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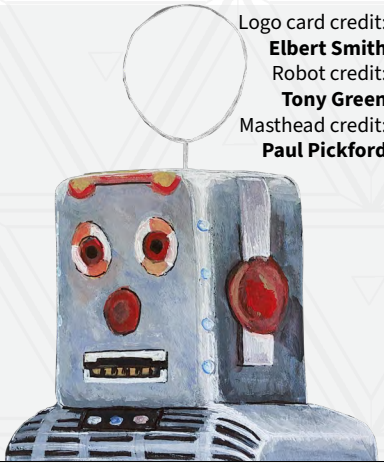


DOCTOR WHO APPRECIATION SOCIETY

558

Celestial Toyroom

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Elbert Smith
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Tony Green
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Paul Pickford



Hello, and welcome to your September issue of *CT*! After a run of issues that were a little out of the ordinary, we're settling back into a more regular issue.

While the format might be settling back into familar territory, our content continues to be out of this world! We're kicking off our coverage of the latest transmedia *Doctor Who* event, *Circuit Breaker*, to see how the Fugitive Doctor fares in the ongoing story across comics, audios, books and more! I was also lucky enough to be able to speak to one of its stars, David Banks, ahead of the release of his new memoir – read on to hear what he had to say!

We're also taking a look back on Russell T Davies' second era as *Doctor Who* showrunner, following the news of his departure announced shortly before the last issue went to print. We've got retrospectives, a debate and one suggestion of what could come next. For what it's worth, I thought there has been plenty to appreciate in the most recent era of *Doctor Who – Lux*, *Boom*, *Wild Blue Yonder* and a few others will certainly do well in my personal rankings! However, I felt both of the series really had difficulties with sticking the landing when it came to their finales, so whoever takes over as the next showrunner will have some work to do there!

While we wait out to find out what's next in a new Wilderness Years of sorts, *CT* is also returning to some of the landmark stories from that era for a reassessment. If you'd like to share your thoughts, that would be, as always, greatly appreciated.

All that's left for me to say is that I hope you can sit back, relax, and enjoy this new *CT*.

Best wishes,

James

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Celestial Toyroom 558

Published by the *Doctor Who* Appreciation Society

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Doctor Who and the media mix

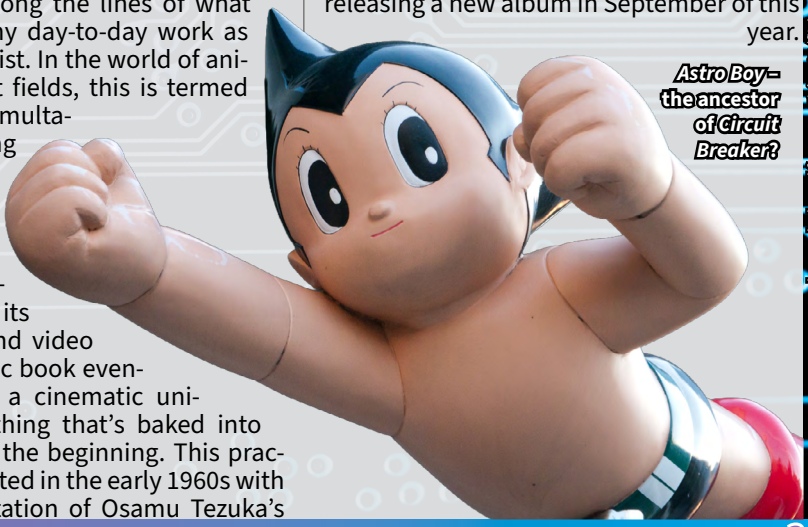
Kara Dennison on the links between anime and *Circuit Breaker*

In the year 2026, *Doctor Who* is already very much a multimedia property. Like the 'Impossible Girl' Clara Oswald, the franchise is splintered across the Doctor's timeline, comprising television, film, books, audio dramas, games, tabletop RPGs, comics and likely things I've yet to discover. And that's true of many things, especially nowadays. Though the creative value may be debatable, franchises understand the financial merits of diversifying and capturing audiences across as many potential media as possible.

"To find the forebears of *Circuit Breaker*, we need to look to magical girls..."

While *Doctor Who* has been what we might technically term 'transmedia' for quite some time, this summer's *Circuit Breaker* is much more along the lines of what I'm used to in my day-to-day work as an anime journalist. In the world of anime and adjacent fields, this is termed 'media mix': a simultaneous storytelling initiative across multiple outlets. Rather than a show starting as a television series and making its way to novels and video games, or a comic book eventually becoming a cinematic universe, it's something that's baked into the project from the beginning. This practice arguably started in the early 1960s with the anime adaptation of Osamu Tezuka's *Tetsuwan Atom* (known in the West as *Astro Boy),* but this style of media mix was more a matter of merchandising. Even *Pokémon,* with products ranging from video games to series and films to mobile apps, is transmedia via growth rather than design. To find the forebears of *Circuit Breaker,* we need to look to magical girls and fictional pop stars.

1983's *Creamy Mami, the Magic Angel* – besides having a name that is somewhat dubious sounding to Western ears – was an early foray into the media mix mentality. The animated series follows Yuu Morisawa, a ten-year-old girl gifted with alien magic for the course of one year. She uses this power to transform into a teenage pop star, dubbed Mami, and the series follows both her youthful misadventures and the life of a teen idol. However, the purpose of the show was twofold: the producers aimed to launch Mami's voice actress, 16-year-old Takako Ohta, as a real-world singer using Mami's singles from the show. While her career didn't soar as high as expected, the fictional Mami (still voiced by a 67-year-old Ohta) is still beloved to this day and even releasing a new album in September of this year.



***Astro Boy* – the ancestor of *Circuit Breaker*?**

Background adapted from: Creativity103 (flickr.com/photos/creativestock/52278426111, CC BY 2.0) and Astro Boy image adapted from: neekohfi (flickr.com/photos/neekohfi/45171157717, CC BY 2.0)

To this day, the majority of media mix projects in Japan are, if not music-centric, then at least music-adjacent. This is possibly because music is such an accessible medium, in the sense that the finished product only needs to be a few minutes long and doesn't require any visual production to launch. As a result, one of the juggernauts of the media mix format, *Love Live!,* centres on high schoolers who form music groups, be it for fame, to save their school or just because they love singing that much. Each era starts as a set of characters with designs, personalities and voices, making their debuts in singles or music videos. It often takes months, or even years, of weaving through live concerts and mobile games before these characters ever appear onscreen. But throughout that time their stories are being told and, more importantly, their fan bases are growing. In recent years, a slew of projects have gotten their start in this format: *HYPNOSISMIC -Division Rap Battle-*, *BanG Dream!, D4DJ* and the increasingly popular *Umamusume: Pretty Derby.*

"...Jikiemi-Pearson's approach appears to centre what makes this Doctor so different..."

There is one interesting similarity across these properties, though: each started with zero fans. Sure, the companies and talents that produce them have fan bases of their own; knowing that your favorite character designer or voice actor is involved in a project is likely to draw the eye. But we don't come into *Umamusume* knowing who Special Week is or why we should care about her. The strength of media mix projects is their ability to encourage engagement with new characters through – let's be honest – less expensive and time-consuming means. We can decide through a few songs and art pieces which rapper, girl group or delinquent basketball player will be our favorite.

And that's what's interesting about *Circuit Breaker*: it both *is* and *isn't* that. Because we both *do* and *don't* know the Fugitive Doctor, and we're still figuring out just how interconnected this whole series is.

The plus side of the media mix approach is that it represents an opportunity to further test a character who, so far, has had much less development than other Doctors. Jo Martin is by no means new to the role, with more than one television appearance and her own Big Finish series. But this more accessible approach, launching her Doctor into books, audios, games and magazines, will let fans from all walks of the Whoniverse learn about her a bit at a time. And Esmie Jikiemi-Pearson's approach appears to centre what makes this Doctor so different from all the others by placing her against Doctor superfan Osgood to further highlight these discrepancies.

Where things start to get a bit wibbly is with the potential interconnectedness of the project. One of the strengths of the media mix format is that, despite being built to consist of multiple parts, those multiple parts can be experienced fully on their own. If one branch of the project is, say, prohibitively expensive or unavailable in your region, you will either get the full story from another branch *or* it won't be necessary to understand what you *do* engage with. In this there's something of a precedent in Big Finish's *Who*-adjacent *Bernice Summerfield* range, whose ongoing plot shifted between audio and prose releases in the 2000s. To try and keep non-completists up to date, the stories provided a quick precis of recent happenings to get everyone up to speed. This approach generally paid off, though not entirely – major moments like Benny becoming pregnant, and later giving birth, come a little out of nowhere without having read the novels. The question now becomes whether *Circuit Breaker* will act similarly. Will a reader who doesn't get *Doctor Who Magazine* in their country be able to enjoy the story with that gap? Will a fan who can't afford the audios be able to get by on the books and comics? This is what will, ultimately, dictate how well *Circuit Breaker* thrives as a media mix property.

