones could channel energy from the Earth or the sun? I saw the five stones sparkling in the sunlight for myself."

"Naturally, Jo," the Doctor answered. "But it is purely due to the natural reflective qualities of the quartz. And as for ley lines," he went on, "absolute poppycock. Why I could take a map of all the pubs in the country and draw straight lines connecting any number of them in whichever direction I chose. It has nothing to do with positioning or alignment." Even as he spoke, he could see the disappointment in Jo Grant's face. He felt a surge of guilt at having knocked her beliefs once more, even though he knew that he was right.

"I'm sorry, Jo," he apologised. "I can see how enamoured you've become of the Professor. He is clearly a very charming and knowledgeable man, but on this subject, he is very wide of the mark."

"You think Professor Finn is a fraud, a charlatan?" Jo asked sadly, he head in her hands.

"No, not at all," the Doctor replied. "I think that he's just become so infatuated with his romantic ideas that he has ceased to see the thing objectively. He

very probably believes everything that he's been saying."

"All right then," Jo conceded. "Then why don't we go along tomorrow morning for the sunrise. We can let the professor perform his ritual and be disappointed. That will bring him to his senses and satisfy you in one go." The Doctor could feel the icy cutting of her words. She was goading him and clearly still had faith in the professor's ideas. It was ridiculous but if it did indeed result in proving a point then perhaps it was a worthwhile endeavour. The Doctor could win his argument and then they could all go home.

"Very well," he snapped, wiping a napkin across his lips, and finishing off his glass of red wine. "Tomorrow at dawn it is." And with that they retired to their rooms.

By the time that Jo had made it down for breakfast, the Doctor had already polished off a full English, several rounds of toast and three cups of tea. As she wearily set herself down to a bowl of cereal and a coffee, the Doctor was busily engaged in conversation with the landlord. She wasn't entirely sure what they were discussing but she heard Professor Finn's name being banded about and the Doctor had a look of some concern on his face.

As the landlord returned to his daily chores, the Doctor turned and saw Jo turning a spoon about in her bowl of increasingly soggy Corn Flakes. The concern dropped from his face and turned into a broad smile and a cheery, "Good morning, Jo". She mumbled something back and asked what the time was. "Four forty-five," the Doctor replied breezily.

"Four forty-five?" Jo exclaimed.

"Eddie very kindly prepared breakfast especially for us after I told him about our early start, last night. Lovely chap. I knew his great-great-great grandmother," he added for no obvious reason that Jo could discern. "Now get your skates on my girl," the Doctor continued. "Bessie is all fired up and we have a date with the sunrise."

"Gosh, yes, we don't want to miss that, do we? But you didn't buy a word of it yesterday so what's changed?" Her face was hard, her usually wide-open eyes narrowed with a suspicious squint.

"Nothing's changed, Jo," he proclaimed, "but Professor Finn holds a genuine belief in his ideas. It would be disingenuous of us to not to turn up and give him the opportunity to prove us wrong."

Jo looked sceptical. "Are you sure this isn't a chance for you to watch him making a fool of himself," she asked sulkily.

The Doctor looked hurt. "Now come on, Jo, I think you know me better than that. Whatever our difference of opinion, the Professor and I are both men of science. And science is all about proposing a theory, testing it, and either finding proof or refining the theory. And that's what we're doing this morning. Now grab your coat and let's get a move on."

The Doctor sometimes had a manner that was so warm and all-embracing that she felt it impossible not to go along with him. This little pep talk had been just the tonic she needed. The weariness was swept away almost immediately as she jumped up from her chair, took her fake fur coat from the coat stand and followed the Doctor outside. Even the slight chill in the air and the morning dew did not dampen her newfound enthusiasm as they roared away.

The Professor was already pacing about the stones, taking photographs, and making drawings and calculations, when the Doctor and Jo drew up in Bessie. The horizon was already becoming lighter as the sun teased them. Dawn had almost broken and one way or another they were about to get their answer.

"Stand over here," the Professor urged them to a point about twenty feet away to the rear of the circle with the sun due almost directly ahead of them. "If my sums are right, we should see the sun break over the central stone. Then all being well, the Earth power will be redirected between all five stones. It should be quite a spectacle."

He began coughing again as he grew more excited at the prospect. Jo put a caressing arm about him as he delved into his crumpled jacket pocket for his pills. He quickly swallowed two and calmed himself as he awaited the big event. The Doctor looked concerned but said nothing as he waited further back.

The first rays of the sun started to appear on the horizon. As the yellow star gently rose, it broke the surface and a ray shot out almost instantly across the dark, rugged surface of the Brecks. As Professor Finn had calculated, the ray hit the first stone and it did indeed appear to sparkle. 'No doubt Jo and the Professor would have put this down to Earth power being channelled via the ley line and into the stones,' the Doctor thought. Of course, he understood it was nothing more than the natural reflective quality of the quartz fragments in the stone. Even so, it did have an air of magic about it.

There was a tension in the air as they waited for more. It took only a matter of

seconds for the sun to rise above the horizon and yet it felt to Jo like an age. Nothing was happening. The other four stones remained in shadow and the Professor was starting to cough fitfully again as if the disappointment was too much. She tried to console him, but it seemed like a futile gesture. Then just for a moment she thought she saw light glinting from one of the other stones. She knew it was probably her overactive imagination but as she gingerly looked up, she saw quartz in first one stone, then another and another sparkling in the growing sunlight. Finally, the fifth stone began to sparkle, and she shook the Professor reassuringly. "Look," she called out. "Look, Professor. You're theory... It's working."

Finn looked up slowly, disbelievingly, and as his vision focussed, he saw that it was true. A shaft of light fell over the first stone and the other four were sparkling, radiating light that seemed to bring the whole circle alive. He almost danced around the stones, raising his arms in the air, his mouth in the widest grin possible. He stopped in the centre as the full sun began to dissipate the effect and tears fell from his eyes. He began to cough as another fit overtook him, then he clutched at his chest. He was still smiling and crying tears of joy as he crumpled and fell to the ground. Jo and the Doctor rushed over, the Doctor quickly checking over the Professor's vital signs. He shook his head sadly. "I'm sorry, Jo," he said. Jo clasped a hand over her mouth and began to cry.

Two weeks later and the Doctor and Jo were saying their farewells to the Professor's family and friends. It had been a quiet and dignified funeral and Jo thought he would have liked to have

been buried here, on the edge of the Brecks not far from his beloved stones. As they sped away in Bessie, Jo said, "I don't suppose anybody will ever know what we witnessed now."

"No," the Doctor agreed. "But you know, all that we witnessed was a natural excitation of molecules vibrating in rapid motion and making the quartz light up. A visual effect but nothing more."

Jo pondered on this for a few moments. She had already suspected but now she knew for sure. "It was nothing to do with the sunrise of ley lines, was it?" she asked pointedly.

"I'm afraid not," the Doctor said with a little hint of guilt. "It was more to do with sonics!"

"You activated the air molecules by using the sonic screwdriver to create the effect," Jo cried out. "But why?"

"The professor was a very ill man, but a truly devoted one. I sympathised with his belief even if I didn't agree with it. It seemed churlish not to let him have his last wish."

"So, you rigged up that special effect to grant an old man his dying wish?" The Doctor said nothing, but Jo knew she was right. The Doctor never ceased to amaze her sometimes. "So, you do have a heart," she smiled.

"Two of 'em, Jo," he proclaimed, patting his chest. "Two of 'em."

