

CELESTIAL TOYROOM

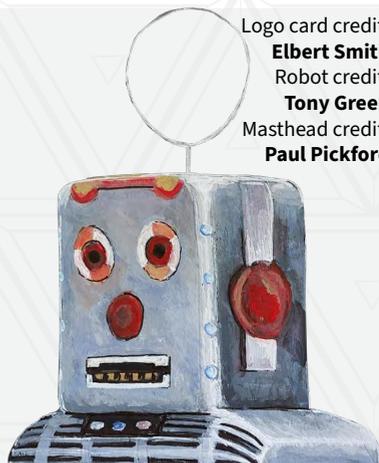


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DOCTOR
WHO
APPRECIATION
SOCIETY
555



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Elbert Smith
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Paul Pickford



Hello there, and welcome to your December issue of CT! While we wait for *Doctor Who* to return to our television screens next Christmas, we've got lots of new articles for you to enjoy.

We've got some major anniversaries coinciding with this issue, including 60 years since the Daleks attempted to build a Time Destructor in *The Daleks' Master Plan*. It's also been 50 years since the Fourth Doctor and Sarah Jane faced some uncanny goings on in *The Android Invasion*, and a decade since Series Nine aired (yes, time really does fly!). We'll also be looking back at CT's past as well in a few Christmas recaps dotted throughout this fanzine.

There's also a bumper dose of Big Finish in the coming issue, courtesy of the new novelisations of *Jubilee* and *The Chimes of Midnight*. Our reviewers have been reappreciating the original stories, while also delving headfirst into their new versions. If you've recently experienced any form of these stories, why not write in and tell us what you thought?

One thing we haven't been able to cover in this issue is *The War Between the Land and the Sea*, as only the first two episodes had aired by the time this editorial was written. So far, I've enjoyed it – Russell Tovey and Gugu Mbatha-Raw have both made excellent leads (which, let's face it, wasn't really in doubt) and the episodes have managed to present some pressing and inconvenient truths with the urgency they deserve. The scripts have been a little clunky in places, but strong so far! There'll be more on this series next time, so for now please enjoy this issue of CT!

Best wishes,

James

ct@dwasonline.co.uk



Celestial Toyroom 555



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Editor: **James Ashway**

Front cover: **Elbert Smith**

Back cover: **@Artfully Liam** on Instagram

Editorial Assistant: **John Ashway**

Honorary President: **Colin Baker**

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Much has happened since my last column back in September's issue of *CT*.

When you read this, *The War Between the Land and the Sea* will have seen the light of day. Alas, given the publication deadlines for this issue it was too late for me to be able to pass comment on the series!

The big news, obviously, has been about *Doctor Who* itself. After all the speculation, Russell T Davies will be returning to write and showrun a 2026 Christmas Special at Bad Wolf Studios. We'll likely then get a new series, as the BBC's press release puts it, "in due course to ensure the Doctor's adventures continue".

After the failure of the Disney+ exercise, I believe it's time for the programme to change course. We'll have had just three showrunners across more than 20 years, and I'd really like to see new blood come in and take us in a fresh direction. As ever, time will tell...

Alongside members of the Dicks family, it was brilliant to be able to present Andrew Cartmel with the Terrance Dicks Award for Writers at Riverside Studios recently. Circumstances meant that we couldn't arrange it earlier in the year, but in the end we got our man! Remarkably, *Projections in Time: Time and the Rani* was our seventh convention of 2025, and every single one sold out. I'm mighty proud of how, in conjunction with our partners, the Society continues to provide high quality, value for money events.



Talking of high quality and value for money, I think that 2026's *CT Annual* is absolutely superb, and must publicly give my thanks and congratulations to Bruce Nicholson and his team for their magnificent work. It's great to read as a PDF download, but if you can I'd urge you to order a hard copy to truly appreciate all the lavish attention to detail.

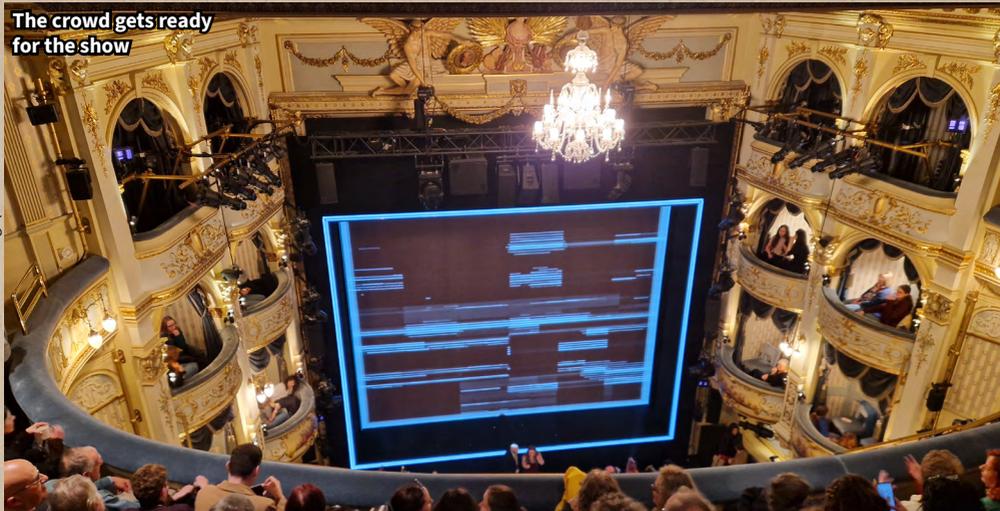
Our social media presence continues to grow online, and we're now approaching 32,000 followers overall. Little could I have imagined such numbers when we belatedly joined Facebook and Twitter in 2011. Thanks to each and every one of you.

Finally for now, may I take this opportunity to wish you a wonderful Christmas. Here's looking forward to 2026 and the Society's Golden Anniversary.

All the very best,

Tony Jordan

The crowd gets ready
for the show



The Marlowe Code

John Ashway reviews *Born with Teeth*, featuring Ncuti Gatwa

Following his sensational turn as Alge-
rnon Moncrieff in the 2024 National
Theatre production of *The Importance
of Being Earnest*, Ncuti Gatwa returns to the
West End in similarly ostentatious fashion
in Liz Duffy Adams' compelling history play
Born With Teeth. This two-hander covers
three imagined meetings between Gatwa's
Kit Marlowe, the famed poet, playwright
and spy, and the up-and-coming William
Shakespeare as they collaborate on a se-
ries of plays. Both squirm under the over-
sight of an Elizabethan "police state"; but
while Marlowe plays the political game to
gain the leeway needed to produce great
art, Shakespeare is willing to tone down
his work to stay under the radar. As they
debate, flirt and fight, is Marlowe seeking
to incriminate Shakespeare, to recruit him
into his dangerous lifestyle, to protect him
or all of the above?

It seems almost too obvious to draw a line
between Gatwa's roles as Moncrieff and
Marlowe, but both characters are larger
than life figures, unrepentant at indulging
their scandalous desires and skilful at bam-

boozing their respective foils at almost
every juncture. Like Moncrieff, Marlowe
changes tones and topics at will, forcing
Shakespeare to keep up, until the conver-
sation is driven back to Marlowe's desired
focus. Of course, in *Earnest* such manipu-
lations are for comedic effect. In *Born With
Teeth*, there is a constant undertone of
predation in his time with Shakespeare, as
well as increasing desperation as the play
moves forward in time.

**"An eye-opening first scene
makes clear the stakes for
our leads..."**

Edward Bluemel's Shakespeare is a seem-
ingly naïve and pliable everyman com-
pared to the outrageous Marlowe, and it
is Shakespeare who talks to the audience
like a friend between acts. *Born With Teeth*
has no bones about demolishing the fourth
wall as the playwright discusses what we
have seen so far, as well as certain meta-
phorical moments that "didn't happen". As
Marlowe's overtures towards him become
sexual, or even romantic, we feel him torn
between his wish to let go, and give himself

to a man he sees as a genius, and a desperate fear that such a move could lead to his death. The chemistry between the pair is palpable from the start, but neither's intentions are fully clear until the play's final moments.

Born With Teeth's production is simple and stark, using anachronistic imagery of static and industrial-sounding electronic sounds to quickly convey that our leads live in a dangerous time of surveillance. An eye-opening first scene makes clear the stakes for our leads, who face torture and death if they make a wrong move, from the get-go. The three main acts take place in an empty stage, save for a simple table and chairs, but the space is taken up by the motion of Marlowe and Shakespeare as they dance around the space, pulling together and apart. Gatwa in particular brings an imposing physical presence to Marlowe that demands Shakespeare's attention, baring his chest and lifting the heavy table that Shakespeare is attempting to work on. In one extraordinary moment he then leaps off it, landing with arresting precision between a reclined Shakespeare's legs.

“My time with Marlowe and Shakespeare absolutely flew by...”

Born With Teeth provides another star turn from Gatwa, whose charisma and physicality are this time turned to a more amoral purpose. We can't help but like, and laugh, with Marlowe, but he makes no bones about his selfishness – we are explicitly told that he has sent innocent men to be horrifically tortured just to save his own neck. We, like Shakespeare, struggle to determine when he is honest, but there is enough sincerity there to make us doubt our assumptions until the end. My time with Marlowe and Shakespeare absolutely flew by, engaging me totally with the adversarial, *sensual* relationship between the pair. Despite its attempts to present a cold, hard edge, there is an undeniable romanticism to this play that I found its most compelling feature.

Into the archives

The Editor delves into December *CT's* of years past in search of festive spirit

To mark the end of the year, I've taken a quick dive into DWAS' collections to see how the society and *Doctor Who* fans were celebrating in years past. We start almost at the society's beginnings in 1976...



Celestial Toyroom #5 – 1976

On the inside of the back cover, the society's early charitable endeavours are revealed:

“To all society members:

DWAS XMAS APPEAL

The five London members of the Society's Executive (Gordon, Jan, Jeremy, Keith & Steve) have pledged themselves to raising enough money to give a complete set of *Doctor Who* Target Paperbacks, at Christmas, to the Children's Ward of the Middlesex Hospital thereby, in our way, bringing some pleasure to those unable to spend Christmas at home.”

From the following issues, it's not immediately obvious whether or not the appeal was a success. I can only hope that it was, as it sounds like a very thoughtful idea. It would also help to make up for there being no December *CT* the following year in 1977.

A view from the sidelines

Sian Wallace looks at how Series 15 explored marginalisation

As a disabled fan of all things science fiction, I will often use fiction as a way to escape the limitations of my body. The fact that I find it difficult to complete basic tasks can make me viscerally angry. I often feel patronised, infantilised and ignored by people who take their mobility for granted. So, when Series 15 appeared to be examining the impacts of marginalisation, I was elated. Russell T Davies frequently stands up for the downtrodden, so I was sure that this topic would be handled with care. By the series' end, however, I was left deflated. This message was horribly floundered, and I feel that it's a missed opportunity to highlight the struggles that many of us face.

“...when Series 15 appeared to be examining the impacts of marginalisation, I was elated.”

Things started well in *The Robot Revolution*. It's the sort of corny premise that I often associate with some of my best memories of *Doctor Who* – how one throwaway action, like a gift from a regrettable ex-partner, could alter an entire planet's civilisation. The 1950s stylings of Missbelinda One highlight the dichotomy of that era, with the optimistic futurism disguising a decade marred by war and hatred of all kinds. There's more bubbling beneath the surface as well, and my favourite part of this episode is a short interaction around a radiation-free X-ray blanket. On the one hand, it's the sort of invention that I dreamed of as a youngster who spent a lot of time in hospitals, and shows the power of fiction to imagine better futures. On the other, it highlights how technology can be misused to oppress. When the Doctor and Belinda examine the injured,

the Doctor warns that judging whether the biological adaptations of the Missbelindachandrakind or humans are better is the start of “a very dangerous path.” This boldly establishes the theme of the series and gave me the impression that the topic would be tackled with the same bullish fearlessness throughout.

Lux continued the series' focus on the margins of society, this time in 1950's America. While I was initially concerned that discussion of the Doctor's race would be fumbled, similar to heavy-handed discussions of the Thirteenth Doctor's gender, I was pleasantly surprised. The genuine fear that would be felt in segregated spaces is sold by the performances of Varada Sethu and Ncuti Gatwa, who shine throughout. While we know that the Doctor can't end racism in just one night, *Lux* follows in the footsteps of other stories tackling difficult themes by having the character draw attention to the wrong that has been done, but leave true change to the people that live there. “Sometimes, I wait for people to topple their world,” the Doctor says. “Un-

Penarth Pier – filming location for *Lux*'s cinema



til then, I live in it and I shine.” While there were good moments, I would have liked to have seen the themes of marginalisation in the episode highlighted further. The differences of the disappeared could have been highlighted, while the *Doctor Who* fans through the fourth wall could have been cast as outcasts in their own reality – explaining why it’s so important to us all.

“...by imagining a better future there’s more of a chance it’ll come to pass.”

The Well tackles the treatment of disability head on as the Doctor returns to Midnight. The planet’s sterile, isolating atmosphere is the perfect way to illustrate how it can feel when a disabled person’s needs are neglected. This point is emphasised when the able-bodied soldiers turn off the accessibility features on their suits and turn their back on Aliss Fenly as they become more suspicious of her. It also furthers the need for education to change things for disabled people, such as when Belinda is called out for being a medical professional with no sign language skills. This point is partially undermined by a somewhat inconsistent use of sign language in the episode, but by imagining a better future there’s more of a chance it’ll come to pass.

“...even people going through the toughest of times can come back stronger.”

Belinda then passed the baton to Ruby Sunday for an inspired exploration of PTSD in *Lucky Day*. Though the trauma and concerns of the Doctor’s companions have been explored before, it’s never been with this much raw emotional honesty. The episode tackles Ruby’s feelings of abandonment and the manipulation she’s been exposed to, but ultimately ends with a message of hope. Giving Ruby a moment to stand up to Conrad and show mercy shows the capacity for recovery in mental

health issues, and how even people going through the toughest of times can come back stronger. This point would have been stronger, however, if the Doctor hadn’t felt the need to confront Conrad as well – Ruby should be able to deal with her own trauma in a manner of her own choosing.

The Story and the Engine takes a very different approach to its predecessors, looking at the importance of safe spaces rather than the direct marginalisation of a group. Including a story where The Doctor returns to Lagos to feel part of a community could have easily been fumbled by a writer with only passing knowledge of African culture and mythology. Inua Ellams, however, more than proves his talent here, with the writer’s love for his heritage shining through in every detail of the episode. He also treats the breach of the barber shop’s sanctity with appropriate severity, with the Doctor more than right to feel betrayed by someone he thought he could trust. It’s all sold through Gatwa’s performance, which is incredibly raw and personal.

Aliss Fenly – someone to be trusted?



The most visceral example of the Doctor's anger comes in the following episode, *The Interstellar Song Contest*. Having seen an auditorium full of people seemingly killed, triggering memories of the genocide of the Time Lords, the Doctor briefly reveals a side of this incarnation that we've only glimpsed before. This is the Fifteenth Doctor on the warpath, driven by a deep-rooted trauma that he's been trying to cover with his fun and breezy persona. It provides a contrast with the Hellion's own trauma at the destruction of their planet, and the different ways that they've dealt with that – from taking revenge to throwing themselves into their art. While the Doctor's attack on Kid has been criticised by some, I think that it's well built up. It's an extreme response to an extreme situation, and Belinda forces the Doctor to confront the fact that he's now ended up in the wrong. It goes to show that even those who seem like they're most in control can be dealing with things we can barely imagine, and how important it is to reach out to others.

Conrad Clark's scheme starts well – but its themes don't stick the landing



The finale starts well, with *Wish World* building on the concerns and themes of the previous episodes in Conrad's not-so-perfect reality. The disabled are literally forgotten by the world's inhabitants, while the power of conformity forces women and the LGBTQ+ community into the ill-fitting moulds that this society expects. Unfortunately, *The Reality War* doesn't go on to deliver. Shirley and her community achieve very little, undermining the value that disabled people have to offer the world. The Rani's scheme also seems ripe for exploration of how the vulnerable are treated, and seemed like it was meant to be setting up a condemnation of the eugenic views that are becoming more common. Instead, this is all quickly swept under the rug as the plot resolves itself with a quick fix, ironically making the dispossessed people that the story was meant to highlight seem like an afterthought. The episodes could have had a much stronger point by combining Omega and the Rani's pursuit of 'the perfect body' and 'the perfect reality' together, paying off the Doctor's thoughts in *The Robot Revolution*.

“...the dispossessed people that the story was meant to highlight seem like an afterthought.”

Looking back, Series 15 is a series that wants to spread progressive messages but lacks the heart and soul to do so. While last minute changes were seemingly forced on the production, there were already missed opportunities to make the series' thesis stronger by tying the themes of invisibility and disability together more closely. In series of *Doctor Who* to come, I want to see writers and showrunners include characters with disabilities and differences as whole people, not just pieces of them. Leaving hints at a character's personality beyond just whatever makes them different can encourage empathy in audiences, and lead to changes in the real world. And in a world where hatred is on the rise, a bit more empathy is something we could all do with.



What will the Doctor and K9 discover this week?

Adventures with Aunty Beeb

John Ashway on some potential options for *Doctor Who's* upcoming CBeebies show

Earlier this year, the BBC invited UK-based production companies to pitch their vision for a *Doctor Who* animated CBeebies show, for broadcast from 2027. Their brief was for a run of 52, 11-minute long episodes aimed at four- to six-year-olds. *Doctor Who* has long engaged with the children's market, beginning with the origins of the main show as a family serial and continuing through to the 'Junior' Target novels and CBBC spinoffs *Totally Doctor Who* and *The Sarah Jane Adventures*. So, young people have always been an important audience for the programme – but what will it look like when catering to even younger children? Based on absolutely no hard evidence at all, can looking at other successful shows for CBeebies, and similar children's channels, provide clues to what this new *Doctor Who* venture might look like?

The first type of show I want to look at is a genre I'm dubbing the 'problem solver'. Heroes on screen encounter obstacles to overcome, and explicitly ask their young viewers to help them. Popular examples of this format include *Blue's Clues*, *Dora the Explorer* and *Mickey Mouse Clubhouse*. They can help to teach kids basic literacy, numeracy and general knowledge, as well as encouraging physical activity if the viewer is asked to join in with certain actions being performed on screen.

This format immediately seems like a great fit for *Doctor Who*. The Doctor can arrive somewhere where people need help and, with the viewer themselves as the companion, set out on their quest. I imagine the issues themselves might have to be less scary and threatening than a typical *Doctor Who* adventure, with scary monsters definitely off the cards. Perhaps we're looking more in the region of hunting for missing artefacts, or a mischievous alien like a Pting causing trouble rather than terror.

One of the most successful elements of *Mickey Mouse Clubhouse* are the ‘Mousketools’. Mickey sets off with a set of four objects that will help him on his adventure, and the viewer is asked to help him pick the right tools when obstacles need to be overcome. This helps teach children practical knowledge and imaginative thinking – for example, using a torch in order to illuminate a dark room or using a blanket as the missing sail for a boat. I can easily imagine the Doctor bringing a set of seemingly random items from the TARDIS that could later come in handy on one of their Cbeebies adventures!

“...Cbeebies is a world where our favourite show could easily be a great success.”