In this downtime between eras, we're going to become more eager than ever for spinoff materials, and projects like these have the potential to satisfy that need. Now, we wait and see whether it will be realised (*or, we can find out now in our reviews! - Ed.*).

Circuit Breaker: The balance of power

John Ashway delves into the first half of the new storyline for the Fugitive Doctor

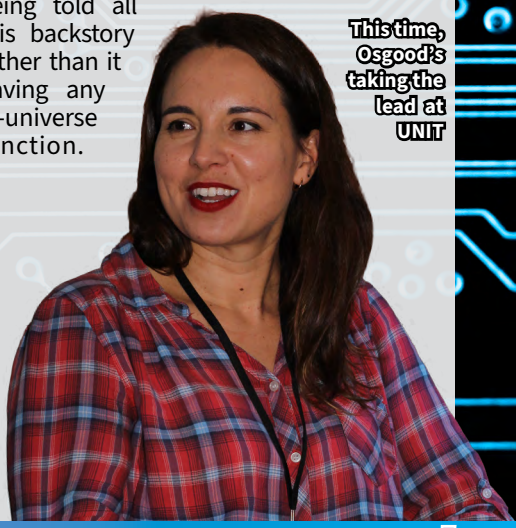
1. Calling the Doctor

In the midst of what's turned out to be another fallow period for *Doctor Who*, BBC Studios have arrived to fill the gap with their third attempt at a large mixed-media *Who* event. Following *Time Lord Victorious* and *Doom's Day*, Big Finish, BBC Audio, Titan Comics, Penguin Random House, East Side Games and *Doctor Who Magazine* have teamed up for an ongoing story that their press release describes as "groundbreaking". Forgive me if I scoff a little at that adjective, having made it through the two previous offerings – each of which was flawed in their own way. *Time Lord Victorious* had a strong narrative hook, focusing on the popularity of the Eighth, Ninth and Tenth Doctors while exploring the relatively untapped 'Dark Times' of *Who* lore, but the confusing structure of different interweaving narrative threads put off many potential buyers. *Doom's Day* fixed that problem with a simple start-to-finish order and focusing on a newly-invented character, but failed to engage many Whovians with its very episodic plot that left little room for development. So, will it be third time lucky for *Doctor Who*'s transmedia ambitions?

From first impressions, *Circuit Breaker* seems to have combined the best of both worlds. The focus on the Fugitive Doctor is a strong attention-getter to attract an audience, giving them more details about a character whose past has only ever been hinted at. Meanwhile, from a structural perspective, there's a standard sequential narrative that makes where to start, and the ongoing story order, clear. So, let's start at the beginning.

This saga kicks off with a text adventure by *Circuit Breaker* overseer Esmie Jikiemi-Pearson. *Calling the Doctor* is available to read for free on the UNIT HQ website, but frustratingly you do need to sign into a BBC account to access it – something I'm not sure is necessary for a story whose aim is essentially to try and tempt its readers into buying further instalments of a *Doctor Who* saga. As you might expect, it's exposition heavy with a combination of emails, reports, transcripts and photos from UNIT's Black Archive to get across the main gist of the series. Put simply, objects from the Doctor's life have been removed from time, charged with dangerous energy and sent to the Black Archive where they could wreak havoc. As much of the Doctor's timeline is affected, only the Fugitive Doctor, who comes from a period before the damage, can be called in to return the items with the help of a special gun called the Resistor to remove the dangerous energy.

As a free story here to kick-start the narrative, I know I shouldn't be too harsh on the info-dump style used here – but I'm quite disappointed. Conveying most of the plot through a simple chat log makes it feel more obvious that the reader is the one really being told all this backstory rather than it having any in-universe function.



This time, Osgood's taking the lead at UNIT

Image adapted from: Super Festivals (flickr.com/photos/superfestivals/34436085631, CC BY 2.0)

Images credit: Titan Comics

While *Doom's Day* also began with a free website short story, that was a full piece of prose with some action and evocative description. In contrast, this feels basic. It also has parts that are hidden behind incredibly obvious passwords, which were more annoying than engaging. For what it's worth, *Circuit Breaker*'s stall has been clearly set out and its structure defined. I do also appreciate there's a genuine reason why the Fugitive Doctor is particularly needed for this mission. So far, it all makes sense.

While we're talking about continuity, however, it is a little odd that UNIT apparently know all about the Fugitive Doctor. It somewhat demystifies this incarnation if she can be called in and treated like any other. However, her characterisation so far is solid. She's spiky, no-nonsense and totally dismissive of the UNIT team until they earn her respect. I think she's pretending not to care right now, but will step up when it comes down to it. I'm a little concerned we're heading for an arc where all her rough edges are smoothed away to make her a more standard Doctor figure, but that's only a suspicion at this point. There's plenty of time to prove me wrong!

Rounding out the rest of our regulars are Osgood, now head of the Black Archive, and her assistant Andrew. In this scenario, Osgood has taken on a Kate Lethbridge-Stewart type role in that she has to be serious and in charge. Andrew, meanwhile, is the new Osgood – fanboying over the Doctor and convinced of the Fugitive incarnation's goodness with little evidence. His naïvety is a touch annoying, but I'm also quite suspicious of him. He just so happens to have been working on the Resistor device, the key piece of tech that can solve this crisis, before it even began. Hmm…

Calling the Doctor kicks off *Circuit Breaker* satisfactorily, but I'm not sure it's something I'd ever consider returning to. In its defence, I don't think it's ever trying to be anything more, but it ultimately feels like a laying down of the series' rules rather than a compelling piece to try and get people into the rest of the adventure.

2. Adversary of the Daleks

After the free website introduction to the saga, *Adversary of the Daleks* is *Circuit Breaker*'s first full instalment and comes in the form of a 48-page adventure from Titan Comics. While I'm not a regular *Who* comic reader, Titan's releases have been highlights in previous multi-media *Who* events, particularly their Missy-focused comics for *Doom's Day*, so they have something of a reputation to live up to.

We jump into the story with the Doctor having already finished her first mission – a short, easy trip to return a statue head that UNIT are using as a kind of warm-up. The Fugitive Doctor is already clashing with Osgood and Andrew's expectations, and we see she's got a real chip on her shoulder when it comes to comparisons with her future selves. Interestingly, this seems to drive her actions in this comic, where she seems to be trying her best to be 'Doctorish' in her own way – with mixed results.

Arriving in ancient Greece for her mission proper, the comic slowly builds up to the appearance of a Dalek. Instead, we first experi-



Cover A, by Jay Anacleto

ence a tale of gods demanding tribute from the general populace before the plot leads simply, but elegantly, into the arrival of a single scout Dalek – the first that the Fugitive Doctor has ever encountered. As a result, she has a pleasingly optimistic attitude towards the Dalek and is convinced that the creature must want *something* that she can bargain with, even if everyone around her says that such thinking is pointless. It's an interesting combination of the Fugitive Doctor's trademark confidence and stubbornness with the pacifist ideals that define later Doctors. Unfortunately, the Dalek is the one creature a compassionate approach simply won't work with and the Doctor's plan backfires tremendously.

There's some real pathos here as the Doctor's attempts at peace go unheeded by her enemies *and* friends, with her best attempts thoroughly eviscerated by Osgood upon her return to UNIT. The wedge between the Doctor and UNIT is driven wider, causing the Fugitive's defensive walls to go right up. She declares that compassion isn't really her thing, which she sadly seems to think is the moral of this adventure. There's a little needless repetition in these final scenes, as both the Dalek and Osgood compare the Doctor to one of those troublesome pepperpots. We've heard this kind of comparison multiple times before across *Who* media, so it doesn't really need reiterating here.

A comic is, of course, about a lot more than just its plotting and dialogue, and *Adversary of the Daleks* contains plenty of excellent artwork that's full of colour and life. The likenesses of Jo Martin, Ingrid Oliver and Omari Douglas are well captured, and the Dalek foe the Doctor faces is a gorgeous bright red as if it's come straight out of a 60s Dalek movie. I was particularly enamoured with two of the full page artworks, which were real highlights here. One presented a gorgeously simple image of the Dalek hovering above the Earth, alone in the vastness of space, while the other presents a gorgeous giant, wooden Dalek facsimile – or, as the story dubs it, a "Trojan Dalek". It's a bit of a shame the latter is slightly spoiled by the previous page, which shows a miniature version of the construction in the last panel. This is an unnecessary choice, as the full page artwork would have delivered the grand reveal much better simply on its own merits.



"...a gorgeously simple image of the Dalek hovering above the Earth..."

As with most Titan Comics releases, there are also multiple cover options. I opted for Cover A by Jay Anacleto, a beautiful illustration of the Fugitive Doctor in front of a giant Dalek looming in the background. I'm less impressed by Covers B and C – a press photo shot of Jo Martin and a cartoony Fugitive Doctor menaced by an approaching Dalek's shadow respectively. That said, the point of multiple covers is to allow choice for those with different tastes, so having some variety on offer should be praised.

