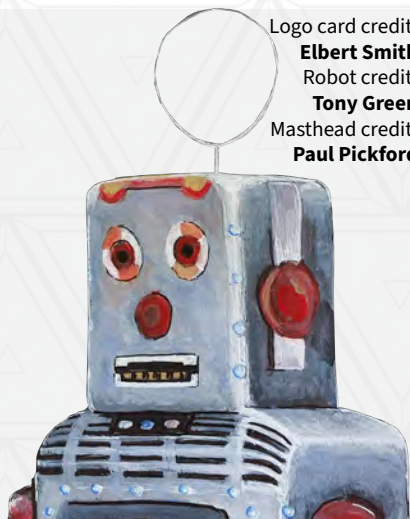


SEALESTIAL TOYROOM





Logo card credit:
Elbert Smith
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Tony Green
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Paul Pickford



Hello there, and welcome to your first *CT* of 2026! There's been plenty of exciting news over the past few months – not least the news that two more episodes of *The Daleks' Master Plan* have been recovered! There are now just 95 missing episodes from the eras of the First and Second Doctor, and with the work of organisations like Film is Fabulous I hope that number will drop even further in the years to come. As the news of the rediscovery came just before *CT* went to print, there'll be a fuller look at this next time!

In the meantime, you might have noticed something a bit fishy about this issue, and you'd be right – we've temporarily rethemed following *The War Between the Land and the Sea*. To mark the series' broadcast, the vast majority of this issue has been given over to taking a look back at many of the outings of the Sea Devils, ranging from their debut story back in 1972 all the way through to their recent series.

To appreciate these classic creatures in their entirety, our writers are taking in audio dramas, television stories, books and even a BFI screening. I also had a fascinating chat with Dr David Hone, Scientific Advisor for *The War Between the Land and the Sea*, who has shared his insights into the show's production and the naming of species for *CT*'s readers. Overall, even if we've not quite enough space to do everything the Sea Devils have ever appeared in, I hope you'll appreciate how much we've managed to cover.

Next time, we'll be marking 50 years of both DWAS and *CT*, so stay tuned for our golden anniversaries! See you in June!



Celestial Toyroom 556



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Best wishes,

James

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Celestial Toyroom

12 March 2026

Extra edition

3p

Strange creatures emerge from the seas!

UNIT lead negotiations with the legendary 'Sea Devils'

Homo Aqua

John Ashway
Reviewer At Large

Doctor Who's latest spin-off has some big shoes to fill. Firstly, this is our last regularly scheduled Whoniverse series for the immediate future. While I'm sure the main show will return past Christmas, it would still be nice to end the current run on a high. But further to that, the decision to follow the same five-part serial format as the critically acclaimed *Torchwood: Children of Earth* has created a lot of expectation to try and meet those high standards. So, how did it get on?

On its own terms, this first episode is an engaging and refreshingly simple opening that does a great job of building out its world, even for viewers less familiar with *Doctor Who*. We follow UNIT logistics manager Barclay who, after being mistakenly sent on an important mission, finds himself the most important person in human-Homo Aqua relations.

Art credit:
Paul Pickford



Russell Tovey makes for an interesting casting choice as Barclay, who on the page is an average everyman who "could not be more civilian". Tovey certainly has the acting chops for the role - his

increasing anxiety when he realises he's been recruited for a mission way past both his comfort zone, and clearance, is palpable and highly relatable. Physically, however, he cuts an imposing pres-

Russell Tovey returns to the Whoniverse, this time as Barclay Pierre-Dupont...



a species, we know that we are having a terrible impact on our world, but squirm when made to face up to that fact.

My only major quibble with this first episode is that Colin McFarlane's General Pierce has a few really quite on-the-nose lines about Barclay's potential importance. It's as if his character has read the script, and knows what's coming in the following episodes. Coupled with McFarlane's rather distinctive 'trailer voice', these moments have an unintended comic effect. That's not to say that McFarlane isn't excellent in the role, however – he brings a great deal of gravitas to his initial negotiations with Homo Aqua.

All in all this episode is a good start, laying the foundations for the rest of the series and doing so with some excellent production values. The various species of Homo Aqua all look amazing, and some well-produced visual effects show the scale of the threat developing around the world. I look forward to seeing more of Russell Tovey and Gugu Mbatha-Raw in the next episode as our leads come to the fore...

ence that makes him look more like a squaddie than most of the actual UNIT soldiers around him. It makes one wonder if he really just arranges the taxis, or if there is more about him waiting to be revealed...

Our first encounters with Homo Aqua are tense, suspenseful moments that the show is wisely happy to take its time with. We know from the show's title that things aren't going to be all sun-

shine and rainbows, and as the viewer we're waiting for that Sword of Damocles to drop. I also felt an unspoken acknowledgment here from our human characters that if Homo Aqua do decide to behave aggressively, humanity will probably have deserved it. There's a sense of inevitability about the story, and the feeble excuses the Earth Ambassador pulls out from a pre-written list of stock responses feel suitably trite. As

Plastic Apocalypse

Titles can do many things. They can be mysterious, teasing audiences about what's to come. They can reference a specific quote or cultural touchpoint of specific relevance to the piece. And they can get straight to the point,

as is the case for *The War Between The Land And The Sea's* second episode. Unfortunately, *Plastic Apocalypse* is a very foolish choice here, as it all but spells out what the key moment of this episode will be to the audience long before it actually happens. Title issues aside, this is a solid episode that con-

tinues to ramp up the tension as the drama continues.

The negotiations with Homo Aqua begin here in earnest, with Barclay immediately thrust into the limelight. The episode presents a nice rounded depiction of the impact on Barclay – his family's life may be turned upside down but he can't

help but feel some new confidence now that he's vital to the world. Kate Stewart's role is also starting to grow as she starts spinning a variety of plates. She's organising diplomatic negotiations one moment, trying (and failing) to keep Barclay on the leash the next, and all the while having to investigate agitators and try squeezing in a personal life. Her relationship with Colonel Ibrahim is far from the most compelling thread, but it's nice to get more of a sense of who she is off the clock – even if her main desire is getting back to work again! Jemma Redgrave and Christofer Ibrahim manage to make this relationship work, while highlighting the growing friction between them. It's also worth highlighting the rest of UNIT too, and particularly Mei Mac as UNIT chief technician Min Tso. She injects a lot of passion and personality into a part that's mostly just exposition on paper.

The negotiation scenes continue to be compelling and suspenseful, but this time humanity do come off a little thick when Homo Aqua ambassador Salt requests some river water. It's pretty obvious this is not a sincere request for a beverage but a diplomatic ploy, and Barclay and UNIT walk right into it. The payoff is just as impactful, however, as we're reminded of how hazardous untreated water can be. Gugu Mbatha-Raw is really rather impressive here, commanding the audience's attention while she creates an

...while real-life UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador Gugu Mbatha-Smith plays the fictional ambassador Salt



ambiguity in her intentions towards Barclay. Is he her “favourite human” because he's straight-talking and willing to sincerely acknowledge humanity's failings, or because she knows she can anticipate and/or manipulate his actions?

“Gugu Mbatha-Raw is really rather impressive here...”

As humanity rather lamely admits it will take about 40 years to clean up the world's oceans, Salt responds with the episode's main set piece – a dramatic dumping of all the ocean's plastic (and, err, the Titanic) back onto land. This is a major effects coup, and with the exception of one rather on-the-nose foregrounded plastic bag looks

wonderful. However, I felt that Barclay's family happening to be moved by car at the same time was a little forced as a way to get our main character personally connected to the incident. As previously mentioned, calling the episode *Plastic Apocalypse* also meant that the titular event wasn't much of a surprise.

What I did appreciate in these scenes was the maturity in Barclay's response. He doesn't argue with Salt that humanity deserves to have its waste returned, but smartly points out that Homo Aqua don't help their cause by making people scared. It remains to be seen if Salt will heed that lesson, as it's clear that powerful human forces are moving against Homo Aqua and UNIT in a big way...

The Deep

We're now midway through *The War Between The Land And The Sea*, and, while I've enjoyed what I've seen so far, *The Deep* starts off in a strangely static manner. The consequences of *Plastic Apocalypse* are kept frustratingly offscreen and don't seem to have made much of an impact. Yes, we hear a lot about the disruption and damage but not a great deal seems to have changed in the drama. Those who were previously advocating for outright war with Homo Aqua are still doing so, and our heroes continue to resist such thinking. While it's given Barclay's status and confidence a bit of a knock, everything is essentially still proceeding as before as he prepares for his latest task – to head to the bottom of the ocean for the next meeting with Salt.

“...*The Deep* starts off in a strangely static manner...”

Accompanying Barclay on his journey are the usual UNIT suspects as well as two diplomats. One of them, Ted Campbell, is unfortunately signposted very quickly as a wrong-un. For starters, he's surprisingly cheerful and genial and is carrying around a very suspiciously segmented globe as a “gift” for Homo Aqua. He's also South African, which shouldn't mean anything at all but is none-

Art credit:
Elbert Smith



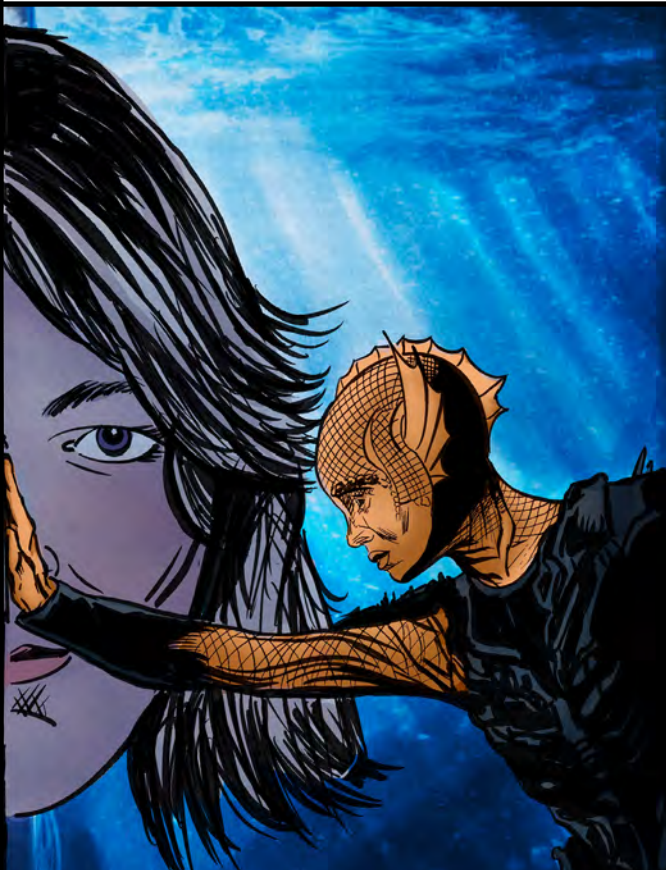
theless distressingly often used as a shorthand for suspicious characters in television and film. I hoped I was being misled on this occasion, but it turned out to be the lazy use of a tired trope once again.

While my suspicions about Campbell were immediately raised, the long descent down into the depths of the Romanche Gap is played very well. Even though we only glimpse moments of this journey, Dylan Holmes Williams' direction clearly conveys the claustrophobia of the diving bell and the agonising wait for its passen-

gers. It's nice to see General Pierce rattled for a change, but also to see Barclay's skill at calming and reassuring people struggling with the situation.

“Jemma Redgrave is truly excellent here...”

Back on dry land, Kate is forced to confront her political enemies who have abandoned diplomacy in favour of an aggressive response. Jemma Redgrave is excellent here, making Kate's frustration at them and her



own impotence palpable. Less successful are Colonel Ibrahim's attempts to get Kate to relax and think about revealing their relationship.

“...probably my favourite episode so far.”

The former is sensible, as Kate is exhausted. As for the latter, I'm with Kate – this really isn't the time to stress her out even further! As the end of the episode suggests, however, Ibrahim's concerns on the matter may soon be irrelevant.

I've found a lot of little bits to criticise here, but this is probably my favourite episode so far. Most of the plot threads have been slow to get going, but are finally picking up steam. I'm hoping this will start to put UNIT on the front foot, playing a more proactive role as their enemies finally show their hand. However, the time it's taken to get here mean that I'm seriously concerned about how this five-part series is paced. There's limited screentime remaining and a lot to get through, especially now the titular “war” may actually be kicking off.

Sea Devil ID

Dr David Hone (see pages 10-14) shares the names he suggested for the different Sea Devil species with *CT*.

Species One – the fish-like species in the negotiations.

- *Piscimorpha homodon* – ‘the fish-shaped one with human teeth’. This name was used for Species One, but changed to *Piscimorpha grandis* – ‘the large fish-shaped one’ – for the show itself.
- *Pteruxomorpha aquaticus* – ‘the amphibian with fins that doesn't leave the water’.
- *Pisicsondylus gracilis* – ‘the fish-like temnospondyl that's thin/graceful’.

Species Two – the species of the Sea Devil warriors.

- *Sauromorpha inexpectus* – ‘the unexpected reptile-like one’.
- *Saurospondyl rhynchus* – ‘the reptile-like temnospondyl with a beak’.
- *Spondylorhynchus scutus* – ‘the beaked temnospondyl with scales’.

Species Three – the species of Salt and Tide.

- *Homomorpha sapiens* – ‘the human-shaped thinker’. This name was used for Species Three.
- *Homospondyl erectus* – ‘the human-like temnospondyl that stands up’. This name ended up being used for Species Two.
- *Spiospondyl habilis* – ‘the thinking temnospondyl that can use its hands’.

The Witch of the Waterfall

With the end now in sight, things should really be hitting boiling point now. Frustratingly, *The War Between The Land And The Sea* seems content to keep them at a low simmer. *The Deep's* double cliff-hanger felt like our villains were finally stepping out into the light, but are instead revealed to be the work of some off-screen villains we'll probably never hear from again. While I appreciate the neat irony of the Severance Committee being linked to something they didn't do, there's just not time for this kind of subtlety in such a short series. Instead, *The Witch of the Waterfall* ends up killing a lot of the previous episode's momentum as the plot drags itself forward.

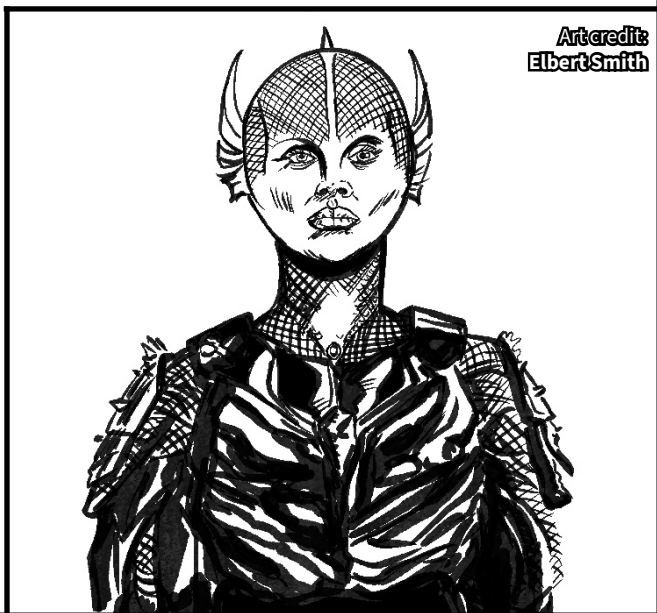
The plot twists itself in all kinds of directions this week to try and squeeze a variety of different threads into the story, making everything feel quite contrived. It begins with Salt's escape from UNIT custody. While it provides some lovely shots of Bristol's harbourside, there's no reason for this entire sequence to happen. We know that UNIT Tower has a helipad, and it's been prominently featured multiple times in *Doctor Who*. So, why is the helicopter carrying Salt having to land so that she can be transferred to a truck? It leaves the audience in no doubt about what's about to happen, and that Barclay will find a way to save her.

This is followed by the revelation that Homo Aqua have turned on Salt for saving Barclay – the only person she could feasibly have rescued in the explosion. Samuel Oatley's Tide is a highlight as he tries to sell this position as the new Homo Aqua ambassador, but it just doesn't feel organic. Instead, it only seems to happen so that our two leads can be together against the world.

Speaking of Barclay and Salt, their romance has been artificially accelerated here to an unsustainable level. While Tovey and Mbatha-Raw are still doing excellent work and make the relationship much more believable than it would be on the page, their characters haven't had enough time for the chemistry between them to develop. It doesn't help that Salt almost feels like a different character here. While this is

probably meant to convey her true nature now that she's no longer serving her people, her new childlike sense of wonder doesn't seem to have any base in what we've already seen. In particular, the episode's title comes from a bizarre exchange where Salt would apparently be happy to be limited to a single river in north Wales and live as the "witch of the waterfall". What does that mean, culturally, to a member of Homo Aqua? Do they know what a witch is? Is she happy to be a subject of fear, and a monster? It's all a bit off.

So, with one episode to go, it does seem like the wheels are starting to come off *The War Between The Land And The Sea*. My biggest concern is that it still feels like the titular war is only just getting started, and I'm bracing myself for a very rushed ending.



Art credit:
Elbert Smith

The End of the War

Going into this episode, I was concerned this final instalment would feel rushed. Instead, RTD's surprisingly bleak conclusion manages to avoid this, as Homo Aqua's enemies end the conflict before it ever really begins. The jarring, abrupt nature of the ending is turned into a strength, rather than a fault, but leads to an episode that leaves many questions unanswered.

While it's not humanity's finest hour, *The End of the War* is a real showcase for Jemma Redgrave. After going through the ringer for four episodes, Kate Stewart is not going to take it anymore. By the episode's end she's been driven absolutely past the line of rationality, and yet we can't begrudge her fury at humanity's stupidity. Will this have any long running consequences for the character back in *Doctor Who*? I'm doubtful, but it remains to be seen. Perhaps Shirley Anne Bingham could be in line for an unexpected promotion?

"I really appreciated the strong pro-eco message..."

It's also unclear where we leave the surviving members of the Severance Committee. We see them meet their maker in a variety of horrible water-based ways, but the exact nature of these scenes isn't obvious. Are they im-

aging what Homo Aqua might do to them in the future, or are these flash-forwards to them getting their comeuppance? Either interpretation could work, but I wish the story had indicated in some way which was intended. As it is, they're some surprisingly abstract scenes in the middle of an otherwise very serious episode.

Barclay and Salt also don't quite gel with events going on around them. While they're initially a source of hope, providing a way to potentially end the hostilities once and for all, it's later revealed that their relationship has been exploited to destroy Homo Aqua. The fact that the pair can end the series living together is supposed to offer some bitter-sweet respite, but feels like cold comfort when measured against the scale of the awfulness around them. Will they really be happy in their reservation, waiting for the day humanity decides to persecute them further? I'm also slightly dismayed at how quickly Barclay decides to leave his family behind, as they've previously been shown to be a very important part of his life.

As the series comes to an end, I'm left slightly unsatisfied with *The War Between The Land And The Sea*. While I enjoyed it as a whole, there's so much in it that there's not enough time to fully explore everything. Big moments like plastic raining from the sky and the undersea bomb made for exciting set pieces, but tended to have lit-

tle impact on the following episodes. How was society functioning afterwards? It's never made clear how these world-shaking events are actually shaking the world. Time that could be used for this is instead given over to the romance between Barclay and Salt, which ends up feeling like something of a distraction from the real meat of the story.

"...there's not enough time to fully explore everything."