The second show I’d like to use as an example is a classic from my own childhood, *Come Outside*. This beloved 90s show saw Lynda Baron’s Auntie Mabel travel around the UK in a polka-dot plane alongside her lovable dog Pippin, learning about the topic of the week. For example, an episode about apples sees Mabel and Pippin travel first to an orchard to see the apples being picked, and then to a market where apples are sold. Mabel talks to the viewer directly in a friendly, familial tone, with Pippin often providing comic relief by being slightly naughty.

While this show was produced in live-action, I think an animated program could cover similar territory. Imagine the Doctor travelling with K-9 in the TARDIS to teach him more about life on Earth, and watching live-action segments through the TARDIS viewscreen? The applications for historical education are also obvious with a time machine that can go anywhen as well as anywhere!

So far, I’ve been looking at shows that speak directly to the viewer, but there’s nothing to say a show for Cbeebies can’t be a simple narrative adventure. Popular programs like *Paw Patrol* and *Octonauts* can tell entertaining and educational stories without breaking the fourth wall. Emo-

tional and moral values such as teamwork, kindness and bravery are just as important to teach as discrete information, if not more so! The important element here is the level of peril our heroes might face. As mentioned earlier, scary monsters like the Daleks and Weeping Angels are off the cards for an under-six audience, but the Doctor and their companions can easily get into scrapes without a fear factor. Repairing spaceships, recovering stolen items, meeting friendly aliens, saving people in danger – there are all sorts of possibilities. And while scary foes may be a no-no, a mischievous meddler causing problems in time wouldn’t seem inappropriate for younger viewers...

The last show I’d like to look at is a true classic that has stood the test of time. Based on a series of children’s books, the seminal *Mr Benn* sees the titular gentleman transported through time and space by a magical costume shop, with his destination always matching the outfit suggested by the mysterious fez-wearing proprietor. At the end of each adventure, Mr Benn returns to his ordinary life with a souvenir of his magical outing. Now, imagine the costume shop instead as the TARDIS wardrobe, and the shopkeeper as the Doctor, and we practically have a *Doctor Who* animated show neatly packaged! Perhaps a new character enters the TARDIS every episode and is sent on a thrilling adventure by the Doctor that teaches them something about themselves or their life. Afterwards, they’re returned to Earth and wonder if that mysterious blue box and its owner were real or just a dream...

Now, to be clear, I’m not really expecting a *Doctor Who* animated show to be quite as obviously inspired by pre-existing shows. But I think the ease with which the basics of *Doctor Who* slot into these formats demonstrates that Cbeebies is a world where our favourite show could easily be a great success. Regular *Doctor Who* is often at its best when it takes inspiration from a variety of sources and creates something unique with them. Could any of the shows I’ve looked at be part of the melting pot for a Cbeebies hit? Who knows...

Doctor Who's darkest hour

Chris McAuley on why *The Daleks' Master Plan* still matters 60 years on

One of the first times I ever met the Daleks wasn't on a screen, but on the page. I was a kid, pulling down a battered copy of John Peel's novelisation of *The Daleks' Master Plan* from the Ballymena Library shelf. The cover promised danger, which it delivered in spades, but also provided much more: death, betrayal and a war across time and space that felt far too big for a children's story. Indeed, the story was so big that it ended up spreading into a second novelisation – *The Mutation of Time*. I didn't know it then, but I was about to discover one of *Doctor Who*'s boldest and most brutal epics, one that still casts a long shadow across the series even decades later.



11

Written by Dalek creator Terry Nation alongside former *Doctor Who* script editor Dennis Spooner, *The Daleks' Master Plan* aired from November 1965 to January 1966. It was a massive undertaking, doubling from the six initial episodes that Nation was asked to write to 12 by the time it was broadcast. If you include the Doctor- and companion-lite prequel *Mission to the Unknown*, then the serial is up to a baker's dozen of 13 episodes – a record *Doctor Who* serial length that would stand for more than 20 years.

Befitting of such grand ambition is the story's scope, which spans galaxies, interstellar diplomacy, betrayal, time travel chaos and, at the centre of it all, the Daleks' desire to build the Time Destructor – a weapon capable of erasing civilisations. Pitted against them is the First Doctor, who leads companions Steven, Katarina (briefly) and later Sara Kingdom on a desperate mission to stop them. The chase takes them from futuristic jungles to ancient Egypt and the heart of a Dalek command. It even pauses for a surreal Christmas interlude where the Doctor turns to camera and wishes viewers a merry holiday. But make no mistake – this serial was no festive romp.

From the start, *The Daleks' Master Plan* makes it clear that no one is safe. Bret Vyon's Space Security Service colleague Kert Gantry is killed in the opening moments, and Bret goes on to threaten the Doctor's life shortly afterwards. They later arrive on the penal planet Desperus, whose criminal inhabitants are bad enough *before* one of them takes Katarina hostage in an airlock. In the ensuing struggle, Katarina opens the outer doors and is sucked out into space along with her captor and killed. This wasn't just brave – it was unprecedented. Death in *Doctor Who* usually meant a guest star falling over politely. But now, one of

our protagonists was dead. Even though the instruction to kill off Katarina came from the production office, who were having difficulty fitting the Ancient Greek character into *Doctor Who's* science fiction adventures, Terry Nation deserves real praise for how he handles this moment. What could have been a functional disposal of the character is anything but. Instead, it's the show at its most murky – did she mean to sacrifice herself, or did this “daughter of the gods” not understand the consequences of her actions? It's never made clear, and the sombre response of Bret, Steven and the Doctor makes this scene all the more striking amid the spy plots and action in the rest of the serial. This moment of raw, unsettling drama permanently changed *Doctor Who*, taking it from an adventure serial whose heroes laughed in the face of death to one where it was all too real a prospect.

“What could have been a functional disposal of [Katarina] is anything but.”

Of course, it's not just Katarina who meets her death in *The Daleks' Master Plan*. Bret Vyon, almost a companion himself at this point, is gunned down by his sister Sara Kingdom just an episode later. Sara is given a chance at redemption when she becomes the Doctor and Steven's new travelling companion, but even that doesn't spare her. In a final attempt to stop the Daleks, the Doctor activates the Time Destructor himself. After initially heading for the safety of the TARDIS with Steven, she turns back to help the Doctor and ends up in the Time Destructor's field, rapidly aging to dust. In *The Daleks' Master Plan*, no good deed goes unpunished.

This serial also gives us a different side to the Daleks. While they've always been far more than the ‘bug-eyed monsters’ Sydney Newman feared, the Daleks have generally had the same *modus operandi* – kill, and keep on killing until they win. Here, they're the smartest they've ever been. Rather than screeching their time-honoured slogan for

everyone to hear, they're tactical overlords who move in the shadows. They form alliances with alien delegates and manipulate key Earth officials to pave the way for their conquest. They don't just exterminate any more. They dominate as well.

“...it was a transformational moment for *Doctor Who*, and for me.”

Of course, *Doctor Who* fans also remember *The Daleks' Master Plan* for another reason – *The Feast of Steven*. Amid the death and destruction of the rest of the serial, the show's first ‘Christmas special’ sticks out like a sore thumb. Though it was reasonable to assume that the audience might not be watching on Christmas Day, so it was best to avoid anything plot heavy, it doesn't stop the episode from being tonal whiplash of the highest order. The audience is jolted straight from tragedy to the comic hijinks of the TARDIS trio before being plunged straight back next episode. It's even worse for fans trying to experience it now, as *The Feast of Steven's* appeal mostly came in what was onscreen. Sadly, all we've got today is the audio. While it's unlikely to undergo a critical reappraisal anytime soon, I will say one thing in its defence – it kicked the doors wide open when it came to showing *Doctor Who's* range.

Looking back on *The Daleks' Master Plan* 60 years after it was first shown, its influence is everywhere. You can see the story's DNA in the concept of the Time War, in story arcs and in the way that modern *Doctor Who*, every so often, dares to kill its darlings. It's a shame that just three of the original 12 episodes exist today, thanks to the BBC's now-infamous tape-wiping policy, as this serial proves that the show could do more – more danger, more drama and more scope. Yes, it's not perfect – it sprawls, and some episodes really sag. But it was a transformational moment for *Doctor Who*, and for me. All these decades later, I think of that paperback on the library shelf in Ballymena, and how far it showed me *Doctor Who* could go.

Adaptation or reinvention: Dalek and Jubilee

Christine Grit compares *Jubilee* to its televised reinterpretation

With the publication of the new *Jubilee* novelisation written by Rob Shearman, it's a good time to take a trip back down memory lane. Originally debuting as the 40th story in Big Finish's Main Range, the Sixth Doctor-led *Jubilee* subsequently served as the basis for Shearman's Ninth Doctor episode, *Dalek*. This television script in turn inspired its own adaptation as both a never-produced alternate version (in case the rights to the Daleks couldn't be acquired), and a Target novelisation back in 2021. Having re-experienced both *Jubilee* and *Dalek* in preparation for the new novelisation, I was struck by how different these stories are. While there are certainly similarities, I'm not really sure how accurate it is to call *Dalek* an adaptation of *Jubilee*.

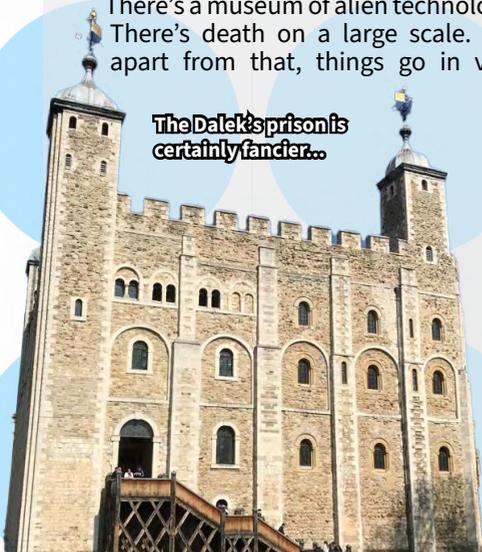
I'll admit, going into this, that the stories' share a few plot beats. A lone Dalek has been captured and is being tortured. There's a museum of alien technology. There's death on a large scale. But apart from that, things go in very

different directions. It's apparent as soon as the TARDIS materialises in both stories. In *Jubilee*, the time machine appears in the Tower of London in 1903 only to accidentally fracture history, landing in an alternate 2003 in which the fascistic English Empire rules the world. *Dalek*, meanwhile, takes place in the space year of 2012 (seven years in the future when it was broadcast). Given that the Van Statten corporation hasn't yet taken over the internet, you could argue that it's still set in an alternate timeline – but really, this pair of stories are interested in doing very different things.

In *Jubilee*, the Daleks are central to the English Empire's way of life. There are films, celebrations and even drinks dedicated to the Daleks. Dalekmania has been harnessed in a very different way in this reality, used as propaganda for the English Empire who have, in essence, become the Daleks themselves. *Dalek*, on the other hand, has very different aims in mind. There's an appreciation that humans, and even the Doctor, can be 'good Daleks', but the episode also has to reestablish these Skarosian menaces as a threat after 27 years off screen. So while *Jubilee* is more interested in the very idea of the Daleks being the threat, *Dalek* makes that menace concrete. It kills its way through Van Statten's bunker, memorably taking out an entire room by electrifying the water from the sprinkler system.

This differing approach to the Daleks also means the stories treat violence very differently. Violence is somewhat casual in *Dalek*, with room after room of faceless soldiers killed off as the lone Dalek tries to make its escape. But in *Jubilee*, things are much more personal and that much more horrific. We meet an alternate version of the Sixth Doctor whose legs have been removed to stop him leaving; a group of entertainers whose bodies have been hacked apart to

The Dalek's prison is certainly fancier...



fit into Dalek casings and Miriam Rochester, a woman who criticises her husband for not hitting her hard enough. While the Dalek invasion force provides plenty of extermination later on, it's the human violence that provides *Jubilee's* added shock factor.

We also see both worlds through different eyes, whether it's the Sixth Doctor and Evelyn Smythe in *Jubilee* or the Ninth Doctor and Rose in *Dalek*. Both Doctors are disgusted at what they've seen and experienced in their respective stories, but they bring very different baggage to the table. The Sixth Doctor has seen the human race willingly give into hate and become versions of the Daleks themselves, while the Ninth Doctor has barely escaped the seeming genocide of the Time Lords with his life. One is angry about a timeline that might be, while the other is frightened because of what's already happened. Their companions bring similarly different outlooks, despite both being sympathetic to the Dalek – Rose's naivety contrasting with Evelyn's desire to change the English Empire for the better.

After their diverging journeys, both *Jubilee* and *Dalek* eventually find themselves reaching the same point. Having realised that the only way for the Daleks to win is to never have invaded the English Empire, the lone Dalek of *Jubilee* self-destructs and convinces the rest of its race to do the same – setting time back on its proper path. Meanwhile, in *Dalek*, the lonely alien decides to implode rather than mutate into something new. Both believe they are protecting the Dalek race, but have undergone very different journeys to get to this moment.

The idea of adapting pre-existing *Doctor Who* stories for the new series would come back in *The Age of Steel/Rise of the Cybermen*, which credits Big Finish's *Spare Parts* as an inspiration, and *Human Nature*, adapted from the New Adventure of the same name. I'd argue that only the latter is a 'true' adaptation, and even then one that has major differences. Whether you agree or not, these reinventions of what has gone before have benefitted the show – by approaching the themes of the originals from new angles, *Doctor Who* can find new inspiration in the same old stories.

Blast from the past

What did *CT's* readers think of *Dalek* back in 2005?

They say quality is sometimes better than quantity, and this cracking episode proves that. One Dalek – but what a Dalek! Even with the aid of CGI, it had me (a mature viewer) spooked.

We also have a new Doctor. More angry and emotional than ever before, bringing home the fact that Christopher Eccleston is going to be sorely missed. And isn't Billie Piper outstanding?

Back to the Dalek, and I suspect the very best is yet to come...

Scott Anderson

I enjoyed this one – it had everything. I know the trailers spoiled it, but the part where the Doctor says to the Dalek, "I've come to help. I'm the Doctor", and the Dalek says, "Doctor... the Doctor?" had a shiver running down my spine. The story had that claustrophobic feel of the underground bunker and no escape. The emotion – when the Doctor thought Rose was dead – was well portrayed. Then, at the end, when the Doctor and Dalek roles were reversed. Wonderful stuff.

Kate Griffiths

Dalek is the best episode so far of the new series, and to my mind ranks as one of the top *Doctor Who* episodes ever. The traditional roles of the Doctor and the Dalek are exchanged, particularly in the confrontation between the Doctor and the Dalek. The Dalek acts in a manner that is sad, almost lonely, and similar to how Eccleston's Doctor has acted at points in the series. The Doctor for his part becomes threatening, antagonistic and even attempts to 'exterminate' the Dalek.

Such a storyline could have failed in the wrong hands, but Robert Shearman makes it work, makes us believe that the Doctor could be this extreme. It moves at a fast pace, but you never feel like you are missing anything...

Continued on page 16

Return of the Daleks: *Jubilee's* life in prose

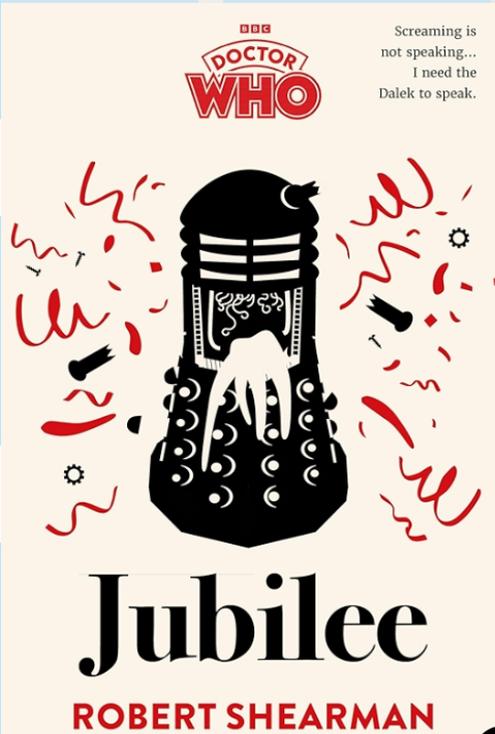
Christine Grit reviews Rob Shearman's new Dalek novelisation

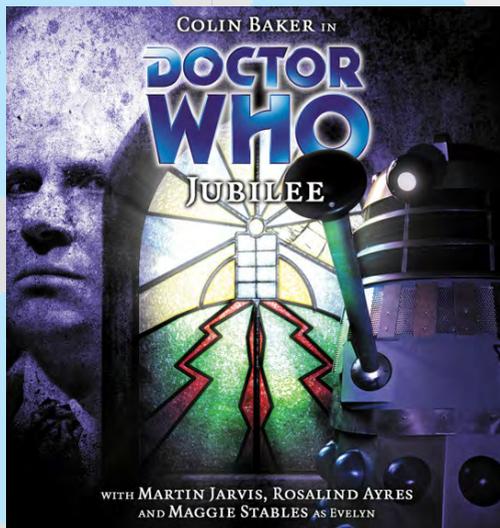
Before there was *Dalek*, there was *Jubilee*. Released in January 2003, this Big Finish audio reinvented the Dalek story by using the fearsome aliens as a way of examining the worst parts of humanity. This central thread carries through into *Dalek*, even if the plots are very different, and now, almost 22 years after its first release, into a new novelisation. I'm very fond of both versions of this concept, as you'll probably be able to tell from my article elsewhere in this issue, so I'm glad to report that author Rob Shearman has once again delivered.

One thing I really appreciated when revisiting *Jubilee* is just how talented Rob Shearman is – not just as an author, but a clairvoyant. In a 2025 where right-wing politics are on the rise, it's hard not to reflect on the parallels Shearman draws between modern life and *Jubilee's* English Empire. It's an empire that appeals to symbolism and ceremony to generate popular support, while making changes that harm the most vulnerable. It's an empire that is suspicious of foreigners, putting up with them only so that they can serve it. And it's an empire led by a demagogue whose supporters believe he can do no wrong. I found it hard not to see allusions to Donald Trump and England flaggers reading this novelisation, even though its central premise was created long before they emerged on the political scene.

“...I'm glad to report that author Rob Shearman has once again delivered.”

While these aspects of the story are seemingly timeless, Shearman has taken the opportunity to go back and rework other parts of *Jubilee*. The original audio didn't pull its punches, with violence, misogyny and torture all commonplace in the English Empire. While still an awful place to live, these aspects have been toned down in the novelisation. Perhaps the best example of this is the singing group of Daleks. I find them one of the most harrowing parts of the original audio, as they're revealed to be people hacked down to size so that they can be stuffed into ill-fitting casings. These musical Daleks aren't quite as horrific this time around, having been transformed into a group of dressed-up actors rather than maimed performers. Luckily, not





Blast from the past

More thoughts on *Dalek* and *NuWho* from *CT*'s readers 20 years ago

Continued from page 14

...The story fits the length of this episode well. The only down point is that Shearman will not be writing any episodes next year!

Paul Ayres

This story was superb. The new style Dalek was “fantastic”. The way the middle swivels, its hover mode and firepower... It makes you wish there were more of them in it – but then how could they have handled more than one? I have heard lots of moans about this Dalek having emotions and it makes me so cross. Do people not listen to the storyline and dialogue? This was a new Dalek absorbing time aura, but unfortunately human DNA from Rose at the same time. This triggers a further mutation including a contaminating human factor, hence the emotion creeping in. Daleks, as we know from [Sylvester McCoy’s] Dalek story are into racial purity and destroy lesser races. That’s why this Dalek blew itself up (impressively). Nobody worried about humanised Daleks in Pat Troughton’s *Evil of the Daleks*. These 45-minute episodes need to be watched more than once to get the point. You haven’t got four to six weeks to get it anymore.