Minor quibbles aside, *Adversary of the Daleks* is a real success for *Circuit Breaker*. It manages to present an exciting and original standalone story, which isn't always easy with the Daleks, while also showing some genuine depth in its characterisation of the Fugitive Doctor. It's given me hope that, while the individual missions that make up each release may be separate, we may still see some proper character development amongst our trio of leads as the saga progresses. The strong plotting is further supported by gorgeous artwork throughout. I'm eagerly looking forward to Titan Comic's next contribution to the *Circuit Breaker* range – but we'll be getting to the *Dawn of the Daleks* soon enough!

3. The Honourable Society

Image credit: Panini Comics

Circuit Breaker continues with another comic – this time within the pages of *Doctor Who Magazine* #632. While the regular *DWM* comic strip continues as normal in the magazine itself, *Circuit Breaker* has its own separate supplement complete with its own cover. With a regular issue of *DWM* now costing £8.99(!), and this release costing £10.99, we could consider *The Honourable Society* to be worth £2. While I may be a little more critical later on in my review, I think it definitely lives up to such a cheap price – but, of course, that's assuming you value the regular magazine you're getting with it as well…

There's a great re-cap on the inside cover that covers the story so far for anyone who's not been following *Circuit Breaker* – a smart inclusion for *DWM* readers who might thus far be unaware of the series that lowers the barrier of entry. We pick up the story with the Doctor still under fire for her actions last time in ancient Greece. This time, UNIT scientist Andrew will accompany her to keep an eye on things as they head to nineteenth-century Italy to return a Sontaran battle mace and set of handcuffs. The problem is, by the time the introductions are out the way, we're already about a quarter of the way through this comic's 20 pages. As a consequence, the main story rushes through with very little time for fleshing anything out.

Almost immediately after arriving, the Doctor completes her mission by blasting the Sontaran objects with the Resistor and leaving them on the ground. I thought she had to be a bit more circumspect with where these objects are left, but apparently not! What could have been a quick trip, however, ends up continuing following a cry of distress that leads the Doctor and Andrew to 'The Honourable Society'. This is a group led by a Sontaran (who is large as life on the cover, so forgive me if I don't count that as a spoiler!) who have kidnapped the mayor's daughter. Why, you might ask? Frustratingly, the motivation for a Sontaran to lead a superstition-led secret society of humans is left infuriatingly opaque. Is this a subtle takeover plan? A crashed Sontaran making the best of it? We don't have time to find out. He offers the mayor's daughter up in sacrifice to a mysterious intangible hooded figure, which isn't exactly the usual Sontaran MO. This figure looks set to be an ongoing part of *Circuit Breaker* though, so hopefully we'll get some proper answers soon enough.

Ending up in a bit of a tight spot, the Doctor is saved by Andrew – who it would appear has the superpower of being able to spontaneously materialise a cloak in about 30 seconds flat when he quickly needs a disguise. I suppose there's meant to be a moral here of accepting help and using teamwork, but it's all over so quickly that it's hard to say.

Coming straight after *Adversary of the Daleks*, *The Honourable Society* really suffers in comparison. While that story had some emotional depth in its depiction of the Fugitive Doctor, this one is nothing more than a simple adventure. It really begs the question of why the comics weren't spread out a little in the *Circuit Breaker* running order. The art fares a bit better, being very colourful and dynamic, but the likenesses aren't quite as strong as the previous comic. But, when looked at under its own merits (and remembering the £2 value I assigned to it earlier), I did enjoy *The Honourable Society*. Even if its main story is a little disposable, it's advancing the ongoing plot that little bit more.



The cover of the insert

4. The Deadliest Weapon

Next up on the *Circuit Breaker* trail is *The Deadliest Weapon*, an original hour-long story from BBC Audio that gives us Jo Martin's first full performance in the series. Rather than a full audio drama, this release is more of an audiobook read by Martin with support from David Banks as the 1980s Cyber Leader. Together, the pair produce an entertaining instalment that helps to get *Circuit Breaker* back on track.

We begin with the Fugitive Doctor apparently back working for Division, seeking to prevent blueprints for a terrible weapon from falling into the wrong hands and assassinate its creator. And, when the Cybermen attack the hotel at which the blueprints are being auctioned, she also needs to stop them too. While the audience might be confused for a moment, the twist of this audio is revealed early on when the ghostly voice of Osgood reminds the Doctor that this is just a memory-worm-induced state. It's a little disappointing this couldn't have been kept back for later, but I've got to admit that writer Steve Lyons' approach does prove an engaging way to get some of the Fugitive Doctor's backstory into *Circuit Breaker*.

Even back in her Division days, this Doctor is more emotional and empathetic than she likes to admit. As the situation escalates, she does her best to protect hotel workers Kel and Jinni even as it leads into a dangerous game of brinksmanship with the Cyber Leader. It's the usual battle of cold logic versus humanity, but here you're unsure how far the Doctor will push her own detachment in the name of the greater good. Kel and Jinni themselves aren't especially interesting, but I do appreciate that they're genuinely frightened of the Doctor here. Someone who they originally thought was just a friendly guest turns out to be dangerous, and, while that trust is being slowly rebuilt, they don't just go along with the Doctor without question. There's also the question of whether they're more connected to the overall narrative than it first appears…

The nature of the "deadliest weapon" itself is an interesting one, as it turns out to be closer to the Doctor herself than she'd ever imagined. However, the revelation of its nature does make the Fugitive Doctor come across as quite naïve. Ultimately, she blames herself for a mistake that, to my eyes, was clearly not a mistake at all but a deliberate trap laid for her by Division. I was surprised that the usually confident and cynical Fugitive Doctor couldn't make the necessary logical leap there – but perhaps this adventure may have been the moment that made her see the true nature of her employers.

Jo Martin is an engaging reader who brings a lot of charisma to this audio, but I would be interested to know if this is her first time reading an audiobook rather than acting in an audio drama. She gives a good performance throughout, but she definitely feels more comfortable performing dialogue as the Doctor rather than reading the narrative prose sections. David Banks, meanwhile, slips back into the role of the Cyber Leader like he's never been away. It's definitely the same Cyber Leader from Classic *Who*, with his usual air of smugness and tendency to get a little cross, but he now also sounds uncannily similar to Sir Christopher Lee. I can't say it's an upgrade that I'm disappointed about.

I really enjoyed *The Deadliest Weapon* overall, and am pleased to see some experimentation in how *Circuit Breaker* can offer more than simple fetch-and-carry quests for the Doctor. We are definitely gathering threads together for the ongoing storyline while continuing to do some nice character work, so I'm looking forward to seeing it build further. Onto the next instalment – oh look, it's another comic. So soon?



The Cybermen are back...

Image adapted from: Paul Hudson (flickr.com/photos/paulhudson/11001210123, CC BY 2.0)

5. Dawn of the Daleks

Images credit: Titan Comics

Titan Comics are back for the fifth instalment of *Circuit Breaker*, which is the last in the series to use the comic strip format. I'll repeat here that I think it's really odd to have three comic instalments in the range clumped together with only one other entry to separate them – wouldn't you rather show off the multimedia nature of *Circuit Breaker* by having some more variety? Format concerns aside, Titan once again pull off an excellent outing for the Fugitive Doctor.

Interestingly, while *Dawn of the Daleks* is from many of the same creatives as the earlier *Adversary of the Daleks*, this story isn't a direct sequel to that one at all – something I had assumed would be the case when I saw both comics were Dalek-related! Instead, this story takes the Fugitive Doctor to the planet Skaro for a follow-up of sorts to *Genesis of the Daleks*. A group of Kaled survivors find their bunker has finally been breached by the ever-strengthening Dalek forces, and it's up to the Doctor to try to get as many of them to safety as possible.



There are many similarities here to the Series 10 finale *The Doctor Falls*, with our hero against a seemingly unbeatable number of foes in a truly desperate situation. Each escape only seems to lead the group to even greater danger. In *Dawn of the Daleks*, the Doctor forms a connection with a scientist named Fliss and the pair serve to motivate and inspire each other throughout the adventure. In particular, the Doctor is taken with a sonic weapon that Fliss uses to save her life, which, given that the social media for *Circuit Breaker* has already shown that this Doctor is going to get her own sonic screwdriver, will presumably be leading to that soon!

"...this story works really well... to show us the Doctor's growth during *Circuit Breaker*..."

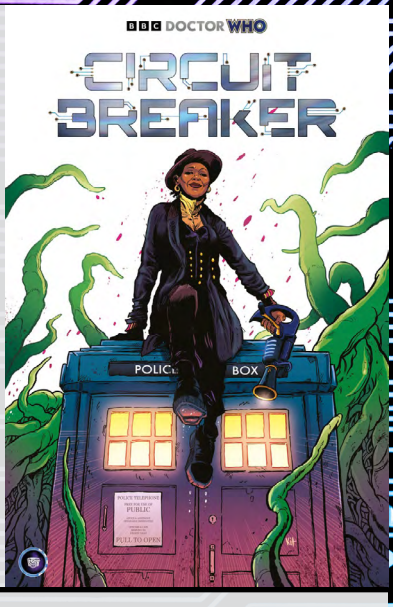
Even in a tale with a rather grim tone, the ending does its best to present a little hope for the Kaleds, and also the Doctor herself. She gets a pleasant coda when the Doctor returns to UNIT with a changed attitude on their continuing work together. In this respect, while not a direct sequel, this story works really well with *Adversary of the Daleks* to show us the Doctor's growth during *Circuit Breaker* in a relatively low-key way.