That said, when *The War Between The Land And The Sea* hits its stride it really knows what it's doing. I really appreciated the strong pro-eco message of the series and its willingness to hold humanity to account for its own actions. We know that we're destroying our planet, so why won't we do something about it? In these moments Barclay worked really well as an everyman articulating our frustration with political processes around the world. There's real, justified anger here, and the final scene manages to crystallise that emotion around Kate Stewart in a way I found really effective. She, certainly, has been changed by these events. But will the world be? With the future of *Who* as a whole somewhat up in the air, I don't know if the main show or any future spin-offs will ever follow up on what happened here. But if they do, I'll certainly be happy to see them.

Naming names, from dinosaurs to *Doctor Who*

When *The War Between the Land and the Sea* needed names for its Sea Devil species, they called on **Dr David Hone**. He speaks to *CT* about his career as a palaeontologist, and how real life and fictional science interact.

Interview by **James Ashway**

What made you want to become a palaeontologist?

It's a good question, and in a way, nothing in particular. I've always been interested in animals and that included everything from tigers and centipedes to trilobites and *Tyrannosaurus rex*. So, I wanted to be some kind of biologist but I wasn't set on anything in particular. It was only when I was doing my Masters that a project came up on dinosaurs that I thought looked interesting, so I got involved. Afterwards, everyone started calling me a palaeontologist, but it really wasn't by design. I've long said that if the PhDs on fish biomechanics or behaviour had come through then I wouldn't be involved with dinosaurs at all. I still like to dabble in the living – I published a paper on wildebeest a few years ago – and I love researching living animals. That said, I do enjoy my research – it's something I fell into, but here I am still doing it 20 years later!

How did you become involved in giving scientific advice?

It's not something that's immediate as soon as you become a palaeontologist. But the fact remains that there aren't that many of us, and even fewer who work on the 'sexy' things like dinosaurs and mammoths. At first, I was just getting a few questions sent in and I pointed some researchers in the right direction. But it wasn't for eight years or so after I'd completed my PhD that I got



David with part of the arm of the giant pterosaur *Quetzalcoatlus*



my first proper gig as a scientific advisor. At that point, I'd already published a book and started writing for *The Guardian*, so my name was out there. It wasn't as if I got a call halfway through my PhD asking for help – it just doesn't work that way! It goes double for me, as my advisor was one of the major consultants on *Walking with Dinosaurs*. It would have been weird if they'd come to one of his students instead!

I think the first programme I was credited on as a scientific advisor was a *National Geographic* documentary called *T. rex Autopsy*. I did also help on a Japanese production before that, but it wasn't released in the UK until years later. It's inevitably picked up since then, as my name's been out there, so you get the same people calling back as they move between productions. Even then, I don't think of it as a big part of my job – I've really not done that much scientific advice compared to some palaeontologists.

How did you become involved in *The War Between the Land and the Sea*?

I suspect that what got me involved is my writing about taxonomy – the principles of naming and how and why new species are described. I wrote a few pieces about it in *The Guardian* years ago, and, though I don't know for sure, I think they must have come across them when they were putting the series together. So, they got in touch to ask about how species are named and

how that would work, but that was about it. I ended up with the rather grand title of Scientific Advisor, but I feel like I didn't contribute that much!

“Everyone thinks the important bit is the name, but that's... not really the important part...”

Had you seen *The Sea Devils* and its follow-ups before working on the series?

I'm not a big *Doctor Who* fan, though a very good mate of mine at university was. So, I've seen quite a bit of the original show, including *The Sea Devils*, and I generally know my way around it. Then I've seen all of Christopher Eccleston and David Tennant's eras, and various bits since then. I've always been aware of what's going on, but I'm not a big Whovian. I got the impression that the intention of this show was a bit of a reset as the *Sea Devils* really don't look like the old models! So, I knew I didn't have that deep fan knowledge, but I also knew that it probably wouldn't help to go back over it, as we're trying to deal with them in their own right.

How do you go about naming a species?

Everyone thinks that the important bit is the name, but that's surprisingly not really the important part of the process. What you're ultimately doing is trying to demonstrate that what you are looking at, be that

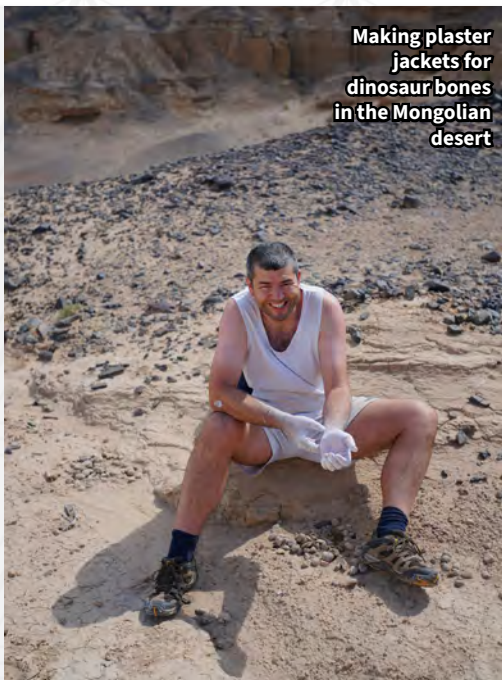
animal, vegetable or bacteria, is distinct from everything else. By demonstrating its distinctiveness, you then show that it needs a new name which you then give it. For instance, most of my work is looking at the fossils of dinosaurs and pterosaurs. First, I examine the bones for features that link it to a specific group. So, if I see a dinosaur with a big head, small arms, few teeth and fused nasals I can be confident it's a tyrannosaur. Then I look at the other members of the group and show that this new species has features that nothing else does, meaning it needs to be properly named. It's normally more difficult for fossils, as you usually only have one of a particular specimen and it's often missing bits. However, living species have their own problems as well – males and females of the same species can look very different, or you might find individuals with random mutations that make them look like something else. Once you're confident you've got a species, then you need to formally describe it and give it a name. There are various rules and guidelines about names, which generally should be memorable and tell you something about the species. For example, a lot of dinosaurs have the suffix '-saurus' because it immediately identifies it as part of the wider group. I tried to draw on that when I was coming up with the names for *The War Between the Land and the Sea*.

“Naming species is one of the few times you get to be creative as a scientist...”

When you were naming these fictional species, were you naming them as if you were naming something real?

I did more or less what I would do if I was naming a dinosaur or anything else. I've named around 15-20 species with other scientists, and I try to look for an interesting feature when I'm naming something. For instance, I like the name *Stegosaurus*, which means 'roof lizard', because it links the dinosaur to the plates running down its back. I'm less keen on what I'd call a 'place name-osaurus', such as *Edmontosaurus*

Making plaster jackets for dinosaur bones in the Mongolian desert



from Edmonton, Canada, or *Ozraptor* from Australia, because it's just not helpful. It's not narrowing anything down for someone looking at these fossils. Once you've identified some key features, I then translate them into Latin or Ancient Greek to see how they work with the suffixes that are normally used in a particular group. I try a few different combinations to see what rolls off the tongue, and then go from there.

So, for *The War Between the Land and the Sea*, I was sent the original scripts and had a look through them. One of the first questions I got asked was whether *Homo aqua* would count as a valid scientific name. It 1000% wouldn't, because to have the name *Homo* they'd have to be our close relatives. Even if they could be called that, it would be one of the most boring and on-the-nose names a scientist has ever come up with for a species! It's fine as a colloquial name, as there aren't really any rules about that, but a proper scientist would come up with something better (and more accurate) if they were naming it. Naming species is one of the few times you get to be creative as a scientist, so you want to take a bit of pride in crafting it.

I guess the same problem would apply to the Silurians, which sometimes get the name *Homo reptilia*.

Yes, it's the same issue! Even if you found me an actual scaly human, I would not call it *Homo reptilia*. It's just so basic! I did suggest some updated names for them, as the Silurians were meant to turn up in the original scripts. However, as they don't appear in the final cut, I don't think any of those suggestions actually made it to the screen.

Anyway, given *Homo aqua* wouldn't work scientifically, my job was to name the three different species of Sea Devil and establish a vague evolutionary history for them. First, I looked through the script to have a look for anything unique that stood out in the descriptions of the different species that I could link a name to. I then focused on their evolutionary history, and decided they could be part of a weird group of ancient amphibians called the temnospondyls. These all tend to have '-spondyl' on the end, so I started shoving that suffix on the characteristics I'd identified to see what worked. I was also well aware that the audience probably have no idea what the temnospondyls are, so I didn't want to go too in-depth!

“It was only when I watched the show that I found out [the names] made it on screen...”

I put all of that together, came up with a few different names for each species and picked the best to send across. For example, one of the names I suggested for Salt was *Homomorpha sapiens*. It means 'human-shaped thinker', which highlights that she's the voice of the Sea Devils and looks more similar to us than other members of the group. They asked for more suggestions, which I sent in, but I wasn't as happy with these. The names were harder to say, or not as obviously linked to anything that the audience might be able to recognise. Then, everything went a bit quiet. I assumed that maybe the production team decided not to use any of the names I'd suggested after all. It was only when I watched

the show that I found out they'd made it on screen, though they'd changed one of them a bit!

If a Sea Devil did walk out of the ocean tomorrow, do you think that we'd use their name for them? Or do you think it would end up being named something different?

I think the most obvious thing to do if you encounter a sentient species we can talk to is to ask what they'd prefer! In the original scripts, there was the idea that UNIT had already encountered these different types of Sea Devil at various times, so the names had been created based on their research. As broadcast, it ends up being a much more spontaneous process!

Looking to the wider universe, would the same naming rules would apply if we discovered life on another planet?

I think the naming system would still apply, as the point of the system is for clarity. If you point at a flower and call it 'Species 758', based on the order it was named, no one would remember that. The average person cannot remember strings of random numbers, but we are built to remember names. While English is the language of science, we use other languages to name species so that anyone talking about a particular species knows exactly what everyone is referring to without confusing it with anything else. So, if NASA did discover microbes living on Mars, they would probably get named as it would quickly get confusing as more are discovered.

What's next for Dr David Hone?

There isn't any more scientific advising on the cards at the moment – at least, they haven't called me back! Maybe there will be a Silurian series one day and I'll get another call. In the meantime, my book *Spinosaur Tales* has just come out and I'm already working on another one. I've got a whole bunch of scientific papers coming through, including some new species, and I've got a podcast called *Terrible Lizards*. In the meantime, I'm teaching at my real job at Queen Mary University of London.

The devil's in the detail: *The Sea Devils* reborn

Ian Wheeler discusses the latest incarnation of a Third Doctor classic

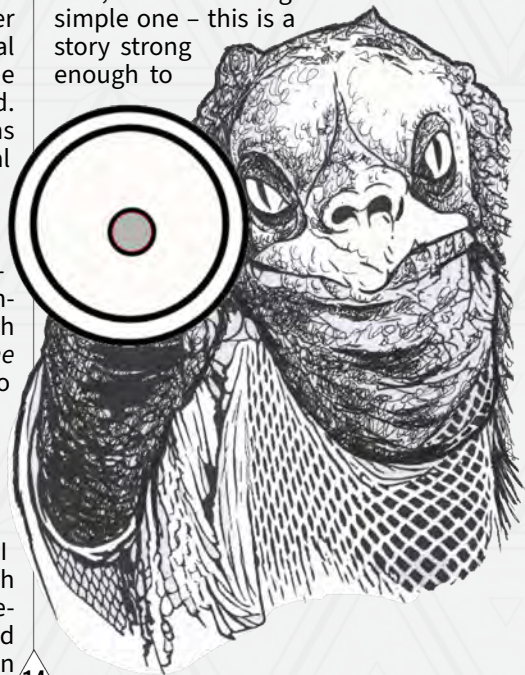
New omnibus versions of old *Doctor Who* stories have become something of a semi-regular treat in the last year or two. I'm not talking about the various special editions made for the Blu-ray collections, of course, but rather the edits created specifically for broadcast on BBC Four and iPlayer from Benjamin Cook and his team. There have been two so far – *The Daleks in Colour* and *The War Games in Colour* – and, like everything in the *Doctor Who* universe, the new edits have divided opinion. I'm personally a fan, although none of them have been perfect. I wasn't hugely keen on the filmic look of *The Daleks in Colour* and I felt that the repeated use of flashback sequences was somewhat overdone. But *The War Games in Colour* was rather splendid, with some excellent new special effects and the chance to finally see the Second Doctor regenerate into the Third. For me, the strength of these compilations is that they repackage vintage material into a format that might make new viewers more likely to tune in and experience them. They add to the mythos but take nothing away, because the original versions are still there to be watched and enjoyed. It's a win-win situation. To tie in with *The War Between the Land and the Sea*, *The Sea Devils* now becomes the third story to get the modern omnibus treatment.

The Sea Devils has always been a favourite story of mine, and probably makes it into my personal top ten. It's certainly one of the stories I re-watch the most and one that I never tire of watching. Even so, I relished the opportunity to watch it afresh in a new format. I was keen to see what decisions the 2025 production team would make in order to present the material in

the best way possible. This release differs slightly from its predecessors in that it's the first to have already had an omnibus edition from the BBC back in the 1970s, but also because *The Sea Devils* was already in colour. Nonetheless, there's still plenty to enjoy as you watch along and try to spot what's changed.

“...my favourite of the three special omnibus editions produced so far.”

The changes start immediately, with a movie-style ‘cold opening’ featuring the story title superimposed over the opening scenes rather than having the usual Pertwee *Doctor Who* title sequence. I loved this idea, and the message to the audience is a simple one – this is a story strong enough to



stand up on its own. You don't need to watch the whole Pertwee era, or even all of Season Nine, to enjoy and appreciate it.

Other changes are harder to spot. I must admit that, on first viewing, the action flowed so smoothly that I was struggling to work out what had been cut. I did notice that the scene where Trenchard demonstrates that the guards can't be hypnotised by the Master was missing, but there was very little else that I saw. Conversely, there were a couple of scenes that I was relieved to see retained. I was pleased that we still get to see the Master enjoying *The Clangers*, as it's a fun character moment even though it adds nothing to the story. I was also delighted that the Doctor and Master's sword fight was kept in, although the editing was tightened up a little.

While bringing the length of the story down, the cuts for these omnibus editions also leave room for a few additions. In this case, footage from *Doctor Who and the Silurians* was brought in to explain the Doctor's recent history with Earth Reptiles. This was done more sparingly than in *The Daleks in Colour* and worked very well to set the scene. The production team also managed to add the phrase "the war between the land and the sea" into the dialogue in a moment that made me smile. It fitted into the narrative so well that I had to go back and check whether it had always been there!

This edition of *The Sea Devils* has been my favourite of the three special omnibus editions produced so far. As such, it's a shame that it doesn't seem to be getting its own Blu-ray or DVD release. Instead, it appears to only be available as a bonus feature with *The War Between the Land and the Sea*. I feel that this is a mistake, as *The Sea Devils* is strong enough to stand alone. It deserves to have its own release, as was the case with the omnibus editions of both *The Daleks* and *The War Games*. I'd hope this would also be the case for any further omnibus editions, and I'd love to see more of them. Perhaps a 60-minute version of one of the stronger 80s stories, such as *Earthshock* or *Revelation of the Daleks*, would be a good one to do next. I will await possible developments with interest!

Dear CT,

The *War Between the Land and the Sea* offers lots to enjoy, especially on a first viewing: Russell Tovey and Gugu Mbatha-Raw both bring new characters to life while Jemma Redgrave manages to elevate the writing. The increasing inclusion of trans and non-binary characters who get to simply exist without having their identity made into a plot point is also rather welcome.

Unfortunately, the show suffers from the same flaws that have also plagued its parent show. The writing (especially in the fourth episode) is uneven and raises intriguing ideas that it fails to engage with, such as the threat that Aquakind poses in the war. The ending similarly raises questions that may never be addressed, such as how broadly Aquakind was affected by *Severance*. Salt mentions that dolphins are considered part of Aquakind – so have they been wiped out? There are also a few moments that stretch our credulity too thin, such as an impossible bullet trajectory that interferes with an otherwise dramatic moment.

Despite its flaws, both casual fans and completionists can enjoy the *The War Between the Land and the Sea* - just don't expect it to affect the status quo.



From Emma Best

**The War
Between the
Land and the Sea**

Whovians gather for the screening...



Convention Confidential: *Warriors of the Deep*

Jamie Hailstone heads to the BFI for a remastered undersea adventure

When it was announced in December that Season 21 would be the next instalment in the *Doctor Who* Collection of Blu-ray boxsets, social media chatter immediately turned to which story would be screened at the now-traditional BFI preview event. *The Caves of Androzani* seemed like a safe bet, although it has been shown at the BFI before. *Resurrection of the Daleks* was another obvious choice. Even *Planet of Fire*, given its overseas shoot in Lanzarote, could have made the running. So, imagine the collective groan from *Doctor Who* fandom when it was revealed that *Warriors of the Deep* would be paddling its way over to London's South Bank.

You remember *Warriors of the Deep*, don't you? It's the story that wishes it was *The Sea Devils*, but somehow never quite gets off the starting blocks. It's bogged down by Cold War allegories, a cast who all look like they'd rather be somewhere else and some of the worst lighting to ever grace Classic

Doctor Who. And, of course, there's the Myrka. The dear old Myrka. A pantomime horse literally covered in wet green paint, which unfortunately made its way onto various bits of the set and the actor's costumes. It's little wonder BBC controller Michael Grade used a clip of it on the comedy programme *Room 101* to justify scrapping *Doctor Who* in the 1980s.

“*Warriors of the Deep* was chosen because it's quite an unloved story.”

Fortunately for everyone involved, those lucky enough to get tickets for the BFI screening were going to be seeing a new special edition of *Warriors of the Deep* with updated effects. Special edition producer Peter McTighe was on hand at the event to explain how the updated version came to be.

“When Russell Minton and I originally talked about Season 21, we wanted to do something special for it,” explained Mc-

Tighe. “*Warriors of the Deep* was chosen because it’s quite an unloved story.”

“A lot of the failings happened because they were so under pressure to get the effects right and because they’d been rushed into the studio. It was an insane situation. Initially, we wanted to go in and replace the Myrka, but after looking at the story, I felt there was so much more we could do with it. It could be much tighter.”

“The whole story has been re-edited and given a sense of pace and urgency...”

“Obviously, the original is still there on the boxset, because we all love the original. But now there’s an alternative viewing experience, which is something quite different. It’s not better, it’s different.”

With McTighe’s words ringing in our ears, the lights went down and expectations were higher than they had any right to be. And, boy, he wasn’t kidding. To say the special edition of *Warriors of the Deep* is a vast improvement on the original would not be difficult, because I can list many things that are. More importantly, however, I actually enjoyed watching it – and that’s something I thought I wouldn’t say in a million years.

The whole story has been re-edited and given a sense of pace and urgency that was sorely lacking in the original. The colours have been regraded, so Sea Base Four no longer looks like the frozen food section at Sainsburys, while Mark Ayres has ramped things up with a truly memorable soundscape. Perhaps most controversially of all, the scene where Solow (played by Hammer Films legend Ingrid Pitt) tries to karate kick the Myrka has also been ‘re-imagined’. I won’t say anymore in case you haven’t seen it yet, but it got the day’s biggest round of applause and deservedly so.