Amanda Barton

I have thoroughly enjoyed all nine episodes so far. My favourite stories at present are *The Quiet Dead*, *Dalek*, *Father’s Day* and *The Empty Child*.

I love the Slitheen. They are up there with the Silurians and Zygons as one of the best monsters ever. I would love to see them again in Doctor Who. The new-look Autons are fantastic, as are the Gelth, the Reapers and the gas-masked zombies.

The scripts are fabulous, special effects are out of this world, all the actors are so talented (Eccleston and Piper are exceptionally good) and the pace of each episode is phenomenal. I love the two parters, but prefer the 45-minute standalone episodes.

Nick Betts

everything has changed – though you have to wait for it, I was pleased to find that their song is still very much present!

“I most appreciated the ability of the novelisation to get inside the head of the Dalek...”

Shearman also takes the opportunity to do things that just aren’t possible in an audio drama here. I most appreciated the ability of the novelisation to get inside the head of the Dalek, and explain what it’s thinking through its internal monologue. Seeing the English Empire through its eyes helps to sell just what a twisted place it is, even if the story’s more violent aspects have been smoothed out in this novelisation.

All in all, this is a novelisation that was worth waiting for. While there might be purists unhappy with some of the changes to *Jubilee*, I didn’t mind some aspects being left out as Shearman added some really nice new ingredients to the mix. There’s still plenty of the original left to enjoy, particularly Dalekmania being played out to its (not-so) logical extreme. This is a welcome addition to my *Doctor Who* library, and one that I can recommend.

The *Jubilee* novelisation is available from all good booksellers



Robert Dick talks to Terry Molloy, Sneh Gupta, Rula Lenska and Matthew Robinson

Convention Confidential: Riverside *Resurrection*

Dominic Smith witnesses the return of the Daleks at Riverside Studios

I think we can all agree that one of the things about being a *Doctor Who* fan is that you can often fall into a rut. We watch the same episodes, see the same guests and wear the same t-shirts again and again. That's one of the things that makes Time and Riverside events so special. Every time they're different, with a new lineup of stories, panels and friends to see. So, while *Resurrection of the Daleks* might be a story I know very well, it's one I've never watched on the big screen with other fans. I've never seen it with my family, either, and they don't know the story at all. Fortunately, we were all in for a treat at Riverside.

“...my youngest... loved it, and sat on the edge of her seat the whole way through.”

After the traditional introductions, *Resurrection of the Daleks* dives headfirst into its more gritty approach as a group of heavily armed policemen gun down civilians in London's Shad Thames. I was a bit worried that the story would be a bit too scary for my youngest but she loved it, and sat on the edge of her seat the whole way through. The rest of my family appreciated the story's harder edge, were confused by the unexpectedly long episodes and got sad when Tegan chose to leave (for real this time).

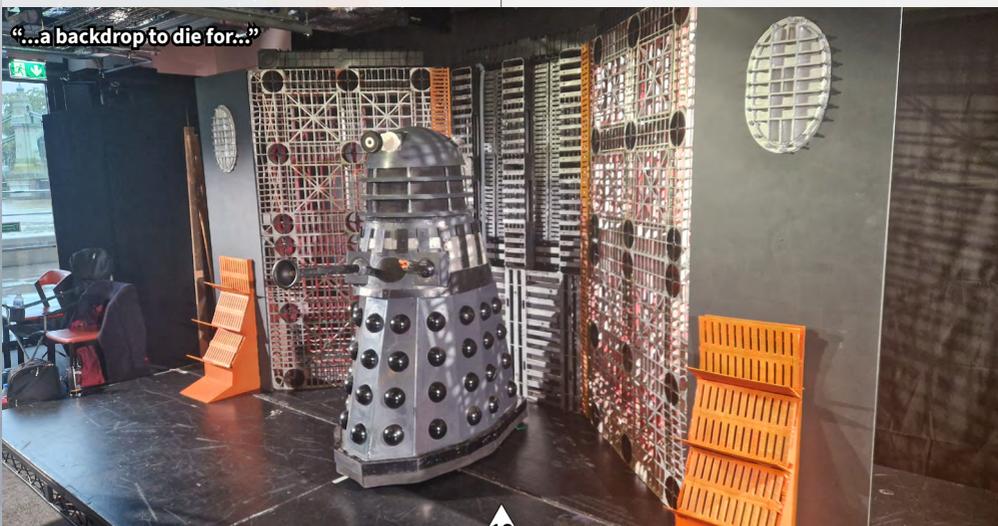
Of course, these emotions are nothing compared to our joy at the range of guests that we got to see. First up were the amazing Terry Molloy (in his debut as Davros), Rula Lenska (as medical officer Styles), Sneha Gupta (Osborn) and director Matthew Robinson. All the guests were on top form, and it was great to see Rula again after catching her in a panto in Wimbledon many years ago with Colin Baker. She is a classy lady with a great memory and some amazing stories to tell. Her stories, and those from the other guests, just tumbled out thanks to the superb interview skills of Robert Dick, who almost got the guests to interview each other. Even Sneha Gupta, who was making her first ever *Doctor Who* convention appearance, had some fascinating insights to share. It turned the panel from an interview into a beautiful, friendly chat which we were privileged to be able to witness. The joy was infectious, and the fact that the guests sat in on each other's panels shows what a lovely little team they formed while filming *Resurrection* all those years ago.

After a break for photos, with a backdrop to die for, it was time for the second episode. Once the credits had rolled, and everyone had pieced themselves together after Tegan's exit, it was time for Janet Fielding and Peter Davison to take to the stage. While they put on a bit of an antag-

onistic façade, the ability to see two obviously great friends bicker, banter and converse is as valuable as stardust. They could have gone on for hours, and they may well have done, but at the time it felt like it was all over in a matter of seconds. These seasoned pros had the audience in the palm of their hands.

“...a beautiful, friendly chat which we were privileged to be able to witness.”

Once the panels were over, it was time for signings and then the long journey home. We were talking in the car on the way home, and I found myself talking not about everything that I had expected, but revelling in all the things I didn't. The joy my wife had meeting Matthew Robinson and talking to him about his work on *EastEnders*. The patience my daughter had in asking guests questions that they have been asked a million times, but maybe not in a long time. The happiness my son has in his growing collection of signed photos and planning who he would like to meet next. The Doctor really does bring people together, and at Riverside he does it over and over again. I've said it before, but thank you to everyone who helps bring these events to life.



Convention Confidential: *Terror of the Zygons*

Prop/inn images credit: Jamie Hailstone

Jamie Hailstone on the shapeshifters' renewed debut story shown at the BFI

Nearly 50 years to the day since the final episode of *Terror of the Zygons* was first broadcast, a group of excited *Doctor Who* fans descended on the BFI on London's Southbank. They weren't there to try and spot the Skarasen in the Thames, but for a first glimpse of the newly restored story and The Collection: Season 13 boxset.

“...the audience were on the edge of their seat and loving every minute...”

For those of you who have never been to a *Doctor Who* event at the BFI, there are two things you should probably know. Firstly, they sell out very quickly, and I mean quickly. If you are lucky enough to get a ticket, you are in for a treat worthy of Rassilon himself and the Season 13 preview was no exception. It was an afternoon no *Doctor Who* fan would forget in a hurry.

As ever, the screening was hosted by the BFI's lead programmer, Justin Johnson, and archive TV programmer, Dick Fiddy, who kicked things off with an impromptu survey to find out how far people had travelled just to be there for this auspicious occasion. Much to everyone's surprise, there were fans from as far afield as the Netherlands, the United States and Australia, which just goes to show how popular these events really are. They also held their customary quiz, for which no *Doctor Who* event at the BFI would be complete. For those who haven't experienced it before, audience members

have to shout out “Dick!” if they know the answer, which sounds like a *Carry On* film waiting to happen. You really had to be there. Let's just leave it at that.

Once the audience had settled down, it was time to enjoy the digitally remastered *Terror of the Zygons*. By the time you read this, The Collection: Season 13 boxset will already be in many of your homes and so you will know just how good it looks and sounds. Suffice to say, the audience were on the edge of their seat and loving every minute of this Fourth Doctor classic. There were also special guests aplenty, including Michael McCarthy, who did the original studio sound back in 1975. He was joined by Mark Ayres, who restores the audio on the Collection boxsets and the animations to such incredible standards

Another of the guests was Neil Cole, who curates the Museum of Classic Sci-Fi in Allendale, Northumberland. Cole



The 1975 Skarasen prop...



The Fox Goes Free Inn in Charlton, which stood in for the story's similarly named Fox Inn

brought the original Skarasen prop from 1975 with him, and was joined onstage by effects maestro Mike Tucker. Tucker had brought a new version of the prop along, which was used to update some of the effects in the final episode of the story for the Collection boxset. We literally had two Skarasens for the price of one. You know it makes sense!

“As *Doctor Who* events go, it was hard to fault...”

And, if all that was not enough bang for your buck, there was also a chance to hear from legendary producer Philip Hinchcliffe. He reflected on *Terror of the Zygons* and his time on the show, which many regard as a golden era in *Doctor Who*'s long history.

Hinchcliffe admitted he probably could have kept Ian Marter on as Harry Sullivan for “two or three more stories” but, on reflection, he felt it was the right decision to pare the series back to the Doctor and a single companion.

Hinchcliffe also paid tribute to many of the writers he worked with on the show, including Robert Holmes, Terry Nation and Robert Banks Stewart, who penned *Terror of the Zygons*.

“They belonged to a generation of writers who knew how to put a script and story together, and they were good,” Hinch-

cliffe told the audience. “They knew you and were able to deliver what exactly you needed.”

“Bob Holmes said to me when I first started that we’re doing this for clever 12-year-olds, but we also knew the mums and dads were watching as well. It was not just an audience of little children, although a few of you in this audience have told me you were scared at the age of five by the show.”

After the screening ended, there was a chance to grab a limited-edition postcard with art by Lee Binding, take part in the Quiz of Rassilon and experience all manner of other shenanigans at the BFI bar. As *Doctor Who* events go, it was hard to fault, and the cherry on the cake was a short but sweet video message from none other than Tom Baker himself. He lamented, with a glint in his eye, how even he could not get a ticket – I told you they were popular! Hopefully, I will see you all at the next Collection boxset preview, whatever season that may be...



**...and fits
2025 sibling!**

The Uncanny Invasion

Jez Strickley reflects on a story where nothing is as it seems

There are several notable features of *The Android Invasion*. It's Terry Nation's penultimate *Doctor Who* script and only his second without the Daleks. It sees the final regular appearance of UNIT, and of actors Ian Marter and John Levene. It also has an average viewing figure of 11.7 million (the third episode even tops 12 million viewers), which puts it at number one for Season 13 and amongst some of the highest viewing figures in *Doctor Who*'s entire run.

The plot itself riffs off Cold War paranoia, which was arguably at its peak during Nation's formative years. *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), for instance, reflected the

fear of Communist infiltration long before John Benton and Harry Sullivan were duplicated. The Kraals' fake Earth setup, meanwhile, echoes *The Twilight Zone* episodes *Where is Everybody?* (1959) and *Elegy* (1960) as well as *The Outer Limits* episode *Counterweight* (1964). It also plays on simulated realities, as seen in the robotic settlements in *Westworld* (1973), and mirror worlds, such as the Counter-Earth conceit in Gerry and Sylvia Anderson's *Journey to the Far Side of the Sun* (1969).

The concept of a mock-up reality sees *The Android Invasion* press down hard on a psychological nerve, the effect of which is unsettling or even plain disturbing. I think this feeling of unease arises from three aspects. First, the fake villagers, in the equally fabricated village of Devesham, tap into what Japanese roboticist Masahiro Mori calls the 'uncanny valley' phenomenon. This state of being, Mori argues, sees us experience increasingly negative feelings towards synthetic devices as they become more humanlike – perhaps not unlike Grimwade's Syndrome, or robophobia, in *The Robots of Death*.

Second, there is the matter of trust. Confidence in other people is key to our wellbeing, but the Doctor and Sarah are forced to confront android versions of not just their loyal friends, but each other. Inhabiting a world where our closest associates are not who they seem can trigger tremendously dangerous insecurities: historically, such forces were rampant during early-modern Europe's witch craze and McCarthyism in the USA.

Third is the sense of isolation conjured up in what the Doctor and Sarah presume to be the everyday village of Devesham. It's a more chilling version of the base-under-siege scenario where the base itself is part of the threat. Anxiety over what other people might be becomes anxiety over the reality of place, taking us towards sentiments such as topophobia (fear of place).



Uncanny Valley

Mori's uncanny valley hits us from the get-go. Just before the TARDIS materialises, we see what appears to be a UNIT soldier walking robotically with his right arm, and later his face, spasming alarmingly. When we return to this figure in a later scene, he is quite unable to control his movements and proceeds to spasmodically march straight off the edge of a quarry to his apparent death.

“The concept of a mock-up reality sees *The Android Invasion* press down hard on a psychological nerve...”

It's all rather surreal. The Doctor's discovery of the dead soldier's "freshly minted" coins, all dated to the same year, raises our suspicions that this person is no ordinary casualty. When we later see the very same soldier alive and well, it is obvious that something is profoundly wrong. All of which is not to mention the anonymous, white-suited and helmeted figures who hunt the Doctor and Sarah on first sight.

A short while later, our heroes enter the village of Devesham and Mori's concept becomes manifest. Here, a bizarre troupe of villagers is trucked in to take up residence in the local pub, with their seeming paralysis and subsequent animation telling us that these are no ordinary folk. Introducing the android versions of Harry and Benton ups the tension nicely, and also directs us towards the second cliffhanger where the robotic copy of Sarah is unmasked, literally.

Later on, the Doctor is copied as well. His doppelgänger creepily appears in a Kraal pod just like the aliens in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, a film which would be remade just three years later. Tom Baker pulls off a sinister turn here as the android Doctor, with his attempt to apprehend the real Sarah giving us our first glimpse of what a malevolent version of the Fourth Doctor is like. Thus, the uncanny valley effect comes full circle as our heroic Time Lord succumbs to the Kraal's fakery.

Traitors

The uncertainty of trust is also key to the unsettling nature of this story. Our first encounter with the Kraals' androids is a UNIT soldier. This is followed by the faux villagers, including the sinister pub landlord. Then we meet the android of Benton, who tellingly is first seen with his back to us. Our sense of betrayal here is nicely emphasised by the Doctor and Sarah's attempt to surprise who they take to be an old friend, only to have a gun pointed straight at them. This stepwise erosion of trust, from unnamed UNIT soldier to established UNIT regulars, to Sarah and finally the Doctor himself, sends our confidence in what we think we know spiralling downwards.

Breaking our trust in the familiar adds to Mori's effect. In this, we are not only thrown out of whack by seeing familiarity where there is none, but also uprooted from those psychological moorings that allow everyday life to function. Our sense of fidelity may differ across peoples, but without it, our cultures and societies simply would not work¹. Nation's script neatly touches on this point as our heroes seek to uncover the truth behind the traitorous behaviour of their apparent friends.

Conversely, the tragic figure of Guy Crawford completely trusts the Kraals' account of his space accident. He believes they rescued him from a near-death event and rebuilt his body, barring his left eye. Yet this story is utterly false. Crawford's conviction in his restoration by the Kraals is an elaborate fiction, brought about by his brainwashing, all part of these aliens' planned invasion of Earth.

Village Without a Future

The creeping sense of unease in *The Android Invasion* rests in its apparently ordinary placement: Devesham, a quintessentially English country village complete with church, shop, public house and even a red-painted public phonebox. It is here, in what should be a safe space, that the Doctor and Sarah begin to unravel the truth of the Kraals' scheme.

Their investigation begins with the deserted village pub, the Fleur de Lys, where they find more newly-minted coins from

the same year. It is this odd coincidence that begins to indicate the settlement's true condition. For viewers at the time, Soviet replicas of US towns to train sleeper agents had been known about since the late 1950s. So, the idea of a facsimile village would have made some sort of sense. The pub's name is a more subtle hint, as interpretations of the fleur-de-lys often invoke faith and fidelity: the very qualities tested in a fake world.

The initial arrival of the villagers, with their eerie movements and deadpan expressions, and then their tableau-like scene being broken by the chiming of the pub clock, reinforces our disquiet, which is further raised when Sarah witnesses the true visage of a white-suited figure. This is followed by the Doctor making a series of crucial discoveries: the phonebox is dead, as is the pub telephone; a horse brass is made of plastic; the pub dartboard is new and unused and the calendar at the bar is fixed on the same date.

“Nation’s script is really on form here, utterly crushing any last feelings of certainty...”

Our growing realisation that Devesham and its surroundings are fake is confirmed in the Doctor's remarks at the climax of the second episode, where he tells the soon-to-be revealed android Sarah that, “This isn't Earth. This isn't real wood. It's some kind of artificial material, like plastic. These are not real trees. And you're not the real Sarah.” Nation's script is really on form here, utterly crushing any last feelings of certainty we might have had. Our brief impression of a seemingly pleasant setting has been totally ripped away and replaced by the understanding that the entire village is a sham.

To summarise, *The Android Invasion* has a number of intriguing elements to it, not least its channelling of the uncertainties of the Cold War. Yet, I would argue that the enduring appeal of this story lies in how it drills into Mori's idea of the uncanny valley. In a world where AI can produce images and generate synthetic human faces, *The Android Invasion* is as pertinent now as it was 50 years ago.

Into the archives

The Editor delves into December *CT*'s of years past in search of festive spirit

Celestial Toyroom #25 – 1978

We now jump forward to news of a DWAS Christmas social in 1978. Jeremy Bentham writes:

“Stepping out of my conventional role as Society Historian for a month, I've been asked by interested members of the Society Executive to coordinate the organisation of a possible DWAS Xmas Party at the Sussex Inn, the venue for our very successful Social Evening prior to the Panopticon.”

“With this in mind, then, the first thing to be established is whether or not the project is viable. To be able to book the room at the Sussex I have to guarantee the management an attendance figure of over 40 persons. Therefore, would all of you interested in attending the Christmas Party on either December 14 or 15 (Thursday/Friday) please stir yourselves to drop me a line as quickly as possible indicating your intention to attend.”

“To remind those who came along in the summer, and to introduce new members, the gathering will be in the Paddock Room at the Sussex Inn which is very near Leicester Square, London. There will be a private bar for our use and food will be provided.”

“As I mentioned above, this is just a preliminary hearing and, depending upon response, I'll announce in the next edition of *The Celestial Toyroom* either the full details of the gathering or the regretted cancelling of the project.”

“This is your Society. Use it!”

Unfortunately for DWAS members, *CT* #26 relates what happened next. While there was sufficient interest to hit the 40 person threshold, the responses were received too late to secure a booking at the Sussex. Instead, DWAS members were invited to come along to a gathering of sci-fi groups at the One Tun near Farringdon Station on December 21.

Blake's 7 blasts out onto Blu-ray

Peter Witney discovers the joy of one of *Doctor Who*'s contemporaries

No, I haven't written an article for the wrong magazine! The reason I've written this is to sell the virtues of buying *Blake's 7: The Collection* to a *Doctor Who* fan.

Now, I'm sure many people who read *Celestial Toyroom* have seen, and are very familiar with, *Blake's 7* and need no such persuasion. I, however, was not one of them. Sure, I had heard of *Blake's 7* before and was aware that Paul Darrow and Jacqueline Pearce starred in it, but I had never seen an episode.