As with Titan's previous effort, the artwork presented here is gorgeous. I especially appreciated the early scenes where vistas of green, idyllic splendour are shattered by the arrival of a whole cavalcade of different Dalek colours and designs. This is great for visual impact, and the variety is explained in the plot as representing the different models needed to conquer varied environments in the future. Scenes on Skaro's surface also draw well from the imagery of *The Magician's Apprentice* to present the horribly bleak landscape strewn with those awful handmines.

I do, however, have to subtract some points from this comic for the quite misleading nature of its primary cover. Cover A, by Nupuni, presents three imposing Daleks with the Doctor and Osgood reacting in the foreground. This suggests to me that either Osgood will be coming with the Doctor on this adventure or that the Daleks are attacking present

day Earth – but neither are true. While I understand that covers can use disparate story elements to create a striking design, I think care must also be taken not to misrepresent the contents. Cover B is another photo cover, which I find unimpressive, so Cover C by Kit Wallis ultimately comes out on top with its depiction of the Fugitive Doctor atop the TARDIS. While it's a strong visual, however, it still doesn't really reflect the issue's contents.

As in previous *Doctor Who* multi-media events, I've been very impressed with the output of Titan Comics. Both issues they've produced have been the highlight of *Circuit Breaker* so far, telling mature, thoughtful stories with beautiful artwork that allow for some real growth for the Fugitive Doctor. Let's hope the high standard continues as we move into some other formats, starting with… oh no, a mobile game…



Cover C by Kit Wallis

6. *Castling*

The next segment for *Circuit Breaker* comes to us via the *Lost in Time* mobile game. I've had to suffer this poor excuse for a 'game' in my coverage of *Doom's Day*, and I wasn't relishing the idea of doing it again. From past experience, I see it as a time sink with no real gameplay that tarnishes the *Doctor Who* brand, so I must thank X user Jamie (@AMadmanNotABox) for taking screenshots of the *Circuit Breaker* story scenes so the *Lost in Time*-averse like me don't have to actually spend any time playing it. As in *Doom's Day*, all of the story is told via static, comic-style images where characters simply stand in place staring at each other. Therefore, nothing's been lost by not experiencing it 'first-hand'.

Castling sees the Fugitive Doctor arriving at the Shadow Proclamation to return a Sontaran helmet. Andrew and Osgood are talking to her remotely as she does so, leading to lots of identical images of the Doctor standing alone in a room with only the text box above her head changing. How thrilling! Further highlighting the limitations of the format are the scenes where the Doctor has to incapacitate many Judoon guards using Martian Judo completely offscreen. Her character model can't actually move in any meaningful way, so all this action has to be left purely to the reader's imagination. This includes a particularly brutal moment where she apparently rips off a Judoon's horn with her bare hands to the shock of Osgood and Andrew. Again, we don't actually *see* this event – it's just reported to us after the fact. So much for all her development in the previous stories and new attitude towards working together with the peoples of the universe. The story even ends with a punchline about how she usually just shoots things she doesn't like, erasing any development she's had so far this series.

There are also Sontarans attacking, but they are quickly seen off by the Judoon. They're seemingly only here to prompt some intrigue about the continuing story. They appear to be supporting the plans of our sinister overarching foe, the Conductor – are they a Sontaran of some description, or something more?

Unsurprisingly, this is by some margin the least satisfying segment of *Circuit Breaker* so far, and I can only hope that will remain the case when the event is concluded. All of the Doctor's development so far has been completely ignored and nothing of particular interest happens. We don't even get to see the Doctor interact with a Judoon or Sontaran, just off-screen imaginary hand-to-hand combat. It's all very disappointing, even by my low expectations of *Lost in Time*.

The man in the fibreglass mask

The Cyber Leader is much more than an impassive face. As his new memoir is released, **David Banks** chats to *CT* about his career as an actor, writer and scholar of the Cybermen.

Interview by **James Ashway**



Image adapted from: David Banks

Hi David, thanks for speaking to us today. To get started, I'd like to ask how you go about writing a memoir – do the memories flow out, or do you need to structure how you recollect the past?

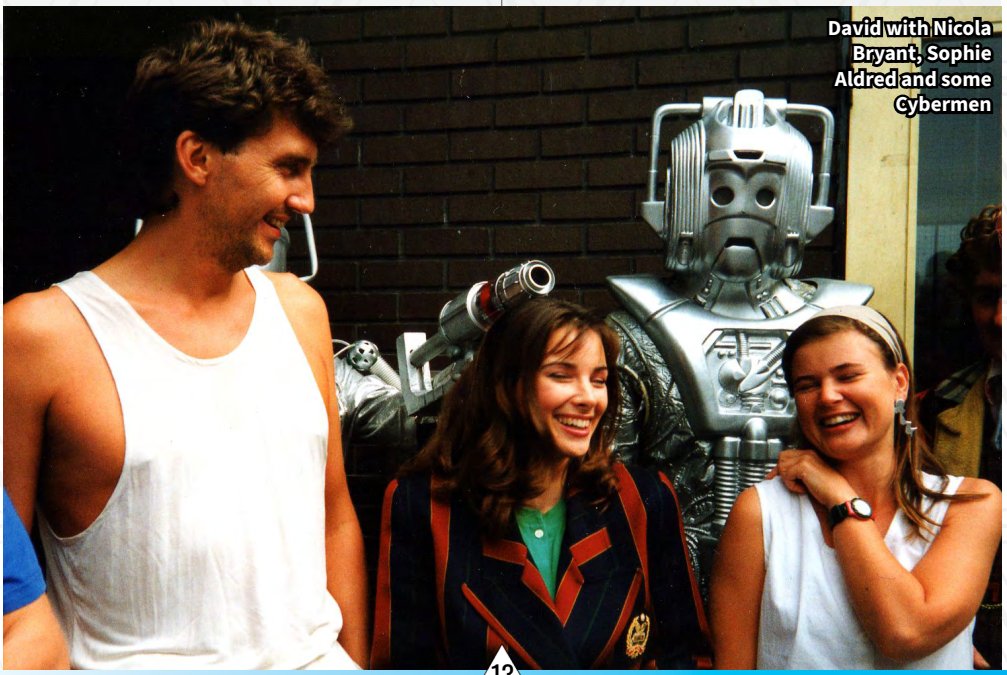
The idea of 'Memoirs of a Cyber Leader' is what started off this book. I realised people think it's the only thing I've done, as if I strut around in my costume all the time. In fact, I imagine I've only worn the costume for a few weeks in total across location and studio filming in all the years since I was cast in *Earthshock*. The memoir seemed like a good opportunity to highlight that as well as my life beyond *Doctor Who*. The other consideration was what I'd already written about the Cybermen before. *Cybermen*, which I wrote 40 years ago now, was an objective look at all the stories that they'd featured in and not just the ones I'd appeared in. The nearest I got to a personal opinion in that book was the philosophical introductory chapter looking at how the idea of cybernetics was created and how it became involved in science fiction through Gerry Davis and Kit Pedler. But there wasn't really anything about me there. So, I thought it would be good to explore what it was like behind the scenes with the Cybermen but from my own personal viewpoint. And once I knew what I wanted to cover, I felt that it all started to flow – in fact, it was a question of what to cut out rather than what to keep!

One thing that struck me reading the your memoir was the discussion of your parents' religious beliefs and your curiosity with Cyber-conversion in *Doctor Who*. Do you see any parallels between the Cybermen and religion?

There are parallels that can be drawn, but between Cybermen and religious practice specifically. In many kinds of groups where beliefs are shared, members want to draw more people in. They think that the group, club or denomination, whatever form it takes, is right and they want more people to be a part of it. That's what the Cybermen are doing. They're doing it by force, but then plenty of formal religions and political groups have forced people to believe what the group believes at certain times in their history. It's not something I delve into much in the book, but I hope the idea comes across. When growing up as a child, I believed what my parents believed in and attended church as much as three times on a Sunday. Eventually, I realised that I didn't have to take on other people's beliefs and that I could decide what was true for me. The Cybermen, on the other hand, would never allow that.

The Cybermen also take things a step further by having full conformity of appearance and belief. You mention discussing the Cyber Leader's outfit with Peter Grimwade at your audition, and I wondered if its limitations informed your performance?