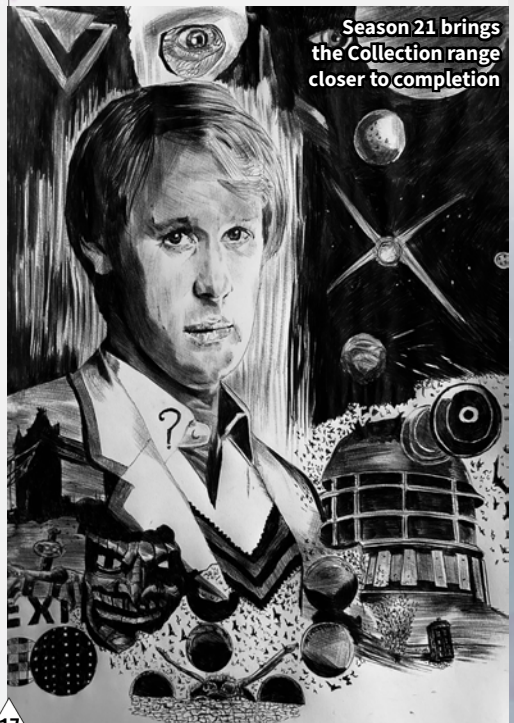
The new special edition also got the thumbs up from writer and critic Matthew Sweet, as well as various cast members including Peter Davison, Janet Fielding and Tara Ward, who played Preston.

“Ingrid Pitt would have loved to have seen this,” said Ward. “I found it strangely emo-

tional, seeing how it had been beautifully improved without losing the feel of the original, so hats off to everyone involved.”

There was also a bit of an exclusive when McTighe revealed the *Destination: Daleks* storyline, which began in the Season 21 trailer, would be continuing as a comic strip in *Doctor Who Magazine*. The BFI’s lead programmer, Justin Johnson, also dropped some hints about a forthcoming screening of the newly restored and 4K version of Paul McGann’s TV Movie.

It’s sad to think the last 1980s series has now got the Collection treatment, and that there are only seven more seasons to go overall. Over the years, these BFI screenings have become the stuff of legend – friendships have been formed, memories have been made and they will be talked about for many years to come. Let’s hope the BFI can find a way for them to continue after the range is complete. In the meantime, there’s the slight matter of the next preview event. Will it be Season 11 (Jon Pertwee’s last) or Season 16 (The Key to Time). Place your bets now!



James Ashway

The Editor

A deep dish

For this issue celebrating all things Sea Devil, what better way to mark the occasion than to put on a bit of a feast? As an avid devotee of the novelty recipe, I thought that Ingrid Pitt's Doctor Solow's Specials in the original *Doctor Who Cookbook* fit the bill nicely. For those who aren't familiar with this mighty tome, it's a collection of recipes submitted by the cast and crew of *Doctor Who* from 1963 all the way through to the mid-1980s. The recipes generally aren't themed or made to look like anything *Who*-ish, but are instead an insight into what these creatives were eating and drinking in their day-to-day lives. Ingrid Pitt's recipes, for instance, provide a selection of eastern European dishes for the home cook to try and make. Much like *Warriors of the Deep*, the story Pitt starred in, these recipes end up as something of a mixed bag.

Doctor Solow's Specials

Ingrid Pitt

While another suggested meal plan in the *Doctor Who Cookbook*, the Brigadier's Banquet, provides a series of recipes that can largely be assembled without much pre-preparation, Doctor Solow's Specials are quite the opposite. Each of the three dishes are quite time-consuming in their own way, and don't naturally lend themselves to a chef alternating between the different dishes as they work towards serving. The preparation is also quite time consuming, and so it can be more than an hour or two before the oven is even turned on. Nonetheless, in the spirit of adventure and for the readers of *Celestial Toyroom*, I persevered.

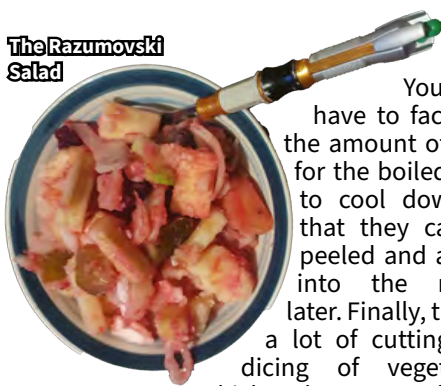


Amountain of
Blinis

The first step in Doctor Solow's grand plan are the blinis – a type of savoury pancake traditionally made in Russia and eastern Europe. While the blinis themselves are made to be relatively small, this recipe requires a large amount of time. The rising periods take up to 90 minutes in total, and that's before you start to cook with the batter! It also quickly become apparent that the recipe doesn't quite deliver what it promised. As the recipe says it makes 32 blinis, I halved this amount to make a smaller batch suitable for the number of guests present. However, I still managed to end up with more than 32 blinis – suggesting that, perhaps, this recipe is much bigger on the inside than it first appears. On the plus side, it does mean that we had more of this delicious starter to share. The blinis are served with sour cream and caviar, though we substituted the latter for a cheaper supermarket alternative. Nonetheless, the saltiness of the fish eggs goes well with the sourness of the cream and the savoury pancakes, making for a winning combination. Cookbook editor Gary Downie also suggests drinking some neat vodka with the starter – we gave it a go, but it's not for the faint hearted!

Next up is the Razumovski Salad, which is another time-consuming dish. The chef needs to boil eggs, beetroot and potatoes before the recipe itself even starts, which takes even longer if you don't have enough pans to be able to cook them all at once.

The Razumovski Salad



You also have to factor in the amount of time for the boiled eggs to cool down so that they can be peeled and added into the recipe later. Finally, there's a lot of cutting and dicing of vegetables which takes up a lot of time – this isn't a quick salad you can throw together in a hurry! It's not helped by the fact that it doesn't specify how many servings this makes – in the end, we estimate that it makes at least eight hefty portions, so there were a lot of leftovers to save for another day. It doesn't help that this salad, while succeeding as a somewhat sour and savoury dish, is one that's best served in smaller quantities. The vast amount we ended up with, therefore, just wasn't worth the amount of time that had to be put in to make it.



Zraza (before)...

Onto the main now, and it's time for Zraza. These are normally beef slices wrapped around a filling of vegetables and other ingredients, but to account for the pescatarian diet of some of our guests, we tried something a bit different. The beef was replaced with vegetarian beef meatballs to try and provide the right texture, with thin vegetarian beef slices round the outside as the wrap. Meanwhile, the bacon filling was swapped out for a vegetarian equivalent. While the filling substitution wasn't an issue, the thin beef slices around the outside didn't hold up when being simmered in a broth in the oven. In the end, this ended

up as a bit more of a vegetarian hotpot or stew than the recipe intended, but it was a pretty tasty one. The accompanying sauce adds subtle meaty and creamy flavours to the dish, and is one that would probably be quite impressive to serve if it were made in its original form. In any case, the time investment pays off much better here than it did in the salad.



...and Zraza (after)

Last but not least, there's some rye bread and cheese to finish everything off. How much you enjoy this really depends on how much you like rye bread, so it wasn't really for me. It's also quite a heavy way to end what's already been quite a carbohydrate-packed dinner. On the plus side, this easy-to-make part of the meal gives you some time to appreciate one of the cook-book's signature caricatures – this time, a well-realised Dr Solow making Blinis while a hungry Sea Devil looks over her shoulder.

While it might not be the perfect set of recipes for a dinner party, Doctor Solow's Specials have certainly provided a memorable meal for both the chef and guests alike. There are a lot of good flavours in these dishes, but the recipes could have probably done with a bit more editing to smooth out some of the issues I found in making them. As a hungry Fifth Doctor might have put it, there should have been another way to make these dishes.

Bon appétit!

Fan face off: In favour of *Warriors of the Deep*

Huw Turbervill makes the case for Johnny Byrne's last *Who* story

I didn't keep a diary, but I imagine Thursday January 5 1984 was not a happy day for 11-year-old me. I had just gone back to school after Christmas. Not only was it cold outside, but the Cold War was raging, and I had a cold (well, I might have done). There was also the Miners' Strike looming and an IRA bombing campaign was going on in London. It was all rather grisly. There was one saving grace, though. *Doctor Who* was back – what better way to light up gloomy January?

It was Season 21, still with Peter Davison as the Doctor, and I thought he was doing a wonderful job – his exit was still nearly a whole season away. I remember being really excited for *Warriors of the Deep*, which had been trailed a few days before. There was some decent model work of Sentinel Six, a Silurian

and the Doctor saying, “When I say run, run!” in Troughton-esque fashion. It all looked absolutely splendid, as this incarnation of the Doctor might have said.

“Modern *Doctor Who*... never comes as close to the knuckle as this.”

When I saw the serial itself, I don't recall being disappointed. I've always been fond of this adventure, and remember being quite surprised when I read poor reviews of it. Rewatching it again for the umpteenth time recently, I can see its faults but still like it. As this article demonstrates, I'm quite happy to go in print in support of it.

For one thing, *Warriors of the Deep* is quite exciting and gripping. It tapped into themes of paranoia that were quite pertinent in 1984. As someone who lived through the



period, it did feel that we were uncomfortably close to World War Three. My father eagerly devoured new bulletins that were rife with tales of Soviet espionage, and it wasn't just the West that were concerned. The Soviets were spooked by Ronald Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative as well as Operation Able Archer, a NATO drill a few months earlier that is often credited as one of the closest times we came to nuclear annihilation. Modern *Doctor Who* is often accused of being political, but it never comes as close to the knuckle as this.

“...people forget just how excellent a performance Davison gives in this serial.”

There's also a lot to appreciate in the production as well. Mat Irvine's model work, whether in space or on the seabed, is really quite good. A few additional details might have been a nice touch, such as a few bubbles or fish, but the effort put into these shots is undeniable. Similarly, the Silurian costumes pass muster – especially if you haven't seen the 1970 story. The Sea Devils also look pretty good when they're still, and one looks absolutely superb on the original Target novel's cover.

I also think there's a lot that gets swept up in complaints about the rest of the serial that's really not that bad. The Myrka in particular gets a lot of negative publicity. Is it perfect? No. But it's much better than creatures like Erato that preceded it, or the Magma Beast, the Ergon and Plasmatoms that followed. Yes, it leaves paint everywhere, but that makes it seem much more organic. I also think that people forget just how excellent a performance Davison gives in this serial. He performs his part with complete conviction, just like the professional he is. Episode Four is a particular highlight, as are the scenes using the giant water tanks in Shepperton and Southampton. Even Dr Solow's karate kick on the Myrka, often highlighted as one of the low points of *Doctor Who*, can be defended – she had no idea that the creature would be able to electrocute her.

For the parts of the story that are understandably criticised, there are many mitigations to consider. The unexpected calling of a general election meant *Warriors of the Deep* did not enjoy the studio time a serial normally would. I think Pennant Roberts' direction always appears uneven and inattentive to detail whatever story he is on – consider Neeva's cricketer glove helmet in *The Face of Evil* – and that lets down an otherwise impressive concept. I admit there's abysmal acting from some of the extras, while the Sea Devils talk far too slowly, but this only acts to obscure an otherwise solid premise. Many of the features that let down the production weren't present in Johnny Byrne's original script, which was altered heavily during pre-production and filming.

Ultimately, *Warriors of the Deep* is a tale of what might have been. The viewer is left with a feeling of sadness for the rushed production, the extraordinary number of deaths and the last-minute changes. Nonetheless, I thought, and still think, that the serial has plenty to enjoy. For all those feelings to dissipate through time, or for your views to be totally swayed by critics, seems wrong. Don't be a worrier – love *Warriors!*

Blast from the past

A positive review by Peter Owen from *Tardis* Vol. Nine No. One in 1984

On the verge of what could be a rough time for *Doctor Who* under John Nathan-Turner, *Warriors of the Deep* was very welcome as an example of just how good a Davison story can be. It contained all the best elements of the previous 14 stories, and carefully avoided all their bad points. This was a story rooted in *Doctor Who* mythology with elements of *The Silurians*, *The Sea Devils*, *Terror of the Zygons*, *Fury from the Deep* and *Frontier in Space* all certainly showing. This is typical of JNT's approach, which has made Seasons 19 and 20 the era not of the Fifth Doctor, but of the five Doctors. On this occasion the main point of reference was the Pertwee era, reflected not only in the monsters, but also in the location, sets and excellent model work. Characterisation, another JNT speciality, was first-class.

Fan face off: Opposed to *Warriors of the Deep*

Alan Darlington makes the case against the Cold War-era tale

Back in 1983, John Nathan-Turner worked out just the type of story that would excite a fan like me – one with returning enemies from the history of the show. *Warriors of the Deep* would contain not just one old enemy but two, as both the Sea Devils and Silurians would face off against the current Doctor. It was a prospect I relished, especially as I had missed out on *Doctor Who and the Silurians* the first time around. Did it satisfy the eager young fan? At the time, I think it did – with a few reservations. Over the years since, the story has slipped into the category of ‘not great but not rubbish either’. However, when I rewatched the story again recently, I found myself homing in on its faults more than I had done previously.

“In many different scenes, the background Sea Devils mull around aimlessly...”

Before I get into that, I have to say that *Warriors of the Deep* isn’t completely beyond redemption. Johnny Byrne’s script is reasonably solid and has some good moments, particularly in Episode Four. The Doctor acknowledges the nobility of the Silurians and is prepared to seek peace, providing a strong contrast with the humans on the brink of Cold War annihilation. He condemns the humans’ willingness to kill the attackers with hexachromite and insists on seeking an alternative solution. Even at the end, when it’s all looking increasingly bleak, he seeks to save the Silurians. The final line, “there should have been another way,” hits hard, and its effect is amplified by the titles rolling immediately afterwards.

Unfortunately, these good moments are undermined by some odd plotting. The regular cast seem to switch erratically between wanting to leave the seabase and wanting to speak to the crew. Turlough, in particular, is badly served by the script. It seems like the script was written with an untrustworthy Turlough, as in *Mawdryn Undead*, and that the character’s develop-

Do the Sea Devil Elite live up to their name?



ment was hurriedly added at the last minute. His final line condemning the deaths is a good character moment, but it doesn't tally with what has gone before.

“The new Silurian design did not impress even the younger, less critical, me.”

The guest characters are also quite disappointing. Tom Adams (Vorshak), Ingrid Pitt (Dr Solow) and Ian McCulloch (Nilson) were hardly inexperienced actors but put in stilted performances as if they were new to television. They share numerous knowing looks, as if no one in the production team could trust viewers to know what they're up to. In fact, Nilson and Solow are so obvious as double agents that it's hard to see how they weren't discovered earlier. Solow's bizarre karate attack on the Myrka is another odd moment, an illogical action which is compounded by being so poorly staged and filmed.

Speaking of the Myrka, no review of *Warriors of the Deep* would be complete without mentioning it. It's not an inherently bad idea – I recall seeing the costume on display in a dimly-lit case in Blackpool and it looked relatively good. This was the initial plan for presenting the seabase and the Myrka, but that's not what happened when the story moved into production. Instead, the bright light and white walls of the base mean there's nowhere for the costume's faults to hide. It would also have helped to disguise how light the door trapping Tegan was, making this scene seem much more perilous. I appreciate when *Doctor Who* is ambitious, but when that ambition can't be realised things can look appalling.

The Myrka was not the only questionable reptilian in the story. The new Silurian design did not impress even the younger, less critical, me. I remember writing, “what next, a bald Yeti?” at the time! They've also lost the ability to use their third eye for anything else but showing who's talking – an interesting feature of their species completely forgotten. While the Sea Devils look much better in comparison, they're

performed with the same agonisingly slow movements and dialogue. They also don't live up to their 'elite' designation. In many different scenes, the background Sea Devils mull around aimlessly, or stand with their heads slumped to one side, meaning they miss obvious things like the Doctor escaping. They're also pretty poor shots, and only manage to miss a few less times than their equally incompetent human counterparts. If the Sea Devil Elite are such bad aims, then I hate to think what the lower ranks were like!

All in all, *Warriors of the Deep's* basic concepts are fine, but the execution really lets this down. A few simple adjustments, including better lighting, better direction of the cast and more inventive camera angles, could have gone a long way towards addressing these faults. As it is, *Warriors of the Deep's* issues add up to a story that proves itself to be much less than the sum of its parts.

Blast from the past

A negative review by Christopher Denyer from *Tardis* Vol. Nine No. One in 1984

The idea of a group of individuals in a small community under attack from monstrous invaders has occurred on many occasions throughout the history of the programme but this one did not offer anything new. After all, the entire plot could be summarised in a couple of lines: one straightforward invasion foiled by the use of toxic gas and one sub-plot involving enemy agents. How did it last four episodes? Equally annoying were the continuity errors. How did the Doctor get to know about the Myrka and how could he recognise the Silurian battle cruiser? He has seen neither of these before. The changes in appearance of the Silurians were unjustified and unlike the Dalek and Cybermen changes cannot be explained as a “change of design.” The Sea Devils were reduced in size and looked far less threatening than in *The Sea Devils*. The human/Sea Devil battles were anything but action-packed and were particularly lacking in visual effects.

Sea-crets, spies and Liz Shaw

James Ashway on a nineties outing for the Silurians and Sea Devils

In the 1990s, *Doctor Who* was doing things a bit differently. With the show off the air, the adventures of the Doctor were told in novels, comics and, eventually, audios. One of the most notable strands of *Doctor Who* from this period were the Virgin books, mostly comprising the ongoing adventures of the Seventh Doctor in the New Adventures. On the other side of the coin were the Missing Adventures, inserting new stories between other *Doctor Who* serials. While these stories were initially pitched as being faithful to the eras they represented, many showed familiar Doctors in lights that would never have been allowed on television. *The Scales of Injustice*, by Gary Russell, is one of these. This dark, cynical thriller sees the Third Doctor, Liz Shaw and the UNIT team confront enemies both home and abroad as the Silurians and Sea Devils emerge once more.

“What follows is a tense tale of political double crossing and espionage...”

The book sets out its stall pretty early on when scientist Grant Taylor is brutally killed by one of his own creations in the opening pages. What follows is a tense tale of political double crossing and espionage as rogue elements within C19, a darker UNIT-like operation, make a power play. It's a story that probably could have been told on television, even to the extent of being divided into seven episodes, but the specifics would definitely have had to change. If Mary Whitehouse was shocked by the contents of *The Deadly Assassin*,

she would have been catatonic if she'd ever sat down to read *The Scales of Injustice*. There are car bombings, torture scenes, mass killings and, to cap it all off, the death of a child. Family teatime viewing this ain't.

More compelling than all that, however, is the book's emotional side. While this novel does feature the Third Doctor, who gets more than enough to do, it's much more interested in Liz Shaw and the Brigadier. The latter probably gets the most character development he's ever had, particularly in these novels, as we see the cracks form between the affable Leth-



bridge-Stewart and the serious Brigadier. Over the course of the book, the widening chasm between his personal and private lives eventually engulfs his marriage, his home and his relationship with his daughter Kate, with little he can do to stop it. Throughout it all he has to remain ready to serve his planet at any time, which is neatly highlighted in this quietly devastating passage: “Alistair Lethbridge-Stewart had been put away. The Brigadier was ready for action.”

“[The Brigadier] probably gets the most character development he’s ever had...”

For Liz Shaw, meanwhile, this story is one of her several swansongs. She’s presented as someone academically interested in everything that happens at UNIT, but who yearns to return to Cambridge and live a normal life again. It’s one of the many

ways that *The Scales of Injustice* takes the lack of detail about Liz and makes it into a strength. By cobbling together UNIT history from the show’s entire run at that time, it manages to craft an effective way of letting Liz leave *Doctor Who* on her own terms without denigrating what came before.