All that changed when I saw the trailer for *The Collection* Season Two, as it looked brilliant! I ordered Season One immediately and was impressed with what I saw. The Collections are produced by the same team that make the *Doctor Who* Blu-ray sets, and it shows! They're very well put together, with a good selection of extras for an all-around enjoyable experience.

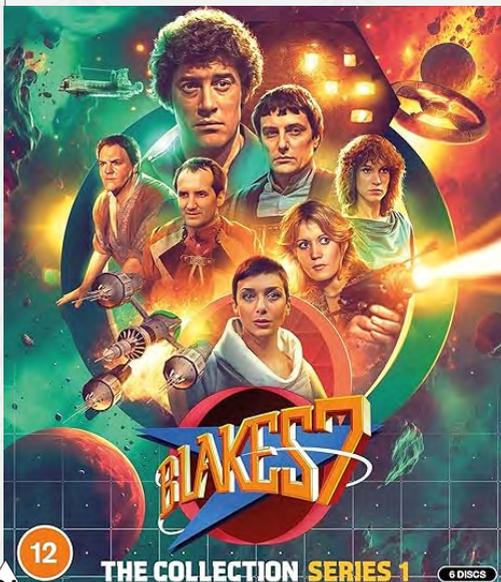
Where *The Collections* really benefit *Blake's 7* in particular is with the use of CGI. Space (and there is a lot of it) now looks great – I'd say up to *Star Wars* levels! I think it's a real shame that the outer space visuals haven't been improved this much on the updated versions of *Doctor Who* stories like *Frontier in Space*, as it looks beautiful in places. It's these improvements which bring *Blake's 7* up to modern-day standards. Sure, a lot of the sets show their 1970s origins in many places, but it is now on a par with the big sci-fi film franchises of the time, such as *Star Wars* and *Alien*.

If that's not already convinced you, there's plenty for the *Doctor Who* fan to love. You can play 'spot the actor' for the many, many cast members that have been in both *Blake's 7* and *Doctor Who*. Most of

the production team have also worked across both, not least Terry Nation and Chris Boucher, so the overall feel is one of a shared style, if not a shared universe.

It also helps that the stories of *Blake's 7* are, for the most part, good. There are a mixture of solid sci-fi, action and political stories. I found it to be a blend of *Star Wars* with *THX 1138*, *Logan's Run* and other dystopian movies of the time. In some ways, it's a shame that *Blake's 7* didn't come out five years later, as the mid-80s sci-fi stylings of *Blade Runner* and the like would perhaps have suited the series more.

Minor quibbles aside, I can highly recommend this. *Blake's 7: The Collection* Season One and Two are both available on Blu-ray, and as there are only four seasons overall, it won't take that much longer to release all of it! Moreover, you can currently get 26 45-minute stories right now, which is more than enough to tide us all over until *Doctor Who* returns for Christmas 2026.



DOG DAYS

THE RUINS OF KAERULA

By Harry Jones

After kicking off the 14th series of Big Finish's Fourth Doctor Adventures with *The Hellwood Inheritance*, the Doctor and Leela return for a new trio of adventures in *The Ruins of Kaerula*. This time, they're joined by some fan favourite characters who have recently been absent from the Fourth Doctor's adventures, for some fun but perhaps not fully realised stories.

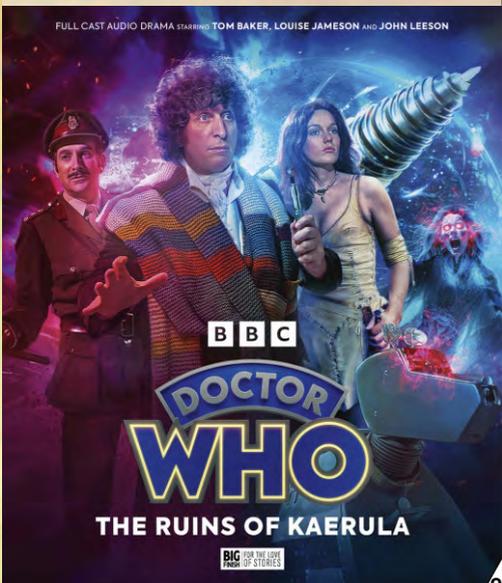
K-9 makes a welcome return to the range in Phil Mulryne's *The Remains of Kaerula* and *The Ruins of Kaerula*, which are best treated as one story. Mulryne is a Fourth Doctor Adventures stalwart at this point, and understands how to write well for the robot dog. He's particularly good at writing comedy based around K-9's literal interpretations of other characters' dialogue, which are enhanced by John Leeson's flawless

delivery. The story also ensures that K-9 doesn't achieve *deus ex machina* status by rendering his signature nose laser largely out of action. Instead, K-9 is well balanced with the Fourth Doctor and Leela, with Tom Baker and Louise Jameson getting the opportunity to show off their acting range in these tales.

"...K-9 is well balanced with the Fourth Doctor and Leela..."

Beyond our main trio, the guest cast show potential but never really break out of being stock characters. The rebel Paysh is well realised by Anna Leong Brophy, reflecting some of the impulsiveness that Leela had in her early stories. However, when the duo are paired together, this avenue isn't really followed up on. Chief Elect Tuldra also feels like a stock bureaucratic commanding officer from 1970s *Who*, but actor Andrew James Spooner does manage to take the character on a journey. This is also the case with misguided scientist Nim Karl, portrayed by Barnaby Kay, though his character development ends up as somewhat of a cheat.

Though I have my concerns about the characters, they do feed into the strongest element of the *Kaerula* duology – its world building. While television *Doctor Who* normally focuses on humanoid characters to build an emotional connection with the audience, the Kaerulans are non-humans with a distinct culture and history. Instead, the audience is given the opportunity to form an emotional connection through the power of voice alone. The planet's history



Cover credit: Big Finish and background image adapted from: NASA, ESA (esahubble.org/images/keck1015a, CC BY 4.0)

also raises pressing questions over ecocide and capitalist greed, which are handled well. The focus on refugees is not so deftly handled, and, like the main range story *Flip-Flop* many years before it, ends up creating slightly problematic implications instead.

“...an interesting, if somewhat flawed, outing in the Fourth Doctor Adventures.”

Perhaps the biggest weakness of this story, and the next story in the boxset, is the feeling of *déjà vu*. It wouldn't be giving too much away to say that elements of *The Hellwood Inheritance* reappear in both the *Kaerula* duology and the third story in the boxset, Tim Foley's *Cry of the Banshee*. There's time travel gone wrong, characters being cruelly ripped from their bodies and disembodied spirits (albeit banshees in the latter story). I'm not quite sure why the production team allowed such similar themes to recur in such close proximity.

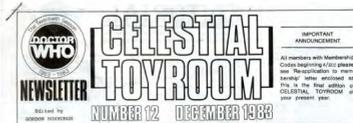
While *Cry of the Banshee* ends up somewhat unremarkable as a result, it does succeed in reintroducing the Brigadier to the range. Jon Culshaw is on fine form as UNIT's commander, having superbly captured the late, great Nicholas Courtney's mannerisms – especially that playful irritability which gives many a comedic moment. “I'm not exactly Florence Nightingale either but come on” is a particular standout, given in response to Leela's sulking about being left to guard a sick man. This repartee helps to build respect between the Leela and Brigadier in what is their first meeting, with the pair developing a successful partnership over the course of the story.

Overall, *The Ruins of Kaerula* boxset is an interesting, if somewhat flawed, outing in the Fourth Doctor Adventures. Its realisation of its four main characters is excellent, but I'd have liked to have seen some of the stories more developed. I'm hoping that Series 14 is now done with retreading familiar ground, and can move on to pastures new. The next boxset, however, perhaps offers something a bit different...

Into the archives

The Editor delves into December *CT*'s of years past in search of festive spirit

Celestial Toyroom #85 – 1983



THE NEW SEASON

As members with Membership Contributions to your pleasure...
At members with Membership Contributions to your pleasure...
At members with Membership Contributions to your pleasure...

- 1. ALL MEMBERS OF THE DWP (I should be Johnny Jones...)
- 2. ALL MEMBERS OF THE DWP (I should be Johnny Jones...)
- 3. ALL MEMBERS OF THE DWP (I should be Johnny Jones...)
- 4. ALL MEMBERS OF THE DWP (I should be Johnny Jones...)
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- 8. ALL MEMBERS OF THE DWP (I should be Johnny Jones...)
- 9. ALL MEMBERS OF THE DWP (I should be Johnny Jones...)
- 10. ALL MEMBERS OF THE DWP (I should be Johnny Jones...)

The rest of the 1970s and the early 1980s aren't especially festive. *CT* #37 mentions that the The Tom Baker Pen Pal Club is having a Christmas party, but that's it. *CT* #49 in 1980 broke the news that Peter Davison was to be the new Doctor, so there wasn't much space for season's greetings. In *CT* #61, then-editor Gary Russell tells us that the fanzine is “never to be called *CT*, *Ct*, *See-tea*, etc ever again” (sorry Gary!), but little in the way of yuletide spirit. He then bowed out the following December in *CT* #73, leaving the Editor's seat open for Gordon Roxburgh. Under his leadership, in *CT* #85, we have this notice:

“For the Christmas Season, Janet Fielding and Valentine Dyall will be appearing in pantomime in Aldershot in *Aladdin*. The production is written by Lovett Bickford and will run from December 17 to January 14.”

After relatively sparse mention of Christmas and other December holidays for a while, things were again starting to look a little more festive.

By Harry Jones

After treading back over familiar themes in its past couple of installments, the 14th series of the Fourth Doctor Adventures breaks new ground as it comes to its conclusion. *The Last Queen of the Nile* boxset contains the series' most interesting stories, from an experimental piece featuring a NuWho monster to a pure historical. Together, they ensure the series ends on a high.

“...the cast expertly bring the world of the rig to life while highlighting... the Silence.”

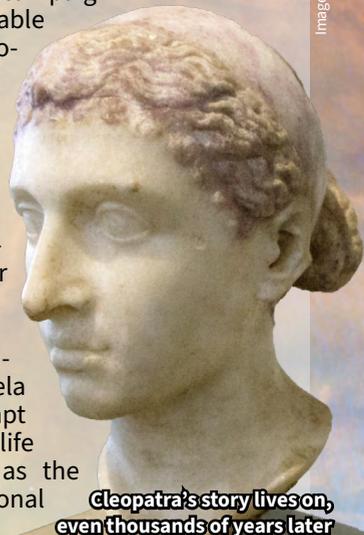
The first story of *The Last Queen of the Nile*, called *Conspiracy of Silence*, builds off the Brigadier's appearance in the previous boxset. Set three weeks after the events of *Cry of the Banshee*, author Jonathan Morris sends the Fourth Doctor, Leela and K-9 to that most recognisable of *Who* facilities: the oil rig. There's plenty for an audience familiar with *Terror of the Zygons* to appreciate here, from mentions of the Zygons to the Doctor's warning about humanity's dependency “on a mineral slime”.

Though this might seem unimaginative at first, it has a very real purpose in the story – to give the audience something familiar to focus on. That's a real benefit, as this is a story focusing on the Silence that uses them to their full potential. Morris wisely limits the cast of this experimental story to just one main character beyond the core four, Nolan, who Charlie Hayes really sells with her performance. Together with the story's editing and sound design, the cast expertly bring the world of the rig to life while highlighting the impact of the Si-

lence. Though these creatures might come from the 2010s, Steven Moffat's creations work quite well opposite this Fourth Doctor team who benefit from K-9 as their not-so secret weapon. The use of the Silence also means that the story is much less prone to any continuity issues, given the monsters' inherent ‘memory-proof’ qualities.

After *Conspiracy of Silence*, the pure historical makes its long-overdue return to the Fourth Doctor Adventures. The last straight story featuring a historical character came all the way back in its first series in 2012, when Leela met Queen Boudica in *The Wrath of the Icenis*. This has now been followed up some 13 years later in *The Last Queen of the Nile* by David K Barnes, a story that's not unlike one of the more Shakespearean adventures of the First Doctor. It sees the Doctor, Leela and K-9 arrive in Ancient Egypt where Mark Anthony, returning from a military campaign without a suitable present for Cleopatra, decides that the robot dog would make an excellent gift. The Doctor and Leela, attempting to recover K-9, follow Anthony and his army to Alexandria where Leela foils an attempt on Cleopatra's life and ends up as the Queen's personal bodyguard.

Cleopatra's story lives on, even thousands of years later



While these story beats don't sound dissimilar to *Doctor Who's* televised historicals, Barnes has updated them for the twenty-first century. For instance, when the TARDIS was taken in 1964's *Marco Polo*, the main danger was that the time travellers would be stuck in the 1200s. In *The Last Queen of the Nile*, there's an added sense of jeopardy that K-9, as something of an unrestrained know-it-all, may contaminate the timeline by revealing his knowledge of future events. K-9, showing off his more sinister side, even considers doing so intentionally after calculating that the greatest chance of the trio getting back to the TARDIS is offered by disrupting historical events. Similarly, though Leela's position as bodyguard to Cleopatra covers similar ground to Ian Chesterton being knighted in 1965's *The Crusade*, the story uses this opportunity to forge a much deeper relationship between Leela and Queen Cleopatra than King Richard and his knight. It leads to some fantastic material for Louise Jameson as Leela considers how a relationship is "possible to feature rage and admiration to one another", and deal with her powerlessness in the war between Alexandria and the Romans.

"...the pure historical makes its long-overdue return to the Fourth Doctor Adventures."

The rest of the cast give similarly strong performances, which help to elevate the material further. John Leeson is on fine form, and gets to show his acting range with two roles beyond K-9. Tom Baker is also excellent, playing the wise Time Lord hidden behind a veil of tomfoolery. He provides some welcome moments of comedy, with the Fourth Doctor's role as an entertainer at a feast leaning into Baker's strengths as an actor. Beyond the core trio, Mark Anthony is well-portrayed by Michael Lumsden as someone whose human frailties will cost him everything as he struggles to navigate his relationships with Cleopatra and his son Antyllus. Blake Ritson, meanwhile, performs the cruel and sadistic Octavian Caesar well. But the main plaudits have to go

to Pippa Bennett-Warner, who constructs a fascinating Cleopatra. The Egyptian Pharaoh is portrayed as a ruthless and regal leader forced to follow what the Romans say, yet merciful at the same time. Bennett-Warner's performance is well-judged, seeing Cleopatra navigate a love-hate relationship with Anthony and the despair of her world falling apart.

It would be remiss at this point not to mention the possibility of a minor controversy over this audio, given the casting of a Black British actress as Cleopatra. The question of her ethnicity is a matter of historic debate, with some scholars presenting Cleopatra as the pale-skinned descendant of Macedonian Greeks while others portray her as a Black African queen. It's an issue that hit the headlines not long ago when the Secretary General of the Egyptian Supreme Council of Antiquities accused a documentary of "a falsification of Egyptian history" by casting a performer of African heritage as Cleopatra¹. I'm no expert on the issue, and I don't think Big Finish intended to wade into this debate, but it's worth mentioning here all the same. All we can do going forward is listen and learn.

All in all, *The Last Queen of the Nile* offers two fascinating stories that are much more original than the previous boxset. They demonstrate why, 50 years and one MBE later, audiences still want to listen to Tom Baker as the Fourth Doctor.



HELL'S BELLS!

THE CHIMES OF MIDNIGHT

By John Ashway

Undoubtedly one of the most beloved and widely praised *Doctor Who* stories in any medium, *The Chimes of Midnight* sees Big Finish firing on all cylinders to bring an impeccable script by Rob Shearman to life. If any audio story deserved a novelisation, it would be this one, but I advise any who have not yet experienced its original format to correct that as soon as possible. A strong cast and excellent direction combine with evocative music and sound design to deeply immersive effect. Rather than discussing the (potentially spoilery – but you’ve had over 20 years!) plot and how it unfolds, I’d like to focus my attention on some of the production elements that make this release such an essential listen.

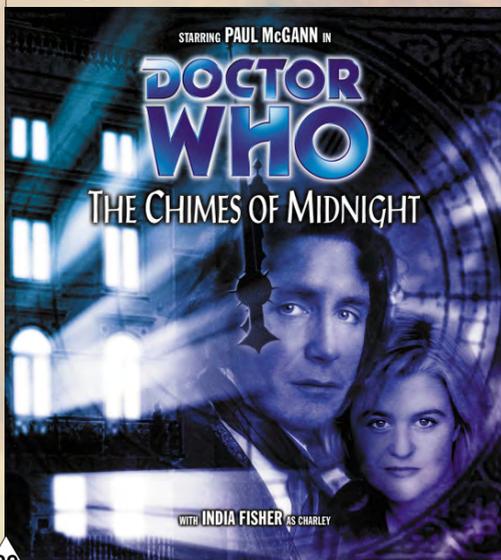
Russell Stone’s haunting music immediately sets the scene before even a single word has been spoken. An introductory music box-like piece plays in time with the tick of a grandfather clock. In just a few short moments the audience already has a sense of when and where the story might be set. It also invokes the themes of repetition and regularity that will prove key to the unfolding story before the plot has even started.

The sound design by Andy Harwick is similarly exemplary, heightening the sense of dread and claustrophobia in *The Chimes of Midnight*. An eerie groaning, creaking sound, with the hint of a sinister laugh, recurs through the early episodes. It’s just vague enough in nature that its source isn’t given away, but makes perfect sense in retrospect when the true identity of the threat is revealed. When a plunger is removed from the face of poor suffocated scullery maid Edith, it’s yanked away with a perfect cartoon-esque ‘spluck’ evoking the blackly comic spirit of the story’s middle parts and highlighting

the ludicrous nature of the increasingly outlandish murders. The final highlight of the sound design comes near the story’s end, when Charley is faced with a vision of fiery destruction so convincing she begins to feel the flames. We hear the crackling heat and sounds of destruction around her, and can totally buy into her distress.

The Chimes of Midnight’s changing sound design reflects its evolving structure, which is nearly without peer. Each of the story’s four parts aren’t divided arbitrarily, but represent a distinct stage in the narrative. The cliffhangers that divide them are not random moments of peril, but genuine turning points. From a creepy investigation of a seemingly empty house, to a murderous black comedy and heavy life-and-death drama, the story is constantly redefining itself in a way that uses the serial format as a real strength.

Cover credit: Big Finish



Of course, all this would be nothing without an excellent cast. Paul McGann and India Fisher do some of their best work here, moving from the fun-loving adventurers audiences have come to know and love since they debuted on audio in *Storm Warning* to people increasingly despairing of the bizarre situation in which they have arrived. There's an early moment where Charley breaks a jar in a pitch-black larder, and for a terrible moment both she and the Doctor believe she's been badly cut by the broken glass. It's a simple moment of horror, but one made viscerally real by McGann and Fisher's sincere and committed performance.

“It’s truly one of the most inventive and enjoyable *Doctor Who* stories ever written...”

The assembled guest cast are also excellent, balancing some very difficult requirements. They need to present heightened, stereotypical versions of your traditional period drama household staff characters – the butler, the cook, the chauffeur and more. They need to repeat themselves frequently, and say truly ridiculous things with total sincerity. And, despite all the horrid things they do and say, they also need to remain somewhat likeable so that we care about their welfare. Each of the cast acquits themselves with aplomb, but particular praise must go to Louise Rolfe as Edith. She has to stand out as the most ‘real’ person amongst the household staff, going through the motions of a menial existence with dull acceptance.