When I told Peter Grimwade that I didn't suffer from claustrophobia, it was more of a hope than anything. At that point, I didn't know what the costume would be like and he didn't really either. In the end, it was quite tight. If the costume had been different, then I would have given a different performance. There'd be a different process of preparation and that would have led to a different outcome during filming. I was lucky that the Cyber Leader was such an interesting character that gets so much engagement with the Doctor. There's a lot of text there that told me about the Cyber Leader through the relationship he has with the Doctor and the Cyber Lieutenant. I think that the text is very important for an actor. You're going out to present the words that are on the page, not yourself. The text gives you everything you need to know about the character.



David with Nicola Bryant, Sophie Aldred and some Cybermen



Image credit: David Banks

On the set of *Silver Nemesis*

You were also an early adopter of home computers, and developed your own software. Did that understanding of computing help when you were preparing for the part of the Cyber Leader?
I think it gave me a sense of the mindset that could have run away with itself and eventually result in the Cybermen. But it wasn't the only source. A couple of years before I got my first computer, the Sinclair ZX81, I had read *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid* by Douglas Hofstadter. It's an extraordinary work that brings together the works of these three men across music, art and mathematics to explore the evolution of systems and meaning. It gave me a real understanding of a broad range of ideas that I found very useful when I was preparing for the Cyber Leader.

When filming began, you filmed the Cyber Leader's death sequence on the first day. Did that alter your performance, or did the rehearsal process mean you could just go straight into it?
Exactly that, I think. Filming out of sequence isn't an unusual process in television, but having the death sequence and some other dialogue heavy scenes on the first day was something of a baptism of fire. That helped, in that you weren't waiting for it to come after days of recording so there wasn't really time to second guess yourself. Having so much time to rehearse meant that there was plenty of time to work out the relationship with the Cyber Lieutenant and how to show that the Cyber Leader was implacable and cruel without too much emotion. I know that it was a bit of a surprise to the fans at the time that there was any emotion at all, and I try to tackle that in the book. I hope I made some valid arguments about why this wasn't the first sign of emotion in the Cybermen.

I was actually going to ask about that, given the Cyber Leader is fond of saying "excellent". Do you think it was a knowing line in the script to show that emotions are inescapable, despite what the Cybermen may claim?
I think that the Cybermen do suffer from confirmation bias, just like many of us with a strongly held belief. It's not necessarily bad, but we need to be able to recognise it. The Cybermen's fault, as it were, is that they don't recognise this bias. They believe that they are completely emotionless. Having given up parts of their body and mind in the pursuit of a kind of immortality, they are unable to even acknowledge the possibility that they might not be entirely devoid of emotion – or something like it. It wasn't something that I knew a lot about at the time, but I've come to understand much more about the Cybermen since then so I think I've got a robust argument now.

You've certainly become a scholar of the Cybermen, and you mentioned writing *Cybermen* earlier on. While most of that book is based on real world principles and existing episodes, part is semi-fictionalised through the character of ArcHivist Hegelia. What made you choose that route?
It seemed to me to be a less boring way of doing it [laughs]! I'd read some wonderful science fiction by Ursula K LeGuin and Dorothy Lessing that gave me a few pointers.

Also, as I said earlier, I wanted to set myself apart and put the emphasis on *Cybermen* being a philosophical and historical enquiry. Basing it in the fictional world was deliciously ironic, as, while we treat the events of these *Doctor Who* stories as gospel, they're just as fictional as everything else in there. After all, the Cybermen don't exist [laughs]! I thought the character of Hegelia was a good way to achieve all this, while also challenging the biases that still exist against women in research.

How was it to take your fiction writing a step further by putting together your Virgin New Adventure, *Iceberg*?

I'd pitched a *Doctor Who* story to Eric Saward before. That was more of a way of trying to get a holiday – by setting it on a Greek island. So, what became *Iceberg* was actually my second attempt. It was a story that grew over a few years. I wasn't working on it all the time, but occasionally trying out different ideas. I find that it's only when you sit down to write something that you start to have ideas about how characters talk and dress and act. I write it all down as I'm going along, and see how it feels when I read it back. Maybe then you have to cross it out and try again, or put the story away for a bit to consider what happens next.



***Iceberg*, featuring the Seventh Doctor and journalist Ruby Duvall, was published in 1993**

Cover credit: Virgin Books

During that time, I also met someone who was really into computing, and was interested in turning the storyline I had into a video game. We worked on that for a while, which allowed me to flesh out some of the characters and storylines a bit more. Eventually that fell through and I ended up talking to Peter Darvill-Evans, the editor of the New Adventures, at a *Doctor Who* event. He mentioned the series and asked me to consider getting involved. I sent him a synopsis, and he 'ummed' and 'ahhed' a bit about it mainly because, at first, I wanted to write it all in the second person singular [where a story is told from the point of view of another using the pronoun 'you']. In the finished novel, the only remnant of that idea is Ruby's dream.

In the end, of course, I was commissioned and had six months to write the novel. I did some acting work during that time, so I think in the end it probably took around three months to write. Something I was interested in exploring was the idea that, underneath the exoskeleton, a Cyberman would have had a human upbringing. I think it's a fascinating idea, because the entity that became the Cyberman could be hundreds of years old, if not older. It's not something that's always remembered, however, so I wanted to remind people of that where I could in the novel. I was also pleased to see that idea on screen when *Doctor Who* came back, where [in *The Age of Steel*] the Tenth Doctor is able to speak to the woman inside the Cyber exoskeleton after the emotion inhibitor is deactivated. I had a very detailed synopsis for the novel, which helped in some ways. On the other hand, having a detailed synopsis means you pretty much know what the ending will be. I enjoy discovering the story in the writing, so I'm not sure if I'd write a novel in that way again.

Speaking of creating by doing, how was it to be able to create your own incarnation of the Doctor for *The Ultimate Adventure*?

It was a great opportunity. I'm much more interested in science fiction than science fantasy, so I was more drawn to the Doctor discussing the choices humanity can make to change the future of our world than I was in Bar Galactica. So, as I was allowed to create

Image credit: David Banks

my own incarnation rather than pretend to be Jon Pertwee, I chose a Greenpeace t-shirt to highlight that. I was also able to have my own rehearsals with the cast so that my incarnation would have his own dynamic with Jason and Crystal. And, in Birmingham, my Doctor finally had his day on stage. It wasn't a long tenure, but I hope it made an impression on some of the people who saw it.

After *Doctor Who*, you were involved in many other productions, such as *Brookside*, but have more recently reprised the Cyber Leader on audio. Was it easy to reacquaint yourself with the character?

In some ways it was more a rediscovery than a reacquaintance. Each writer brings their own ideas to their stories, and Andrew Smith was able to open up the Cyber Leader in a fascinating new way when I returned to the role in *Hour of the Cybermen* at Big Finish. He was portrayed as the ultimate psychopath, but I think the Cyber Leader still remained true to the idea of the Cybermen. So, I wasn't so much reacquainting myself here as familiarising myself with a new interpretation of the same character. I've enjoyed being able to perform in multiple audios at Big Finish, and was delighted to be asked to read a number of stories for BBC Audio as well.

You've most recently appeared as the Cyber Leader in *The Deadliest Weapon*, part of the *Circuit Breaker* series. How did that appearance come about?

I was in the studio recording some short stories for BBC Audio when I was asked to read some lines for a separate project. There weren't any details or background information in the script, just some fragments of dialogue with the Doctor that I was asked to deliver as the Cyber Leader. So, I prepared those as I would any other. Now the CD's come out, I see it's presented as Jo Martin with David Banks, which I didn't realise would be the case!

Is it difficult to be able to perform without the context of what the lines would be used for?

Again, I think it all comes back to the text. Even in these short snippets, you get an idea of the immediate surroundings which gives you some idea how these lines should be delivered. I've been involved in two soaps, *Brookside* and *Canary Wharf*, and, to a certain extent, being given lines out of context reflects that genre. Acting in soaps is a bit different from acting in other productions as you're set adrift from the normal way you interpret a script, as you don't know what's coming next. I've not heard the audio yet and, as I've forgotten what the lines were now, I'm looking forward to finding out what the Cyber Leader's argument with the Doctor is!



Recording *Hour of the Cybermen*

Last, but by no means least, what's next for David Banks?

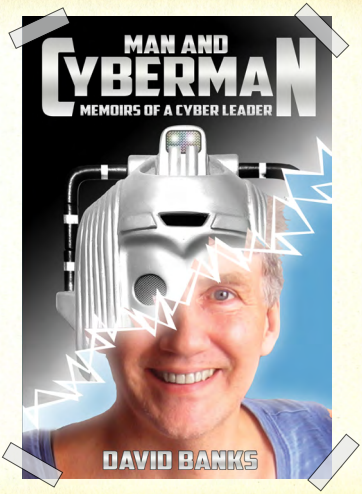
We've just launched the book and have some events lined up for that. I wrote it in around 12 weeks or so as I wanted it to come out by the end of the year, as this year is the 60th anniversary of when the Cybermen first appeared.

I've also written two other memoirs that haven't been published yet. One is about *Canary Wharf*, the soap I was in. The other touches on love, loss and happiness, written following the death of my partner of 30 years. I'm hoping those will be published in the not too distant future. And then I've got two plays called *Five Marys Waiting* and *A New Way to Play an Old Game* that I would love to get produced. There'll be some other things on the way too which for the moment will have to remain under wraps.