When it’s not piecing together UNIT continuity, the novel’s also trying to join up the continuity of the Silurians and the Sea Devils – collectively known as Earth Reptiles. *The Scales of Injustice* puts a few twists on the standard formula of negotiation and conflict, adding Silurian/Sea Devil hybrids to the mix, but nothing on the level of *The War Between the Land and the Sea*. Instead, it’s a bit more of an Earth Reptile greatest hits as it ties up the continuity between *The Silurians*, *The Sea Devils* and *Warriors of the Deep*. It’s perhaps a bit of a missed opportunity that it doesn’t go further, but the novel’s already packing a lot in.

“...this grittier take on the Third Doctor’s era still contains plenty to admire...”

While *The Scales of Injustice* won’t be to everyone’s tastes, it’s certainly one of the most striking Missing Adventures and arguably one of the range’s high points. It’s not a perfect book – it runs on a bit long, and some of its allusions to other *Doctor Who* novels are a bit opaque for the modern reader. There are also some loose plot threads that are eventually followed up on, but might make someone reading today feel like they’re missing out on something. Nonetheless, this grittier take on the Third Doctor’s era still contains plenty to admire, even as it celebrates its 30th anniversary. While original copies are hard to come by, a 2010s reprint and audiobook are more readily available on a second-hand marketplace of your choosing. As our own world takes a turn for the cynical, now seems like as good a time as any to see that happen through the lens of *Doctor Who*.



Darwin's

BLOODTIDE

DILEMMA

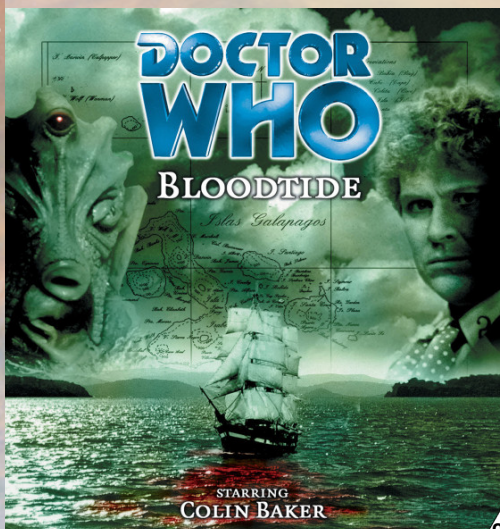
By Chris Kocher

Since *Doctor Who* returned to our TV screens in 2005, the Doctor and his companions have recruited numerous famous names from history to help them fight off alien threats – Charles Dickens, Agatha Christie, Winston Churchill and Nikola Tesla to name just a few. It's a step change from classic *Who*, where the Doctor was a notorious name-dropper (including Nostradamus, Galileo and Mao) but never brought these famous faces along for the ride. Some 'pure' historicals featured encounters with figures such as Marco Polo and Nero, but there weren't any other-worldly adventures to be had. In fact, the only example of what's become known as the celebrity historical that I can think of is *Timelash*, which features a young H.G. Wells in a major role. This style of storytelling returned in Big Finish's *Bloodtide* 16 years later, penned by the ever-prolific Jonathan Morris.

"In true *Doctor Who* fashion, the Doctor and Evelyn are soon separated..."

When this story was released 25 years ago, Big Finish was the only source of regular, live action *Doctor Who*. Paul McGann had only just joined Peter Davison, Colin Baker and Sylvester McCoy in these audio adventures, and what stories they were. The Sixth Doctor particularly benefitted from these adventures, with fans warming up to the character thanks to some cracking performances and scripts. One of the best ideas that the range had was to introduce Maggie Stables as companion Evelyn Smythe, a history professor who was mature and sassy enough to put the Sixth Doctor in his place when needed. *Bloodtide* is only her fourth appearance, but Stables' hilarious, heartfelt and heroic performance meant that she was already beloved.

In *Bloodtide*, the Doctor surprises Evelyn by taking her to meet one of her heroes – naturalist and biologist Charles Darwin (Miles Richardson). They land on the Galápagos Islands in 1835, where Darwin is starting to formulate his theories about natural selection based on how different species adapt to the specific conditions on each island. However, strange things are happening on the islands. There are prisoners who disappear in jail and are never heard from again, and a suspicious governor presiding over events. In true *Doctor Who* fashion, the Doctor and Evelyn are soon separated and begin to investigate what's happening with the help of Darwin and some new friends. Based on the cover,



Cover credit: Big Finish and background image adapted from: NASA, ESA (esashubble.org/images/hetcl015a, CC BY 4.0)

you might not be entirely surprised to hear the the Silurians might have something to do with it.

The story borrows heavily from *Doctor Who* and *The Silurians*, featuring many familiar tropes: hypnotised humans, deadly infections and warring Silurian factions that the Doctor exploits for the greater good. *Bloodtide* walks a difficult path by acting as both a prequel and a sequel to Jon Pertwee's classic, and goes to great pains to explain why the Silurians failed to wake up from their millennia-long slumber. Morris even includes a monstrous, ship-smashing Myrka – referred to as an 'adult' specimen to distance it from the infamous creature that appeared in *Warriors of the Deep* (and why this story appears in our Sea Devil roundup – Ed.).

“Bloodtide walks a difficult path... as both a prequel and a sequel to Jon Pertwee’s classic...”

Richardson – better known to Big Finish aficionados as Braxiatel in the *Bernice Summerfield* and *Gallifrey* audios – does an admirable job portraying Darwin's gradual realization that differences among species are not from God's hand, but the work of nature over millennia. While there's plenty of excitement and incident to be had from the Silurians, Darwin forms the emotional core of *Bloodtide*. Listeners can empathise with his rising doubts about everything he has believed for his entire life, making him a much changed man by the time we reach the end of the story.

Is *Bloodtide* a groundbreaking story? Plot-wise, it's a pretty straightforward run-around with the usual cycle of captures, escapes and recaptures that keep everyone occupied. But it's the character moments that make it special, whether it's the Doctor musing about how time erases all things or Darwin grappling with his crisis of faith. It's something that Big Finish did well in those early years – making stories that felt familiar to old-school fans but with layers and nuance that anticipated *Doctor Who*'s TV revival.

Blast from the past

An excerpt from an interview with **Jonathan Morris** in *CT #289*, where he discusses *Bloodtide*'s creation.

“I was asked by Big Finish to come up with ideas for a story featuring the Sixth Doctor and Evelyn involving both the Silurians and the Sea Devils,” he remembers. “I felt it would be problematic to feature two monster races in one story. I wanted it to be just Sea Devils, but we compromised on Silurians. I think this was the right decision; Silurians work better on audio as they can carry dialogue and show emotions. Writing dialogue for monsters is always tricky. On the one hand you want to avoid having them saying hands-on-hips things like, ‘The Doctor must die! Excellent!’ all the time, but on the other hand, you can’t have them talking casually, using contractions and saying things like, ‘We’ve captured the Doctor. That’s nice!’”

“The goal with *Bloodtide*, for me, was to write a traditional four-part *Doctor Who* monster story. It’s a very strong formula and does rather dictate the structure of the storyline. I also wanted to try to make it more straightforward and focused than *Festival of Death*. I was also attempting to have themes running from scene to scene, with alternating scenes exploring the same ideas from different perspectives. That was what I was attempting, anyway.”

“To begin with, I was worried I would not have enough story to fill four episodes, and considered another plot strand set in a freakshow in Victorian London. Fortunately I decided not to bother with that (rather corny) idea. Similarly, I couldn’t really manage to work the Sea Devils into the story.”

How much research was undertaken? “I watched the 1999 repeat of *Doctor Who* and *the Silurians*, though I didn’t take notes or study it particularly closely, because there is a danger that you can start concentrating too much on what has gone before. *Warriors of the Deep* was one of the first stories I videoed off the TV, so naturally I know it verbatim.”

BATTLES | THE POISON AND BENNY SEAS

By Filip Wieland

Cover credit: Big Finish

The first time I encountered Professor Bernice Summerfield was in one of the two Big Finish Main Range stories she appeared in. At the time, I didn't realise that she was a major character dating back all the way to 1992's *Love and War*, published during *Doctor Who's* Wilderness Years. I've since learned that she's not just a companion to the Doctor, but is also presented as the Time Lord's equal. As befits such a status, she's been the protagonist of her own series of novels at Virgin as well as countless Big Finish audios. Back in 2003, this saw her encounter the Sea Devils in *Professor Bernice Summerfield and the Poison Seas*.

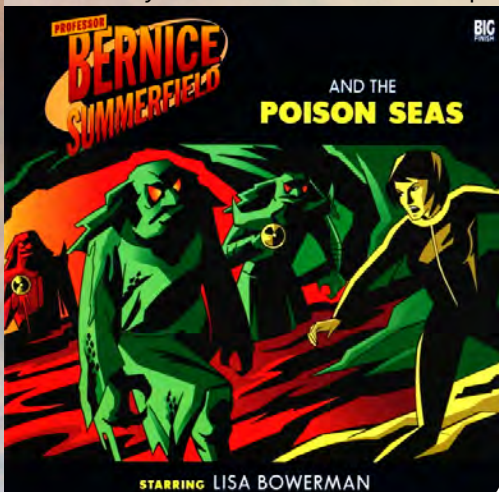
In this audio, the Sea Devils have decided to move away from Earth – and given the ending of *The War Between the Land and the Sea*, who can blame them? They've established a colony in the seas of the planet Chosan, which they also share with humans. Benny has been sent here to help

the Sea Devils defend themselves against a terrorist organisation born out of a war that recently ravaged the planet. I later found out this all follows on from a previous Benny audio, *The Secrets of Cassandra*, but it's not really important to understand *The Poison Seas*. All you need to know is that the Sea Devils are in trouble, with their bases under attack from both the terrorist group and the aggressive local sea life.

“...a base-under-siege story... that reveals hidden depths, both literally and metaphorically...”

As soon as the story kicks off, it's immediately apparent that everyone here seems to have their own agenda. Submarine captain Carver speaks of being orphaned during the war from the last time Benny visited Chosan, and how the unaddressed trauma of that upbringing has put her on a path of violence against the perceived enemies of her continent. Base chief Lurnix might secretly be collaborating with terrorists – or using them to achieve his own goals. And even the ocean itself might be up to something. Not only is there aggressive wildlife in Chosan's seas, but there's something in the water that's causing strange mutations among some of the Sea Devils who have swam in the open water. What starts off as a problem of molecular biology quickly becomes more metaphysical in nature as a mysterious entity uses proteins to bind sea creatures to its will.

David Bailey's storytelling here is very effective and efficient. While it might be a base-under-siege story, it's an enjoyable one that reveals hidden depths, both



literally and metaphorically, among its characters. Benny herself is a particular beneficiary. Having been reading some of her adventures in the New Adventures for this very publication, this still feels like the first time I've got to sit with the character properly since *Love and War*. This is very much 'Main Character' Benny, complete with a speech about how she's not really brave but still shows up and does the adventuring anyway. It's similar to the sort of speeches the Doctor might give, but something about this felt different. Maybe it's the lack of bombast, or Benny being altogether a lot more, well, human.

The personal nature of Bailey's story is also reflected in one of its major themes – the meaning of what 'home' is. Both the terrorist cell and the protein entity want to rid their home of a perceived Other, but have very different perspectives on this. One wants to eliminate anyone they don't like by exterminating them, while the entity wants to assimilate them into itself. The Sea Devils, meanwhile, want somewhere to call home away from the noise and pollution of Earth's oceans. And Benny... Benny just wants to go home. But judging by the garbled radio transmission towards the end, she's not going to get there anytime soon.

The only major criticism I have of *The Poison Seas* is its sound editing. I had trouble understanding some of the Sea Devil dialogue, especially from the more minor characters. There's a certain combination of the Sea Devils' stuttering, deliberate style of speaking with the echo of a large space that means the words can be completely blurred. This only happens a handful of times, but it does make some scenes more difficult to understand than they really needed to be.

Reservations aside, I really enjoyed this audio drama and would recommend that anyone interested give it a listen. As the Sea Devils are having a bit of a resurgence in the 2020s, now seems like the right time to explore some of their back catalogue. Whatever you might discover, it certainly can't get any worse than the head of UNIT playing beach police!

Dear CT,

I must admit that I tuned into *The War Between the Land and the Sea* not expecting much. What was this random spin-off no one asked for? Was this just going to be the mid-2020s version of *Torchwood: Children of Earth*?

With my arms crossed, I began watching and have to admit I was pleasantly surprised. Of course, its tone was more *Torchwood* than *Doctor Who*, but it was grounded enough to be an earnest, gripping and entertaining sci-fi drama. Whilst one assumed *Romeo and Juliet* tropes based on the promotional materials, the characters of Barclay and Salt were much more developed, nuanced and real than that. The simplicity of Barclay's understanding of the world and the anger of Salt made them real adversaries before their relationship evolved into something else.

I think one could criticise some of the more simplistic parts, be they conspiratorial plots and assassinations, the quick romance or how many characters suddenly realised that pollution is bad. However, given the compact nature of five episodes, there was certainly a lot to get done. This was a bold and successful spin-off, and I look forward to more from the UNIT team – hopefully with Rose Noble, Mel, and the Vlinx next time!



From Phillip Gilfus

*The War
Between the
Land and the Sea*

A DEVIL OF A TIME

TIDAL WAVE

By Emma Best

Cover credit: Big Finish

Long before *The War Between the Land and the Sea* aired, I was eagerly consuming the *UNIT: The New Series* audios to better understand the characters and structure of the modern UNIT. I was especially excited about *Tidal Wave*, the second episode of the *Assembled* story arc, since the audio directly deals with the Sea Devils being dragged into a conflict with UNIT.

“An outstanding cast manages to overcome the issues with the audio’s script...”

For anyone expecting overt parallels with *The War Between the Land and the Sea*, don’t get your hopes up. While I hardly expected the TV series to directly reference a Big Finish audio made more than eight years before, there’s very little connecting the two. It’s hard to think of the Sea Devils in *Tidal Wave* as having any relation to those in *The War Between the Land and the Sea*, and I think it’s quite unlikely that Russell T Davies and Pete McTighe listened to this as part of their preparation for writing the show. *Tidal Wave*, for instance, establishes that the Sea Devils are able to create bio-engineered sea creatures that can be used as weapons – a technological capability that was notably unexplored in the recent series. It’s not the fault of either story that they don’t enhance the experience of the other, of course, but it does create a disconnect between these different versions of Kate Stewart’s UNIT.

Now that’s out of the way, let’s discuss what *Tidal Wave* is actually about. It’s the second part of the *UNIT: Assembled* box-set, and essentially amounts to a fetch quest that acts in service of the overall sto-

ry. While it presents a complete story in its own right, it lacks any significant narrative or plot development beyond that which seeds elements for later in the *UNIT: Assembled* story arc. It does succeed, however, at fulfilling the series’ nostalgic potential by joining the modern UNIT family with classic UNIT member Jo Jones (née Grant). Katy Manning wears her role like an old sweater and delivers some of the episode’s best lines, like “UNIT always did need more hugs”, even if the writing for her character is uneven. Jo is presented alternately as a compassionate person that campaigns for an end to animal experimentation and as someone who labels objections to the term ‘Sea Devil’ as “political correctness gone mad.” It’s something that doesn’t ring true for the character as someone who normally goes out of their way to accommodate everyone. While she eventually makes an effort to use more correct terminology, it’s unclear from Guy Adams’ writing whether



this was a response to being called an “ape”, an attempt at practicality while dealing with the Sea Devils or character development.

Jo’s role in the story also seeks to honour the Doctor’s past efforts to establish peace between humans and the Sea Devils. While it’s not unusual for the Doctor to be absent in *UNIT: The New Series*, the constant discussion of them in *Tidal Wave* means that they loom large over the story. Whether it’s Jo referring to them as “the man I loved” or repeated reflections on *The Sea Devils*, the result is that the Doctor’s absence is felt unusually strongly such that I spent as much time thinking about them as the characters that are actually in the story.

Those who are present, however, are as good as ever. Jemma Redgrave is excellent as always, despite only being in a few scenes, while Ingrid Oliver has perfected Osgood’s mix of fanservice and characterisation. Fanservice isn’t something I usually enjoy, but Oliver infuses it with such enthusiasm that it works. Listening to her performance gave me the same feeling that talking about *Doctor Who* with another fan does, but without breaking my suspension of disbelief. It’s a very comforting element, and in some ways it’s like visiting an old friend with new friends – while the familiar is soothing, the experience is also infused with new elements that make it different from past experiences and stories. For me, fanservice, especially obvious fanservice, is usually a red flag. But the fanservice in *Tidal Wave* **works**, and the writing and performances are good enough to pull it off even though you’re aware of the tricks Guy Adams is using to pull it off.

While *Tidal Wave* has its flaws, I still found myself smiling at the story after listening to it a second time. An outstanding cast manages to overcome the issues with the audio’s script, ensuring that it makes for a solid part of the wider *UNIT: Assembled* arc. *Tidal Wave* may not be well connected to *The War Between the Land and the Sea*, but it’s nonsensical to apply those criticisms to a story made before that series was probably even a seed in Russell T Davies’ mind. It’s ultimately an enjoyable way to spend an hour, and you can’t ask for more than that.

Dear CT,

I’ll admit I did approach *The War Between the Land and the Sea* with a certain amount of trepidation. This was mostly due to rather personal reasons. I spend a lot of time writing about climate change, and occasionally *Doctor Who*, so having to think about the two things at the same time could have spelled disaster for my addled brain, or rather what’s left of it.

But what really impressed me were the scenes between Salt and Barclay in the negotiation chamber in the second episode. Salt airing the grievances of her species and Barclay’s script of political platitudes really hit home. Climate change and sustainability can often seem like abstract and complex issues, but the dialogue brought it to life perfectly.

Some readers may not know this, but in August, talks to establish a legally binding international



agreement to tackle plastic pollution ended without an agreement. The recent COP30 climate summit in Brazil also failed to explicitly agree on the roadmaps to transition away from fossil fuels and halt deforestation.

These are important issues, which will have to be addressed in one way or another. Kudos to Russell T Davies and Pete McTighe for highlighting them boldly and imaginatively.

From Jamie Hailstone

*The War
Between the
Land and the Sea*



A Chief Sea Devil's life for me

Jez Strickley looks back at 2022's Easter Special

The last adventures of Jodie Whittaker's Doctor saw a variety of villainous favourites stepping up for one final tilt at her Time Lord. Amongst these figures was an especially welcome returnee: the Sea Devils. A cameo in *Dimensions in Time* notwithstanding, it had been almost 40 years since these underwater menaces were last seen in 1984's *Warriors of the Deep*. They sailed back onto our screens in 2022's Easter Special, *Legend of the Sea Devils*, for what promised to be a swash-buckling adventure on the high seas.

To briefly recap, *Legend of the Sea Devils* sees the Doctor, Yaz and Dan making an unplanned landing in nineteenth-century China. Soon enough, the trio become caught up in a hunt for the treasure of a lost Portuguese carrack, the *Flor de la Mar*, and the world-threatening machinations of a Chief Sea Devil intent on flooding the Earth. This

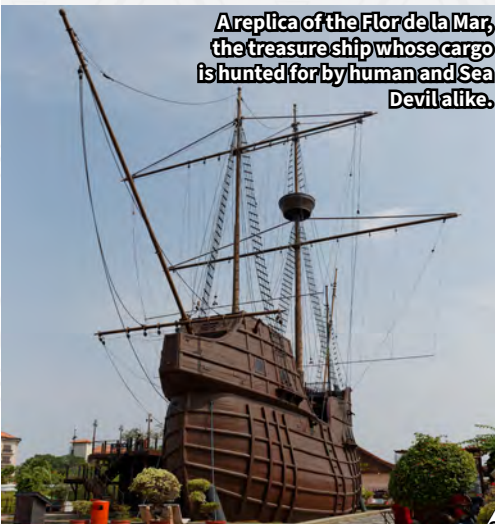
makes *Legend of the Sea Devils* the first televised story where these marine reptiles aren't playing second fiddle to their Silurian cousins or the Master.