I’m delighted that *The Chimes of Midnight* has been reinvented for a new audience, and look forward to reading the new novelisation myself. It’s truly one of the most inventive and enjoyable *Doctor Who* stories ever written, and I’m sure that will remain the case whatever medium it is presented in. Nonetheless, I hope I’ve successfully made the case that there are certain unique features of the audio that will never be replaceable, and simply demand to be experienced.

Blast from the past

An excerpt from Terry Francis’ review of *The Chimes of Midnight* from *CT* #292 in 2002

The *Chimes of Midnight* grabs your interest from the onset. The first minute is simply a piece of Russell Stone’s superb incidental music followed by the TARDIS materialising. Such is the intensity of this tale; even the dialogue-free sections hold your attention – a pretty mean feat for an audio drama! Saying that, the dialogue is as rich as one of the central character’s infamous plum puddings. In the past, I have felt that the Big Finish range has suffered from poorly written scripts. Indeed, of last year’s McGann output I only liked *The Stones of Venice*. A good script with some juicy dialogue gives the actors something wonderful to play with, and Robert Shearman certainly delivers the verbal toys and a nice game for the performers. You can almost hear the delight Paul McGann has with the production – certainly his best ever outing as the Doctor to date. It is also a testament to India Fisher that Charley Pollard has a substantial role in the proceedings, but I cannot say any more than that without giving anything away (though on this point I did find it slightly disappointing that the events of a previous story – I won’t say which – are vital to this one). The ensemble is complete with an ably talented and convincing cast to help McGann and Fisher.

More importantly, it feels like a proper *Doctor Who* story. A claustrophobic setting of a group of isolated individuals, each with a motive to kill one another. However, add the mysteries of time itself playing games and you create the kind of tension I have not experienced since *Whispers of Terror*. There are more twists and turns here than a forkful of spaghetti – and it is fun when the story catches you out. On top of that, the cliffhangers are to die for – each one surpassing the one that has gone before! The beauty of this adventure, however, is that once you know all of the surprises it still stands up to repeated listening simply due to its atmosphere and acting alone. If the rest of this year’s output is as uniformly brilliant as this then I’ll be a very happy man indeed.

A NOVEL IDEA

THE CHIMES OF MIDNIGHT

By Kara Dennison

Three years before *Doctor Who* would kick off its modern tradition of Christmas episodes, Big Finish delivered what may well be the Doctor's most memorable holiday adventure ever. The Eighth Doctor and Charley Pollard audio *The Chimes of Midnight* remains one of Big Finish's most celebrated releases, receiving a gorgeous limited vinyl edition in 2016. Just in time for Christmas 2025, a year woefully without a festive *Doctor Who* special, fans got the next best thing: Robert Shearman's novelisation of his own classic story.

“...Shearman's original story remains intact and is even enhanced.”

If you haven't heard the original audio drama of *The Chimes of Midnight*, a quick primer: the Doctor and Charley land in the basement of an upscale house somewhere in England, late on Christmas Eve in a year they assume is 1906. The downstairs staff – a scullery maid, a cook, a butler, a chauffeur and a lady's maid – are all preparing for the big day. But as the clock strikes 10pm, scullery maid Edith is found dead. More deaths follow, with time rewinding whenever the clock strikes midnight. As the Doctor settles into the role of an amateur sleuth, Charley finds herself drawn into the increasingly surreal world of the house. Saying much more than that, for anyone who hasn't experienced the story before, would rob you of a great deal of fun and fright.

While there are naturally a handful of changes to turn an audio drama from a long-form series into a stand-alone novel,

Shearman's original story remains intact and is even enhanced. On the page, with the benefit of internal monologue and description, his off-*Who* writing style shines through even more than it already did in the story's original form. Readers of Shearman's other works, especially his interactive horror anthology *We All Hear Stories in the Dark*, will recognise his trademark style: stories that are equal parts dark and whimsical, turning what might otherwise be comical situations into nightmares. The best *Doctor Who* tends to happen when a writer brings the Doctor into their world, and that is why *The Chimes of Midnight* has stuck in the collective consciousness of fans for more than two decades.

Even if you know the story backwards and forwards, the book is very worth it. The opportunity to read Shearman's descriptions, and to get deeper into both the Doctor's and Charley's minds, is something that's not really possible on audio but is in prose. Better still, it's an introduction to an era of *Doctor Who* that fans who don't listen to the audios might otherwise miss. We get an encapsulated version of Charley's story: her time aboard the R101, her presence as a paradox and her unrequited feelings for the Doctor. New readers may find themselves craving more of this dynamic... and fortunately, there's plenty of it.

In a time where the future of *Doctor Who* is still iffy (even if it's less iffy than it was), these novelisations are a gift – and *The Chimes of Midnight* is an especially welcome one. Christmas wouldn't be Christmas without it, after all.

The *Chimes of Midnight* novelisation is available from all good booksellers



The Doctor, the telly and Me

Kara Dennison looks back a decade to Series Nine

Consider the Doctor. Initially devised as the centrepiece of an educational adventure serial, the Doctor has gone on to become so much more. No longer simply a cross between the Wizard of Oz and Father Christmas, the renegade Time Lord is a larger-than-life figure added to by every writer and actor who comes to the show. The more anyone tries to make sense of the Doctor, the more complex the story becomes, like the world's longest game of Exquisite Corpse.

After presenting, and subsequently fracturing, the fairy tale of the Doctor during Matt Smith's run, showrunner Steven Moffat introduced Peter Capaldi's Twelfth Doctor. No longer was our hero an old soul in a lanky young body: now he was grey and angry on the outside, with raw and exposed emotion just below the surface. And in the wake of a run of episodes asking the

show's biggest question – "Doctor who?" – this new Doctor's run set out to provide the answer. Or, at least, *an* answer.

Series Eight interrogated what it means to act as the Doctor, mirroring his actions across the figures he faced: a leftover from the Time War who claimed to be unlike their own people; a dashing living legend; an immortal soldier who can only rest when its battle is won. The series concluded that, while the Doctor may not always be 'a good man,' he tries, and that's what matters.

Following on from this conclusion, Series Nine asks a more difficult question: what about the person *under* the name? Who is the Gallifreyan runaway who adopted an alter ego and set himself up as the righter of wrongs across time and space? We saw a glimpse of the Doctor as a frightened child in *Listen*, but this series stripped the layers away even more, showing what kind of person would *need* to set such rules for themselves.

Just as Series Eight mirrored the Doctor, whoever that may be, Series Nine constantly mirrors the person underneath. The most straightforward of those mirrors is Missy, who emerges once again in the two-parter *The Magician's Apprentice/The Witch's Familiar*. As the Doctor crosses paths with Davros, Clara Oswald finds herself the short-term companion of Missy. It also furthers Clara's role as a pawn in their ongoing game, which started all the way back in *The Bells of Saint John*, by bringing the companion's status to the forefront. The Doctor and the Master have always been two sides of the same coin: old friends who are more similar than they are different. But the Twelfth Doctor and Missy take it upon themselves to prove that their old friend could, and should, be more like them. Missy could be good, yes, but the Doctor could be so, so wicked if goaded into it.

“...Series Eight mirrored the Doctor... Series Nine constantly mirrors the person underneath.”

Under the Lake/Before the Flood, besides gifting us yet another guitar solo from Capaldi, also presents us with a magnificent bootstrap paradox. More importantly, though, it introduces Series Nine's theme of transformation. Here, albeit briefly (and with a twist), we see the Doctor become a monster. It's all a trick, of course: the Doctor always saves the day, and he's on our side. And on the other side of the television screen, it's a little easier to have faith that even the most dire circumstance will work itself out. But don't forget: there was still a very real moment when, at least to Clara, the Doctor had become a monster who was too far gone to save. Think about that. Feel it in your gut where it feels uncomfortable. And consider the Doctor.

The two-parter *The Girl Who Died/The Woman Who Lived*, rather than showing us what the Doctor could become, shows us what a *person* could become in the Doctor's shoes. Human girl Ashildr's life is saved by a Mire repair kit, giving her the same sort of immortality as the Doctor. But

without the Doctor's same guardrails, such as a companion at their side and a brain that can hang on to centuries of memories, she becomes something else. She is now 'Me,' the only constant in her transient world. While she becomes a new challenge for the Doctor, someone who witnesses his acts throughout time, she's yet another example of what he could become: someone forever changed by the weight of functional immortality and the loss it brings.

The Zygon Invasion/The Zygon Inversion once again turns a familiar face into a 'monster,' with the Zygon 'Bonnie' taking on Clara Oswald's appearance. It's another transformative moment, but what stands out most is the Doctor's speech to both Bonnie and Kate Stewart about the nature of war and healing from it. "I fought in a bigger war than you will ever know. I did worse things than you could ever imagine, and when I close my eyes, I hear more screams than anyone could ever be able to count." Both Russell T Davis and Steven Moffat have driven home the effects of the Time War repeatedly, with *The Day of the Doctor* putting those memories on full display. Here, we see another example of its



Me goes through lives like changes of costumes

Image adapted from: Wangka Maiden Photography (flickr.com/photos/wangkaMaiden/photography/22764797348, CC BY 2.0)

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#555 FREE

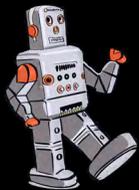
DOCTOR WHO APPRECIATION SOCIETY

COMIC REVIEWS:

The Prison Paradox #1

Words by: James Ashway

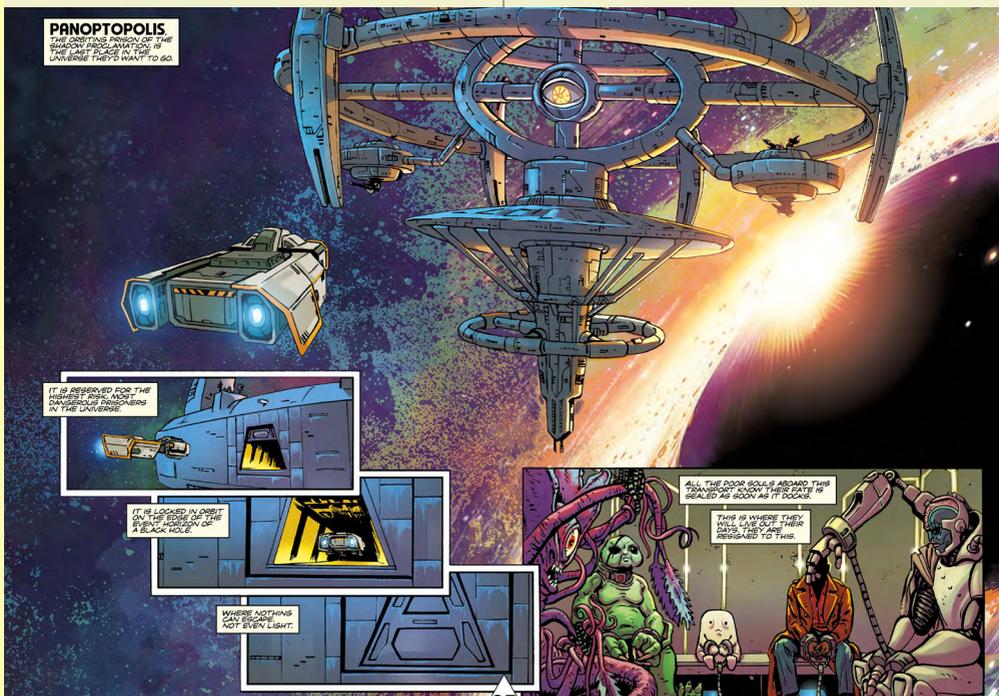
Robot credit: Elbert Smith



Comic images credit: Titan Comics

While we wait for *Doctor Who* to return to television next year, the adventures of the time traveller continue in the worlds of spin-off media. It's particularly welcome for the Fifteenth Doctor, whose short era is ripe for new tales to be told. As such, it's a pleasure to see the Time Lord return for a new storyline at Titan Comics. After tackling an automated shopping centre and a god of fear with Ruby Sunday in his previous series, *The Prison Paradox* takes the Fifteenth Doctor in a more nostalgic, but equally enjoyable, direction.

The first issue of the series sets the scene for the Doctor and Belinda, taking the form of a longer-than-expected stop-off to take a vindicator reading. In the process, Belinda ends up being taken prisoner off panel by the Warden, head of the infamous Shadow Proclamation prison known as the Panoptopolis. Inside the facility, perched on the edge of a Black Hole, are the universe's most hardened criminals, from Methelough the Planet Drowner and H-8, the self-proclaimed 'Living Gun', to Annie the Adipose and Felik the Slitheen. Throw the Doctor into the mix and, inevitably, hijinks ensue.



While the general storyline isn't anything especially new, ploughing the same furrows which have been followed by series such as *Guardians of the Galaxy*, it's one that's told pretty well. Dan Watters' plotting is reminiscent of Terrance Dicks' *Timewyrm Exodus*, where the Doctor effortlessly runs rings around his captors with the help of allies. In this case, rather than having Ace on hand to bamboozle Nazis from an alternate future, the Doctor is working with Methelough, H-8, Annie and Felik in order to fight their way up to the Warden and, perhaps, make their escape. It makes for a breezy and fun first instalment of *The Prison Paradox*, with a healthy dose of noughties nostalgia helping it go even further. The only real downside is that Belinda doesn't get a lot to do in this first issue, and is limited to just a few scenes with the Warden. Admittedly, it could be argued that this is simply the comic reflecting Belinda's role in the second half of Series 15, where the role of the time-travelling nurse was reduced after her first few episodes. We'll see whether this changes as the series evolves in issues still to come.

“...a promising start for this... TARDIS duo who deserved a bit longer together.”

The world of the comic is ably brought to life by artist Sami Kivelä, making their debut on the series, and returning colourist Valentina Bianconi. Between them, the pair bring together eye-catching artwork over a range of scales, from sweeping vistas of the Panoptopolis hanging in space to the claustrophobia of the Warden's screen-clad office. With a variety of new environments and aliens promised in the next issue, there's plenty of opportunity for even more striking artworks in the near future.

All in all, it's a promising start for this new series, which gives more time to a TARDIS duo who deserved a bit longer together. The Doctor's set to face all manner of underwater menaces in the Panoptopolis next time, and I for one will be looking forward to diving in.



The Doctor's gang assemble



Doctor Who: The Prison Paradox #1
Written by: Dan Watters
Artist: Sami Kivelä
Colourist: Valentina Bianconi

The Prison Paradox #2

The Fifteenth Doctor's back with a splash in the second issue of *The Prison Paradox*, which explores the underwater world of the Panoptopolis prison. With Belinda still held captive by its shady Warden, will the Doctor and his gang of misfits make it through by themselves? While the answer's never really in doubt, it's still another fun instalment in this comic series.

While the first issue was a comic story told more conventionally, this one does things a bit differently. It's told from the perspective of Methelough the Planet Drowner, a Tentaculon convict with an epithet that the story makes clear isn't quite as accurate as we were first led to believe. As Methelough is seemingly mute, the tale is narrated through their thoughts as events play out around them. It's not unlike the novel of *The Spy Who Loved Me*, just with an alien narrating the Doctor's adventures rather than a woman narrating James Bond's. It's quite an engaging narrative device that does a lot to

humanise Methelough, so it's a shame that it's not continuous the whole way through. There are occasional steps away from the Tentaculon to focus on the rest of the gang, which aren't bad by any means but draw the reader out of the otherwise distinctive tale. It seems that, based on the preview of the next issue, each character will get their own turn in spotlight. It's something to look forward to, especially if they do one focusing on Belinda's side of the story – she once again gets very little to do here.

The artwork and colouring are just as good as ever, with Sami Kivelä and Valentina Bianconi bringing the Panoptopolis' underwater zone to life in vivid detail. They're just as good at the large scenery as the smaller details, from the colours of an enormous red fish popping against the blue background to the unhinged look in the Warden's eyes. Their work also doesn't just provide a visual to go alongside the narrative – sometimes, it helps to enhance it. One moment in particular that stands out is the Doctor pulling wetsuits out of a cupboard, proclaiming “one size fits all”, while Annie the Adipose looks sceptically at the human-sized outfit on the floor next to her.

Things continue to shape up well for *The Prison Paradox*, with the team set to explore a more ghostly area of the Panoptopolis in the next issue. If things continue as they have so far, we're in for a spookily good time.



Methelough, this issue's main protagonist



Doctor Who: The Prison Paradox #2
Written by: Dan Watters
Artist: Sami Kivelä
Colourist: Valentina Bianconi





The changing faces of Doctor Who fandom

Paul Driscoll on life as a *Who* fan and father

A few musings for any vexed parents out there who, like me, might be wondering why we are still more obsessed with *Doctor Who* than our children are. I'm 56 now and my earliest *Doctor Who* memories include the unmasking of Linx in *The Time Warrior* and the stage show *Doctor Who and the Seven Keys to Doomsday*. I very quickly became a huge fan, much more so than my own parents had ever been.

I dropped most other interests. Only Liverpool football club survived the invasion of *Doctor Who*. My den was no longer the Secret Seven's shed – it was a TARDIS. My handed down collection of 45s from the Beatles and Lonnie Donegan gathered dust as Mankind and

Linx was formative for Paul – but less so for his son Luke



Geoff Love's disco versions of the theme tune were played on repeat (once I'd mastered positioning the needle on the right groove). I halted work on my *Mr. Men*-inspired comics to draw new adventures for the Fourth Doctor. I replaced the cap gun and cowboy outfit in my dressing-up box with an old brown dressing gown, a striped scarf and one of my Dad's broken screwdrivers.

My children, all six of them, have dipped in and out of the series to varying degrees. My first was in his mother's womb when the McGann movie was broadcast, my middle three were born around the start of the revival in 2005 and my youngest, Luke, was born two days after the Twelfth Doctor fought Robin Hood with a spoon.

Luke is 10 now and was the one who most reminded me of my own childhood. I even wrote a little piece about his love for *Doctor Who* in a *You and Who* anthology. But that was when he was under five.

He watched DVDs of Eccleston and Tennant to catch up on what had gone before and my *Doctor Who* figure collection became his. The toys-to-life video game *Lego Dimensions* furthered his interest – he spent most of his gaming time killing off the Doctor so he could regenerate, and we started to watch clips of the original series together to bring those mysterious faces to life.

Luke's interest began to wane during the Thirteenth Doctor's years. Despite my encouragement, he couldn't identify with the new heroes. It wasn't the stories – the scripts themselves didn't really matter. It was the characters. He'd stopped seeing the Doctor as a hero, not because of gender, but because others like Sheldon Cooper (*Young Sheldon*) and Dustin Henderson (*Stranger Things*) had taken her place.

There was the briefest of revivals for Luke with the 60th anniversary. The Tenth Doctor is his favourite incarnation, so he was excited to see Tennant and Tate return. But it wasn't the same. *The Star Beast* was a hit, but Luke lost concentration in the next two. He's only

watched a handful of Ncuti episodes, often walking away partway through. Though he's largely lost interest, he still carries a battered old Tenth Doctor figure with him. It's a relic of a lost age, one that seems now to have largely passed.

“The world of *Doctor Who* was somewhere we could all go, and feel a part of something else...”

This year, we took Luke to see the Series 15 finale at Bolton Cineworld. There was a glint in his eye afterwards, and an excitement in his recognition of Billie Piper as Rose and the Bad Wolf. But he's not asking for more. What the future brings is only a mild curiosity for him, so it seems that I'm now the only *Doctor Who* fan in the room once more. But why? Is it a failing of the series, is it *because* he's crafting his own identity or is something else going on?