David Banks, thank you very much!

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:



Cover credit: Telos Publishing

Steve Claringbold gets an insight into one of the Doctor's most memorable foes

Few people in the history of *Doctor Who* can be as recognisable as David Banks despite never showing their face. The rich tones and imposing presence of the Cyber Leader are all down to this man, who cuts a memorable presence despite only appearing in a few television stories. His new book, *Man and Cyberman: Memoirs of a Cyber Leader*, is just as memorable. It's a highly entertaining memoir that explores the journey of Banks from childhood fascination with science fiction to becoming one of the most recognisable figures in the history of the Cybermen.

"Banks' style of writing... contains genuine reverence and affection throughout."

The book begins with Banks' formative years, where we see his love of acting, writing, music, literature and science gradually developing into a creative career. He explores his developing fascination with acting, writers and playwrights as a child and describes playing a part as like wearing an "exoskeleton". It's an especially appropriate term for someone who would later spend so much time within a Cyberman costume. The memoir is similarly layered, connecting the Cyber Leader with his own life throughout the book. This makes it as much about identity, memory and creativity as it is about *Doctor Who* and television. His reflections on first encountering the Cybermen in *The Tenth Planet* are particularly compelling in that what initially frightened him was not simply the monster themselves, but the disturbing idea of being forcibly transformed into something else without knowing how much of the original person would remain.

Many buying this book will be interested in hearing about Banks' Cyber years, and they will not be disappointed. It's a highlight of the memoir, especially because he's honest in his opinions of the stories he starred in. He regards *Earthshock* as the outstanding Cyberman story, praising its excitement, surprise and drama. His memories are frequently hilarious, particularly regarding the practical difficulties of working inside the cumbersome Cyberman costume. Banks recalls one memorable incident where he was unable to see properly through the Cyber Leader helmet, leading him to stumble down some steps. Like the professional he is, he carried on and so this blooper remains in the finished episode.

I also appreciated Banks' style of writing, which contains genuine reverence and affection throughout. He does offer criticism at points, but he nonetheless remains appreciative of the people and experiences that

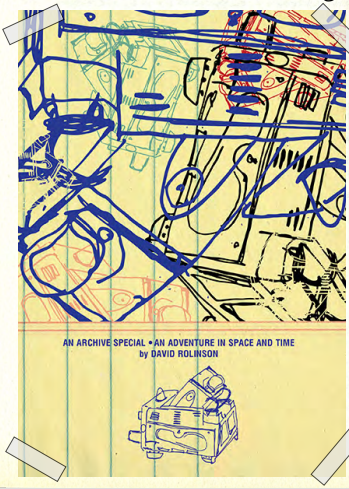
shaped his career. His recollections of working with Colin Baker, for example, reveal a strong sense of camaraderie and humour. Towards the end of the book, Banks reflects on the enduring legacy of the Cyber Leader and just how enduring the character has become.

In closing, *Man and Cyberman* is a brilliant memoir because it is about much more than a notable *Doctor Who* character. Instead, it's an exploration of how childhood fascinations and a love of imagination, curiosity, acting and creativity can shape an entire life. Banks has written a fitting bookend to his long relationship with the Cyber Leader and how escape has proved impossible. Thoroughly enjoyable, *Man and Cyberman: Memoirs of a Cyber Leader* is one to add to your collection.

***Man and Cyberman: Memoirs of a Cyber Leader* is available from: telos.co.uk**

Cover credit: Obverse Books

We're also reading:



Evan Jones looks into an anniversary special

After a decade of publishing its flagship range, it's nice to see that for Obverse Books still has new tricks up its sleeve. Whilst prior entries in the *Black Archives* have each taken a deep dive into an individual *Doctor Who* episode or serial, this 'special' entry takes an in-depth look at the 50th anniversary docudrama *An Adventure in Space and Time* (*AAISAT*) – marking the first time that the range has examined something that is ancillary to the main TV show. This bumper-length 270-page book is the work of David Rolinson, a film and TV historian, writer and academic researcher who has a clear interest in the William Hartnell era of the show.

The book makes a strong case for the value of the so-called 'docudrama' format, saying that it's neither a failure to be either a documentary or drama, but rather a powerful combination of the two which engages with and celebrates the history of *Doctor Who*. Rolinson has thoroughly researched his arguments covering an incredible range of sources and deftly placed it within the context of other twenty-first century docudramas such as *The Road To Coronation Street*, *We're Doomed! – The Dad's Army Story* and *Mr. Bates vs The Post Office*. There are also in-depth discussions of the histories and portrayals of Verity Lambert, Sydney Newman and William Hartnell, among others.

It takes a little while for the book to get going, as the first five chapters don't really move beyond the first few minutes of *AAISAT*. Here, Rolinson takes his time to explore the language and grammar of British television including BBC idents, trailers, continuity announcements and the differences between home and cinema viewing. The discussions get rather meta at times, with chapters on actors playing actors and making television about television, though this is to be expected within the docudrama format. If you're looking for a thorough discussion of *Doctor Who*'s role and place within the history of British television, however, then this is certainly the book for you.

Rolinson gives himself a slightly wider remit than other writers in the range by examining the surrounding TV schedule in which *AAISAT* was broadcast. This includes the supplementary documentary *William Hartnell: The Original* presented immediately after it as well as parts of *Doctor Who* episodes that are re-enacted within the drama, such as the un-broadcast pilot episode of *An Unearthly Child* and the "You can't re-write history" line from *The Aztecs*. His arguments are, howev-

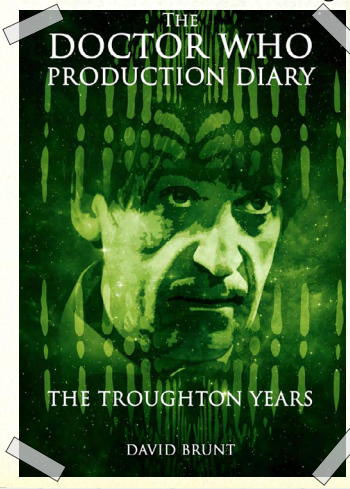
er, with merit, as these excursions do inform the understanding of fans and the wider audience. Nonetheless, they could perhaps have been trimmed down without losing their essence.

Overall then, I recommend this entry given its incredible detail of research and value-for-money. Rolinson makes strong cases for which details and characters from the beginnings of *Doctor Who* are included, excluded, merged with other people (poor David Whitaker) or just simply alluded to; you are bound to learn something new about *AAISAT* from this book. Hopefully this entry paves the way for similar books, perhaps covering spin-off shows like *Torchwood* and *The Sarah Jane Adventures*, or even high-profile charity specials such as *Dimensions in Time* or *The Curse of Fatal Death*. One thing's for certain though – the *Black Archives* are far from being all over.

An Adventure in Space and Time: An Archive Special by David Rolinson is available from: obversebooks.co.uk

Cover credit: Telos Publishing

We're also reading:



Owen Taylor discovers how the Second Doctor's era was put together

David Brunt's follow up to the popular *Hartnell Years* is another book carefully curated to cover as much information and detail from these years as possible. From costume fittings to the intricacies of script procurement, this book gives an in-depth look at the daily goings on as the show was produced.

The first highlights are the discussions and decisions around the replacement of Hartnell and the process of finding his replacement. There are interesting notes in the development of the Doctor's personality, with plenty of references to this not being the first time he has regenerated in early drafts of the scripts. The rigour of writing a script for an as yet unknown actor and how he will portray the role comes through gradually as the writers try to account for changes beyond their control. Indeed, there's much in here about how *The Power of the Daleks* evolved as time constraints and Terry Nation's plans for a Dalek spin-off forced the hand of its writers.

The changing scripts are also fascinating not just for what they reveal about abandoned stories such as *Prison in Space* but also how certain concepts were being avoided in general. There are discussions on moving *Doctor Who* away from historicals, especially contemporary settings such as World War Two, and dropping overly jokey scripts and stories.

"... a must not just for fans... but anyone interested in television production as a whole..."

All this plays out within the context of the production as a whole, as Brunt draws together surviving letters and reports into a coherent timeline. We get a great focus on the minutiae of producing the show year-round, having to balance the strains on its leads with day-to-day issues such as cast holidays, rehearsal slots and script changes. These details can be heavy at times, and somewhat of a slog if read all in one go, but are ultimately rewarding. By providing a comprehensive overview of everything that happened in this era of *Doctor Who*, readers can see the broader trends in the media landscape that the show was responding too. The move towards more sci-fi stories brings with it budget issues that will in turn bring about changes in front

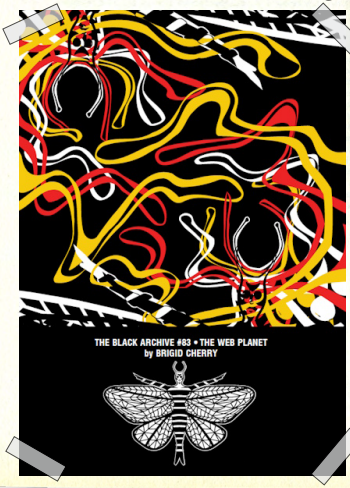
Cover credit: Obverse Books

of and behind the camera, putting down roots that will ensure the show's success in the 1970s. Even before the 1960s were over, questions over the future of *Doctor Who* were already leading to *The Invasion* as a trial run for a new UNIT-led era of the show. And that's just one example from among the many this work covers.