Reintroducing an old monster for such an occasion, therefore, requires finesse. Chris Chibnall and Ella Road deserve credit for balancing the story's competing demands as they weave elements of Chinese history, such as the piracy of Zheng Yi Sao, into the fictional narrative of the Sea Devils. Indeed, the act of tapping into East Asian culture here appears more genuine than the Sea Devils' Samurai aesthetic in *Warriors of the Deep*, and helps this reboot veer away from the monster-of-the-week routine. Certainly, the Chief Sea Devil and its crew are better served in this regard than their reptilian relatives in Chibnall's earlier work *The Hungry Earth/Cold Blood*.

Keeping the Sea Devils' appearance in line with their 1970s iteration is another well-judged move. Subtle adjustments can work well, but larger changes, such as

Victory of the Daleks' redesign of its titular foes, have taught us that if it ain't broke, don't fix it. One smart upgrade, though, is that the Chief Sea Devil appears to communicate via an auxiliary device, avoiding the problem of an animatronic jaw not quite synching with the spoken lines. The Hua-Shen and the flying galleon are also nicely realised and make for memorable additions to Sea Devil lore.

There's also a welcome change among the regular cast's dynamic, which is refreshingly easy going. Shorn of the weighty *Flux* story arc, and with no heavy foreshadowing of Whittaker's looming departure, the TARDIS crew is allowed, for a single outing, just to be. The poignant conversation between the Doctor and Yaz, where an understanding between them is shared, is the highlight of this breathing space. There's also time for some harmless distraction. Dan, for instance, is introduced to the less serious side of historical time travel by way of Yaz's costuming, whilst the Doctor gets the chance to play the awe-and-wonder card as she encounters the marvels of the deep blue sea. There are some fun swashbuckling moments, and although Dan's swordsmanship seems exaggerated in places, it echoes his pirate costume rather well. This is a story which doesn't take itself too seriously, and, quite frankly, is all the better for it.



A replica of the Flor de la Mar, the treasure ship whose cargo is hunted for by human and Sea Devil alike.

That being said, *Legend of the Sea Devils* tends to receive low scores from critics and series polls alike, which rank it towards the bottom of the Whittaker era. This is a pity. As a seasonal special, and the Thirteenth Doctor's penultimate story, it could have been a wonderful momentum builder for her finale. So, given the positives I've outlined, why does this story fall short of the mark?

“...a story which doesn't take itself too seriously, and... is all the better for it.”

I suggest there are two issues here which are hard to bat away. The first is that there's little in the way of real menace, despite the Hua-Shen. The Chief Sea Devil's scheme, with its ecocidal intentions, seems to come and go too easily. It's as though it were part of a more developed storyline, edited down to meet an unforeseen shorter time slot. Dan's aforementioned blade craft, which makes light work of a gang of Sea Devils, emphasises this point and leaves the hostile plans of these aquatic antagonists somewhat overstated. While the previous Easter special, *Planet of the Dead*, is similarly quite unthreatening, it's lifted by its location filming and some lively acting from Lee Evans.

This last detail ties into the second issue. Although the cast does a decent job of carrying the plot, and John Bishop in particular seems more at home in his role, there's no standout performance in *Legend of the Sea Devils*. To be fair to the actors, given the lack of time, there's not much opportunity for it either. A touch of righteous indignation, à la the Doctor's reaction to the Pirate Captain's shrunken worlds in *The Pirate Planet*, would not go amiss to push things that bit further.

If *Legend of the Sea Devils* were tucked in amongst a season of tales, its shortcomings would be less pronounced. But as a standalone Easter special, it doesn't punch its weight. It's this lack of substance that leaves an otherwise decent story at half-mast.

UNDER THE WAVES

THE SEAS OF TITAN

By Christine Grit

Cover credit: Big Finish

can't be the only one who was delighted when Christopher Eccleston donned his leather jacket once again and stepped back into the role of the Ninth Doctor at Big Finish. His Doctor has now experienced many more series of audio adventures than he ever had on television, exploring strange new worlds and meeting some old favourites. *The Seas of Titan*, the first story of the *Hidden Depths* boxset, finally introduces the Ninth Doctor to the Sea Devils on one of Saturn's moons and provides a very enjoyable story in the process.

“It’s wonderful to finally see a future where humans and Sea Devils can... live together...”

The early Ninth Doctor boxsets feature the Time Lord travelling on his own, picking up a new friend along the way before heading off alone once more. For *The Seas of Titan*, the companion of the week is Diana Hendry, the lead researcher in a near-abandoned outpost. An economic crisis on Earth means that the whole Titan colony is on the verge of collapse and, aside from her co-researcher Rachel Bates, Diana is the only person working on this base. Nonetheless, both scientists struggle on against the odds to try and prove that there is life in Titan's oceans. The arrival of the Doctor sparks a change in Diana's life, as he encourages her research and joins her in a submersible heading out to explore the oceans. However, this dive inevitably goes wrong – and the Sea Devils are waiting...

At first, *The Seas of Titan* seems like it's going to stick quite rigidly to the standard Silurian and Sea Devil story format. The Sea

Devils have caused a pandemic to make Titan's human colonists suffer in response to the pollution they're releasing into the ocean, while there are good and bad members of both groups as they work towards peace. However, it manages to plot a new course and end up a little differently than I'd expected. The Sea Devils have developed a beautiful city beneath Titan's waves and, after a lot of struggles, eventually decide to let the surviving humans join them there. It's wonderful to finally see a future where humans and Sea Devils can find a way to live together, and really emphasises the theme of isolation. The humans aren't cared about by their home planet, while the Sea Devils have been driven out. They're happy to start a new society on Titan, one where they can work together to try and ensure a better future.

I had a few small issues with the story, which suffers a bit in the characterisation of villains. It turns out that Rachel was ulti-



mately responsible for sinking Diana's submersible, but her reasons are a bit vague. Seemingly, she was jealous of the Doctor and Diana's burgeoning friendship and decided that they'd be better off dead. While it's necessary that their submarine sinks so that our heroes can meet the Sea Devils, it seems like this development is more of a plot function than a character beat. I also found Sea Devil scientist Taroth a bit of a cardboard character, and could have done with a bit more development to make me engage a bit more with her.

That said, it's all made up for by Eccleston's wonderful performance. Writer Lizbeth Myles has done a great job capturing his character, including all his phrases, little jokes and comments, and Eccleston really sells them to the listener. His journey in the submersible and wonder at seeing the underwater city are so easy to visualize thanks to his acting ability, making for a lovely audio experience. I'd love to see his Doctor drop back in on Titan a bit later to see how things are getting on. What's Diana up to now? Have the humans re-established contact with Earth? There are plenty of opportunities here for future Ninth Doctor audios to explore.

For now, however, I want to conclude by reiterating just how much *The Seas of Titan* is a really lovely yarn. While I have my nitpicks, this was a story that was easy to listen to and imagine as it progressed. It also makes a welcome change from other Sea Devil stories I remember by daring to do something different. What's more, buying it means you also get access to the other two stories from *Hidden Depths*. They're very different from each other, but all provide some great material for Christopher Eccleston and the Ninth Doctor. I hope he keeps making stories at Big Finish for a very long time to come!

Help us decide DWAS' ultimate season poll winner for our 50th anniversary!

It's our 50th anniversary in June, so what better way to help us mark it than by helping us to settle a question many decades in the making?

For many years from its inception, DWAS ran a regular season poll where members voted for their favourite story. And while some of these vote-winning stories did battle it out for supremacy in the 20th anniversary poll, a complete overview doesn't seem to have taken place. So, it's your chance to decide which story becomes the Season Poll Champion of Champions.

For such an undertaking, there are of course a few caveats. Firstly, season polling didn't continue consistently throughout the *NuWho* era. While we have some results, the lack of a complete spread means that this poll is exclusively focusing on Classic *Who*. Secondly, while Season 13 onwards had their top episode selected by members at the time, those for earlier series were selected by a vote of members in 1983 ahead of a poll for the 20th anniversary of *Doctor Who*. So, when you're voting on these stories, bear in mind that some of these were selected by fans who may have never seen the stories in question, and where substantial amounts of the episode were, and in some cases still are, missing. As a result, the stories we might now think deserve to be top of the poll might not be the ones that you're voting on. The Eighth Doctor's TV Movie is also included, even though it doesn't technically fall in any season.

Having your say on the poll is easy – just follow the link below, which will take you to a Google form. You can vote by selecting one ranking from each column until you've given your view on every story. To avoid processing personal data we will not be collecting emails, so please only vote the one time to keep things fair. Voting will open on March 31, and will close on May 1. We hope the results of the poll will appear in the next issue of *CT*.

Poll link:

forms.gle/dg4kKBv79rDrWyYd6



DWAS decides

SIEGE IN A SWAMP

STORM OF THE SEA DEVILS

By Owen Taylor

Cover credit: Big Finish

Taking on an established monster and finding something new to do with it can be challenging, and even more so when it is confined to a particular area. It often leads to either a homage to previous stories, or a complete reworking of them into something totally different. Big Finish, however, has excelled at being able to do both over the years. By weaving these different approaches together, they're able to bring something both fresh and reassuring to their listeners. *Storm of the Sea Devils* does just this, presenting a fairly safe but nonetheless entertaining outing for these old adversaries.

The story begins in the swamps outside 1970s Calcutta, where the eccentric millionaire Ramesh Kamal has been building an isolated hotel for the rich and famous. Its opening has just been cancelled, however, amid rumours of devils in the surrounding swamp. As a result, Harry Sullivan's holiday

in the city ends up being cut short as UNIT co-opts him into investigating the sightings alongside rookie agent Naomi Cross. The hotel has called for a doctor to treat an injured occupant, and Harry is sent to step into the role. However, when he arrives he finds that there's a Doctor already there – in this case, Tom Baker's Fourth Doctor.

“...it's the characterisation of the regulars where *Storm of the Sea Devils* really shines.”

What follows is a nice twist on the regular Sea Devil format. *Storm of the Sea Devils* moves away from the normal North Sea bases to the swamps and rivers of India where these creatures can be glimpsed lurking in the monsoon rains or swimming alongside crocodiles. One, named Shorak, can even be found as a 'guest' at the hotel, having been chained up after injuring anthropologist Professor Billiamoria. This isn't received well by Taurix, the Sea Devils' leader and Shorak's mate, and a fairly classic base-under-siege story ensues.

While the plot of David K Barnes' tale isn't groundbreaking, it really succeeds in its depiction of its human characters. The guest cast are well used, particularly Ood actor Silas Carson in the role of Kamal. Kamal is an enjoyable Bond-esque villain, who has his own pet crocodiles and acts like Dr Kananga from *Live and Let Die*. His wife Amita is struggling under the strain of being married to him, with Amina Zia portraying her as someone on the verge of a mental breakdown. Satnam Bhogal, meanwhile, rounds out the trio as Kamal's handy henchman Haldar.





However, it's the characterisation of the regulars where *Storm of the Sea Devils* really shines. The story acts as the start of a series of audios where Naomi Cross and Harry Sullivan travel with the Fourth Doctor, and succeeds in making you interested for more. Christopher Naylor is a real highlight as Harry, slotting the character right back into the role that he was created for. He stands as a complete opposite to Kamal, going from rescuing the Doctor to ensuring that the story's supporting cast are safe and well without breaking a sweat. Naylor's performance succeeds in making this feel like a natural continuation of Harry's character development, rather than some kind of caricature. Tom Baker, for his part, obviously relishes the reunion of these characters, and shows off his Doctor's trademark humour in an otherwise serious adventure.

Naomi, meanwhile, is the heart of the story. While Eleanor Crooks' character had previously appeared in other Big Finish audios, this is much earlier in her own timeline. At this point, she's a frustrated low level operative who craves assignments rather than answering the phones. It means she has a brash outward manner but a more sensitive interior, and the story reflects her empathy with the Sea Devils throughout.

Indeed, it's Naomi that takes the lead in wanting to broker a peace. The Doctor recognises her promise, and tests her to see if she would make a suitable companion.

With all this focus on the human characters, however, it's perhaps inevitable the Sea Devils suffer in comparison. Shorak is a bit of a mixed bag, at times presenting herself as a scientist that believes all life is precious and at others admitting that she was planning to let global warming kill off humanity. Taurix, meanwhile, is the more stereotypically military minded Sea Devil set on killing the humans no matter the cost. While the story does use the standard format of a Silurian/Sea Devil adventure to its benefit, with the Doctor listing the events that normally happened when they encounter humans, it still feels somewhat by-the-numbers. While Naomi and Shorak eventually manage to find "another way", to quote the Fifth Doctor, it would have been good to have seen a broader exploration of the story's setting and themes.

Overall, *Storm of the Sea Devils* is an enjoyable adventure that's worth diving into. It includes enough new ideas to stop it from being a stale retread of what's gone before, but it's more calm waters than a full blown storm.

Has March had what's possibly the best Friday 13th ever? I think so, as the return of Episodes One and Three from *The Daleks' Master Plan* (*The Nightmare Begins* and *Devil's Planet*) has brought a huge amount of joy to fandom. It's been almost 13 years since the return of *The Enemy of the World* and much of *The Web of Fear*, so the return of more missing episodes has been long overdue. I'm really looking forward to these episodes being made available on BBC iPlayer over Easter, while hope for further recoveries in the future has suddenly increased!

There was also an outpouring of delight at the surprise announcement that the TV Movie would be getting a new release in the form of a 4K Blu-ray. The BBC's press release for the announcement boldly states that the Eighth Doctor's debut "has never looked or sounded so good, with a 24-frame transfer to match the original film rushes and immersive surround sound rebuilt from the original raw sound elements."

I have to say that the claim the story is a "beloved adventure" is, perhaps, pushing the hyperbole to a near RTD level, but nonetheless it really is very welcome. Someone I know who has seen excerpts of the transfer has told me that it looks absolutely amazing, and I can't wait to see it. So, roll on May and the TV Movie's 30th anniversary.

Talking of May and anniversaries, it's not long now until *The Capitol: 50 Years of DWAS* - and Paul McGann is even one of our special guests! I'm



so grateful for your support in making the weekend a sell out well in advance. Planning started all the way back in November 2024 so I sincerely hope that all the hard work that's gone into this comes through - it certainly won't be for lack of trying on our part!

In the meantime, Dave Greenham's wonderful Projections In Time events at Riverside Studios continue with a varied programme planned for the rest of 2026; James Ashway's splendid CTs set the benchmark for *Who* magazines and Bruce Nicholson has great plans up his sleeves. Your society continues to deliver, which is something I'm immensely proud of.

I'm looking forward to seeing at least some of you at Gatwick Airport's Crowne Plaza, and in the meantime send every one of you my very best wishes.

Cheers!

Tony Jordan

Time and Relative Dimension in Canon

Image adapted from: Gage Skidmore (flickr.com/photos/gageskidmore/5773917357, CC BY-SA 2.0)

Don Klees discusses *Doctor Who*'s ongoing narrative

In one of the more provocatively titled essays in the *About Time* book series, writer Tat Wood asked 'Is Continuity a Pointless Waste of Time?' Wood's answer proved to be more nuanced than the wording of his question suggested. His issue was not with fundamentals such as consistency of character – which he described as “a basic requirement for any long-running drama” – so much as the subset of *Doctor Who* fandom who, “believed that the internal consistency of the overarching story that had been running since 1963 was possible, desirable and an end in itself.”

“*Doctor Who*'s ongoing story remains fundamentally the same one viewers joined in [1963].”

While Wood's essay largely focused on the early part of John Nathan-Turner's tenure as producer, with Ian Levine acting as an uncredited advisor on continuity matters, the undercurrent not only persists, but also animates, a substantial portion of fan engagement with the series. This is generally true of all long-running science-fiction and fantasy series, where even those that started with a broader plan, like *Star Wars*, accumulate inconsistencies and contradictions as the narrative unfolds. *Doctor Who*'s original 13-episode commission never allowed for any long-term planning, but its continuing story displays a key difference – it's never been reset. Where most highly documented fictional universes have pursued at least one explicit reboot and/or a divergent timeline, *Doctor Who*'s ongoing story remains fundamentally the same one viewers joined in *An Unearthly Child*. Later stories sometimes shifted our perspective on what previously transpired, but very little

has been explicitly erased. Considering how *Doctor Who* has generally thrived over the past six decades, it's surprising that anyone would choose to go a different route.

Nevertheless, many ongoing narratives have done so. DC Comics has relaunched its continuity several times in the past four decades while over two decades worth of *Star Wars* novels were rebranded “Legends” in 2014 as Lucasfilm prepared to kick off the new trilogy of sequels. Going back further, *Star Trek: The Animated Series*, originally a continuation of the initial adventures of the Starship Enterprise, was later declared by creator Gene Roddenberry not to be an official part of that canon. Whatever his reasons, it would be hard to argue that *Star Trek* as a whole would be richer without the series, and particularly *Yesteryear* – the Emmy-nominated animated episode that depicted Spock's early life on Vulcan. Later *Star Trek* writers clearly agreed and incorporated elements from it into later stories. Like other classic stories that ‘no longer happened’ in their respective universes, such as Alan Moore's Superman story *For the Man Who Has Everything*, this example highlights a subtle distinction between canon and continuity.

Spock's childhood was declared non-canon – but it still found its way back into *Star Trek* continuity





The terms are often used interchangeably but are not quite synonymous. While the word canon's origins, related to measuring, align with the idea of continuity – honouring everything previously established as 'real' in a fictional setting – it also refers more broadly to a body of work. As the TARDIS Wiki page about canon observes, “*Doctor Who* objectively has a canon in the sense of later stories drawing upon the concepts and imagery of earlier works”. This encompasses a variety of connections, ranging from specific plot points to simply how things look, some of which are more meaningful for viewers than others. Highly specific references that hinge on a viewer's familiarity with previous stories tend to be less impactful than those that intersect with the folk memory of *Doctor Who*. This explains why jokes about Daleks having problems with stairs endure, despite several popular stories providing proof to the contrary. While there's much to enjoy about a singular narrative unfolding over several decades of stories, it shows how engaging with that lore can turn a source of enjoyment into an obligation, as evidenced by the deadly serious approach that dominates so much fan discussion about the show.

The 1995 book *The Discontinuity Guide* is a magnificent exception. Though writers Paul Cornell, Martin Day and Keith Topping made an earnest effort at reconciling contradic-

tory elements across *Doctor Who*'s original run, their approach is – as Terrance Dicks wrote in his foreword – “delightfully loony”. Perhaps wisely, Cornell, Day, and Topping sidestepped spinoff stories and focused their work on televised *Doctor Who*. This did not, however, preclude them from discussing one of the most contentious instalments ever shown by the BBC. Whether or not one agrees with their rationale for placing 1993's *Dimensions in Time* between *Shada* and *The Leisure Hive*, it thoroughly validated Dicks' description of their work.

“...engaging with that lore can turn a source of enjoyment into an obligation...”