It's an obvious point to make, but we have grown up in different times. Society has changed far more than the series has. I don't think the stories have aged in terms of plot, themes or even characters, but only in the way they are presented and the context behind them. That's the challenge of any *Doctor Who* producer. How to make those timeless stories resonate with each new audience. How to capture the imagination in such a way as to foster brand loyalty.

Nostalgia alone, however, isn't enough. It would just result in a cycle of revivals that only appeals to those were there in the 'good-old-days'. It's not enough to wait for the next generation of fans to take up the mantle. Layers upon layers of memories and mythos can soon become too much, leading to the occasional attempted clear out – think Chris Chibnall's first series. These soft reboots usually only last so long and then the old costumes are put back on once more. The attempt of the mooted CBeebies cartoon to try and engage the young sounds like a good plan, but the fact remains that it won't appeal to Luke's generation. Will the Doctor ever be a hero for them again?



***Stranger Things*' Dustin – a challenger for the Doctor?**

When I was growing up, the sense of being an outsider was profound. It was the key factor in why I identified with the Doctor. It helped that other kids in the playground weren't interested. They were busy collecting and exchanging *Star Wars* cards. I joined in, and for the record I loved *Star Wars* too – it was the first movie I saw at the cinema and Dave Prowse was a family friend. But I never felt I truly belonged among the *Star Wars* fans, or even that I wanted to belong to the crowd.

“If *Doctor Who* is to enjoy a resurgence... then we have to keep talking about it.”

Doctor Who was outside the conversation. No one else knew that Darth Vader had been in the series, and no one else would have cared. That had a profound effect on me. I could see others who were stood on the margins for very different reasons. We could be allies, even if our estrangement had other roots – whether religion, race, sexuality or physical characteristics. The world of *Doctor Who* was somewhere we could all go, and feel a part of something else, something greater, more beautiful.

Today, things are different. The boundaries between worlds are blurred, and there are so many ways to find alternative forms of belonging. Other worlds are there to see and hear at the click of a button. The downside to this is that I think there's more of a tourist mentality to fandom now. People dip in and out at will as they seek new experience after new experience. It sounds like a certain Time Lord, wandering in the fourth dimension. It's certainly the case with Luke, who has been in and out of several fanbases. Like most others his age, his primary media is TikTok and YouTube. He might binge a full series of something, depending on what the flavour of the week is online. As such, *Doctor Who*'s cliffhangers hold little interest for him. Their role in drawing viewers back in next time is much diminished from my childhood. Now, it's far more likely that Luke and his peers will either watch it all when it's out, or they won't see it at all.

If that's the case, then it seems that the key to making this generation fans of *Doctor Who* relies on social media. That, however, is much harder than it might sound. I hear positive things about *Doctor Who* on social media, but none of that seems to reach my son or his friends. Targeted advertising and personalised algorithms restrict who sees what, making it that much harder to keep *Doctor Who* in front of their eyes. There are popular *Who* influencers, podcasts and video essays, but they tend to be made by fans for fans. Or, more accurately, by a certain persuasion of fans for a certain persuasion of fans.

If *Doctor Who* is to enjoy a resurgence among my son's generation, then we have to keep talking about it. The same diversity of views and ideas that powered fanzines will also spread the show online. Even if someone comes across *Doctor Who* solely through memes or out-of-context clips, it'll gradually find its way to new fans. Cross-overs, spin-offs and multimedia adventures will also play a role in pushing *Doctor Who* into new online spheres. But the main thing is to keep the conversation going – as long as we're talking, then *Doctor Who* can never die.

You won't

BELIEVE

what's
inside The
Screaming
Jungle!

The future?



"How far, Doctor? How long have you lived?"

Images credit: David Howe

Long before the birth of the world wide web, **David J Howe** was among the fans documenting *Doctor Who's* past and present. He speaks to *CT* about his fascination with the show's production, publications and products.

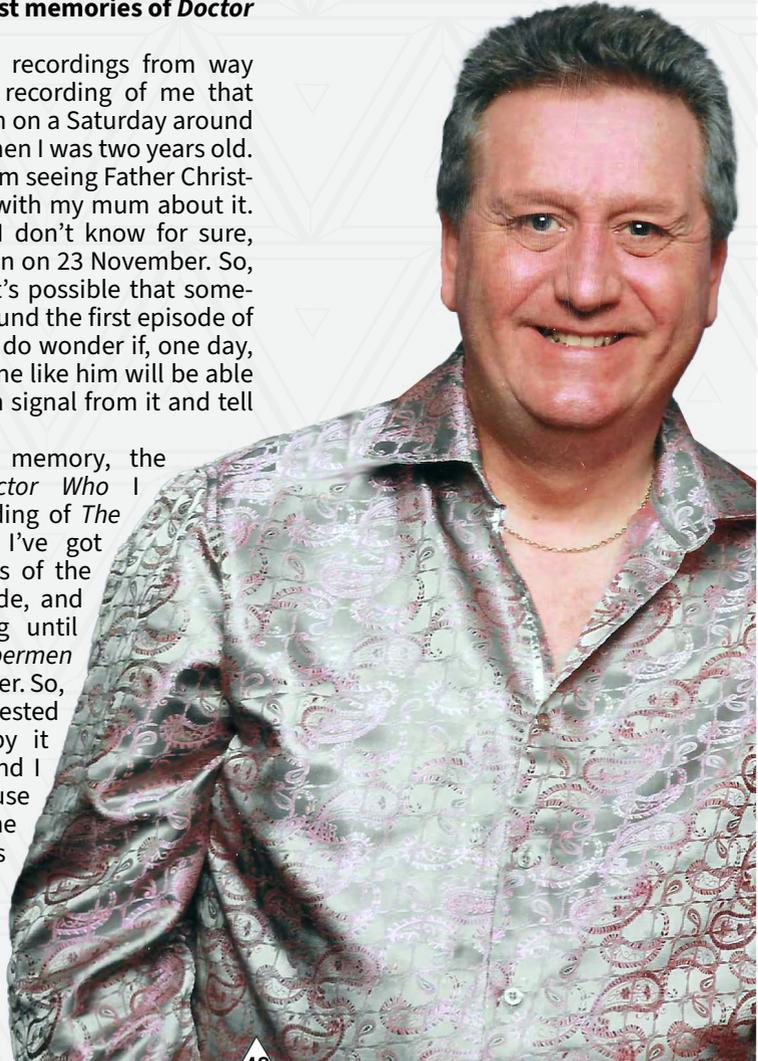
Interview by **James Ashway**

David's love of *Doctor Who's* monsters sparked a lifelong passion for the show

What are your earliest memories of *Doctor Who*?

The family has tape recordings from way back, and there's a recording of me that must have been taken on a Saturday around Christmas in 1963, when I was two years old. I'd just come back from seeing Father Christmas and I'm talking with my mum about it. This recording, and I don't know for sure, could have been taken on 23 November. So, as I'm burbling on, it's possible that somewhere in the background the first episode of *Doctor Who* was on. I do wonder if, one day, Mark Ayres or someone like him will be able to extract a television signal from it and tell me for sure!

As for my actual memory, the earliest bit of *Doctor Who* I remember is the ending of *The Evil of the Daleks*. I've got quite good memories of the Daleks in that episode, and then there's nothing until *The Tomb of the Cybermen* around six months later. So, I was definitely interested in and influenced by it from an early age, and I think that was because of the monsters. In the mid-late 1960s, I was also very into *Lost in Space* which was also thanks to its monster of the week approach. There was always a cave with a new monster in it,



and they stuck in my imagination. It was the same with *Doctor Who*. I remember the Daleks, I remember the Cybermen, and I remember not watching *The Ice Warriors* because I was too scared. Then I remember bits and bobs from the rest of that series, and then I remember *The Mind Robber*, *The Dominators* and bits of Season Six onwards more clearly. Other shows like *The Tomorrow People* or *Ace of Wands* caught my imagination for a bit, but *Doctor Who* always had the best ideas and the best monsters. It's a shame that kids these days tend to get cartoons over live-action drama, as I think that the live action shows I saw had a formative influence on me. My interest in the monsters also meant that I was always interested in how they created them, and the show more widely.

That interest in the behind-the-scenes stayed with me, and it grew as the 1970s progressed. In the process of looking back for my book, I've found that a lot of my memories are *Doctor Who*-related, whether because I was hurrying back to see an episode or that I couldn't see an episode. For example, I couldn't watch an episode of *The Curse of Peladon* because my dad

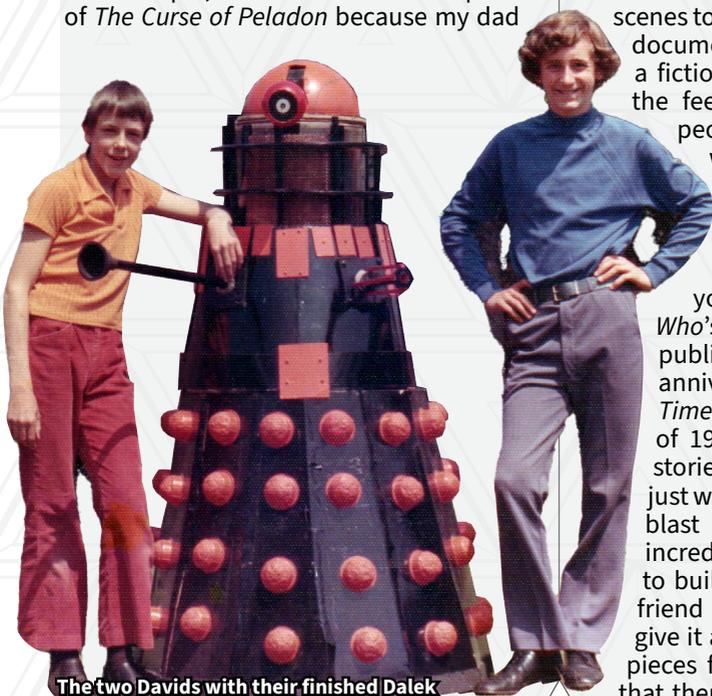
wanted to watch *U.F.O.* instead. Instead, he rigged up a way of allowing me to listen to the audio of the episode, so at least I got to experience it. We then got a colour television in time for *The Sea Devils*, and so the first thing we saw in colour was the *Sea Devils* rising out of the sea at the start of the fourth episode. So, *Doctor Who* really seems to be at the core of my life.

“...*Doctor Who* always had the best ideas and the best monsters.”

It's interesting how memories seem to latch onto certain things over others.

It is! If you'd asked me what else I was watching, I'm not sure I could remember much else from the early 1970s aside from the ones I've already mentioned. Season Eight was when I really started watching it avidly, and I remember everything from then on. It was also around the time that two key publications in my life came out. The first was Piccolo's *The Making of Doctor Who*, which was a behind the scenes told through UNIT and Time Lord documents. While it was something of a fictionalisation, it's hard to explain the feeling of reading this book to people today, as we have such a wealth of details about what's going on behind the scenes.

In 1972, there was nothing, and it was only by keeping the *Radio Times* clippings that you'd have some sense of *Doctor Who*'s production. The other key publication was the *Doctor Who* 10th anniversary special from the *Radio Times*, which came out at the end of 1973. It broke down the actual stories with photos and details that just weren't available until then. That blast of history and nostalgia was incredible. It even included plans to build a Dalek, and so me and my friend David Butterworth just had to give it a go. We built it out of bits and pieces found in skips and rivers, and that then led to me producing my first



The two Davids with their finished Dalek

Doctor Who film. My dad had access to an eight-millimetre film camera so we took footage of the Dalek trundling around the streets, and started putting plots into that. All along, it was feeding my knowledge for how you make a show like *Doctor Who*.

Between your family's film stock and recording technology, it seems like documenting was in your blood. Do you think that had an impact on your life?

It absolutely has. My dad had a reel-to-reel tape recorder, and so I think from *The Sontaran Experiment* onwards I started recording *Doctor Who* myself. I'm not sure why I didn't do *Robot!* But I started keeping cuttings from the *Radio Times* and newspapers as well, so I was amassing material about the show. From *The Robots of Death* I started taking pictures from the television screen, and then in 1978 or so my Dad got a video recorder and I was able to start recording with that.

“...it's hard to explain the feeling of reading [*The Making of Doctor Who*] to people today...”

I'd also encountered DWAS at the end of 1976, which was another turning point. There were earlier fan clubs, but this was the origin of what we now recognise as *Doctor Who* fandom. With a few people I met, such as my good friend Paul Simpson, I decided to start my own fanzine. We started visiting the likes of Malcolm Hulke and Terrence Dicks, as well as the offices of WH Allen. Now, I could start combining all of this information and material I had about the show into something for everyone, and it snowballed from there. It was a hobby that I did in the evenings, but it became bigger and better as I strove to do more. There were barely any photocopiers in 1977 but I managed to track one down, and photocopied the issues myself. As the technology improved then the issues got better as well. I absolutely loved doing it. It gave me a wealth of contacts and information that meant that when Jeremy Bentham stepped down from DWAS' reference department he



With Zig and Zag



Behind the scenes on Downtime



David, Mary Tamm and a furry friend



PHOTOSPOT



Forays into fanzines



Do you think that the changing access to information about the show changed *Doctor Who* fandom?

That's a good question. I think it has to some extent, and you can see this through how reference books have developed. When we did *Doctor Who: The Sixties*, we put everything we knew in there. After that, it was two years until *The Seventies*. During that time, we got access to the BBC Written Archives Centre at Caversham and suddenly we had far more information than we could possibly use. So, the level of incidental detail in *The Seventies* is far greater than its predecessor because of this, but there's also a lot that was left out. We had to be much more selective in what would tell the best story of the decade in question, as people weren't looking for too much information at the time. But now, with the amount of information about *Doctor Who* that's readily available online, I think there's more of an appetite from fans now to know precise details that they wouldn't find anywhere else. That's one of the reasons that Telos published *The Doctor Who Production Diary: The Hartnell Years*, which delved into the era in levels of detail which haven't been seen before. There's an astonishing amount of information in there. You wonder how it might have affected Mark Gatiss when he was putting together *An Adventure in Space and Time*. Would it have helped, or would it have blown his brain? Having so much information is both a blessing and a curse.

“I always say that I started collecting when I stopped throwing things away.”

What made you want to take the jump to publishing books yourself?

As well as being involved in *Doctor Who*, I was also very involved in the British Fantasy Society. One of my friends in the society started publishing horror novellas, and I thought this format would be a great fit for *Doctor Who*. So, I used my contacts at the BBC and they were up for it, but only if I had a company. So, I set up Telos Pub-

lishing to start releasing these novellas, as well as to release a book on a show called *Urban Gothic* which I also loved. Of course, it's foolhardy to run a company based on just one thing you don't actually own. So, we branched out into books about *Blake's 7* and other shows and this meant that, when the BBC did take the fiction license back, we had plenty of other projects to be getting on with.

One of Telos' first books was about *Doctor Who* merchandise, of which you are a noted collector. How did the collection start, and when did it hit you how much you had?

I always say that I started collecting when I stopped throwing things away. There were things that I bought, like *Doctor Who Magazine* or the Target books, and there were things that would come to me, such as scripts or newspaper cuttings, and I kept them. In fact, one of the few things I remember *not* getting was the Leela Denys Fisher figure, because I didn't want to buy a girly doll as a kid. I must have been mad! In the end, I had to buy it much more expensively many years later!

As I bought more stuff, I fell in love with the packaging, design and range of merchandise, from 'The War of the Daleks' game from the 1970s to the Marks & Spencer underpants. It only really hit me how



Daleks on display

much I had when I went to move house. I remember that, when I got married in the early 1980s and moved into a new home, the whole of the loft became the *Doctor Who* cave. Then we moved again and we needed to convert the loft there so that it could all fit in. It got to the point where I had to pick my way through channels of stuff just spilling out everywhere. I was just accumulating so much stuff at that point, but collecting it gave me such a nostalgia hit. It only accelerated in the 1980s and 1990s when I was becoming something of a *Doctor Who* historian, and people would come to me to check details of the show's history. There wasn't a lot of money washing around at the time, so I would normally ask for a contributor's copy of whatever I was helping out with. That's when I started advising businesses like Fine Art Castings



The collection has now morphed into a full-blown museum



David with his co-author on *I am the Doctor*, Jon Pertwee

about their models, or helping out with trading cards, and ensuring the information was all accurate. Then, when the new series came back, I was friendly with Character Options as well. I was very lucky that all these organisations were willing to let me have review samples, and it helped me keep on top of all the merchandise that was coming out. I don't get as much any more, but I still get sent various things to review that get added to the collection. I also try and keep up with certain ranges myself, such as Demon Records' excellent vinyls and the Character Options figures. But these days a lot of what I get tends to be the outliers, the stuff that's a bit more unusual. So, I had to get the Ncuti Gatwa Barbie, and the *Doctor Who* matryoshka dolls. It's stuff that's so crazy that you just need to have it!

Even though I've slowed down my collecting, I've still got a lot of stuff. So, I've established a little private museum which I show people around by prior arrangement. Even then, I've got so much that I can't have it all on display. There's stuff like clothing or paperwork which is really hard to display, so that's still being stored around the house as well. It really creeps up on you when you can't see it all! But I get a lot of pleasure from sharing my collection with other people. I'm not the kind of person who wants to hide my stuff away. I like to see the collection through other people's eyes and the enjoyment they get from it. It means it hasn't all been a waste of time!

Now we've caught up to the modern day, you've just released a book about your life as a fan. How did that come about?

Who Me! is all about my life story, as that's what the publishers wanted. They told me that I'd done so much stuff, from being a fan to writing books with Jon Pertwee and running Telos, and that they wanted me to share the stories that I'd built up. So, that's what I did. It starts way back in the early days, in what John Nathan-Turner used to describe as "19 hundred and frozen to death", when I was a young man, and comes through to the modern day. I really enjoyed writing it and it flowed out of me. I wanted it to be fun and a tribute to *Doctor Who*, so it's deliberately light and breezy. I hope people enjoy reading it and get the rush of enthusiasm about the creativeness that came out of this daft old TV show. I hope it goes well, and if it does I'd certainly like to write some more books.

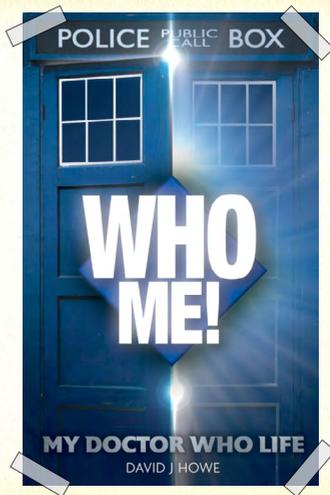
David Howe, thank you very much!



Sil from *The Devil Seeds of Arodor*

The TARDIS Library

We've been given access to the Doctor's collection of literature from across time and space. This month, we're reading:



Owen Taylor on the world of *Doctor Who* through David Howe's eyes

Growing up as a *Doctor Who* fan in the 1980s and 1990s, one name that would be very familiar would be that of David J Howe. Various reference works would bear his name, from books full of in-depth production details to merchandise guides. He's now written an autobiography of his fan journey, spanning from his childhood all the way to the present day. I found a lot of similarities with my own life as a *Doctor Who* fan within its pages, while marvelling at Howe's experiences and associations that most of us can only dream of.