While other books have looked at this period from an academic perspective, giving a more narrative look at the time and how it reflected contemporary issues, *The Troughton Years* is quite different. Its detailed, heavily researched and generally fascinating approach provides a holistic overview at just how *Doctor Who* was put together. It's a must not just for fans of the show but anyone interested in television production as a whole. I for one look forward to Volume Three!

***The Doctor Who Production Diary: The Troughton Years* by David Brunt is available from: telos.co.uk**

We're also reading:



Nick Smith travels back to the far-off world off Vortis

Like a precocious child in a goofy handmade Halloween costume, there's a lot to love and admire about *The Web Planet*. The script is clever and, at times, headily poetic. The planet Vortis and its inhabitants are truly alien. The performances are definitely heartfelt, with turns from Derek Jarvis and avant-garde stage performer Roslyn de Winter. And yet, as author Brigid Cherry points out on several occasions in her *Black Archive*, some viewers find the story "silly or clunky." So, is it really worth a whole book devoted to the analysis of its forms and themes?

Cherry gives *The Web Planet* the honest reflection it deserves. She looks at the technical aspects of the production, including the 4:3 framing and composition; set-building (with smooth studio floors for the cameras, painted backdrops and rocks made of bagged sawdust) and the puppeteering aspects of the aliens – from the wire-flying Menoptera to the hardcased Zarbi. In so doing, Cherry provides fascinating insights into the way television was made in the mid-'60s.

"Cherry gives *The Web Planet* the honest reflection it deserves."

Aside from the scriptwriting, which gives its characters unique turns of phrase, the delivery of those lines helps to make *The Web Planet* an otherworldly experience. Cherry devotes a chapter to the actors and their commitment to the butterfly bit, focusing on de Winter, who is unique in *Doctor Who* history for being credited for 'Insect Movement'. De Winter also appeared as the Grey Lady in *The Chase* but was far better known as a theatre actress, assistant stage manager and director in Australia and the UK. She worked on a variety of avant-garde and feminist productions, which Cherry neatly ties in with the aesthetics and themes of liberation in *The Web Planet*. When approached as a swinging '60s televisual experiment, the serial gains legitimacy in the eyes of modern viewers.

This book is not an easy read, with long chapters and the occasional repetition of its facts and findings. It's also a bit unspecific when Cherry alludes to the criticism *The Web Planet* has received through the years for its flaws. I would have found it helpful to hear from a greater range of critics, which are somewhat lumped together as the "many writers and reviewers" who find the story

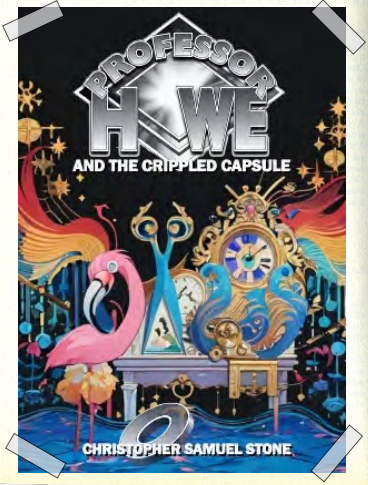
"clunky, slow and over-long." Even so, Cherry mounts a successful defence, especially when she parallels Vortis with the Earth prophesied by Rachel Carson in the 1962 book *Silent Spring*. This non-fiction classic, published a few years before the transmission of *The Web Planet,* railed against the effects of biocides on nature by explaining how pests could grow stronger and the ecosystem could be damaged by an insidious poison. As a reflection of such fears, *The Web Planet* is as valid as any allegorical B-movie or satirical sci-fi novel of the time. Cherry uses perceptive contexts like this to conclude that it's alright to try something different, especially in a time-and-space adventure series.

Recommended for nostalgia buffs and readers who take their mothmen seriously, this *Black Archive* sheds new light on an old-fashioned show that dared to be different and, in many ways, succeeded.

Black Archive #83: The Web Planet by Brigid Cherry is available from: obversebooks.co.uk

Cover credit: Long Scarf Publications

We're also reading:



Christine Grit is swept away into the world of Professor Howe

Humour is difficult in books. Firstly, everyone finds different things funny – some people love exaggeration while others want subtlety. It's also a cultural issue. Hailing from the Netherlands, what I find funny might differ from someone from the UK because of our background. And, last but not least, whether something is funny depends in part on the medium. For example, Dutch 'word jokes'– often translated as 'puns' in English – are funny when spoken but awfully bland on the page. So, the *Professor Howe* books, which parody *Doctor Who* to raise money for Children in Need, face a difficult challenge. But, having read *The Crippled Capsule*, they're doing pretty well.

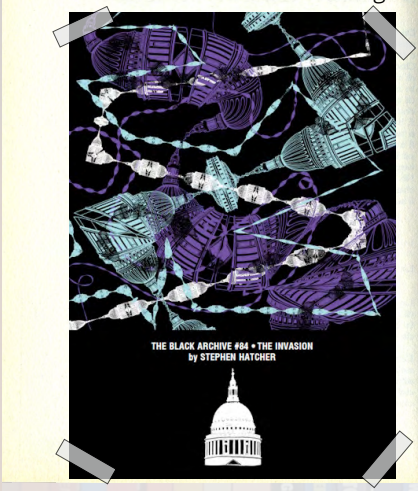
One of the main sources of humour in this book is subverting expectations and turning things upside down. Putting on a helmet that looks suspiciously like a mixing bowl for cupcakes? Well, I wouldn't step out the airlock just yet – it actually is a mixing bowl after all! This story takes in an eclectic range of subjects for its humour, from the Professor's large collection of scissors to the works of Dali and Michelangelo. There's a planet of Guinness also known as X, a talking pink flamingo and the occasional moment where the narrator bursts in! You'll just have to read this to find out what links all of these threads.

As you might have guessed, the book delights in absurd humour. While some things are immediately funny, such as a chesterfield sofa as a character, *The Crippled Capsule* also gets funnier the more you read. You might even occasionally find yourself laughing out loud at things that initially seemed rather ordinary. I read the first 75 pages in one sitting while travelling, and probably irritated my fellow travellers no end! This cumulative impact means that being able to read the book for a sustained period of time, rather than reading a few pages here and there, is definitely the way to go about it. Otherwise, you'll lose the plot and – worse – the humour in the text.

All in all, I'd recommend this book to anyone who likes to have fun. You don't need to have read *Professor Howe* before, and it's in aid of a good cause. And, in the times we're currently living in, we could all do with a good laugh!

Professor Howe and the Crippled Capsule by Christopher Samuel Stone is available from: professorhowe.mystrikingly.com

We're also reading:



Cover credit: Obverse Books

Hamish Crawford investigates the work of International Electromatics

In the latest *Black Archive*, five-time *Short Trips* author Stephen Hatcher explores Patrick Troughton's swinging Cyberman showdown, *The Invasion.* Hatcher adores this serial unreservedly, embracing its Summer of Love ambience, championing its mammoth length and considering it the Cybermen's finest hour. While there's plenty to appreciate here, I would have liked it to have delved a bit deeper.

Hatcher's approach is appropriately Mondasian, dismantling its handle-barred helmet to reveal a quivering mass of inspirations beneath the surface: *Blow Up*, *The Avengers*, *The Man From U.N.C.L.E.*, *Counterstrike* and more. However, these discussions of *The Invasion*'s influences tend to overshadow discussion of the serial itself. A section that begins with the influence of H.G. Wells on science fiction ends up as a segue into talking about *Quatermass* instead, while an in-depth exploration of *The Power Game* ultimately concludes that "whether… we can count *The Invasion* as a business drama is … doubtful." Similar tangents on National Service statistics and "peacetime military dramas" like *The Army Game* and *The Phil Silvers Show* also provide little new insight into the Cyberman story at hand.

When this book does focus more on *The Invasion* itself, I also would have liked to have seen a more critical approach. Derrick Sherwin's unlikely claims of scripting it before *The Web of Fear*, and thus creating Lethbridge-Stewart, don't stand up to much scrutiny and can be disproven with Andrew Pixley's *DWM Archives* and BBC documentation. I was also surprised not to see mention of *Attack of the Cybermen*'s Euston Films-esque opening, Ian Marter's gutsy 1985 novelisation and the Virgin New Adventures that build on *The Invasion* in the discussion of the story's legacy.

"...this *Black Archive* is... a consistently brisk and enjoyable read."