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SQUEELIM

by Matthew J. Gleason

The peculiar woman glared down at the hamsters running and hopping wildly around their glass tank. I saw her dressed in her dark blue coat and jacket and bright multi-coloured shirt just staring at the tiny furry creatures as intently as a scientist examining alien blood in a movie. Right then I felt my body move almost involuntarily. I was motivated purely by curiosity. I left the spot in the small pet store which housed the snakes and made my way over to the strange woman and the hamsters. "Hello," I said. My voice was unsteady. "I'm eleven." I said stupidly.

"I'm the Doctor." she responded in a British accent like from Harry Potter or something but y'know, in real life.

"No, my name's Alex. I'm 11 years old." The woman smiled in a way that was neither warm nor cold but somehow both charming and half a threat. "I'm the Doctor. You wouldn't believe my age. What do you think of these hamsters?" I glanced down at the tiny creatures. I had been wrong in thinking that they all were running. Most were but one was nearly perfectly still. It was bigger than the others. Its fur was darker. Its eyes were a strange, unfamiliar shade of green. All the others seemed to be afraid of that hamster and would not come close to it. "What is it?" I asked the Doctor.

"Good question. Well done you." Now she was smiling widely and seemed genuinely excited in a mad sort of way. "Would you believe me if I said it was an alien?" I slowly nodded my head.

"Would you believe me if I told you I was an alien?" I nodded again without any hesitation. "Where's your adult?" the Doctor asked suspiciously.

For a moment my brain froze like I didn't quite remember what to say. "We live a block away. Mom lets me come here to look at the animals alone sometimes."

She glared at me for a moment as if weighing the truth of my answer. "Do you happen to have any money my brilliant young friend?"

"No" I said.

"That's alright. You see this isn't really a real hamster so taking it from here could hardly be called stealing. Do you follow?"

"I think so." She laughed chaotically. "Good now open your backpack."

I unzipped the orange backpack I had stained with chocolate pudding earlier that day.

The woman reached into the hamster tank and snatched the fat, slow moving rodent. "Who's a genocidal shape-shifting space carnivore?" she asked the hamster in a faux cutesy voice before dropping it into my bag. The small creature was surprisingly heavy.

"What are you two up to?" shouted a man behind the front counter.

"RUN!" the Doctor yelled, grabbing hold of my hand.

We ran together, first out of the pet shop and then three or four blocks before we stopped beside a graffiti covered dumpster in a litter strewn alleyway. "See this?" the Doctor asked me as

she produced a syringe full of a green and purple bubbling fluid. I nodded. "This is a very special cocktail of super sciencey chemicals. It's my invention, actually, although my friend Karvanista helped a bit. A really tiny bit admittedly. Want to know what it does?" I nodded again. "Nothing. It makes nothing happen. That's good news for us because nothing is exactly what we want. Are you keeping up? Hand me our friend." I reached into my bag and grabbed the ball of fur. "This won't hurt a bit," the Doctor said to the hamster as she took it from me and quickly jabbed it in the side with her syringe. It audibly yelped. "Oh, I'm sorry dear. Had to do that so you wouldn't turn into a big scary space monster and eat this nice young person's planet all up."

"So, you're saying it can't change shape now?" I asked the Doctor.

"Exactly! The Squeelim are a positively fascinating species. Through a not entirely unique chemical process they're able to change shape at will. However, this only happens after they set a specific goal. When it's time to do whatever it is they intend to do, they change back. Word from above is that Whiskers over here had quite the convoluted plan, to replace your nation's president and start a nuclear war. Of course, in that shape he thinks he's just a regular old hamster and now that we've blocked the chemical process from repeating that's all he'll ever be. You my friend, have just helped a tiny bit in saving your world. Feels good, doesn't it?"

I was amazed. "Yeah, but what are we gonna do with him?"

The Doctor went quiet for a moment as if deep in thought. "The last time I had a pet she turned into a sentient opera so probably best not. You keep him. He can't do any harm. Besides, you've

earned it."

A bright multi-coloured light flashed from within the Doctor's coat. "Ah that means trouble. Basically, I've got to run. Have a good life... What was your name?"

I started to answer but she was already sprinting away. That was well enough as at that moment I could not have recalled my name.

Then I remembered everything, and forgot the illusion, which was the boy. There was a loud shrieking sound. I looked around to see where it was coming from, but it was produced by my own slick and soupy body. In a rain puddle I examined the dark black feathers which ran down my ostrich-like neck. It was always so strange returning to my true form. It was like waking in freezing water. I looked down at the hamster which I now clutched tightly in my pincers. "Thought you could start your own planet? Thought you were better than the Empire? Think no more on that." I said to the stupid little thing. It just looked at me terrified and empty minded. I tossed its tiny body into one of my many mouths and ripped through it in seconds. It tasted of weakness. The Squeelim would be better off without it. We would take Gallifrey. We would take everything.

THEY JUST POP INTO MY HEAD

by Paul Burns

I couldn't believe she was standing in front of me. She was carrying a small blue journal and smiling excitedly. She spoke: "You're Paul Burns, aren't you? Got to say, loving your work. Just one question," Her tone turned serious: "The stories in this journal, four adventures, across my timeline. You weren't there at any of them. How did you know what happened?"

The Doctor sat on my sofa and opened the journal. "You've given each adventure a title. I pulled them off the internet and I've listed them in my journal chronologically." She fixed her steely eyes on me, they then darted back to the book. "First one: The Nightmare Present. I had a scarf and naturally curly hair back then, and..." She paused and let out a melancholic sigh, "It was my first Christmas with Harry and Sarah. Seventies dream team fighting off an army of Hydrothermites, who froze an old lady and was about to do the same to some children." She smiled at the memory: "But I choose my friends well, and Harry and Sarah managed to stop them before I even got upstairs." She looked at me again. "Full house that night, me, Sarah and Harry, Benton, Miss Blackthorne. Only person missing was you." She wrinkled her nose: "Are you Harry's grandson? Benton's nephew? No, wait, that doesn't explain the other times."

The Doctor flicked through the journal. "Something Familiar. I had just stopped

a load of Autons and got myself a new companion. Mona Pinoc! Now, I'm usually good at word games-you want to see how many anagrams I can make out of The Mighty Jagraffess of the Holy Hadrajassic Maxaraddenfoe. But on that day, bit slow, bit skinny, took me a while to work out Mona Pinoc was an anagram of 'companion'. Mona was actually a shape changing killer robot who had captured my friends Sarah, Mel and Ace. But why am I telling you? You've already written all this down."

The Doctor wasn't really giving me a chance to speak. Her usual mercurial speech pattern left no gaps, and she was on a roll. "Devil's Keep: Love this. Spending any time with Jo Jones is a treat, I love that woman, and it was a real blast from the past when we teamed up to fight the Sea Devils and rescue her friend, Abby. One thing: psychic child in Nightmare Present. Psychic Abby in this one. Are they related?"

I went to speak but she was already onto the final story: "How The Grintash Stole Christmas," she read. "I was getting cat hair out of my coat for ages; and I swear I can still hear a buzzing from one of the Swarm of the Biantine in the TARDIS. Nice linkage in this one. Evil talking cat, my old amazing technicolour dream coat and meeting Melanie Bush after all these years. Didn't like her carrot juice punch though. Step too far that!"

The Doctor then turned to the back of the journal. The print was thinner, and the stories were unfinished. "Three stories. Not on the net but written down in your head. The TARDIS plucked them from your mind when we turned up and transferred your thoughts into this book. NOMOPHOBIA. A story about aliens called the Mayshorn, stealing human lifespans to lengthen their hour-long existence. Bill is still upset at losing her friend Cheryl in that one. But these last two... they've told me exactly who you are... Master!!!"