This book draws you in like many of the interviews Howe has conducted over the years, with an easy narrative style that makes you feel like you're sat at one of the various dinners mentioned throughout the book. It's also, in an open nod to Douglas Adams and Terry Pratchett, full of footnotes that help the reader understand references or expand on the anecdotes. These help readers from all kinds of background to be drawn into Howe's life, beginning with a childhood driven by exploring the mechanics of television production. His love of audio, film recording and photography will be familiar to many who sat with a cassette tape next to the TV capturing the audio of an episode in the days before stream-

ing and home media. In Howe's case, this passion for recording led to his increasing involvement with fanzines and reference guides as he became a bigger part of nascent *Doctor Who* fandom.

The next stage of Howe's wondrous tale takes him into the workings of the show as he watches production from the gallery, helps out at conventions and begins friendships with actors such as Fraser Hines along the way. While *WHO ME!* is fundamentally a book about the joy of this journey and his love of the show, this section is tinged with sadness as we see the effect of early friendships with people like Malcome Hulke and Terrance Dicks, and their sad passing, on Howe's life. Perhaps the most poignant chapter in the book is the one that focuses on Howe's relationship with Jon Pertwee, and the impact Jon's sudden death had, as they worked on his autobiography.

WHO ME! doesn't wallow in the sad times and continues with a regeneration, much like the show itself, as the years to follow bring new adventures for Howe. The creation of Telos Publishing allows him to realise his lifelong love of the Target novelisations in his own publishing house, helped by his teenage associations with both Target itself and later Virgin Books. This focus on Telos occupies the latter half of the book, as well as Howe's ongoing involvement in a variety of conventions. Even

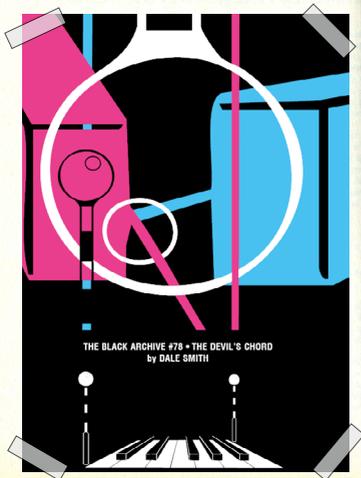
a brush with mortality doesn't deter him from grabbing every opportunity to spread his love for *Doctor Who* and its community.

It can be easy to be jealous of such a life, but the obvious care and humility in *WHO ME!* instead provide a sense of wonder for its readers. For those already familiar with the world of *Doctor Who*, this is a fascinat-

ing look at how fandom grew and evolved. For those not yet as involved, it's a wondrous tale of a life where every chance is taken. Either way, grab this book, pull up a chair and immerse yourself in Howe's tale!

***Who Me!* by David J Howe is available from:**
bedfordsquarepublishers.co.uk

We're also reading:



Hamish Crawford discusses the Beatles, Bond and a *Black Archive*.

Dale Smith's analysis of *The Devil's Chord* commences with a pugnacious gauntlet thrown by Russell T Davies: "People are perfectly free to have opinions, but they've given it five minutes' thought. We live with it 24 hours a day. You can absolutely guarantee we have given it more thought, and we have more reasons for doing what we've done than you can possibly imagine." Suitably mollified, Smith devotes considerably more than five minutes thought to this musical episode, crafting an insightful and eclectic *Black Archive*.

Smith's analysis is rooted in a thought-provoking cultural history of post-war Britain, all of which is underpinned by The Beatles. This *Black Archive* contextualises their now-forgotten rebellious iconography and considers the four mortal musicians' distance from their band and its eternal phenomenon. The other side of the coin

is James Bond, with Smith heavily citing John Higgs' *Love and Let Die* to use 007 as the symbol of the establishment. Bond is something of a third wheel here, reduced to embodying tradition and remorseless longevity against the Fab Four's mutable, zeitgeist-compressed innovation.

"...*The Devil's Chord* has launched a dreamier discussion of ideas, riffing on the episode's themes..."

What follows over the next couple of chapters is a wide-ranging discussion of *The Devil's Chord*'s themes, taking in everything from music's status beyond all human culture and history to the Byzantine nuances of copyright law. While these insights are stimulating, it does mean that it's not until the fourth chapter that the *Black Archive* focuses on the episode itself. Here, alas, the book runs aground amid many quotes from RTD on the episode's inspiration, casting and myriad other topics. These anecdotes obscure critical appraisal of the episode itself, meaning *The Devil's Chord* gets pretty short shrift in its own *Black Archive*. That's not to say there aren't valuable insights – Smith reveals the episode's surprising musical gaffes, from confusion over tune, harmony, and melody to, bizarrely, not featuring a *bona fide* Devil's Chord. But there are plenty of ideas that don't feel fully thought through. For example, we are told early on that *The Devil's Chord* is neither a musical episode nor a celebrity historical, but not what it actually is. Instead, Smith stresses the finished teleplay's ordinariness: its *Pyramids of Mars*-aping structure and its place in a season that settled for retooling past Davies-era story arcs after promising something more radical. The fi-

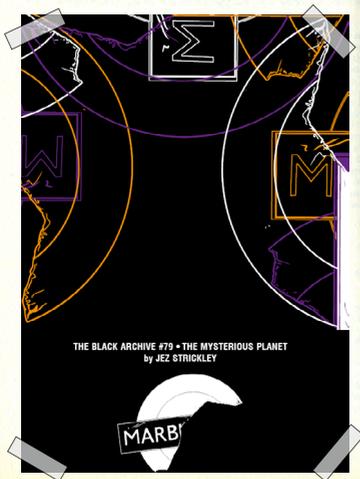
nal chapter, meanwhile, upbraids certain *Doctor Who* fans as people prone to eviscerating any new regeneration. It's a fair point – too much vitriol has been hurled at the undeserving Time Lord and their handlers for me to disagree. However, I would have liked a wider range of critical views to support this, rather than relying heavily on the assessments of Elizabeth Sandifer.

Despite having some misgivings about this *Black Archive's* analysis of its focal episode, the five chapters, and the two witty

appendices that follow, ensure this book makes for a rewarding read overall. It's ultimately appropriate that *The Devil's Chord* has launched a dreamier discussion of ideas, riffing on the episode's themes just as sixties musicians reinvented existing musical styles. There's the occasional bum note, but this analysis is more than worth a moment of your time.

***Black Archive #78: The Devil's Chord* by Dale Smith is available from: obversebooks.co.uk**

We're also reading:



Exploring a wide range of philosophies and hypotheses, Strickley uses the theme of place as a starting point for his book. Ravolox, née Earth, is a planet with an identity crisis, and it's not the only body with that problem. The underground dwellers have a double agent smuggling people to the surface in their midst, while the dread robot Drathro is a clunky collision of self-awareness and programming. In his exploration of *Planet's* major characters and settings, Strickley unearths plenty of fascinating ideas, adding new strata to the hoary story.

“...author Jez Strickley has found plenty to say about Holmes' final full narrative...”

Nick Smith revisits the first part of *The Trial of a Time Lord*

The *Black Archives* have tackled all kinds of *Doctor Who* stories. Some adventures rich in themes and deeper messages immediately seem worthy of a deep dive, such as *Vengeance on Varos* and *The Massacre*. But *The Mysterious Planet* isn't one of those. At first blush, it seems hardly worthy of a book-length critical analysis. Though it may kick off a series long arc, its plot is a light, whipped-up mix of Robert Holmes moments, including an amusing conman double act (Glitz and Dibber) and two capable youths recruited by dint of their intellect (the mumbling Humker and Tandrell). Nonetheless, author Jez Strickley has found plenty to say about Holmes' final full narrative.

One particularly compelling strand of analysis looks at how we are defined by our surroundings. They can provide shelter and home comforts, or hazards and uncertainty. We might see a place as sanctuary, like the underground dwellers in their sterile abode, or fear it, as they dread the surface. Strickley juggles the terms topophilia (love of place) and topophobia (fear of place) as he goes underground, overground, pondering free. He delves into texts such as Yi-Fu Tuan's *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes and Values*, which conjectures that a place might not necessarily be geographical, but “a phenomenon rendered meaningful by human experience.”

Up top, Queen Kattrya rules her farming folk with no written laws and no ancient babysitting robot. The Tribe of the Free have chosen to settle in a verdant area,

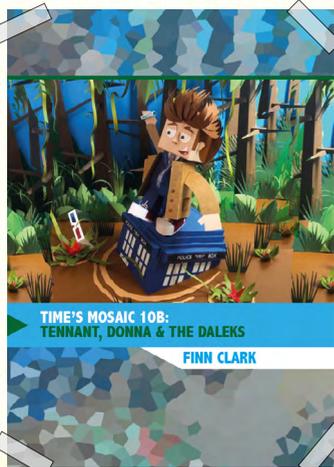
ploughing the land and living in rudimentary dwellings. Their sense of place is just as strong as their underground counterparts. As he compares the two societies, Strickley uses themes such as the four elements and ecology as launch-points to share complex concepts. Philosopher John Locke's argument that consciousness creates personal identity, Drathro's potential sentience and the wisdom of experience are just a few of the ideas Strickley bandies about.

You'll find scant mention of Glitz and Dibber in these discussions, which I thought was a missed opportunity – it would be interesting to compare their mercenary approach to Drathro's utilitarian views or Peri's empathy. Strickley could also take a tip or two from Glitz and Dibber, since their

comedic scenes help to keep *The Mysterious Planet* moving. While there are some witty subheadings, the book feels a little dry in places under the glare of Strickley's analysis. But don't let that stop you from getting deep with the underground dwellers and down to Earth with the Tribe of the Free. By encouraging us to think about our own sense of place, Strickley lends power to our psychologically shared values. We can watch our favourite show in a cinema, on television or even on our phones, and never leave our shared comfort zone. Like *Ravolox*, our location can change, but *Doctor Who* will always be a constant.

Black Archive #79: *The Mysterious Planet* by Jez Strickley is available from: obversebooks.co.uk

We're also reading:



Steve Claringbold discovers a new appreciation for the Tenth Doctor & Donna

I've often wondered what it is about Tennant's Doctor that keeps fans, and show-runners, returning time and time again. Personally, the Tenth Doctor isn't one I've returned to often, whereas Eccleston's all too brief stint is in hard rotation. In fact, it must have been almost 10 years since I last watched the Tenth Doctor's adventures. With that in mind, I was excited to read *Time's Mosaic 10B* by Finn Clark, part of Obverse Books's ongoing attempt to chroni-

cle as much of *Doctor Who* in every imaginable kind of medium as possible. This volume focuses on the Tenth Doctor and Donna Noble, with some Dalek adventures thrown in for good measure. It's well worth a read, and has made me much more interested in giving the Tenth Doctor's adventures another go.

Time's Mosaic 10B starts with a great introduction, that's well worth a read in its own right, before diving headfirst into the television stories. I thought that the reviews were fair, highlighting not just the niggles with the stories but also their successes as well. Clark also shares snippets of contemporary reviews as a comparison for his own, providing a variety of different avenues to discuss how these stories have fared over time. I also appreciated how he pointed out things in the episodes that I'd managed to miss on previous watches, making me more likely to revisit them in the future.

Following the televised adventures, Clark's attention turns to the Tenth Doctor's adventures in prose. I was in total agreement with his thoughts on the novels, as there were a lot of missed opportunities to make some of these books so much better. The short stories fare better, getting a more favourable review on the whole, before it's time to consider the comics. I found this section a particularly

interesting read, because comics are a medium I've never managed to get into. I've been bought collections in the past, but haven't been able to make much headway into them. Clark highlighted a variety of aspects about these stories that I wasn't aware of, and has definitely swayed me into having another try at reading them. Last, but not least, are the adventures of the Daleks, forming the cherry on the top. There's plenty of information for *Doctor Who* fans to enjoy in here, so much so that there were points when reading this book where I questioned my fanhood because I just wasn't aware of these details.

With the Daleks defeated, I was sad when *Time's Mosaic 10B* came to a final end. It's a joy to read and I genuinely couldn't fault

this comprehensive book in any way. It doesn't delve into the Tenth Doctor's Big Finish adventures, admittedly, but then there's only so much that one book can cover! Besides, readers won't be short changed with what they've got – there's so much Tennant/Tate and Dalek media included that I'd never even heard of and am now interested in searching out. It's also made me keen to discover the other books in the *Time's Mosaic* series to see what there is to be revealed about all the other Doctors. I really can't recommend this book enough – there's definitely something for all *Who* fans here.

***Time's Mosaic 10B: Tennant, Donna & The Daleks* by Finn Clark is available from: obversebooks.co.uk**

We're also reading:



Alan Darlington recaps the books of *Doctor Who's* Icons range

Penguin has just released the fourth of its Icons range of *Doctor Who* novels.

These novels seem designed to pick up on the popularity of the show's 'celebrity historical' episodes, where various Doctors end up having adventures with a variety of famous faces. Whilst I have no problem with this basic principle, I believe that the range needs a bit of a re-think.

First of all, I'm not familiar with many of the 'icons' who are used in the stories. I

admit that might just be down to my own ignorance, and that these are names that many might know. It's not necessarily a problem, provided I came away from the novels having gained an appreciation of someone new. However, I did not.

The range began with *Frida Kahlo and the Skull Children*. While I know that Frida Kahlo was an artist, I'm not that familiar with her artworks. A quick Google revealed a lot of her portraits, including one of a girl in a skull mask – presumably the inspiration for the title and villain of the book. I don't think that the text, however, drew this out. Instead, Kahlo could have been replaced with someone completely different and I'm not sure it would have made much difference to the plot.

Next up came *Charles Darwin and the Silurian Survival*. It's the second time the evolutionary scientist has crossed paths with *Doctor Who*, following on from Big Finish's *Bloodtide* almost 25 years ago, and is probably the best-used icon of this range so far. Although the adventure comes relatively early in his travels, the novel picks up on general knowledge about the scientist and builds on it, involving him in the story in a way that a more generic character could not.

The third release in this range is *Shirley Jackson and the Chaos Box*, which builds on the author's short story *The Lottery*.

While the name initially meant little to me, I do recall having listened to an adaptation of this short story. This novel focuses more on building on *The Lottery* than it does on fleshing out Shirley Jackson.

“...I like the idea of the Icons books... However, I’m not as certain on the range’s execution.”

The most recent release in the range is *One Night Only (A Fela Kuti Story)*, featuring another icon I hadn’t heard of before. While I came away from the novel knowing a little more about the Nigerian singer and activist, I can’t say I know about him in any great detail – and I think that’s probably true of the target age group for these books as well. Kuti is not integral to the plot, and his main role just seems to be to play music at the end – a little like the Beatles in *The Devil’s Chord*. Without going back and counting, I estimate that he only appeared in 10 or so pages, and didn’t do a lot in most of them. I would have liked this novel to have had an a larger page count to give Kuti more of a role in the plot, as well as to avoid such a rushed ending after an initially strong setup.

All in all, I like the idea of the Icons books. Introducing young readers to these figures, especially lesser known ones, harks back to *Doctor Who’s* original mission of education. However, I’m not as certain on the range’s execution. The celebrity historical is a tried and tested format on television, and I have enjoyed many of these stories. What makes them work, however, is the focus on the celebrity as an indispensable part of the narrative, whereas the novels seem to put a famous name to an otherwise quite generic character. This is why the Darwin novel worked best in my opinion, while the others haven’t succeeded in engaging me. With a fifth novel due to be released next year, I hope that it will involve its chosen icon in the plot in the way that they truly deserve.

The Icons range is available from all good booksellers

Into the archives

The Editor delves into December *CT’s* of years past in search of festive spirit

Celestial Toyroom #109 – 1985



After the resurgence in festive spirit in *CT*, it was time for the groundbreaking *CT* #109 – the first Christmas-themed issue of this fanzine. It had a festive masthead as well as artworks depicting stories shown around Xmas, as Ian Bremner explains: “It is incredible to think that, 22 years ago this Christmas, the first-ever Dalek story was being screened by the BBC. When I realised that, I began to think of all the *Doctor Who* serials that have been screened around Christmas. Well, if truth were known, there are not many. However, with *CT* Editor’s licence, I managed to work out the stories nearest to Christmas each year...”

In the end, the team whittled down their 22 possible stories to a hand-picked selection, spanning *The Dalek Invasion of Earth* through to *Attack of the Cybermen*.

The following year, in 1986’s *CT* #121, Neil Hutchings raised the Christmas bar further with a back cover dedicated to ‘Christmas Toyroom’. A decade on from the first, December *CT’s* were now more festive than ever.

NEW
THE NEW
Doctor
WHO
ADVENTURERS

**ILLUSTRATED
 BY ELBERT
 SMITH**

IDEA BY RICHARD UNWIN, COMPILED BY JAMES ASHWAY

A team of explorers are undertaking a journey too broad and too deep for the small screen. Their mission: to read the Virgin New Adventures novels from beginning to end, to see how a group of relatively younger fans react to that particular slice of the Wilderness Years. This time, all aboard the New Adventures...



John Ashway is 32 and founded the *Big Who Listen*, a Big Finish blog. Reading the New Adventures is Central to his Metropolitan lifestyle – but with *Transit* has he met his Waterloo (& City)?



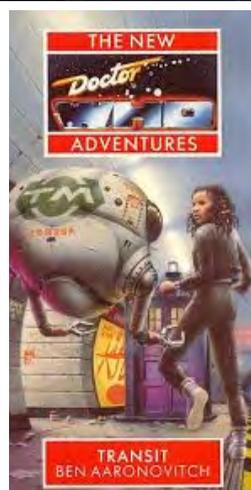
Georgia Harper is 31 and has spent almost a decade in autism policy advocating against stereotypes. She is delighted to get the chance to read a *Doctor Who* book about trains.



Evan Jones is 30 and fully qualified to drive a Category B vehicle within the UK. Their current car is not a spritely yellow roadster but a small yet practical car. Her name is Carlotte Ritchie.



Filip Wieland is 29, and has been known to enjoy a good train journey. He would be excited for services to Pluto, but at this rate he'd settle for the completion of HS2 within his lifetime.



TRANSIT
 BY BEN AARONOVITCH • PUBLICATION DATE: DECEMBER 1992

It's the ultimate in mass transit systems, a network of interstitial tunnels that bind the planets of the solar system together. Earth to Pluto in forty minutes with a supersave non-premium off-peak travelcard.

But something is living in the network, chewing its way to the very heart of the system and leaving a trail of death and mutation behind it.

Once again a reluctant Doctor is dragged into human history. Back down amongst the joyboys, freesurfers, chessfans, politicians and floozies, where friends are more dangerous than enemies and one man's human being is another's psychotic killing machine.

Once again, the Doctor is all that stands between humanity and its own mistakes.

Even before they begin, the New Adventurers are concerned about the novel's layout

Georgia: Oh God, a glossary...

John: I would have loved to have known there was a glossary, but they put it at the end and provided no hint it existed!

The Doctor stands on an ancient beach as a lungfish crawls its way onto land. Before his eyes, it evolves from fish to amphibian, to reptile, to mammal, to human.

John: A nice bit of symbolism to start...

Georgia: I assume this "mistake" sequence flashes through everyone's head when they turn on the news?

Filip: The Doctor is acting like a tweed-wearing father who thinks he knows best, but is actually stuck in the 1950s:

On Mars, Sol Transit System (STS) employees Credit Card, Dogface, Blondie, Lam-baba and Old Sam take a call from their manager, Ming, about a power failure. This network sends passengers throughout the solar system in subspace tunnels, but someone is stealing power from it.

John: That's a lot of names to remember!

Georgia: Yes! A *Doctor Who* trains novel!

Filip: Having previously known Ben Aaronovitch mostly for *Rivers of London*, he really does like writing about cities.