Fittingly, that infamous charity special also illuminates the distinction between canon and continuity. Though the serial's exact place within continuity might be debatable compared to other multi-Doctor stories such as *The Five Doctors*, it remains a chapter of *Doctor Who*'s ongoing story, literally part of its canon, even if some would prefer otherwise. Cornell, Day, and Topping's assessment of the story as “amusing nonsense” is among the more thoughtful reviews, despite its brevity. The editors of *Doctor Who Magazine* went to greater lengths after the story aired

to explain why they would not count it within the show's 'canon'. Their reasoning, focusing on elements such as the lack of closing credits and having no production code, came across as arbitrary, as if they craved a factual justification rather than saying they just didn't like it. That position has been easier to maintain without a home media release or a pronouncement from the *Doctor Who* production office.

That lack of an official position shows another key difference between *Doctor Who* and other media franchises. It never had a central authority to make pronouncements about the status of a given story in the way *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* did. The absence of a neatly defined canon allows the show's creative teams greater latitude to evolve and change. Its twenty-first century incarnations are notably richer as a result of the willingness of numerous writers and producers to probe the boundaries of the show's canon. Steven Moffat and Chris Chibnall each introduced previously unknown incarnations of the Doctor, both of which altered viewers' understanding of the show's onscreen history.

Of course, not everyone was happy with this, and some fans hoped that Russell T Davies would undo Chibnall's 'Timeless Child' revelation when he returned to *Doctor Who* in 2022. Davies' well known affinity for soap operas aside, it seems hard to believe anyone truly expected him to deliver *Doctor Who*'s answer to finding Bobby Ewing alive in the shower at the end of *Dallas* Season Nine. Beyond the matter of courtesy and respect for his predecessors, Davies clearly leans toward an expansive canon, and narrative question marks, rather than excluding things in the name of cohesion.

In the same vein, he clearly values the multitudes of spin-off stories. Not only did Davies keep the BBC from cancelling Big Finish Productions' license to produce *Doctor Who* audio dramas, he commissioned writer Robert Shearman to rework his Big Finish play *Jubilee* into the 2005 episode *Dalek*. Davies likewise commissioned Paul Cornell to adapt his New Adventures novel *Human Nature* for Series Three and adapted the 1978 *Doctor Who* Weekly comic strip *The Star Beast* himself as one of 2023's 60th anniversary specials. Each

iteration of those stories featured a different incarnation of the Doctor from the original, and while the events of *Jubilee* are significantly different from *Dalek*, they all invite the question of which version of events 'really happened'.

Davies' introduction of the Time War provides one explanation – they all happened in one of the melting pot of realities created by this conflict. This could also answer where stories featuring the shape-shifting companion Frobisher fit within the Sixth Doctor's remarkably complicated lifetime or the placement of Lance Parkin's 1998 novel *The Infinity Doctors*. Parkin's book doesn't sit easily within established continuity but nevertheless offers some lessons about the value of enjoying stories on their own terms. At one point in the book, Omega extolls the virtues of being able to reshape reality within his universe with god-like power, prompting the Doctor to ask, 'What's the opposite of matter?' The overly literal reply of "anti-matter" leads the Doctor to respond, "Wrong, wrong, wrong. The opposite of matter is 'doesn't matter.'" And though not every story matters to everyone, each adventure matters to someone. The temptation to rewrite *Doctor Who*'s history and eliminate its more embarrassing moments is understandable, especially to anyone who's ever watched *Arc of Infinity*, but would only serve to diminish its ongoing story.

Omega's had multiple guises over the years – but they're all still valid



Background image credit: James Ashway, Open book adapted from: Raoli (commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:EmptyBook.jpg, Public Domain) and cover credit: BBC Books

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:



Kara Dennison sees how the Doctor and Belinda react to a cry for help

As *Doctor Who* fans, we generally count ourselves fortunate to receive any expanded media; but that goes double for eras that feel truncated. In the wake of the end of the Disney+ deal, new stories with Ncuti Gatwa's Fifteenth Doctor and companions are especially welcome. These original stories breathe new life into an era that's already ended and let us picture in our mind's eye what might have been had it been allowed to continue. Hannah Fergesen's *Spectral Screams* takes us back to the second and final season of Gatwa's run, where his Doctor is paired with Belinda Chandra as she attempts to make her way back to Earth for tomorrow's shift.

“At just over 200 pages long, *Spectral Screams* is a very full book for its length.”

This particular story appears to be set early in the season, with Belinda still a reluctant adventurer and having memories of only *The Robot Revolution* and *Lux*. What is meant to be a brief stop on party planet Sooz to grab a Vindicator reading goes suddenly awry when the TARDIS channels a... well, spectral scream. The Doctor leaves it

up to Belinda whether they will take on this side quest or stay focused on getting her home. Fortunately, she opts to help.

The party in distress is Adama, a sentient bioship that crash landed on a mushroom-covered world a century ago. Healing the ship will require dealing with mycelium-infested locals, an Imperium bent on retrieving a stolen superweapon and bounty hunters. Oh, and three-headed snakes, if the rumours are true. As Belinda struggles to offer aid to multiple people reluctant to trust her, the Doctor digs deeper into the mystery of the crash that started everything.

At just over 200 pages long, *Spectral Screams* is a very full book for its length. While a packed book is generally a good thing, the 'guest cast' of this particular adventure feel a little much for the space available. There are already three parties at odds, so the novel can sometimes feel a bit clogged with the sheer amount of crossing and double-crossing going on amidst the many factions. It doesn't make the book unfollowable, and indeed the conclusion does manage to tie up all the loose ends, but a story this dense deserves a somewhat longer page count. Fergesen keeps things relatively balanced, but one gets the sense that a bit more wiggle room for all of her different ideas would have been the ideal outcome.

Despite the story feeling a bit bigger than its allotted space, Fergesen tells a very good *Doctor Who* story. There are moments where Ncuti's Fifteenth Doctor falls slightly into generic Doctor-ness, but there are just as many where his unique personality shines through. The ending in particular, in which the Doctor's complex emotions are an essential aspect of saving the day, feels just right for this regeneration. Belinda, meanwhile, gets the stronger characteri-

sation of the two, with her commitment to doing good and her uncertainty about the Doctor at constant odds.

While I have my quibbles, *Spectral Scream*'s weak points are far outshone by its strong ones. It makes for a fun read for any fans longing for more of the adventures of the Doctor and Belinda.

***Spectral Scream* by Hannah Fergesen is available from all good booksellers**

We're also reading:



Steve Claringbold delves into a Wilderness Years adventure

The late 1980s and 1990s were a fertile time for the *Doctor Who* aficionado. While the show was off the air for most of that time, the Time Lord and his friends were still enjoying new adventures thanks to dedicated fans. One of these is *Wartime*, a 1988 video release from Reeltime Pictures that expanded the story of Sergeant John Benton and UNIT following an agreement with Derrick Sherwin. This story was later expanded into a novelisation, which was recently reprinted, that builds on the original 35 minute video release. It's a book that I can't recommend enough.

At just 101 pages long, I was expecting *Wartime* to be a quick read. And, while it was a quick read, there was so much packed

into it that I was pleasantly surprised. Stephen James Walker, who's responsible for novelising the story, notes that he could have fleshed out the story even more. By doing so, however, he was concerned that the original content would be lost. As it is, this is a neat and compact story with the original content sandwiched in the middle of the book between two entirely new pieces of work, similar to Terrance Dicks' novelisation of *Shakedown*. This added length gives *Wartime* time to expand on the character of John Benton and delve into his past trauma. In the process, it reveals some of the reasoning behind why he decided to join the army and ultimately ended up at UNIT. While I won't spoil that here for anyone who has never seen the original video, Walker's writing presents it in a way that draws you in from the first page and holds your attention right to the very end.

The story begins in Iraq, where Benton has been loaned out to the SAS to take part in a reconnaissance mission. This is where things start to go awry, as a mysterious entity starts to control their thoughts. This segues nicely into the adaptation of the video release, where Benton and a Private Willis are transporting the mysterious entity back to UNIT HQ in their Land Rover. While doing so, Benton starts to experience hallucinations of his childhood and dual traumas involving both his brother and his father. Walker's writing highlights the unsettling nature of these psychological issues, and how we can often hold on to certain parts of trauma in our lives while also hiding the full picture of what might have happened. It also shows how Benton's past shaped his

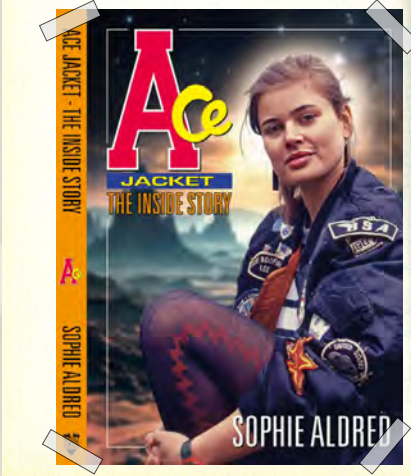
future, making him the character we know and love. This then leads into the final part of the book, where Benton and his team have ended up at UNIT's vault as they come under further psychic attacks from the mysterious entity. It also fleshes out Reeltime's section of the *Doctor Who* universe with the introduction of Lieutenant Cavendish, who later appeared in *Downtime*.

It's been a long time since I've read a novel that captured my attention throughout, but *Wartime* definitely hit the spot. There

are subtle nods to the Doctor and stories past that are enough to please longtime fans while not excluding those less familiar with *Doctor Who* history. As someone who's never seen the original production on which *Wartime's* novelisation is based, the book has done an excellent job at piquing my interest. I'm looking forward to seeking out Reeltime's videos in the near future.

Wartime (Standard Edition) by Stephen James Walker is available from: telos.co.uk

We're also reading:



Phillip Hunter Gilfus appreciates a very special item of clothing

We all recognise the famously decorated jacket that Ace wears in her many appearances with the Seventh Doctor (and beyond). But what are the stories behind her many different badges? Why does Ace have so many sourced from America, such as the US flag, NASA mission patches and US military pins? What exactly did she do to receive her coveted Blue Peter badge? And what drew Ace to subjects as diverse as Winnie the Pooh, "I Hate Work" and a camel?

These are the questions that *Ace Jacket: The Inside Story* attempts to answer through over 80 contributions including short stories; interviews both real and fictional; illustrations and even a song (via

QR code). The contributions come from a range of sources, including Doctors (Davison, Colin Baker, McCoy, McGann, Tennant, Capaldi, and Whittaker), companions (Hines, Manning, Jameson, Waterhouse, Fielding, Bryant, Langford, Bowerman), and showrunners (Moffat and Chibnall). There are also submissions from a variety of *Who* writers and notable fans. While this might be a big draw for some, and with no disrespect to these contributors, I found it was instead better to dive straight into this tome and let the articles, poems and pictures wash over me.

Just like Ace's travels, one can start in the middle, at the end or wherever one wishes. Many of the stories behind Ace's badges focus on her time in school, usually befriending an outcast and discovering their shared love of vehicles or what it's like to be different in 1980s Perivale. Other badges, meanwhile, are collected on an adventure with the Doctor. This collection does not limit itself to just one contribution per badge, so some fans may find their left eye twitching from the multiple explanations. However, it encompasses both the spirit of *Doctor Who*, and of Ace herself, to allow for different possibilities. In Big Finish writer John Dorney's essay, he asks, "Is it really plausible that each and every single [badge] has a story attached to it?" As John and other writers muse, it may have been as simple as Ace buying something that looked fun, or even subversive, at her local shop. But that's the magic of *Doctor Who*: What if everything, and everyone, had a story? It's up to the reader to choose which story is 'real'.

All in all, this A4 hardback is a must read for die-hard Ace fans, but even more casual ‘Ace aficionados’ can immerse themselves in it. It’s wonderful to see such a hefty tome full of appreciation for the character, to the extent that there’s even a lovely “Galactic Gallery” appendix featuring profiles of different cosplayers in their Ace jackets. While some of the contributions are more memorable than others, there’s plenty to inspire greater appreciation of Ace, Sophie Aldred’s portrayal of her and the ability of Whovians to imagine a story of their own

from just a single badge on a jacket. Sales of *Ace Jacket: The Inside Story* supported the National Autism Society and Autism All Stars, with pre-orders already available for *Ace Jacket: The Outside Story* – a successor focusing on a “forensic examination of every screen-used jacket.” If the strength of this first volume is anything to go by, it’ll be well worth picking up when it’s released later this year.

***Ace Jacket: The Inside Story* edited by Sophie Aldred is available from: sophiealdred.com**

We’re also reading:



Nick Smith on Turlough’s debut and the return of the Brigadier

As one of the editors of the *Black Archive* books, Kara Dennison knows what she’s doing. Unlike some of the more turgid entries in the range, her monograph on *Mawdryn Undead* is an accessible, thoughtful examination of a story that delighted many fans back in 1983 with its intriguing new companion, guest stars and flashback sequence. While *Mawdryn*’s reputation has slipped somewhat in the years that followed thanks to its skewed chronology, unimaginative lighting and an overly ambitious script, it remains one of the most memorable stories of the Davison era. Rather than focus on its flaws, Dennison digs into the story’s origins, its level of au-

thenticity regarding Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and its novel approach to regeneration, asking herself what makes the adventure feel so contemporary.

To start with, *Mawdryn* didn’t just bring back an old villain and companion – it introduced a new TARDIS traveller in the shape of Turlough. He was a morally ambiguous character, like Adric before him, which made him much more relatable and believable (to me, at least) than a perfect goody two-shoes would have been. Nonetheless, the introduction of a companion who wants to kill the Doctor was certainly left-field – as was the casting. Instead of the rowdy *Grange Hill*-style schoolkid we might have expected, we ended up with Mark Strickson’s more intellectual and sympathetic portrayal. Dennison argues that 1980s audiences weren’t ready for such a shady, complex companion and that “the concept of Turlough... seems like one made for a contemporary era”. While twenty-first century audiences are used to following character arcs across multiple episodes of *Doctor Who*, this was more of a novelty for *Mawdryn*’s contemporary viewers.

“...an accessible, thoughtful examination of [*Mawdryn Undead*]...”

This *Black Archive* also contains a novelty of its own. While many approach *Doctor Who* with a cool, scholarly objectivity, this book incorporates Dennison’s refreshingly personal perspective. The author compares

her own Complex PTSD to the Brigadier's trauma, as well as fictional depictions of the condition and real clinical research. Unsurprisingly, she finds that *Doctor Who's* take on trauma is superficial for reasons of time, pacing, and audience comprehension. The latter is particularly important – Dennison notes that PTSD was not included in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* until 1980. So, even though 'shell shock' was explored in *Mawdryn's* contemporaries such as *To Serve Them All My Days*, the condition was new to viewers. As such, they wouldn't know that the return of the Brigadier's memories, pushed by the Doctor, is just narrative shorthand. In reality, the effects of PTSD are brutally long-lasting and can be caused by all kinds of trauma.

It's not just a symptom of Blinovitchian explosions.

The sincerity and meticulous clarification of Dennison's writing about PTSD and the book's other topics, including regeneration, immortality and Mawdryn's Flying Dutchman-style endless voyage, make this *Black Archive* memorable and well worth reading. She revels in the timey-wimeyness of Grimwade's writing while managing not to poke the bear of the UNIT dating controversy in the process. This book is a joy to read, approaching *Mawdryn Undead* in a way that will help any reader appreciate this classic story.

***Black Archive #80: Mawdryn Undead* by Kara Dennison is available from: obversebooks.co.uk**

We're also reading:



Nick Smith rediscovers a First Doctor classic

Fans know everything from the background to the sock size of writers like Robert Holmes, Stephen Moffat and Terrance Dicks. But Lesley Scott, co-writer of 1966's *The Ark*, remains a mystery about whom incredibly little is known. While Philip Purser-Hallard's new book about *The Ark* does not uncover new information about Scott, he does spotlight the only female writer in the programme's first two decades.

Scott has no other television credits. According to her writing partner Paul Erickson, who also novelised *The Ark*, Scott's contribution was, "a fiction agreed between them". Purser-Hallard writes that Scott was "by all accounts" in a relationship with Erickson. Nevertheless, Purser-Hallard treats her credit with respect and theorises that the difference in quality between the two halves of the story – the last two episodes are more simplistic than the first – could be chalked down to Scott's limited experience as a scriptwriter. Did the couple share the load and write two episodes each? We'll never know for sure, it seems, but Purser-Hallard has fun with his guessing game.

“While acknowledging its issues, the author finds a lot to love about *The Ark*...”

The Ark is best known for its two-by-two structure, as the TARDIS returns to the same vessel later in time to find that devastating changes have occurred. As Purser-Hallard points out, episodes were individually titled at the time, so as far as '60s viewers were concerned Episode Three (*The Return*) was a new story... until it wasn't. This clever conceit, along with the impressive scope of the ark itself, are two of the key elements that make *The Ark* worth a deep dive.

One result of this exploration is Purser-Hallard's focus on classic *Who* as a societal snapshot of the time it was made. In 1966, Britain's empire was dwindling, with four countries having gained independence in the few years since *An Unearthly Child*. *The Ark* is wish-fulfilment, with white, primarily male, English-speaking 'guardians' leading a society underpinned by a servile minority. In the serial's second half, we see a post-revolution society led by the Monoids, who bicker, make mistakes and are cruel. In this way, *The Ark* plays out fears of, as Purser-Hallard puts it, "how countries formerly part of the British Empire might collapse when that support – and its associated control – was withdrawn." It's easy to look back at old shows and criticise their naivety with the benefit of hindsight, but Purser-Hallard puts his finger on the reasons why stories like *The Ark* are still problematic today.

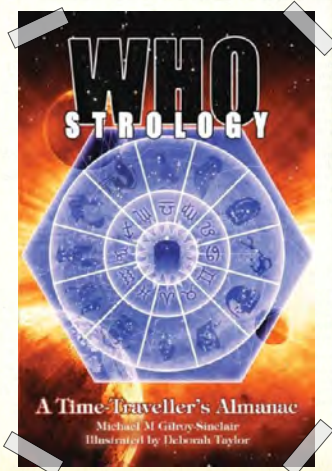
While acknowledging its issues, the author finds a lot to love about *The Ark* too. It's impressive from a production perspective, with a relatively small studio transformed into the seemingly enormous Ark complete with live animals. The story itself is aware of the legacy of 'generation starships' in

sci-fi literature, creating a world with family lineages and a justice system that enrich the backdrop of this time-bending escape. Purser-Hallard also acknowledges the innovative design of the Monoids, with their cyclopean nature a rare attempt to get away from the two-eyed, human-like monster default. It wasn't necessarily always going to be this way, however. The author sifts through early script drafts to find that the Monoids were originally described as more reptilian, which makes sense in some respects – they're certainly cold-blooded in their treatment of the humans.

Purser-Hallard's book about *Midnight* is excellent, and his latest *Black Archive* is not to be sniffed at either. While this discussion can't get to the bottom of all *The Ark*'s mysteries, such as Scott's contribution and Erickson's inspirations, it finds many different ways to look at the adventures of Dodo and co. far beyond end of the world. And as the inhabitants of the Ark learn, the journey itself is just as important as getting to the end.

***Black Archive #81: The Ark* by Philip Purser-Hallard is available from: obversebooks.co.uk**

We're also reading:



Emma Best indulges the more mystical side of *Doctor Who*

I was immediately curious when I came across *Whostrology*, a *Doctor Who*-themed astrology book. I didn't know what to make of it, but I was nonetheless intrigued. After spending a month with the book, I'm still unsure of what to make of it – except that it's neat.