The Doctor took out her sonic and aimed it towards me dramatically. It beeped. She looked hugely disappointed after she studied it. "Aww, human. I was so sure. Thing is, the last two stories don't even feature me. Well, I am outside the vault door with Bill in Troubled Water, but this one about the Master's first meeting with the Cybermen... when did that happen? Got to say, Blood In The Wires, love that title."

The Doctor closed the journal. "Well, how did you know about these adventures?" I sat on the chair opposite her and cleared my throat. "You have to understand Doctor, you inspire me and my friends so much. Not only do we love your adventures and all the faces you've worn, but it runs deeper than that. You're responsible for so many of my friendships. You've turned strangers into families and so many of us pay tribute to you through stories and art. You have no idea what you mean to us, riding around in that small-on-the-outside blue box. The least we can do is tell your stories and sometimes those stories, they just pop into my head."

The Doctor looked touched. Then sprang to her feet. "That's it!" She ex-

claimed. "Timey wimey! You haven't written these stories yet. The TARDIS put them into your head when she was probing around. You wrote them and I travelled back to your past." She looked confused. "Sorry, shouldn't have happened. I should mind wipe you really... You know... spoilers..." she looked at me and smiled. "But then, I wouldn't be much of a friend or inspiration, would I?" She lifted herself off the sofa and put the journal in her pocket. "Keep telling your stories, Paul. Keep up the good work. Thank you."

The Doctor opened the door to her TARDIS. She turned around and grinned. "By the way, would it be OK if I joined your group one week? I love a good game of Bingo!"

*

NEMESIS

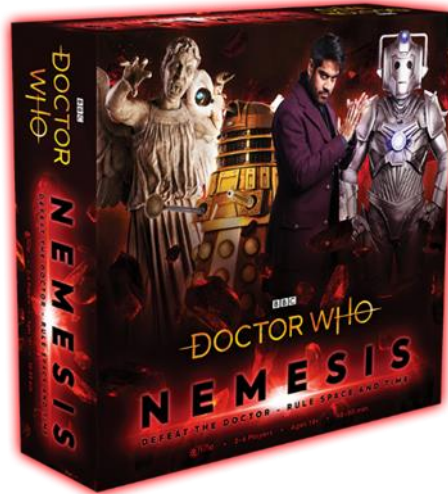
Game review by Dave Chapman



Part 1 – Gameplay

Other than turning a wilfully blind eye, there is no way to avoid the following comparison. Doing that, however, both handcuffs me as a writer and potentially insults you as a gamer; so I'm just going to get it out of the way. If it wasn't for the designer and licensing agreements, Doctor Who: Nemesis could have easily been part of Ravensburger's Villainous series. If I'm going to be bluntly honest, it probably would have been better served if it had been part of it, even under a co-publishing deal. Why? Because gameplay aside, there is a sizeable tabletop game franchise already called Nemesis which means you have to say the full "Doctor Who: Nemesis" title or risk confusing people. In fact, even if you do use the whole title, there are a lot of gamers who will still get confused. Seriously, I had to clarify what the game is to probably 90% of the people I talked to. Plus, if you've played any version of Villainous, you already have a good idea of how Doctor Who: Nemesis

plays. If you haven't that's also ok, I'll do my best to walk you through it.



Each player takes on the persona of one of the Doctor's classic nemeses: Daleks, Cybermen, Weeping Angels, or The Master. Each nemesis has a unique, double-sided control board with a different faction or iteration of their chosen nemesis. I'll go into more detail

on each of those in the next issue, but as an example, as the Daleks you would play as Davros or as the Dalek Emperor. Each player also has a unique deck of cards for their chosen nemesis and an additional set of cards added to that for their chosen faction. Further added to their deck are cards representing two randomly selected Doctors (Doctors 1-13 plus the War Doctor).

On their turn, a player will choose one of the four locations on their control board, which will determine what actions they are allowed to take during that turn. These actions are generally some combination of drawing cards, playing cards with specific traits, moving cards around, and/or gaining tokens. One of the more important card types is Character cards, which are split between Hero cards (usually The Doctor or Companions) and Nemesis cards (usually Minions). While most Nemesis cards are played at locations on your own control board, Hero cards can be played on any player's board depending on your personal strategy at the time. When a Companion card is played on a location, it forces that player to pass on one of the actions listed there, whereas a Doctor forces the player to pass on both actions. The most common way to rid yourself of Heroes is through the Conflict Step of a turn.

Conflict isn't normally automatic but when initiated, a player adds up the combined power of any characters and modifiers at the location, commits any power tokens they wish, and plays/activates any cards that trigger during the conflict step. Then players roll a die (a different custom die for each nemesis, for the record) and add that to their total. Cards with a conflict trigger may

be activated during any and all conflicts, even when a player isn't otherwise directly involved. All heroes work in concert, regardless of the owner, whereas each player's minions only work with that player's other minions. Yes, it's possible that more than one player may have minions involved in the same conflict, but so far that hasn't happened in any of my games. The losing side has been thwarted and all cards are placed into their respective owner's discard pile, with the exception of the Doctor. Doctors are not thwarted, they are captured and placed at the top of the victor's control board. Having captured Doctors can often trigger a win condition.



Prior to the Conflict Step, there is a Minion Step, that allows players to play or move a single minion, which may be beneficial during the optional Conflict Phase, but it's important to remember that the main Action Step of a turn doesn't happen until after the Conflict Step. This is important because many actions can bring into play cards that may impact a Conflict, and the results of a Conflict will impact the available actions at that location. The results of a Conflict may also impact potential win conditions for every player in the game. As far as general mechanics go, that covers most of them. But what makes

the game fun, challenging, and replayable, is not what every player can do but what each player can do exclusively. As I mentioned earlier, each player has a unique deck of cards, which is then customized by their chosen faction and random Doctors. This customization is also where the potential for future expansion products will likely be. If you have already gleaned what you want to know from this review, I'm going to bring it to a close in a moment here. For those wanting to know more, You'll be able to read part two in Celestial Toyroom, where I will look at the different nemeses that can be played, as well as a brief look at the Doctors.

Doctor Who: Nemesis is an unusually challenging game to review because it has a bumpy learning curve. The basics are fairly simple but until they've played a lot, every player in every game is probably going to have a different experience with a new learning process in almost every game. Honestly, my biggest complaint isn't even with how the

game plays, but a minor yet common packaging detail. The insert fits the four control boards perfectly, with little space to add anything else. But below that, there is too much space. There are five card wells, one for each player, plus the heroes. but each well is deep enough to hold 3-4 decks in them and only three of them have anything (the control boards) to keep cards from flying everywhere. I went online and found a customizable tuck box template and played arts and crafts during an episode of The Legend of the Traveling TARDIS to assemble them. Even if Gale Force Nine put out official "prettier" printable options for the decks I'd be thrilled. I happened to have access to appropriately coloured crafting cardstock, but still printed a few on basic white printer paper to make sure they worked right. I also managed to misspell "Weeping" Angel and didn't want to waste more paper and time to fix it.

Given the opportunity, I'd play Doctor Who: Nemesis anytime, and I'm going to be taking advantage of splitting this review into two parts to play a few more times. There are just too many combinations to work through and too much fun to be had.

[You can visit Gale Force Nine by clicking here.](#)

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CHRIS CHIBNELL'S ERA OF MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

by John Lane



Doctor, but apparently not enough to live according to the character's inclusive, fiercely egalitarian philosophy. Trolls, eh? Go figure.

This piece is about Chris Chibnell's tenure as showrunner of Doctor Who, the things he brought to the table, the things he left off the table, and his general approach to making the show. So, let's crack on and start with a positive, a really big positive. Kudos has to go to Chibnell for taking the plunge and casting a woman to play the Doctor. There's no denying it, this was huge. Not just huge for the lore of the show, but huge on a cultural level too. It was a big risk, but it paid dividends. A whole new section of fandom suddenly found that they, finally, were also represented by the lead character of their favourite television series.