Evan: I really don't like how the author is not explaining anything to me. I am utterly drowning in futuristic vibes.

Ming goes to check on the construction of the STS's first interstellar extension, the Stunnel. It's due to open the following day, but it's yet to be tested.

John: Untested, you say? What could possibly go wrong?

Georgia: Standard railway timings, then.

Filip: There's an awful lot of emphasis on how experimental this tunnel is – I'm sure it'll be fine though...

Evan: ...Are we not going to address that there's a literal character here called Ming the Merciless? The *Flash Gordon* villain?

On the Moon, student Kadiatu strikes a deal to deliver a package to Old Sam. She joins the STS engineers on their night out, but finds someone has stolen her money pen. Kadiatu races to catch up, but finds the TARDIS materialising in front of her.

John: This is definitely trying to be "adult". Kadiatu puts her own body up as collateral, before going to a crazy party and sleeping with Blondie. It's all a bit try-hard sexy.

Having built up sufficient power, the Stunnel is ready to be opened. The President of the Union of Solar Republics arrives to inaugurate the line, but as soon as Ming activates it everything goes dead.

John: The build-up to inevitable disaster is really effective at cultivating suspense.

Filip: Oh no, not the space Elizabeth Line!

The Doctor and Benny step out of the TARDIS. Suddenly, something crashes through the station. Benny and the TARDIS are thrown down the line, and the Doctor and Kadiatu are left in the rubble.

John: It's very unclear what actually happens in this scene. The Doctor is so casual that I didn't initially realise that the TARDIS and Benny were gone. Where's his sense of urgency?

Georgia: I was confused too – at one point I wondered if there were multiple crashes. In any case, "Check Destination on Front of Train" is *never* a good sign...

Filip: The Doctor's first interaction with Kadiatu is a little bizarre, but they get better.

Evan: We are now in Chapter Two, 27 pages into the book, and the Doctor and Benny have finally arrived on the scene. Aaronovitch is taking his sweet time.

The STS engineers find that everyone at the Stunnel terminus has been turned to a blue goo. Old Sam, a veteran of the Thousand Day War against the Ice Warriors, has to be sedated. Meanwhile, the Doctor and Kadiatu meet Francine – a veteran who served alongside Kadiatu’s father and is now a data broker. She promises to trace the money pen while the Doctor and Kadiatu get drunk at a bar.

John: What about Bernice?!? Why does the Doctor not seem to give a monkey’s?

Georgia: Happy birthday, Universe! Is this all some kind of Big Bang sequel then?

Filip: Some of the scene-setting here is really cool, and you get the sense that this is a living world we’re not seeing all of.



Benny finds herself alone at the bottom of a shaft. Lost in memories of the past, she hears a voice in her head. Emerging from the shaft, she is taken in by a pair of prostitutes, Zamina and Roberta, from Pluto.

John: I didn’t need to read that Zamina has the taste of dried semen in her mouth. That detail does not enhance the novel.

Georgia: Ah, so Benny was thrown from London to Pluto. We also get a glimpse of her tragic backstory here, which I hope gets explored more in the future.

Filip: We gotta keep that trademark VNA shock value going, I guess.

Evan: I am deeply puzzled by this book so far. We are jumping through so many places and characters at such a rate that I have only the faintest grasp of what’s happening.

The STS engineers reconstruct the incident at the Stunnel. They realise that there was something inside it that’s escaped into the rest of the transit network.

Georgia: [technobabble intensifies]

Filip: I like that this is gearing up to be a cosmic horror, which *Doctor Who* doesn’t do often enough.

Evan: A monster in a tunnel? Okay, this sounds like *Doctor Who* now.

Near Pluto, Mariko and Naran freesurf through the empty tunnels. An entity that looks like the President catches up with them on an empty platform and transforms them into ‘razvedka’.

John: Some new antagonists have just been forcibly recruited. The transformed humans are vividly described, with just enough detail left out for you to form your own twisted imagining of their new appearance.

The Doctor wakes up in Kadiatu’s apartment. He finds that she’s studying time

travel, including his own adventures, and considers destroying her research. He flips a coin and loses, so puts it back safely.

John: I guess the TARDIS took the Doctor where he needed to go again, because otherwise this is an outrageous coincidence.

Georgia: Kadiatu's companion audition is going well, though I wish we got to spend more time with Benny. Also, the Doctor turns up his kidneys to cure a hangover.

Filip: Kadiatu is Not Like The Other Girls.

Evan: I have a funny feeling that the Doctor is going to regret that coin flip. We'll see.

Ming is promoted to Director-General of the STS. Elsewhere, Benny, Zamina and Roberta pitch a team-up to the local gang. Benny can see a greater purpose in her head, but can't quite make sense of it.

Georgia: Do we need to know this much about Ming's sex life?

Evan: This is such a Grown-Up book for Grown-Up *Doctor Who* Fans who talk about Grown-Up Things.

John: Ming is living her polygamous best life, and generally doing her best as the closest thing around to a person in charge!

Filip: The Stop seems to be a poor caricature of pre-gentrification Peckham crossed with *Lord of the Flies*, and Benny takes charge on the basis of being an adult among a gang of mostly literal children.

As they look after Old Sam, the STS Engineers discover that Francine is after them.

Georgia: It sounds like the Thousand Day War has taken their toll on all of them – they're essentially androids at this point...

Mariko and her gang of newly-converted commuters meet with the rest of the President's forces. Another razvedka gang attacks the STS Engineers and their main-

tenance train. Blondie and Old Sam hold them off, but Dogface is seriously injured.

Georgia: A "go faster knob" is more at my level of technobabble, to be honest.

Filip: It's worth pointing out that the maintenance train is actually a repurposed steam locomotive, which is very cool.

Evan: Everytime I read Dogface I can't help but think of the Lupari from Series 13.

Benny has started a full-blown riot on Pluto which has led to the death of thousands, including Roberta. Old Sam and Blondie suit up in ex-military body armour and head down the line towards Pluto.

Georgia: Benny has just been involved in something huge, and we've all missed it because we were following the never-ending stream of engineers and razvedka!

John: Benny's actions and thoughts have been left vague to this point – now it's made clear she's controlled by the big nasty.

Filip: It's baffling to think someone would approve track maintenance crews having machine guns, but it comes in handy here.

The Doctor and Kadiatu are also travelling to Pluto, and the Doctor realises that Kadiatu is a distant descendant of the Brigadier. They find the TARDIS embedded in the wall beyond the end of the line. Benny threatens them with a gun.

Georgia: I want "We are all lost luggage in the Victoria Station of life" on a poster.

Filip: It's so annoying when you park your time machine wrong, and it gets towed away.

Evan: Kadiatu's heritage is doing a lot of work to make her seem really important to the reader.

The arrival of Old Sam and Blondie allows the Doctor to knock the gun out of Ber-



Kadiatu's inbuilt training activates, and she holds off the attackers with Blondie and Old Sam. After the battle, the Doctor takes the group to his house in Kent, a base of operations he's used in many bodies and centuries. Meanwhile, at the Stunnel, something is building up.

Georgia: I'm here for the Doctor's pasta era.

Evan: [Bugs Bunny voice] "Eh, what's cookin' Doc?"

Filip: There's a really odd wolf-based metaphor here, which I think is meant to be Kadiatu coming to terms with her background as a genetically engineered super soldier, but I don't think it quite lands.

The STS network itself has become sentient, and is being harmed by the attacks of the entity possessing Benny, the President and many others. While Mariko and her razvedka are being upgraded, the Doctor gets in touch with part of the STS network.

Georgia: The transit is now a person. Never change, *Doctor Who*.

John: Until this point, I'd assumed the STS network was the main bad guy, having achieved sentience through dimension-puncture and going a bit mad god. But something stranger is pulling the strings...

Filip: I'll be honest, I didn't think the transit network would turn out to be sentient. I thought all the weirdness was down to demons coming from the subspace tunnels.

Evan: Despite the weirdness of a sentient transit system, the plot is starting to bend back towards the usual *Doctor Who* formula. We have a bespoke villain and the Doctor must find a clever way of defeating it.

Benny and Zamina have escaped to Mars following the evacuation of Pluto. Benny briefly regains control of her body and gives Zamina a package for the Doctor.

nice's hands. As Benny escapes, the room is swarmed by the President's gangs.

Filip: Finally, all the characters are in one location! Midway through the book!

Francine heads out to see a distant descendant of the Brigadier from a liaison in Africa centuries before. He recalls destroying a facility that had created a new breed of supersoldiers from the genetic material of enhanced soldiers that fought in the Thousand Day War. He destroyed everything but the firstborn of the project – Kadiatu.

John: Good Lord! So, despite initially seeming like a normal university student, Kadiatu is in fact incredibly important and tied into the Doctor's past. Convenient.

Georgia: Okay, I really like this setup.

Filip: It's a minor contrivance to have Lethbridge-Stewarts in this, but I approve.

John: Zamina now knows Benny is not to be trusted, and gets out of there during Benny's brief moment of lucidity.

Filip: Benny finally gets to do something for herself two thirds of the way through the book!

Having received the package, the Doctor and Kadiatu head to Mars. They chase Benny across the planet and find themselves in an Ice Warrior nest. During a shootout in the nest, Kadiatu kills Benny - but it turns out it's actually a duplicate.

John: These scenes on Mars are my favourite part of the book – the Doctor against a companion with a home-turf advantage, as Benny is an expert on Martian history. The twist that the Doctor's been played by a duplicate is surprising, but on reflection Aaronovitch has done a good job of hinting at it!

Georgia: Our new companion may have become a virus on her first day. It's a dangerous job. As we've raised the possibility, are we going to encounter any Ice Warriors?

Filip: I liked Kadiatu's little speech at the Doctor about how he's probably going to be angry with her for killing the duplicate Benny to save his life.

Evan: As someone who knows Benny has future stories, her being killed by Kadiatu, only to then be revealed as a duplicate, didn't really surprise me. I wonder what it was like without that foreknowledge.

The real Benny catches up with Zamina, who flees into the Olympus Mons West shopping centre and escapes onto a train.

John: Poor Zamina. I'm glad she appears to have gotten out alive!

Filip: Mars, with its weak gravity, is a great setting for high-speed chases on foot.

As they make their way out of the Ice Warrior nest, Kadiatu tells the Doctor about her family history. She says that the Brig-

adier, then a lieutenant, was lost in an African tropical forest when he was found by members of the local tribe. Mariatu, the daughter of the local chief, left the village with the Brigadier and returned eight years later with their child in tow. This began a branch of the Lethbridge-Stewart family that eventually adopted Kadiatu.

Georgia: I don't need to know the Brigadier's feelings about anyone's clothing, or lack thereof.

Evan: The UNIT Dating Controversy just got even more controversial!

John: At the time, I imagine fandom found this shocking. Personally, I could do with a bit more detail about this relationship – specifically, to what degree this was a loving, consensual relationship...

Filip: I actually found that flashback quite funny and endearing. I can absolutely believe that Mariatu could hold her own against the Brigadier if she ever needed to, and I'd be very concerned for him if he ever crossed her.

Francine picks up Kadiatu and the Doctor in a jet. However, the unidentified plane is regarded as a threat by a long dormant civil defence programme. The plane crash lands on the nearest runway.

Georgia: This is a really well written scene. I enjoyed the Doctor's destruction-based point-scoring, as well as the plane's slow-motion crash landing set to 'Je Ne Regrette Rien'.

John: Francine is just really cool.

Filip: There's a very tender scene after the crash landing where a female Yoruba army major dresses Kadiatu's injuries and they talk about the Doctor. He really does enjoy turning up in Earth's myths and legends.

Benny breaks into the Stunnel's power centre and begins to kill the employees. The Doctor and Kadiatu arrive, and Kadia-

tu kills what turns out to be another Benny duplicate. Kadiatu starts to hear voices warning her about the Doctor.

Georgia: The engineers are now speaking to the personification of transit. Or one of them. Just another normal day at work.

John: Will the real Bernice Summerfield please stand up? This poor one genuinely believed itself to be the original...

Filip: This is such a video game scene. I can imagine shooting my way through razvedka goons while every so often getting snarky commentary from Sylvester McCoy.

Evan: Benny being killed by Kadiatu, only to then be revealed as a duplicate, still doesn't surprise me.

Kadiatu and the Doctor kill two razvedka and steal their freesurfing boards. The Doctor heads down the line with part of the sentient STS, while Kadiatu is picked up by the engineering train. At the other end of the line, drones are building a piece of equipment around the TARDIS.

Filip: At this point in the book it's hard to keep track of the plot anymore. I think that's partly due to it making little sense and partly due to editing choices, but who cares? It's a vibe I can get behind.

Evan: I'm obsessed with how they still use fax machines. Does this mean fax makes a vinyl-style comeback in the coming decades? Also, I did not have Thomas the Tank Engine resolving the plot on my bingo card.

The STS engineers defend the Stunnel as the razvedka and Benny attack. In the fight, Blondie is killed by Mariko and Naran. The Doctor arrives and kills Naran with the freesurfing board. The gateway opens fully, and the entity beyond, which the Doctor nicknames Fred, pours the rest of itself into Benny.

Georgia: Dogface gets put to sleep, supposedly for a week, and then immediately

resurfaces four pages later. I'm either missing something here, or *Transit's* manuscript wasn't that well proofread. I'd also have appreciated 'cake monsters' being in the glossary, instead of the many terms in it that have yet to appear in any meaningful way...

Mariko tries to kill the Doctor, but Kadiatu shoots them dead. The device on the TARDIS fires a beam of artron energy at the Doctor, who absorbs it and then releases it towards the Stunnel. Benny/Fred disappears, and the Doctor and Kadiatu throw themselves into the Stunnel after her.

Filip: I did not have the Doctor going full superhero on my bingo card, but it means he gets a lot more action here than we've seen from him in the last two novels.

Evan: The villain declaring they have no need of pronouns, like some sort of alt-right supporter, has aged surprisingly well.

The Doctor and Kadiatu find themselves in a virtual dimension that the Stunnel's designers accidentally punched into. They develop mental software to help them navigate the environment, like an army of Aces as defence programmes. Kadiatu learns that Blondie is dead.

John: Ooh, it's going all Puterspace again. Unfortunately, the boundaries of what's possible here aren't as well defined than in *Love And War's* virtual world, so I'm not that invested. The Doctor will get out somehow.

Georgia: ...Huh? What? I did enjoy the Aces running amok, though.

Filip: We're not in Paul Cornell's virtual world of the previous novel, but a dimension where thought is data and life is software. It's very abstract, but I don't hate it.

Evan: I'm not quite following this but I think the Doctor is challenging the villain, who is in charge of a virtual government, with an army of Aces running about like Lemmings (the 1991 puzzle game).



I also didn't pick up that Fred was killed. I don't think the adventure in the void is very easy to follow.

John: This is all quite abstract and vague for the climax of a novel... *Love and War* did this much better, keeping all of the important stuff for the real world.

Filip: The STS showing up here was a bit of a surprise. I liked that, ultimately, Kadiatu ended up saving the Doctor and Benny.

Evan: The very fact this directly follows *Love and War* invites comparison between the two virtual worlds and, unfortunately, this one is a bit fuzzier and less well-defined. It all adds up to a vague climax.

The STS system decides to stay in virtual reality while the Doctor, Benny and Kadiatu return through the gateway. Kadiatu picks up Blondie's corpse and carries him away, while the others stay behind.

Georgia: ...Is Fred not the STS system? Oh, okay then.

Filip: Best not think about what happens to the trains when the software spirit of the STS leaves the building.

The Doctor meets with a sentient archive programme, FLORANCE, and has it delete historical records of him while advising it to invest in rebuilding Pluto. Meanwhile, Kadiatu buries Blondie alongside her mother and father. Elsewhere, Francine and Sam return to the Ice Warrior nest to negotiate a peace.

Georgia: If we ever knew that Zamina was also connected to Blondie, then I'd forgotten it. There's a LOT going on in this novel, even by VNA standards, and I think I'm feeling the consequences of that as the ending approaches.

John: I'm glad Zamina gets a happyish ending. Even before this adventure she'd been through an awful lot – Benny just made it a whole lot worse!

The Doctor makes his way to the royal court of this dimension, where he meets the Emperor of Subsystems. A trial begins over Fred's possession of Benny, with the Emperor presiding, but the Doctor realises it's all a charade created by Fred. Fred reveals he lured the Doctor here to incorporate the Time Lord into his programme.

Filip: The Doctor is actually in proper peril here. This is Fred's domain, and the Doctor can't do anything about that.

Kadiatu attacks the court in the guise of a leopard, bringing a virtual rainforest with her. The Doctor uses the distraction to separate Benny and Fred's programmes using the help of the sentient STS system, and Kadiatu kills Fred.

Georgia: ...Yeah, I did not pick up that that was meant to be Kadiatu, though I did assume there was a connection with the cats.

Filip: This was a poignant funeral scene in the midst of an otherwise very rushed wrap-up for *Transit*. I'm glad that Zamina survived, and was able to come back for the end.

Evan: The Doctor deleting historical records about himself so he becomes an unknown once more? I've never heard that one before!

A few years later, Kadiatu has been working with Ming on time travel. The only way to make it work, however, is a nucle-

ar explosion. After forcing an evacuation and destroying her research, Kadiatu sets off into the vortex after the Doctor.

Georgia: Sounds like there's more Kadiatu to come in the New Adventures – I'm looking forward to it!

Filip: I'm getting distinct notes of Jack Harkness from Kadiatu here!

Evan: It's making me think more of the Doctor's daughter, Jenny, heading off to adventures unknown.

What did our readers think of the book?

John: I'm unsure how I feel about *Transit* as a whole. It creates a compelling sci-fi world, but it often doesn't feel like *Doctor Who*. It's disappointing that Benny's first trip in the TAR-DIS sees her possessed for the majority of the story, and I wonder if Kadiatu was a companion candidate who wasn't chosen similar to Ray from *Delta and the Bannermen*. There are strong concepts here, but they're slightly brought down by the novel's overwhelming cynicism and frequent unnecessary use of 'adult' elements.

Georgia: I love the concept behind *Transit*, and Kadiatu in particular is a brilliant character – I'm really glad that this doesn't seem to be the last we'll see of her. That said, I found this novel to be overstuffed to the point that key elements seem to have completely passed me by, which became particularly apparent towards the end. It also meant Benny was effectively written out of most of her full debut as companion, which is a shame. The world of *Transit* was immersive, detailed and fun to spend time in – but in many ways that came at the expense of the story itself.

Filip: There's some top-notch worldbuilding here and some individual scenes that are really well written, but the plot as a whole is basically incomprehensible. I'm in two minds about Benny being co-opted by the antagonist – on the one hand it made for some interesting drama, but on the other we didn't really get the chance to know her. There's also a fairly high amount of VNA shock value that doesn't really add anything: you wouldn't hire Quentin Tarantino to write and direct an episode of *Doctor Who*, no matter how good his own films are. Still, I loved Kadiatu as a character and I hope we'll see more of her in the future.

Evan: Even as a fan of Aaronovitch's television work and *Rivers of London* books, I just couldn't get into this novel. The first three or four chapters are packed with gratuitous shocks, hazy vibes and a lot of background noise, before it suddenly starts to make itself into a more *Doctor Who*-like shape around the halfway point. But it's just too late by then – why should I care about all these one-off characters who get shunted around and picked off before I feel like I got a chance to know them? New companion Benny gets sidelined, the main villain is underwritten and I still don't understand what a cake monster really is! For me, this book just never coheres. Dogface? More like dog's dinner!

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