First published in 2012, but reprinted recently, *Whostrology* describes itself as a "tongue in cheek guidebook" to astrology in the *Doctor Who* universe. It's clearly more comedic than guidebook, as the horoscopes are all specific references to *Doctor Who* stories. Instead of the familiar Zodiac signs, the signs in *Whostrology* have different names and descriptions that reference different pieces of series lore, though they share dates and concepts with the Zodiac signs. These signs are spread across a book that is part puzzle, part art book, and part reference guide. Each page presents the reader with a horoscope for a different day (including 29 February), a list of cast and

crew members born on that day and an illustration that's related to the day and the horoscope – albeit sometimes indirectly.

“Michael M Gilroy-Sinclair’s passion for the show shines through on every page...”

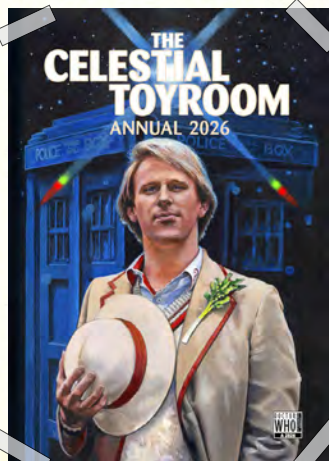
The horoscopes range from the fairly general that one could *try* to follow to those so specific that you would have to relive the Doctor’s adventures to follow them. Whatever their flavour, each is full of references to *Doctor Who* stories, ranging from the obvious to the incredibly niche. These are generally related to the show, but readers will find some references to the expanded universe: one of the signs is the Timewyrm, which the book cheekily associates with “a whole new universe of literature.” At the end of the book is a brief guide to “astrological years” between 1963 and 2012, each referencing *Doctor Who* arcs, productions or developments. My personal favourite is

1991, the Year of the First Virgin, which references “the more literate aspects of life.”

Ultimately, *Whostrology*’s greatest appeal is its novelty, and it’s extremely successful in that regard. The book is easy to pick up and put down, ideal for reading in short bursts or for choosing a *Doctor Who* story on any given day. Michael M Gilroy-Sinclair’s passion for the show shines through on every page, and the book combines the kind of enthusiasm that usually accompanies amateur fan productions with a professional execution. I still don’t know who to recommend the book for, but it clearly has a ready market: autographed copies of the first edition are listed online for nearly \$200 USD! If you’re unsure whether to spend any money on the book, the creator has published [audio recordings of some horoscopes on YouTube](#) so that you can get a flavour for it. But if you do think it’s for you, I’d recommend seeking it out.

Whostrology by Michael M Gilroy-Sinclair is available from: telos.co.uk

We’re also reading:



Kara Dennison reviews a new DWAS tome covering the Fifth Doctor’s era

Peter Davison first appeared onscreen as the newly regenerated Doctor less than a month after I was born, and it would be another 18 years before I had

any idea what *Doctor Who* even was. But for viewers old and/or British enough to witness the Fifth Doctor’s debut in real time, it was a formative era. Tom Baker had defined the show in a way that echoes to this day, and after several years in the role, was giving way to the then youngest actor to play the Doctor. The popularity of *Star Wars* and *Alien* affected the global view of science fiction in ways that would affect the show directly. Feelings in the moment were turbulent, as they are after any regeneration, but perhaps even more than usual. And in the 2026 DWAS annual – focused on Davison’s tenure as the Doctor – we get a long-form look at feelings then *and now*.

Landing at just under 200 pages and available in hardcover, paperback or a free digital edition, the *Doctor Who Appreciation Society 2026 Annual* is a comprehensive look at the Fifth Doctor’s era: episode reviews, features on important figures on- and offscreen, retrospectives on comics and even a piece of original fiction. Importantly, this is not purely academic, although some features are excellently researched and

cited to the point that they could be solid reference material. The volume is review mixed with reminiscence for the most part, offering a broad spectrum of thoughts on Davison's individual episodes.

“It’s eye-opening to see varying opinions four decades apart juxtaposed...”

The bulk of the annual consists of these episode reviews, many of which have at least some sliver of autobiographical content. These reviews are by and large insightful, some skewing to production observations while others reflect on what it was like to be a child viewing these episodes on the night. Heightening these reviews are snippets from previous DWAS issues contemporary to the era. It’s eye-opening to see varying opinions four decades apart juxtaposed with each other – a reminder that our immediate reactions to recent episodes may resonate differently 40 years from now.

A highlight of the volume was Paul Burns’s ‘Time Heals,’ the one fiction offering in this annual. It’s a quiet piece musing on the nature of unexplored grief at a very particular point in this era, highlighted by Richard Jones’s art. Matthew Kilburn’s retrospective on Barbara Clegg was a wonderful piece of work as well, as was Paul Scoones’s insightful coverage of Fifth Doctor-era comics. Most of all, the researcher in me loved the number of documents and photos shared in the annual’s pages.

If there is one thing this collection could do better, it would be to offer a broader cross-section of insights and input – not *instead* of what it already has, but *in addition*. It would have been wonderful to also hear from newer viewers discovering Davison for the first time or the international audience (about whom we hear briefly through a UK lens). The absence of these viewpoints doesn’t make the annual any lesser, but their presence could have made it even better.

The Celestial Toyroom Annual 2026 is available from: dwasonline.co.uk

Dear CT,

From the moment *The War Between The Land And The Sea* first broadcast, it was under a lot of pressure. As the final swansong of the BBC/Disney deal that had by then died a very public death, *The War Between...* was seen by many fans to have the future of *Doctor Who* itself on its shoulders.

While I was pleased that the show was heavily promoted by the BBC, I found it a bit odd when I couldn’t see any mention in the advertising that it was a *Doctor Who* spin-off! I can only imagine what those visiting from outside the Whoniverse must have made of *The War Between...* but, for what it’s worth, I thoroughly enjoyed it. The main cast all give brilliant performances – especially Jemma Redgrave as Kate Lethbridge-Stewart, whose arc goes to places that certainly should have ramifications for the main series when it does return. Whatever *Doctor Who* looks like in the future, I certainly hope they come back to UNIT after this!

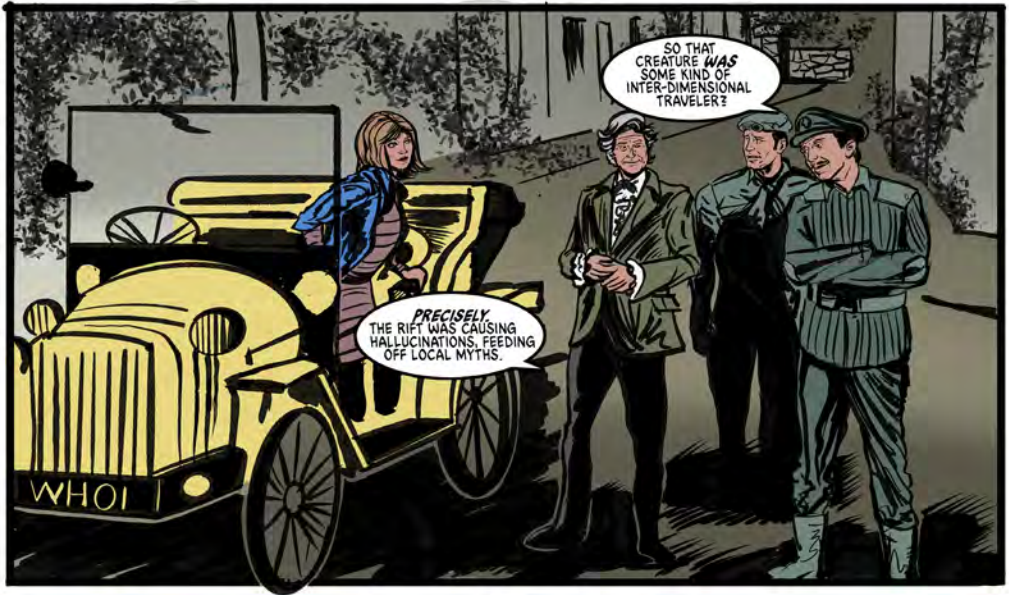
The script was more of a mixed bag, but I was pleasantly surprised by how well *The War Between...* drew me into its often far-fetched plot. In what’s become a running theme for this era, I’m not sure it nailed the landing – to be fair, it has the sort of premise that’s difficult to bring the world back from!

That said, *The War Between...* was never intended to be the saviour of *Doctor Who*. It was supposed to be a weird, fun little spin-off to tide us over. And on that front, it has absolutely succeeded.

From Georgia Harper

**The War
Between the
Land and the Sea**





SO THAT CREATURE *WAS* SOME KIND OF INTER-DIMENSIONAL TRAVELER?

PRECISELY. THE RIFT WAS CAUSING HALLUCINATIONS, FEEDING OFF LOCAL MYTHS.



WELL, I JUST *HOPE* IT MADE IT HOME. I'VE HAD *ENOUGH* HOWLING MIST MONSTERS FOR ONE LIFETIME!



OH, COME NOW, JO. WHAT'S A *TRIP* TO THE COUNTRYSIDE WITHOUT A LITTLE EXCITEMENT?



ONE DAY BENTON I'D LIKE AN INVESTIGATION THAT *DOESN'T* INVOLVE SOMETHING FROM BEYOND THE STARS---

NEXT: DOCTOR WHO AND THE *SIEGE OF THE GENOSMEN!*

Convention Confidential: Riverside and the Rani

James Ashway saw the Seventh Doctor's debut at Riverside Studios

If any *Doctor Who* story is truly marmite, *Time and the Rani* is a good candidate. Some people admire it as a camp classic, with bright outfits and spoon playing to boot! For others, however, its convoluted plotting and dense dialogue make it a struggle to get through. So, it was a bold group of Whovians that assembled at Riverside Studios for the latest Projections in Time to celebrate the Seventh Doctor's first story with DWAS.

In a change to the usual format, the event kicked off with signings from many of the assembled guests. These included script editor Andrew Cartmel, director Andrew Morgan and actors Wanda Ventham (Faron) and Karen Clegg (Sarn). After the crowd's appetite for signings was sated, they took their seats in the auditorium for the first two episodes and the first panel which followed.

Stephen Cranford interviews Wanda Ventham, Andrew Cartmel, Andrew Morgan and Karen Clegg



Andrew Cartmel made no secret that the story, originally titled *Strange Matter*, wasn't how he would have chosen to begin his time as script editor. When he came aboard just one episode had been written, but his attempts to shape the story met with strong pushback from writers Pip and Jane Baker.

"I thought that Pip and Jane had solid plotting but I didn't like their dialogue," Cartmel said. "I tried to make rewrites, but they were very resistant to changes. In the end, I only got 'leave the girl, it's the man I want' in."

Other changes would be made to the story as the production developed. The name of the serial changed to *Time and the Rani* as producer John Nathan-Turner wanted to have the Time Lady in the title. Pip and Jane allowed it, but made it a nod of the hat to the JB Priestley play *Time and the Conways* – something Cartmel said that "nobody got".

Andrew Morgan, meanwhile, moved the setting of the story from a wood in Surrey to a distant planet, as he didn't like the idea of the story being set in England. By combining footage from a few quarries together in the edit, the planet of Lakertya was born.

Morgan credits the distinctive feel of Lakertya to the team behind the screen, from Geoff Powell's set design to Lesley Rawstone's makeup and Ken Trew's costumes. He even went as far as developing a special run for the Lakertyans to make them a bit more alien.

The director was also pushing the boundaries of his own craft, relying on the advice of the effects team to take the shots needed for the Rani's bubble traps.

"When I was filming this, I had no idea what the bubbles were going to look like," explains Morgan. "Colin [Mapson, the Visual Effects Designer] was brilliant and

told me what to do for different shots. Then Colin and Dave [Chapman] added the effects in afterwards, and I was so pleased at how brilliantly they turned out.”

One of the victims of the bubble trap was Karen Clegg’s Sarn, who described how these scenes were filmed in the studio.

“When I was killed off, it started off with me just spinning on the spot,” Karen recalls. “I was a trained dancer, but the wig was quite heavy so it pulled me off balance. So, I was then put on a spinning machine to try going faster, but it still wasn’t working. In the end, I think they ended up using one of the takes of me on my own!”

While Clegg may have been killed off less than 10 minutes into the first episode, she was very grateful for the part. Having just decided to leave *42nd Street* in the West End after a promised part failed to materialise, she received a call from Morgan about a role in the serial.

“It turned a hard time into something special that we’re still talking about all this time later,” says Clegg. “As a young actor, it was great to work alongside so many other great performers. We got on really well.”

“During lunchtimes in the rehearsal studios, I remember Richard [Gauntlett] and Mark [Greenstreet] would use me as a human cricket ball by sending me up and down the studio on a rolling chair. They were long studios, so it was a lot of fun!”

Her on-screen mother, Wanda Ventham, also recalled the joy she had working on the serial.

“Me and Kate [O’Mara] were old friends and we just couldn’t stop giggling on set,” says Ventham. “I fell on the floor laughing when she said ‘Leave the girl, it’s the man I want’ in rehearsal.”

She also discussed the issues the production faced on location, with pouring rain meaning that the furry Tetrap costumes had to be kept under wraps in bin bags until the last minute. Just before filming started, the bin bags would be removed, and Ventham was warned about the “Tetrap droppings” all over the place.

By *Time and the Rani*, of course, Ventham was an old hand at *Doctor Who*, having previously appeared in *The Faceless Ones* and

Image of the Fendahl. She even gave David Tennant a few pointers following his casting, having been put in touch by her son - Benedict Cumberbatch.

“I don’t think Benedict has seen *Time and the Rani*, but maybe I should send it to him!” she laughed. “It would definitely amuse my grandsons.”

As the first panel drew to a close, the guests were joined on stage by DWAS Co-ordinator Tony Jordan, who surprised Andrew Cartmel with the Terrance Dicks Award for Writers along with members of the Dicks family. Cartmel thanked them all for the award, as well as recognising the many cast and crew who made and continue to make *Doctor Who*.

Shortly afterwards, the photo studio launched into action as the final guests arrived – Mel herself, in the form of Bonnie Langford, while Anita Dobson ensured at least one Rani was present for the occasion. They held court over an entertaining second panel following Episodes Three and Four, delving into the filming of *Doctor Who* both then and now.

Following a final signing session, the day drew to a close as guests and attendees alike made their way home. Whatever you think about the story, there’ll always be plenty of people with time for *Time and the Rani*.

Image credit: DWAS

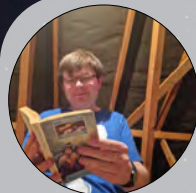


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BY ELBERT
SMITH



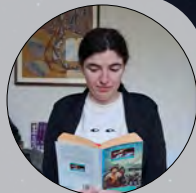
IDEA BY RICHARD UNWIN, COMPILED BY JAMES ASHWAY

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, there are tortoises, trains and troublemakers galore as the team set off for the planet of Sakkrat...



John Ashway is 32 and founded the *Big Who Listen*, a blog reviewing each Big Finish Main Range story. He enjoys reading on the bus, but hates when stories come to an abrupt...

Georgia Harper is 31, based in Kent and previously co-hosted the *Cruising Through Doom's Day* podcast with Filip Wieland. She likes *Doctor Who*, gigs, pasta, and trans rights.



Evan Jones is 30 and lives in Warwickshire. He enjoys blogging about *Doctor Who* at thebrainofmobius.co.uk. He's never gone to a music festival and is turtle-y fine with this.

Filip Wieland is 30 and lives in Kent. Did you know that if your train journey was delayed by more than a century due to being frozen in time you may be entitled to compensation?



THE HIGHEST SCIENCE

BY GARETH ROBERTS • PUBLICATION DATE: FEBRUARY 1993

Sakkrat. Many legends speak of this world, home of an ancient empire destroyed by its own greatest achievement: the Highest Science, the pinnacle of technological discovery.

When the TARDIS alerts the Doctor and Bernice to the presence of an enormous temporal fluctuation on a large, green, unremarkable planet, they are not to know of any connection with the legend.

But the connection is there, and it will lead them into conflict with the monstrous Chelonians, with their contempt for human parasites; into adventure with a group of youngsters whose musical taste has suddenly become dangerously significant; and will force them to face Sheldukher, the most wanted criminal in the galaxy.

On the planet Vaagon, a race of hermaphroditic tortoise-like aliens known as Chelonians are attacking a human colony. The Chelonians are led by General Fakrid, who is on the verge of laying eggs, and the promotion-hungry First Pilot Jinkwa.

John: I have to take minor issue with the cover art here, which depicts the Chelonians as bipedal. The book, meanwhile, presents them as quadrupeds – hence their need for harnesses and such in their ships!

Filip: The Chelonians are what you get when you cross the Daleks with the Klingons by the way of a Pets at Home.

The Chelonians are on the verge of victory. Suddenly, bright blue lights appear around their tanks and the Chelonian ships vanish. They find themselves elsewhere, having suffered heavy damage and with many casualties.

Georgia: Are they on Earth? Dare I dream of the disparate plots converging so soon?

Evan: At least the locations are more clearly signposted than in *Transit*.

Elsewhere, a trio of young men on their way to a music festival have also found themselves and their speeder in unknown territory. Molassi threatens Sendei with a knife before Rodomonte returns. The latter's high on a substance known as A and claims to have seen a giant tortoise.

John: Well, Molassi seems like a treat to know.

Filip: These opening scenes are a bit of a whirlwind and I think the Festival Three are the least comprehensible until later in the story.

Georgia: I suppose the Chelonians ended up here, but they seem to have left a disparate plot arc behind on Vaagon!

Evan: Glastonbury sounds way more fun now, actually.

At Rickmansworth Station, a frustrated commuter despairs as a single carriage pulls up at the station. According to the guard, one of the carriages that was meant to be there has vanished.

John: This is a very odd way to begin what will turn out to be a major thread – with a minor bystander rather than someone actually involved.

Filip: If a train departs Chorleywood in 1993, and an Earth colony is attacked in 5665, what is the airspeed velocity of an unladen swallow?

Georgia: Yes, more Tube content! I really like the detail of the platform clock restarting.

Meanwhile, General Fakrid goes into labour and gives birth to stillborn eggs. He issues orders to bury the Chelonians' dead and for the Second Division to be made ready to fight.

John: The Chelonians may be generally monstrous, but this is still an awful moment for Fakrid and generated a lot of sympathy in me.

A cobbled-together ship, piloted by a life-form stolen from a genetic laboratory known only as the Cell, arrives in orbit over Sakkrat. It begins to revive its human passengers.

John: Add another thread to the developing tangle...

Filip: The Cell was manufactured on Chekhov's, sorry, Chekley's World. I wonder if it'll come up again.

Georgia: The Cell will not know peace. The Cell was surely not set up just for that. We will absolutely be seeing the Cell again.

The assault force's tanks come across Rodomonte, but are destroyed in a hail of black globules. Fakrid declares war on the entire planet.

Filip: So the General just saw an entire tank division get obliterated and his response is anything other than to take a defensive position? What is this, the Charge of the Light Brigade?

Rosheen and Klift awaken on the ship over Sakkrat. They were once thieves who stole vast sums of money, but are now being held captive by Sheldukher, the most wanted criminal in the galaxy. His pod has been reprogrammed to wake him an hour later than them, and they set about trying to kill him.

Georgia: I told you the Cell wouldn't know peace. It's a VNA character now, so it'll know only chaos.