Of course. there was also uproar, mostly from the giant man-babies of the aforementioned troll mob, but also from the shock jockeys and internet bile mongers who make a living from fanning the flames of any potential cultural controversy with cries of woke warfare and tragic tales of childhoods retroactively shredded, crushed and cruelly, viciously set ablaze. Happily, the show, and the vast majority of fans, just drove on past and left them all wailing and gnashing their teeth in some dark, dusty corner somewhere far behind. Ultimately, a great choice was made and now Doctor Who is a different show because of it. Well played.

As Doctor Who enters another phase of existence, once again helmed by Russell T Davies but this time in partnership with streaming behemoth Disney, enough time has passed since the Thirteenth Doctor stood upon a clifftop and exploded gloriously into the sunset for us to step back and take a critical look back at the era of Chris Chibnell, an era with much in its favour certainly, but also - as you've probably already surmised from the title of this piece - one of missed opportunities and unfulfilled promises.

First off, and I think this is important to stress before we really get going, this is not going to be a roundabout takedown of Jodie Whittaker. I like Jodie Whittaker, and I liked her portrayal of the Doctor. While I do sometimes wish she had brought more of her incredibly engaging and eccentric offscreen personality to the role, I respect the choices she made with the part and how she played the most famous time traveller in the history of pop culture. I was never part of the weirdo #NotMyDoctor troll mob, who proclaim to love the

So, to missed opportunity number one. A massive shift in Doctor Who takes place and then, like a strange mirror universe version of Chekov's gun in which the gun just turns out to be an unremarked upon choice of living room ornamentation, is barely ever mentioned again. Ouch. At least, ouch from my point of view. Now, I recognise there are two different schools of thought regarding how the show handles the first female Doctor in its multi-decade-spanning history: one states that such an event needs to be acknowledged and played out within the show; the other states that doing so would lead to the show being bogged down by that one single event - and the politics surrounding it - and detract from the escapist fantasy adventure the series is supposed to embody.

Obviously, I belong to the first school. While I do accept that labouring on the Doctor's gender could get tired very quickly (assuming nothing other than that is the focus of the show), ignoring it almost completely seems like a very odd path to take given the momentousness of... well... the moment. I was really excited for the first female Doctor and what it would mean for the character and I really wanted, needed for that to be part of the stories that would unfold. Now, sure, we could say that gender probably isn't something the character of the Doctor would find important - yeah, it's possible, but I have my doubts; the Doctor has seen enough of the universe to know how such things come across in different worlds - but while the character might not think about it, we, as an audience, as a culture, do.

The idea that the Doctor commands respect simply by walking into a room

because of their inherent Time Lordliness is fine in principle, but only because up until this point the Doctor has always been a man, who struts about like a man, more often than not in a man's world, something we have been primed and socialised to think of as the norm. To see that norm challenged, by someone who knew full well that their new physical appearance would indeed challenge that norm, would have been both very interesting and extremely cathartic to experience.

Earth is still a basically misogynistic old place run in the main by rich old white men, men who it is no great leap to imagine would react with rather a different form of indignation to the Thirteenth Doctor than they might, say, to the Twelfth. How satisfying it would have been to see a Doctor fully aware of the retrograde nature of such everyday sexism play joyfully with that idea, and use it not only as a means to quickly put such arrogant old white men in their place, but also as a teachable moment extended to all the peoples of the Earth, both within and without the confines of the show's narrative universe.

It would have been so great to have that awareness reflected in the show, to embrace and revel in the triumph of the Doctor's progressive spirit, itself an obvious reflection of the triumph of Jodie Whittaker's casting in the first place. Plus, watching the Doctor put down a bunch of chauvinists would have served as a pleasing metaphor for both the show's response to sexist trolling and its response to unmerited gender-based condescension in society as a whole. Again, I'm not saying that every single episode needed to have a moment of gender affirmation shoehorned into the

plot (not every planet is Earth, after all), only that when the circumstances in which the Doctor found herself contained the potential for such affirmation (and then always through action rather than just speechifying), then let it happen. It didn't need to be always, just more often than not.

Next up is the crowded TARDIS crew. It's been a long time since having so many people in the TARDIS continually worked, so I wasn't really expecting much from this anyway, but from the perspective of missed opportunities I see this as the first of two instances in which the possibility of an all-female TARDIS crew was avoided because, I suspect, of a fear that somehow this would be a step too far for fandom after already casting Whittaker as the lead. More of that, though, when I talk about the second instance. For now, let's continue with the Gang of Four.

First off, another positive. Having a larger crew meant an opportunity to include a more diverse group of people aboard the TARDIS, a chance Chibnall took great advantage of, not just in terms of gender and race, but also, interestingly, age. I think we all loved Graham, no matter what we might have thought about the character before we ever got to see him, and I can't imagine Thirteen's tenure without him.

We also got Ryan, a young Black Briton, a really nice young guy, who might have been the first companion in Doctor Who to have a disability, which was surely the intention, had Chibnall remembered to make it important on more than just a few instances. Ryan struggled with dyspraxia, a common condition that affects movement and co

-ordination. Except in Ryan's case it didn't. Not much. It seemed most writers either forgot about it or didn't know about it, which is Chibnall's fault for not insisting that showing the condition was integral to the character. To see how someone with that kind of disability functions in the dangerous world of the Doctor would have been fascinating, and also would have allowed viewers with disabilities of their own both to connect with Ryan and to more easily imagine themselves in his place. This alone was a wasted opportunity, but not only that, it was also kind of insulting. I mean, why bother? Why include a disability at all if all you're going to do is brush it aside because of its narrative inconvenience? Not cool.

And then we had Yazmin Khan, the first British Asian companion in Doctor Who. Yazmin, or Yaz, was for me the most interesting character of the new series, a young police officer, capable, smart and possessed of just the right skills for a member of a TARDIS team. Unfortunately, because the crew was so packed, and across the first two seasons most of the character focus was concentrated on the relationship between Ryan and Graham - which was nice, sure, but essentially boring - Yaz was almost entirely sidelined. Again, at the risk of repeating myself, this seems like a really odd move to make with the other female lead in a show that just took the huge step of shaking things up by casting a female Doctor. We would have to wait three seasons before we really got some proper time with Yaz and when we did she was, unsurprisingly, great. How much greater would she have been if it had just been her from the start, not having to share focus and allowed more than just slivers of charac-



does not give a modern audience near enough credit for our evolved sensibilities. Without a doubt there are going to be a bunch of forehead-vein-throbbers with something to scream about, but they are a minority, they have been a minority for a long time now, so screw them. Who cares what a few cellar dwellers think? Honestly, Bishop was fantastic as

ter development, especially given where her relationship with the Doctor goes by the time their era comes to a close.

Which leads to the second of two instances in which the possibility of an all-female TARDIS crew was avoided: the introduction of Dan in Whittaker's third season, the experimental serialised season called Flux. Now, yes, like Graham, once he was there, we all loved him - how could we not? - but... there we were again, with another chance for a real first. Imagine that, a Doctor Who with two female leads. Imagine the infinitely fascinating possibilities of that friendship, imagine how they would approach the problems they would encounter; imagine how... but nope! We can't have that!

I just can't help but feel that this decision was, again, based on fear of disapproval from the viewership and its trolling satellites. Now, obviously this is just my take and of course I could be wrong - we're all allowed to be wrong once in a while - but still I honestly think the choice to bring Dan into the mix was made from a sense of deep apprehension of how some perceived audience would react to a TARDIS without a single sausage swinger in it, which

Dan. He had excellent chemistry with Yaz, and they played off each other so much better than Yaz was able to do with Graham and Ryan, but... but, oh, what a missed opportunity! It's not like the Doctor travelling with just one companion is some crazy radical notion. It's basically how it has been for the majority of time Doctor Who has been on air. What was the problem with having that for Thirteen and Yaz?

Finally, there was Thasmin. The idea of a mutual romance between Yaz and the Doctor wasn't something that, in fairness to Chibnall, he had envisaged from the beginning, but rather something that grew organically from a certain section of fandom who started shipping the pair, flooding social media with fan art and fanfic centred around this potential cosmic romance. Now, while it may not have been Chibnall's idea, he did run with it, not only teasing the possibility but also having Yaz be in love with the Doctor, so that the chance of an actual same sex relationship between the Doctor and companion seemed like it might just happen, if only for the length of one meaningful kiss.

We'd know it would be a doomed romance, we'd know it couldn't last, be-

cause of the nature of the Doctor; it's what David Tennant's Tenth Doctor said to Rose essentially, BUT, dangling it out there in the first place and then doing nothing with it other than have the Doctor more or less say 'I would if I could, but I can't' seems, I don't know, cynical? It felt more like an instance of paying lip service rather than any true intent (much in the same way as Ryan's incredible disappearing dyspraxia); an exercise of self-congratulatory box-ticking rather than truly diving deep into what all of this might mean, for the Doctor both as a fictional character in her own universe and as a pop culture icon.

Because that's the issue. Doctor Who is pop culture, these days a worldwide phenomenon too, and therefore nothing that takes place inside the show exists within a vacuum. It is a piece of entertainment intended for mass consumption. Thus, people need to see themselves reflected in the stories they engage with, and they need those reflections to be meaningful. It's not enough to say the Doctor is a woman now and not explore what that actually means, especially when saying the Doctor is a woman now has such an enormous social impact that it makes the news. It was actual news. On the news! That is not nothing. So let the show delve into why it's not nothing. Similarly, it's not enough to say a person has a disability and then gloss over it every chance you can get, or hint at a same sex relationship, while enjoying the appreciation that comes with that, and then swerve at the last moment.

This is not to say that any of those things are not still important. They are. They are ENORMOUS, and Chibnall

should be acknowledged for bringing them to the show, but so much more needed to be made of them. I'm grateful for having a female Doctor, just as I'm grateful to Chibnall's other additions to Time Lord lore, like the Timeless Child concept. I think it's brilliant. It reintroduces mystery to the character of the Doctor, explaining the whole 12 regenerations thing while simultaneously freeing the Doctor herself from that random limitation; I'm grateful for the introduction of the 'Ruth Doctor' and therefore the first Black Doctor in the series' history, even if it is only as a peripheral Doctor (but then, so was John Hurt's War Doctor, so it's nothing to sniff at).

As a whole, Chris Chibnall's era has been one that you can like provided you don't think about it too much it, which is fine, there's plenty of Doctor Who like that, but for what it promised with these fantastic changes and ideas, it was sadly disappointing in the end. I'm not talking about storylines here, or Chibnall's approach - or rather lack thereof - to publicity and creating buzz around the show (those are topics for other pieces), just the letdown of unfulfilled potential. In some ways, this lack of follow-through, especially in terms of the Doctor's amazing gender shift, might be considered a disservice to both Jodie and the concept of a female Doctor, but thanks to the actor's performance, awesome production values (most of the time) and the largely positive reception from the majority of fans and new viewers, I don't believe we'll have to wait for another fifty years before a new Doctor peeps her head out of the TARDIS doors.

LOST IN TIME

Game review by Nick Smith



In our busy world of linear time, there's a demand for idle mobile games. These games go on with or without the player; stories unfold in the background, ready for interaction when the user is ready. A new entry to this style of game is Doctor Who: Lost in Time from East Side Games, who describe themselves as 'fans first.' The game developers, publishers and tech providers started in East Vancouver, Canada in 2011. They specialize in tie-ins such as Star Trek: Lower Decks, The Office Somehow We Manage, RuPaul's Drag Race Superstar, It's Always Sunny: The Gang Goes Mobile and Archer: Danger Phone. 'We help empower passionate fan bases to explore their favourite content in a fun, convenient medium in the palm of their hands,' say East Side. We asked the team about their latest release.

COSMIC MASQUE: What is 'Lost in Time'?

EAST SIDE GAMES: Doctor Who: Lost in Time is an idle mobile game where players help the Doctor save the universe by harnessing a new energy on their adventures through time and space. Set in the universe of the esteemed sci-fi series, we unveil an original story featuring multiple Doctors and Companions facing off against the show's most fearsome foes – all against the backdrop of the franchise's most iconic locations.

CM: Who is it for?

ESG: New and diehard fans alike will love collecting their favourite characters and exploring iconic locations, all while progressing through a brand-new Doctor Who adventure. But players don't need to be acquainted with the show to enjoy the game. Whether you've found the game through a love of the show, or start playing the game before watching a frame of the series, Doctor Who: Lost



in Time truly is for everyone looking for a new idle game to play.

CM: What makes it stand out from other, similar games?

ESG: This is the first idle-genre mobile game inspired by the action-adventure classic, giving this passionate fanbase the opportunity to explore the world of Doctor Who in the palm of their hands.

CM: Why was this specific franchise (Doctor Who) chosen as a good fit for East Side?

ESG: Doctor Who has one of the most loyal and devoted fan bases in the

world. Through our decades of experience infusing IP with our idle game mechanics, we saw a perfect opportunity to give that fanbase a new Doctor Who experience that they could truly get excited about.

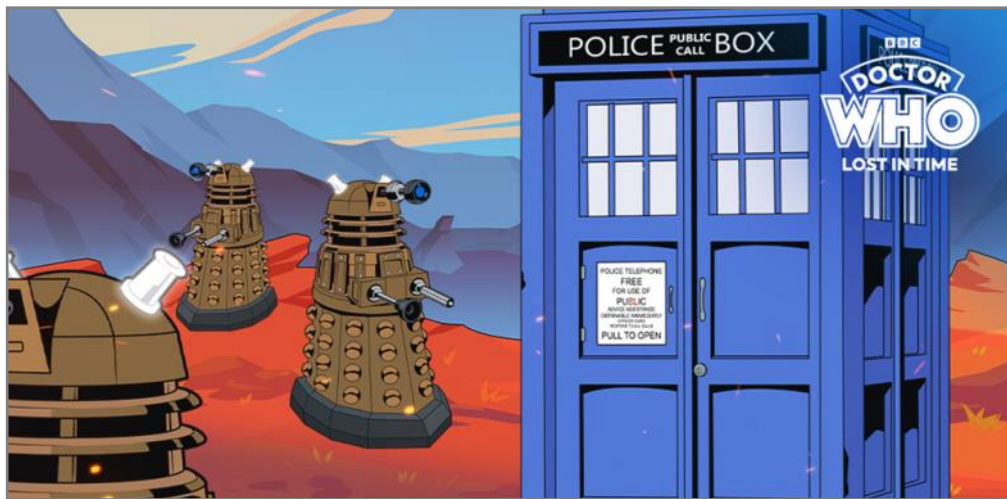
CM: Who was involved in the creation of the game?

ESG: In partnership with BBC Studios, East Side Games co-developed this game with Bigfoot Gaming.

CM: What are your hopes for the game?

ESG: First, we hope that players find the





game entertaining and come back to play every day. We've already seen Doctor Who fans celebrating the familiar faces they see in the game as well as various locations introduced through the show. Seeing their excitement and knowing this game is bringing them joy is the ultimate goal.