Evan: This is the third book in a row where we have someone 'hacking into the mainframe' and I'm a bit bored by it now.



Sheldukher walks into the room and reveals he's already awake. He has implanted devices under the skin of Rosheen and Klift that can age them prematurely. When Rosheen lunges for him, he ages Klift by 40 years as a punishment. Rosheen vows to kill Sheldukher.

Filip: Not content with having a planet with a hostile environment, an army of bellicose tortoises, not to mention side conflicts between some of the characters, Roberts brings in a third major antagonistic force before we even meet our lead characters.

Georgia: They Daleks' Master Plan-ned him!

In a bar, Professor Bernice Summerfield explains to a man trying to hit on her that she and the Doctor are searching for a Fortean Flicker, an event that creates coincidences and can move people and objects across time and space. After the man tries to stop her from leaving, Benny knocks him out cold.

John: ...and finally our leads have made it to the book. It's a nice introduction scene for Benny though!

Filip: This is a very tidy scene, explaining both the premise of the novel and of *Doctor Who* in general, before showing us that Benny can fend for herself.

Georgia: Alongside these events comes the stunning revelation that the TARDIS lacks duvets. Did they all get thrown out between the Peter Davison era and now, or did I just never notice the companions' rooms didn't have them? Were duvets acquired for the bunk beds fitted before the Ponds moved in? So many questions. And *The Highest Science* will answer none of them.

Evan: Benny is chugging rocket fuel as if that's a totally normal thing to do.

Benny returns to the TARDIS, where the Doctor has finished working on a device that tracks Fortean Flickers. It seems to be focused on a planet known as Hogsuum,

out in a distant part of the galaxy. The TARDIS databanks suggest consulting the works of Gustav Urnst, a 'scholar' who disappeared decades ago.

Filip: There's a very nice bit of banter here about how all tracking devices have to go 'bleep'. I like that.

Evan: We must now visit 'The Most Boring Planet in the Universe', so what could possibly happen there?

The Chelonians come across the remains of the Second Division, which a garbled message suggests was destroyed by the Eight Twelves. They find themselves attacked by the same black globules and retreat. Meanwhile, with Rodomonte missing, tensions between Molassi and Sendei are at breaking point. Sendei threatens to break a valuable record to stop Molassi leaving in the speeder.

Filip: You can bet that this record sounds like *Be Here Now*.

Georgia: I'm not sure text is the ideal format for a car chase, to be honest.

Benny reads Urnst's book, and finds that he appears to have actually discovered Sakkrat after years of making up his discoveries. They land on Hogsum, which they believe is actually Sakraat, and are detected by the Chelonians. Fakrid and Jinkwa set out in a reconnaissance tank towards the TARDIS.

Filip: Straight out of the gate, the Doctor and Benny have split up. Stop it! Don't be bad science fiction characters.

Evan: The Doctor lets Benny wander off because he knows the drill by now. He also watches a terrible, cheap-looking sci-fi show called 'Captain Millenium' on a screen and mocks it.

Georgia: This is certainly another VNA with multiple, vaguely overlapping plots that switch just as you've got into one of them.

While the Doctor stumbles across Rodomonte, Bernice is fired on by the Chelonians. She manages to reunite with the Doctor, but the Chelonians keep attacking. The Doctor sneaks towards the TARDIS while Benny and Rodomonte run away, finding his ship undamaged.

Georgia: It's been zero days since the Doctor last forgot about Bernice. On the plus side, I love her narration of her own surely-soon-to-be-acclaimed discoveries!

Evan: The petition for Benny to become the David Attenborough of space starts here.

While Rodomonte makes it back to Sendei, Benny is overcome by a desire for strawberry trifle and wanders off. She's actually being drawn into a boggy pit by a tentacled creature that's affecting her senses, but is rescued by Sendei.



John: Benny's entrancement is quite scary in this compellingly written sequence. I appreciate that the tentacle creature is easy to escape if the victim still had the will...

Filip: Yes, this is a solid scene, and it shows how dangerous the planet is before you consider the many bad guys Roberts has thrown into the mix.

Georgia: Apparently, we must be told *one million times* how pretty Bernice is.

The Cell detects the Doctor's mind and causes the Time Lord to collapse, leaving him at the mercy of the nearby Chelonians. Through a telepathic link, the Doctor gives the Cell its first feelings of hope.

Filip: A genuinely touching moment, and it's very fitting for the Seventh Doctor as well – even if it's perhaps closer to Sylvester McCoy's role in *The Hobbitt*.

Georgia: Oh, that's sweet.

Benny is carried to the speeder by Sendei, and given a burger and a fizzy drink. She apparently confirms a prophecy that Molassi believes is told in the lyrics of his favourite song. Molassi thinks he's the subject of the song – the Wizard King.

Filip: When you believe an entire album is about you, it might be time to go easy on the drugs.

Evan: The lyrics are terribly forced rhymes, but without a tune we will never know if this song is an absolute bop.

The Doctor wakes up in the Chelonian tank, which comes under fire from the black globules. He lunges for the controls and drives the tank out of danger. He reveals the globules are living bullets as the Chelonians take him back to their camp.

Filip: In the moments leading up to this, the Doctor made a contraption out of spoons – something that Roberts invoked many years later in *The Lodger*.

Georgia: I love the Doctor's nonchalant response to being knocked out at this stage.

The Doctor investigates a sick Chelonian in the medical bay. He discovers that it has ingested Bubbleshake, a highly addictive fizzy drink that causes madness and eventually death – the same drink that Benny is drinking. Fakrid threatens the Doctor's life unless he develops something to destroy the Eight Twelves.

Filip: I too worry about my soft drink consumption sometimes.

Georgia: Chekhov's Fizzy Drink!

Evan: This seems like the precursor to Bubbleshock in *The Sarah Jane Adventures*.

Benny stops Rodomonte jumping from a high rock to his death. Benny realises that the drink is addictive and causing her poor judgement, and starts to destroy it, but is stopped by the rest of the group.

John: So far these Benny sequences are my favourite of the book – an unsettling, original predicament with our heroine convincingly losing her mind, but not without a struggle.

Filip: Again, the high rock scene was written really well. But it is also the second novel in a row where Benny is placed under the influence of some deadly force and denied the full use of her mental faculties.

Georgia: I am relating far too much to Bernice's poor food-and-drink-related choices in this novel.

The Doctor tells the Chelonians of a weapon called 'diplomacy' that he can deploy on a solo mission. The Doctor discovers the Eight Twelves are the passengers of a missing train carriage from the 8:12 service to Aldgate who believe they are the survivors of a nuclear incident. He takes the smart guns from two of the passengers, Vanessa and Hazel, and destroys the weapons' artificial intelligences.

John: I find disarmament works best as a tool for peace when it applies to both sides of the conflict, and not just one...

Georgia: It shows just how much is crammed into this novel that I forgot all about the train!

Evan: We apologise for the delay in the train narrative. This is due to an unexpected redirection of the train into outer space. Please seek out the Delay Repay website to reclaim the appropriate compensation.

Sheldukher and his unwilling assistants prepare to land on Sakkrat. Meanwhile, the Doctor returns to the Chelonians and claims to have killed the Eight Twelves with diplomacy. However, the Chelonians know he is lying and that the Eight Twelves are now defenceless.

Filip: Good job, Doctor, that's definitely not going to cause problems later!

Georgia: I appreciated the reference to "that rubbish they used to put on after Grandstand"...

Evan: If only there was, like, some sort of coincidental spacecraft crash to help the Doctor get out of his terrible barefaced lie...

The speeder breaks down in sight of eight stone monoliths depicted on the cover of Molassi's album. Benny begins to believe the prophecy might be true as they enter into the legendary city.

Georgia: The greatest peril seen in *Doctor Who* to date: running out of pop!

Sheldukher's ship lands in the midst of the Chelonians. He uses an ultrasonic pulse to temporarily disable them, and sends in his accomplice Postine to round up the Doctor and the Eight Twelves. In the city, Molassi's descent into madness continues. With the cans of Bubbleshake having run out, Molassi and Sendei argue. After Sendei smashes the recording of the seemingly prophetic song, Molassi stabs him.

Filip: There's something Lovecraftian about this sequence. We have ancient and mysterious ruins and characters quite low on sanity, where everything seems to be driven by a delusion that might just be real.

After aging Rosheen for attempting to shoot him, Sheldukher identifies the Doctor and threatens the Eight Twelves if the Time Lord won't help him find the legendary Highest Science of Sakkrat.

Filip: The Chelonian army is just sitting around throughout all of this, incapacitated by Sheldukher, because the plot doesn't need them yet. This section of the book has a few instances like that where characters will be given some busywork to do while the actual story progresses elsewhere.

Georgia: I'm looking forward to finding out what the heck a remedial is. Maybe the Eight Twelves aren't from Earth. Maybe there's a Metropolitan line in a faraway galaxy. Oh wait, that was the previous novel.

John: The Doctor is finally forced, at gunpoint, to engage with the titular primary plotline of the book!

High on pure A, Molassi begins to see ghosts emerging from the walls of the city. In a drug-induced stupor, he fatally stabs himself. Rodomonte comes across his body and kills himself using a rock. Benny finds both corpses and is sealed in the chamber as a ghostly figure emerges from the wall.

Filip: I see that we're starting to thin out the cast for the finale. This scene serves to place Benny in peril, and it's very effective.

Evan: Molassi used drugs. It was not very effective.

John: This does rather serve to make Benny's side of this novel feel a bit pointless.

Sheldukher's ship lands at the city of Sakkrat, but the doors won't open. The Cell is attempting to kill everyone aboard as

revenge for its centuries of torment. The Doctor manages to open a door and the crew escape just before the ship explodes, with Sheldukher taking the unwilling Cell in its carry case.

Filip: The Cell really is the great pathetic character of our time.

Georgia: The Doctor finally remembers Bernice!

Bernice finds herself outside the city, where she reunites with the Doctor. He blocks the effects of the Bubbleshake poisoning and reunites with Sheldukher's gang. As a Chelonian assault force arrives, Postine is sent to hold them off while the rest head for the city of Sakkrat.

John: The Bubbleshake plotline is now over so the Doctor turns it off.

Filip: Now, you might wonder how one woman is able to hold off an entire tank squadron, and the answer is simple – she's just that good at shooting things and she was given a really nice gun.

Georgia: I would love to have the Doctor spring-clean my mind. For one thing, I forgot that Bubbleshake could kill. On the plus side, "it seems reports of my breath have been greatly exaggerated" was very funny.

General Fakrid engages Postine in single combat. He kills her but is fatally wounded. Before dying, the Chelonian reveals that he is Jinkwa's mother.

John: I'm unsure if the author intends the Chelonians' hermaphroditism to be in some way humorous? Taken straight, I find them an interesting alien race whose culture and technology has been considered quite fully. But if they're supposed to be a joke, I don't get it. I'll err on the side of assuming the best.

Filip: So far, the Chelonians have been portrayed as a largely one-dimensional race. I think this starts to change from here, but

I also struggled with how to interpret authorial intent here – especially having seen some of Roberts's statements on gender.

Georgia: I'm not sure if I find "The Time of Blood" as an analogy for periods funny or kind of offensive. Either way, I'm not sure it quite works – the Chelonians are already pretty bloodthirsty, so Fakrid's personality doesn't actually change very much!

Evan: I feel like the Chelonians are being played for laughs, but I'm not in on the joke. Is Fakrid's death supposed to be a bad *Star Wars* joke? "Jinkwa, I am your mother!"

In the city, Klift is killed after being crushed under a rock. As the Doctor chases Sheldukher deeper into the complex, Benny and Rosheen retrieve Postine's gun outside to hold off the Chelonians. In the ensuing battle, Rosheen is killed but Bernice is teleported away to safety by one of the ghosts, which are part of a wider security system for the complex.



John: ...and there goes another supporting character who's served her usefulness.

Filip: Benny has been granted some level of protection by these 'Sakkrations,' but the writing is a bit less refined here – clearly there's meant to be a diegetic reason for this, but to me it reads like the story has written itself into a bit of a corner.

Georgia: I would probably be sadder about Klift's death if he'd been more involved in the story while he was alive.

Evan: Klift and Rosheen were certainly two of the characters within this novel.

Jinkwa, who is becoming increasingly authoritarian, orders three soldiers to be made into living bombs and sent into the city. One disobeys orders and doubles back, attempting to destroy Jinkwa, but is unsuccessful. Jinkwa shoots dead another officer that tries to overthrow him.

Georgia: Ah, so the Environments Officer WASN'T completely pointless!

Evan: RIP the Environments Officer! Justice for the Environments Officer!

After briefly being attacked by a chimeric creature, the Doctor, Bernice, the Cell and Sheldukher reach the centre of the complex. Sheldukher goes first and is captured in a forcefield by two humanoid constructs, but the Doctor and Bernice manage to trick their way past them.

Filip: It's a fun set piece that ends with the Fortean Flicker providing the Doctor with the means necessary to confuse these constructs. However, I don't know if I like that this is in service of Benny going on the computer and doing exposition for a number of pages.

Bernice accesses a computer terminal and finds that the entire planet was terraformed to resemble the legends of Sakkrat as part of a plot to recover the Cell by its creators. The Fortean Flicker is being

caused by a faulty time element used to keep the base operational, which the Doctor deactivates and takes with him.

John: I feel like a trick has been missed here. If everything so far has happened because of a coincidence-causing Fortean Flicker, surely the planet's resemblance to Sakkrat should turn out to be the biggest coincidence of them all and be entirely unrelated to Sheldukher's goals – a cruel cosmic joke. Instead, it makes the Sakkrat and Sheldukher element the one part of the plot that is not coincidence based.

Filip: Oh, that is good. The whole Sakkrat thing is just a sting operation for Sheldukher specifically.

Georgia: The Cell might get a happy ending?! Maybe?!

The Doctor and Bernice reunite, and witness Sheldukher age himself to death rather than be taken alive, activating an implanted bomb in the process. The constructs try to take the Cell from them, leading to Bernice killing it to stop it falling into the wrong hands.

Filip: It's a damp squib of an ending for the Cell, who much like many other characters has now fulfilled its purpose in the narrative and is now surplus to requirements.

Georgia: ...in context that's a happy ending of sorts, I suppose?

Evan: So the villain has finally been caught, and his response is just to turn himself into a bomb and let himself die. How dreadfully convenient!

John: Boo! I thought the whole point was that our heroes would treat the Cell with compassion, like the proper lifeform it is!

The ghosts running the base set the chimera to attack the Doctor and Bernice, who come across a transmatt station. Just before the bomb detonates, they manage to activate the transport and escape.

Filip: There's a line here about how Benny "can't remember how to read". Yes, her brain is turning to mush from Bubbleshake withdrawal, but this is still very undignified for our learned companion.

Georgia: I've seen some terrible excuses for the Doctor needing to explain everything to the companion before, but 'she forgot how to read' really takes the biscuit! I don't love that Bernice is completely lucid and yet completely helpless to the effects of Bubbleshake when convenient.

Evan: Benny 'forgetting how to read', just to allow the Doctor to exposit, is just a dreadful bit of writing!

Back at the Eight Twelve camp, the Chelonians are spreading chemical weapon pods around the site. The Doctor arrives and challenges Jinkwá, who tries to kill him. Before he can do so, Jinkwá is shot by Vanessa with a stolen Chelonian gun, but manages to activate the pods. The Doctor freezes time with the time element, and vows one day to return and save the Chelonians and humans.

John: That's not an ending! You can't just leave the only sympathetic supporting characters to be dealt with later, probably never. Boo!

Filip: Oh look, the Doctor took away the Eight Twelves' only effective means of self defence and now they're frozen in time forever with no means of escape. Amazing work, no notes.

Georgia: Either they're all just stuck there forever, or there's a sequel to this. Not sure which of those scenarios I prefer, to be honest.

Evan: Rubbish! I actually booed out loud at my physical copy of this book, which I know fully well cannot hear me.

The Doctor cures Bernice of the Bubbleshake poisoning, and takes her to 1930s London for a night at the theatre.

In the audience is Gustav Urnst, who was transported there by the Fortean Flicker six months ago.

Filip: It's a fun little vignette. And importantly, the book has now ended.

What did our readers think of the book?

Filip: There were some genuinely good bits in this novel, but the connective tissue between them is what lets it down. Too many times characters are very obviously put on hold while the focus shifts elsewhere. Very few of the characters are actually likeable, and in the end, the whole novel felt just... excruciatingly average.

Georgia: There are some great elements in here, but it's very overstuffed. By the time *The Highest Science* really got going, I was really struggling to care about all the different half-formed arcs. It's also unfortunate that Bernice spent most of her first novel missing and most of her second novel drugged – I still don't feel like she's had a proper first story!

John: I think too many plates are being spun here, so a couple were doomed to fall – specifically the Eight Twelves and Chelonians whose threads just stopped. Sheldukher probably emerges as the main plotline, and while this angle is perfectly fine it's pretty standard sci-fi fare. Is *The Highest Science* supposed to be a funny book? I'm still unsure, which is probably the most damning thing I can say. And did every plotline have to end on a sad note?

Evan: *The Highest Science* promises some sort of light-hearted space-hopping yarn, but it never really manages to deliver on that. What we get isn't half as funny as it makes itself out to be, and the loose plotting goes somewhat off-rails by the end. Benny gets some moments to shine but even these are haphazard. Overall, it's just not a very memorable or interesting novel.

Next time... *The Pit*

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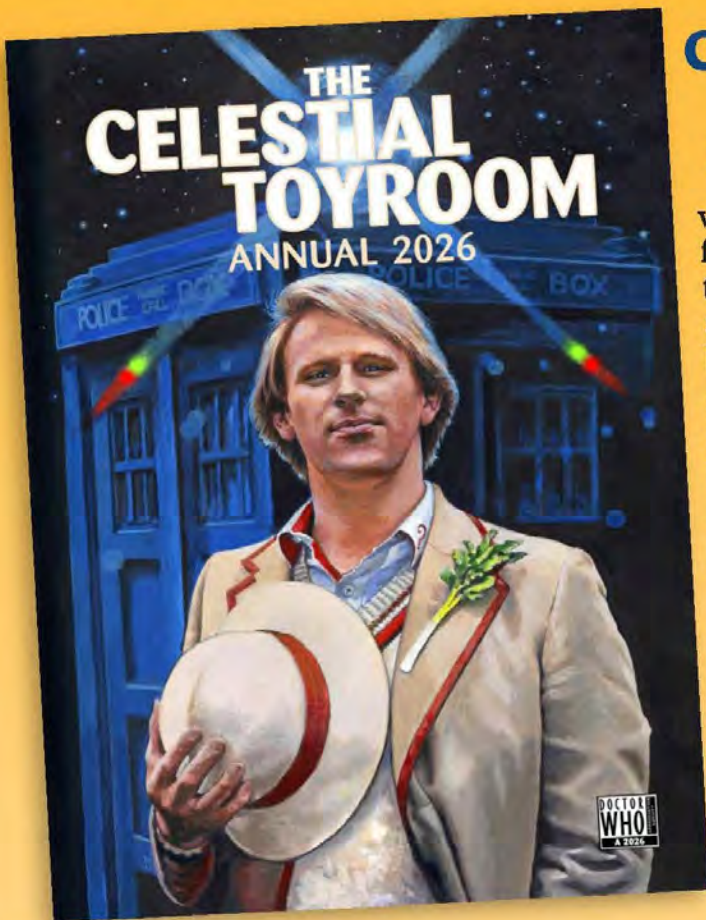
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