CM: Congratulation on being name-checked in the promotion for "Doom's Day." What can you tell us about how it fits into the crossover?

ESG: We are thrilled to be able to contribute to the Doom's Day story. As you can imagine, we can't give too many details yet, but what we can say is that our instalment will be one that our players won't soon forget.

CM: How do you feel now the game is complete and released?

ESG: We're thrilled with the worldwide release, and with how the game has been received, but our work is far from finished. We'll continue to listen to feedback, add new episodes and events, while doing everything we can to give our players the best mobile gaming experience possible.

Thank you to Jamie Steel and Lisa Shek at East Side Games!

[For more information on East Side Games, click here.](#)



DOCTOR WHO: THE ARK

Review by Paul Winter



Do you want to know why Robert Holmes and Philip Hinchcliffe rejected John Luca-rotti's initial script for The

Ark and later rewrote it to become The Ark in Space? If so, listen to Big Finish's version of the original story to find out!

In reality we can never know just what The Ark would have looked like on screen. It would probably have been re-named for starters to avoid confusion with the season 3 story. However this audio version should give you an idea.

Lucarotti's script is more akin to Doctor Who of the 1960s. The style is more traditional SF of that era (as opposed to the darker stories we were about to get from Holmes) and it is clearly aimed at a younger audience. Whereas there is nothing wrong with these things in themselves, they do present a more light-weight and unsophisticated adventure with a bit of a 'monster of the week' element to it. Robert Holmes's disturbing idea about the wirrn consuming human bodies and intellect is missing, although the infamous 'puffball' which was an original episode title does present a fascinating alternative. Nonetheless The Ark in Space was much better.

The adaptation itself is clearly going to follow the rejected storyline—there would be no point in BF doing it otherwise— and that aside it does seem to have translated into the audio format well. We get Sadie Miller playing Sarah-Jane, which is just a joy. She has the part down well, and Philip Hinchcliffe is very complimentary in the accompanying feature. Christopher Naylor presents us with a version of Harry Sullivan that is probably stifled by the original script. He is quite dull, but still acquits himself well.

The star is of course Tom Baker, and it is a delight to have him such an enthusiastic part of the Big Finish stable these days. If only he had done it years ago....

I must admit though, that I found his performance quite irritating in this. We get a version of the fourth Doctor that is more akin to the post-Hinchcliffe 'sillier' portrayal, and then some. The constant flip-pant quips get very grinding after a short time and I found that I had little confidence in the character for some while. It is a shame as in other releases he is exactly as I remember his Doctor—or at least, how I wanted to remember him. Never mind. He is Tom Baker and can do no wrong.

This is very much a release for serious fans interested in how the show could have developed. If that is you, you will probably enjoy this one.

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THE RETURN OF JO JONES

Review by Jordan Shortman



It's been fifty or so years since Jo Grant left the Doctor to marry Clifford Jones at the end of *The Green Death*. In that time, we've learnt how the couple tried to save the world by bringing people to justice and protecting Earth from those corrupt people who would destroy it. We saw her return in *The Sarah Jane Adventures* story, *The Death of the Doctor* where she met the Eleventh Doctor. But now it's time for her to meet "her" Doctor again, allowing us to see properly for the first time how she's changed but is also exactly the same Jo Jones we've always known and loved.

The set gets underway with *Supernature* by Matt Fitton. I was impressed with how much this felt like a traditional Third Doctor story. Corrupt officials, a semi-isolated location, and environmental themes, brought slightly up to date thanks to the story taking place in the modern day from Jo's perspective. The isolated location is a lighthouse on the Isle of Wight, which for me, felt really close to home as I live on an island just in front of that one. But that location brings its own problems as it quickly becomes clear the

writer doesn't really have any idea what the Isle of Wight is like. Instead, it feels much more like the island we see the Master imprisoned on in *The Sea Devils*, although this time, it's nature running wild rather than the Master.

Matt Fitton does, however, manage to capture the right Seventies feel he is going for, with a serious and slowly paced tale that could threaten to be slightly boring if it weren't for the quick reunion of the Third Doctor and Jo at the very beginning. Tim Treloar and Katy Manning do manage to do much of the heavy lifting for this story, with Manning delivering all the pathos in the more touching moments, including one that explains what happened to Clifford Jones, in a move that feels completely in touch with the character as played by Stewart Bevan. As a result, this story works as a wonderful tribute to him.

Felicia Barker's *The Conservitors* sees the Doctor taking Jo in the TARDIS to an alien planet. It's an interesting experiment in hearing how much Jo has grown up, even since her impromptu trip with the Eleventh Doctor. In fact, she sounds a little jaded here. Maybe that isn't quite the right word but there is a definite sense that she is fed up with all these different worlds having corrupt people in charge. The young Jo Grant was so ready to take on other worlds but here there is a sense that she has pretty much had enough of evil-doers.

Pairing Jo with the man in charge, Premier Maldon, played by Gary Turner, is a good idea, allowing listeners to hear how much more independent Jo has become from the Doctor, thanks to her fifty years of life away from him. Of course, she wouldn't do anything to hurt him, but she is certainly

much more manipulative here, and there is a sense that Jo might have manoeuvred Maldon into destroying himself and his regime. Like all good villains, his path to hell is paved with good intentions. Trying to create a risk-free world has resulted in an authoritarian state, with the robotic Conservitors suppressing the population's free will. Jo's behaviour around Maldon might make you think she's been learning manipulation from the Seventh Doctor; it's a shame that this doesn't continue into the following story, but it's an interesting take on the character that Katy Manning rises to effortlessly.

The final story in this set is *The Iron Shore*, written by Lizzie Hopley, and it immediately feels different from the other two adventures on offer. It's partly narrated by Katy Manning, giving it the feel of a *Companion Chronicle*; but this is to the story's benefit.

Finding themselves on a haunted wet dock, on another alien world, the Doctor and Jo uncover the truth behind a terrible curse. While the previous two stories almost seemed to go out of their way to feel like authentic Seventies adventures, Lizzie Hopley tells a thoroughly modern tale, with elements from the Third Doctor's era. As a result, this story feels the most fresh and imaginative, even if that imagination does get stretched.

Whether I was not paying enough attention, or perhaps the story does become confused, I couldn't quite put my finger on it; but I did become completely lost throughout the second episode, which hasn't inspired me to give it another listen. It was nice however to finally get to experience the Third Doctor outside the Seventies trappings.

Tim Treloar continues to impress as the Third Doctor. He's got the mannerisms down to a tee and it isn't hard to imagine Jon Pertwee delivering these lines, even if the action is a little unlike the era in which it's set. Treloar manages to achieve the right balance between doing an impression of Pertwee and honouring the original actor,

and bringing enough of himself to the role. I felt that it took Treloar a few releases before he really nailed the Third Doctor but he's fantastic now and I'm looking forward to more releases with him.

And what can be said about Katy Manning as Jo which hasn't already been said? If anything, this set shows what a powerhouse actress she is, as she brings a more modern feel to the character that she's been playing on and off since 1971. With the death of Jo's husband, you really feel this is a character who has been through the wars and is still trying to remain hopeful even though the worlds the Doctor is taking her to, aren't inspiring any hope that she can change the corrupt minds of those she meets. But there is a sense by the end of this set that Jo has found her spirit of adventure once again and is properly ready for more escapades, while also carrying with her, the beliefs she shared with her late husband.

I had expected this set to be a one-and-done deal with Jo returning to Earth at the end. However, it ends with the promise of more adventures to come. Hopefully if we're getting more stories with this pair, it will put Jo more front and centre and explore this slightly darker side to her personality. Creating new authentic Seventies stories is fun, but we don't need every story to be like that. There is room too, for fresh-feeling modern stories.

In conclusion, this is a very strong set of adventures that manages successfully to bring back one of the most popular companions ever to travel in the TARDIS.

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THE EIGHTH OF MARCH 3 - STRANGE CHEMISTRY

Review by Eva May Moon



For its third annual release in celebration of International Woman's Day, Big Finish brings us two new stories written, produced, directed by, and primarily starring women.

In *A Ghost of Alchemy*, written by Louise Jameson, the Fourth Doctor and Leela arrive in New York in 1921, and bump into the great scientist Marie Curie, who is about to embark on a gruelling tour of the United States, which will culminate in her being presented with a sample of the radium that she needs to continue her work by President Warren G. Harding.

The Doctor is able to hypnotise Mme. Curie to help her overcome the crippling stage-fright that is preventing her from speaking in public; but unfortunately, this puts her in danger from an enemy who is jealous of the attention that the scientist is attracting and who is opposed to the whole idea of women in science.

The idea of the Doctor and Leela meeting Marie Curie is an absolutely compelling one. Polish born but French by marriage, Curie

was a pioneer in researching radioactivity and discovered two elements – radium and polonium; she was the first woman to win a Nobel Prize and the first person to be awarded two – and one of only two people to be awarded prizes in two different categories (Physics in 1903 and Chemistry in 1911); and was by any measure one of the greatest figures in the history of science, irrespective of gender.

Of course, as a female scientist in the early 20th century, Curie was faced all her life by those who sought to give the credit for her achievements to her (male) colleagues, principally to her husband and chief collaborator Pierre (who always resisted such attempts). Following this lead from history, Louise Jameson has resisted any temptation to introduce any threat from aliens or master criminals and produced a simple tale in which Leela and the Doctor fight to save the great scientist from a murderous misogynist – a jealous fellow scientist. I was struck by the contrast with the TV story, *Rosa*, in which writer Malorie Blackman and showrunner Chris Chibnell did not find it enough for their protagonists to be faced by mere human racism, but felt they had to introduce a future space racist into their story, which all felt rather unnecessary. In avoiding the temptation to go down that particular science fiction route, *A Ghost of Alchemy* works so much better and emerges as a very fitting adventure for the Doctor and Leela to share with a great woman from history.

Leela's relationship with the Doctor here is much more one of equal partners, rather than her being merely his 'companion'. She takes a full part in the story, giving Mme Curie the support that she needs. Con-

stantly underestimated by the two villains, she provides a great contrast with the shy, academic scientist, and the two women are able to learn from each other.

Two more historical characters of note feature in the story, the 29th President of the United States, Warren G. Harding, and the First Lady Florence Harding, with their scenes providing entertaining light relief from the adventure. The President comes over as a somewhat verbose, indecisive and weak man, with Florence being very much the power behind the throne, further underlining the central, but not always evident role of women in the society of the time.

A straightforward, uncomplicated historical adventure, but never just a superficial run-around, *A Ghost of Alchemy* is an absolutely delightful opening to this year's Eighth of March set.

The second play, *Fairies at the Bottom of the Garden* by Karissa Hamilton-Bannis is a sixty-minute, single episode story, in which the sixteen-year-old and increasingly troubled Amelia Pond, encounters fairy-like creatures in her garden. Her new therapist may have some of the answers she is looking for, but then again, she may be pursuing an agenda of her own. Unbeknownst to Amelia, an old enemy of the Doctor is in town and is looking to use his future companion in her ongoing fight with the 'Raggedy Man'. *Fairies at the Bottom of the Garden* is a perfectly fun story, although if truth be told, nothing particularly special in and of itself.

It's always good to see the return of Michelle Gomez to the role of Missy, although I felt that the character was perhaps just a bit underpowered here – not quite as brilliantly insane as she has been in some of her appearances.

On her Big Finish debut, Caitlin Blackwood shines as young Amelia Pond. Since appearing as the original Amy, all those years ago, Caitlin has grown up and resumed her acting

career; her performance as the troubled teen is a mature and sensitive one. She assumes the leading role with consummate ease, and is never outshined when up against the brilliant Gomez.

This opens up some interesting possibilities for the future, which is where the story scores absolutely.

There can be little doubt that such is the stellar nature of Hollywood leading lady Karen Gillan's career, there is little hope of her returning to the role of Amy Pond in the near future. But now, Big Finish are working with the original Amelia. Why should grown-up Caitlin Blackwood not play grown-up Amy in future releases – perhaps alongside Arthur Darvill as Rory, or if Big Finish can find a suitable replacement for the departing Jacob Dudman, in a series of Eleventh Doctor Adventures? Who knows if this will happen, but it's nice to consider.

Then there is Missy's plan to sabotage one of the Doctor's 'pets' before they meet the time lord. Having failed with Amelia, will she try again with some of the Doctor's other companions? There are certainly possibilities for a whole range there.

Fairies at the Bottom of the Garden, while not, perhaps as satisfying a listen as *A Ghost of Alchemy*, is a fun, enjoyable entry in the Big Finish canon. Taken together the two stories make a fine pair and an excellent celebration of International Women's Day in the universe of Doctor Who.

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THE ELEVENTH DOCTOR CHRONICLES: ALL OF TIME AND SPACE

Review by Geoff Stephens

Jacob Dudman's extended swan song with Big Finish continues, with three more adventures featuring the Dudman as the Eleventh Doctor, travelling with 54th century cybernetically enhanced engineer Valarie Lockwood.

The collection opens with the title story, *All of Time and Space* by 'Ellery Quest' (Tim Foley). After a devastating explosion onboard the TARDIS, the scene moves to London, 1956, where an aspiring writer Ellery Quest, is pitching a new play to a theatrical impresario. The play, *Doctor Who*, features a wandering adventurer in time and space called the Doctor and his companion Valarie Lockwood. The impresario is not interested, especially when Ellery starts singing the play's theme tune – "Diddly-dum, diddly-dum, diddly-dum..." When the Doctor and Valarie keep speaking to Ellery in impossible ways, including via a TV set and the image on a coin, it become clear that something odd is happening and he cannot be sure where the boundaries lie between fiction and reality.

All of Time and Space is a brave and very different opening to the set, which, I suspect won't be to everyone's taste. However, although the mystery of who or what is behind the explosion remains to be resolved later in the set, everything that happens in this story – or at least almost everything is explained by the end – and the conclusion is satisfying.

One little thing bothered me; we discover that when Ellery is making his pitch for his play, he is receiving information being fed to him directly by the Doctor; but where does he get his knowledge of the theme tune from? Are we to understand that the Doctor knows that familiar 'diddly-dum' tune and recognises it as his own theme?

Jacob Dudman is as brilliant as ever as the Eleventh Doctor, and the success or failure of this range depends so much on his ability to convince us that this is the same character Matt Smith played on TV. It is surprising that for a great deal of the play, both his and Safiyya Ingar's voices are distorted as the voices of the Doctor and Valarie emerge through puppets, causing much of the resemblance to the original actor's voice to be lost. It just about works – but only just. A very different Eleventh Doctor story, but an enjoyable one.

The Yearn by Angus Dunican, sees the Doctor and Valarie land in an underground research base on the planet Medruth, where the three surviving scientists are besieged by 'energy panthers' called the Yearn, who have taken over the surface of the planet. All the other humans have simply disappeared and Hoster, Roanna and Wyler know that it is only a matter of time before they meet the same fate.

There is certainly a lot of good things about this play – in particular the use of the TARDIS's consciousness as part of

the key to defeating the Yearn; and certainly the performances of all involved are of the highest quality. However, when it comes down to it, this is just another 'base-under-siege' story, in which the Doctor and Valarie turn up at a point where all appears lost; get thrown into prison accused of being behind whatever is going on and finally emerge to defeat the bad guys. There's nothing wrong with that, of course; but there really is nothing new about it. Add to that, another well-used trope – a romance between the Doctor's companion and one of the locals – and the re-treading of old ground reaches another level. The script seems to acknowledge that, with the Doctor noting that Valarie wouldn't be the first of his companions to leave him for someone she hardly knew; and in the end Valarie makes the rational decision and stays on-board the TARDIS; but by that stage, this going-nowhere romance has already started to irritate. One more minor irritation – if I remember correctly, the Doctor's nickname for the TARDIS, "Sexy," is only mentioned once on TV, in the episode *The Doctor's Wife*. There, it worked well, as a fun little detail, helping to establish the relationship between the Doctor and the TARDIS in the form of Idris. Every reuse of it in these Eleventh Doctor Chronicles makes me wince with pain. Please, Big Finish, avoid the temptation.

Anyway, enough complaining. *The Yearn* is a perfectly passable story, with a nice central idea. Just don't come here for anything new.

Rather the opposite charge might be levelled at the final story in the set, *Curiosity Shop* by James Goss. If anything,

this story might be accused of being too far removed from the traditional Doctor Who adventure.

Valarie has become separated from the Doctor and finds herself stranded on a strange planet. She discovers the TARDIS in a junkyard belonging to an elderly man called Foreman, who tells her he does not believe in the Doctor and renames the TARDIS 'Barbara'. Over a number of weeks, Valarie returns to the junkyard and each time finds Foreman transformed into a new man (whom we, the listeners recognise as resembling the Third, Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, Ninth and Tenth Doctors). In return for being able to check on 'Barbara', Valarie hands over more and more of her cybernetic implants and tells Foreman more and more of the story of how she came to be here.

James Goss is without doubt, one of Big Finish's most accomplished writers and I am quite sure that there will be many listeners, for whom this story is an absolute highlight of *The Eleventh Doctor Chronicles*. However, I'm afraid I am not among their number. For me it just doesn't work as a story and left me feeling somewhat confused.

The story is a great showcase for the talents of Jacob Dudman as a mimic, as he brings us his takes on seven more Doctors, with degrees of success ranging from very good to excellent, although none of the impressions on show here come close to matching the accuracy of his uncanny Eleventh Doctor. And there we have a problem really. Dudman isn't long for this range now, and in the time we have left to enjoy his peerless performance as Matt Smith as the Doctor, that's what I want to hear

him do – not to have him indulged by letting him demonstrate his range of impressions. One is tempted to wonder if much of the purpose of this story was as a failed attempt to persuade Jacob to stay around a little longer, by making it more interesting for him.

This is the second of the three stories in this set, where something has been allowed to get between the listener and Jacob's Eleventh Doctor, which has to be a misjudgement. If you have a prize jewel like Jacob Dudman for just a limited time, make the most of that and have him do what he is best at.

So, for my money, this set is something of a disappointment, with one story that doesn't try enough to be original and two which try rather too much. I appreciate the answer to that is probably that 'you're damned if you do and damned if you don't', but there is a sweet spot, which this Doctor managed to hit more times than not on TV. I'm afraid this set doesn't quite pull it off.

[To hear the trailer click here](#)

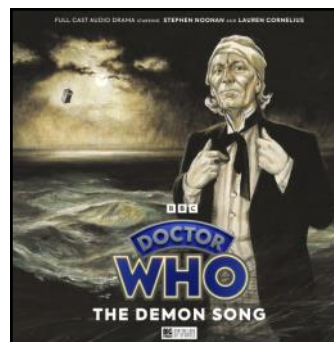
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THE DEMON SONG AND THE INCHERTON INCIDENT

Review by Paul Winter



Ok, I was unsure about this one. My previous encounter with the first Doctor played not by David Bradley but Stephen Noonan I had disliked. I am not quite sure why. It may have been the interpretation of the Doctor or it may have been the stories, but either way, I did not expect to like these two new adventures.

However whatever my own ill-defined shortcomings of previous stories were, this set I enjoyed. Again, we get an actor 'suggesting' the character of the Doctor in speech patterns, and reactions rather than attempting a carbon copy and in the case of Hartnell, this is probably the best way to do it. Stephen Noonan was, eventually, the first Doctor for me. I did take a little longer to accept him than Tim Treloar as the third, but that might be down the more 'varied' nature of the first Doctor we saw on screen. Stephen does give us a 'sharper' version of the Doctor than the later Hartnell interpretation, and it is more akin to season one as opposed to season three when these adventures are set but nonetheless he fitted into the stories perfectly.

Lauren Cornelius gets more free reign as Dodo, probably because we saw so little of Jackie Lane's version either at the time

(the decision had been made to write her out almost before she appeared on screen) and because so little is now left in the archive. This is good news for Lauren though who gets more freedom as a consequence.

There are two stories. The Demon Song is set in the 2020s—very much the future for Dodo, although the Doctor himself is a lot more attuned to 21st century society. We have a traditional missing persons adventure with an alien twist and whilst not ground breaking, it is good fun.

The Incherton Incident is more heavy going. It is set in a small English village just after World War Two. This was an interesting time when what we now regard as post-war certainties were still being forged. There was great fear of the threat posed by the USSR (sadly it seems little has changed there) and the USA was uncertain about the UK with some fearing that it was 'going communist' too, with the election of a Labour government. These fears are reflected in Nicholas Briggs's excellent script. There is also great peril for Dodo at one point and whilst we all know she will survive the day to suddenly vanish part way through The War Machines, it is still tense. Prepare for alien incursions and foreign spies aplenty!

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ROCK STARS

Interview by Nick Smith

Not content with aiding and abetting interstellar criminals, the Ogri from the planet Ogros have been delighting music fans for generations. They frequently pack out stadiums with their slick string of classic hits, their duck walks and their Megara light shows. Their best-known songs include Sympathy for the Chisel, Honky Tonk Obelisk and It's Only a Rock but I Like It. We sat down with them to find the key to their success.

COSMIC MASQUE: Thanks for sparing us the time to talk.

OGRI: Oh, we're in no rush.

CM: Your tunes have been celebrated as iconic. How does that make you feel?

O: It leaves us quite cold, really.

CM: What of rumours about disappearing roadies?

O: All we can say is, sometimes life on the music circuit can bleed you dry.

CM: Any chance of super-grouping with other rock creatures?

O: We reached out to the Stone Roses but they're not all they're cracked up to be. We're hoping Eldrad will give us a hand one of these days.

CM: What's your favourite colour?

O: Eggshell grey.

CM: Is there a film you never get tired of?

O: There's that boxing movie with Sylvester Stallone... the name escapes us.

CM: You've made Boscombe Moor your permanent home. Why?

O: It was either there or Gibraltar. At Boscombe, the neighbours are great, one of them is an artist like us although she's more into plein air than airplay. Another is quite an outlaw. They're fun to be around.

CM: Do you feel that minerals are underrepresented in the music industry?

O: It's lonely sometimes but I've hit rock bottom before, dragged myself back and crushed it. I'm happy carving out a niche for myself.

CM: You've been touring for a very long time. How do you respond to criticism that you're just a bunch of slow-moving fossils?

O: Ouch. I think we could take a bite out of any boy band and come out on top.

CM: We understand you have some little lintels on the way. Are you hoping

to create a musical legacy?

O: They'll be chips off the old block.

CM: Do you have any favourite songs from your playlist?

O: We never tire of performing Standing Very Still Jack Flash or Under My Lintel. The fans love Heart of Stone.

Our thanks to the Ogri for the interview, and for their monumental music!



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