Something else I feel that this *Black Archive* is missing is articulating how *The Invasion* combined its diverse inspirations into more than the sum of the parts. Season Six is a *Doctor Who* crossroads – its thrilling unevenness betraying more ambition than the conveyer belt of recurring monsters that populate Seasons Four and Five. Yet, the need for new blood like Jon Pertwee and Barry Letts is evident. Troughton is dissatisfied with the scripts and exhausted by the workload, while Sherwin and producer Peter Bryant's antipathy to the series arguably informs *The Invasion*'s novelty – Sherwin wants to make a series about UNIT while Bryant wants to produce *The Power Game*. Ultimately, it falls to Troughton, Nicholas Courtney, Kevin Stoney, Douglas Camfield, composer Don Harper and designer Bobi Bartlett (whose Cyberman redesign is unmentioned in this *Black Archive*) to elevate the finished episodes above the potboilers they could have been.

Though I have my reservations, Hatcher's affection and the thorough appendix from the papers of supporting player Ian Fairbairn ensure that this *Black Archive* is nonetheless a consistently brisk and enjoyable read.

Black Archive #84: The Invasion by Stephen Hatcher is available from: obversebooks.co.uk

The Invasion: The most swinging sixties story

Stephen Hatcher explains why this Cyberman story needed a *Black Archive*

So, how did I come to have written the *Black Archive* on *The Invasion*? Well, for a start, it's one of my two absolute favourite *Doctor Who* stories and stars the very best Doctor ever. I was 10 years old when *The Invasion* was broadcast in the autumn of 1968 but, because of family reasons, I didn't see it at the time. As a result, I only first encountered it when the story was released on VHS in June 1993 with linking narration to cover the missing episodes by Nicholas Courtney. Then came the fabulous DVD release in November 2006, featuring the first ever animated reconstructions in *Doctor Who*'s history. Episodes One and Four were animated in high quality by Cosgrove Hall with money originally allocated to pay for a sequel to *The Scream of the Shalka* that had been cancelled due to the impending return of the TV series. How could I not have been swept up by this Cyberman epic?

As mentioned, I was a child in the 60s so I was too young to have been involved in any of the extraordinary cultural events of that decade. I didn't turn on, tune in and drop out; I didn't go to any music festivals or 'love-ins' and I didn't even buy any records by the Beatles or the Stones. But no one growing up during what is known as 'The Swinging Sixties' could fail to be affected by those extraordinary years of change and renewal when a new, post-war generation came to prominence, bringing with them new music, art, fashion and attitudes.

It was a time of liberalisation in attitudes to sex and its portrayal in the arts. The contraceptive pill became widely available; abortion and homosexuality were legalised and censorship was abolished in the theatre and much relaxed elsewhere. 1968 was the epicentre of that exciting period – right in the middle between 1967's 'Summer of Love' and the Woodstock Festival of 1969. How could the *Doctor Who* of the period fail to be affected by that?

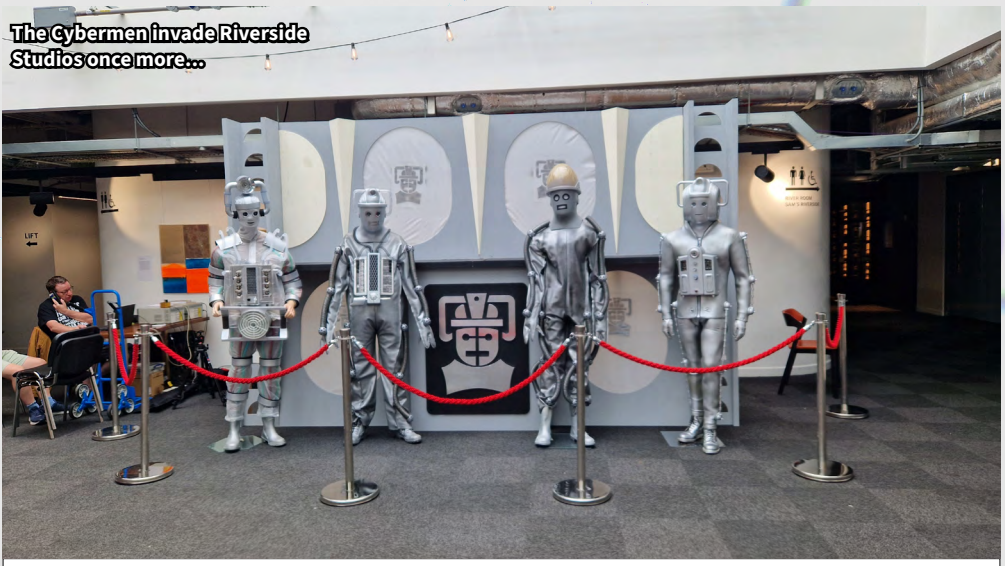
It was also a period of enormous technological advance – from the transistor becoming part of everyday life and the creation of the UK's motorway network to the Apollo programme and the first heart transplant.

"How could I not have been swept up by this Cyberman epic?"

The more I thought about it, the more I came to the conclusion that *The Invasion* is the most Swinging Sixties of all *Doctor Who* stories. It puts so many of those 60s themes – the technology, the 'dolly bird' with that most swinging of professions, a photographer, and the Swinging London landmarks – front and centre. Beyond that, *The Invasion* fits in very neatly with so many of the most significant TV tropes of the era. It's a spy-fi show, like *The Avengers* or *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*; it's a military drama like the fabulous *Redcap*; it's a business drama like *The Power Game* with a *Bond*-esque evil tycoon in Tobias Vaughn and, of course, it's a sci-fi story like *The Invaders* or 1967's *Quatermass and the Pit* film.

So, when Obverse Books held one of their regular open submission periods, this all formed the basis of my pitch and I was delighted to have it accepted. It's been a long period of writing and rigorous editing, during which my tendencies to wander far off topic and waffle on at length about almost any 60s TV show that took my fancy have been reined in. Now, some six years after commission, it's out in the wild. I hope it's a worthy addition to such a long and successful series of books.

Images credit: James Ashway



The Cybermen invade Riverside Studios once more...

Convention Confidential: Cyber season

James Ashway revisited the early stories of Mondas' finest

Over the past 63 years, *Doctor Who* has assembled quite the distinctive rogues' gallery. Whether it's the iconic outline of the Daleks, the distinctive silhouette of the Ice Warriors or the reptilian stylings of the Silurians, these creatures have changed through the years as new techniques and technologies have brought new possibilities for their design. But of all of the Doctor's foes, it's the Cybermen who have arguably changed the most. Their evolution from fabric-wrapped warriors to more robot-like forms has been written across decades, providing new opportunities to reinvent the Cybermen for a new era. Some of the most dramatic changes happen across their first few stories, which were highlighted as part of DWAS' latest Riverside event – Black & White & Silver. Things were just as good as ever – though there were a few upgrades in store.

As with many of DWAS' Riverside events, the day focused on a selection of episodes from across a few different stories rather than showing them all in full. So, the day kicked off with the Cybermen's invasion of Snowcap Base in Episode Two of *The Tenth Planet*. Polly herself – Anneke Wills – then took to the stage after the credits rolled to discuss everything from gardening to John Lennon and, of course, *Doctor Who*. Anneke recalled how she was cast in the show, which began with a nerve-wracking audition at BBC Television Centre.

"You go in and there's a bank of blokes who give you a script that you read until they tell you to go home," Anneke said. "I didn't know how it went, so I was working on the downstairs cupboard when I got the call to say I'd got it. I remember going out into the road and shouting that I was going to be in *Doctor Who*!"

Turning up at her casting call, she met Michael Craze for the first time. Anneke described her co-star as someone "practical,



Stephen Cranford talks to Anneke Wills and Ben Craze

funny, sweet and who took no prisoners", and who embodied the character of Ben to the full. While they enjoyed working on a variety of different episodes, particularly *The Smugglers*, they were "very proud" of their work on *The Tenth Planet*. However, this period also brought uncertainty over the show's future.

"I remember the day when Patrick Troughton walked into rehearsals at St Helen's Church Hall," Anneke shared. "We all stood up and cheered as we knew he'd be great for the part."

"However, it was hard on [Patrick] as he was getting a lot of flak. At the end of rehearsals, me, Mike and him would get in my Mini and go to the pub where Patrick could share his ideas for the part. He really felt the responsibility of taking over the part and making sure it didn't fail."

While Patrick would continue in the role until the end of the 1960s, Michael and Anneke would leave *Doctor Who* within the year. They lost touch at this point, though they were able to pick things up from where they left off when they did see each other. Michael's untimely passing cut these reunions short, but DWAS had a surprise in store for Anneke when they brought Ben Craze – Michael's son – out onto the stage.

Ben said that it was great for his children to be able to see their grandad, even though many of Michael's episodes are still missing. While he himself isn't an actor, he shared that his children are currently attending drama academy and so, one day, another generation of the Craze family might be in *Doctor Who*.

Following the first panel, the screenings resumed with the third episode of *Tomb of the Cybermen*. Afterwards, stars Michael Kilgarriff (the Cyber Controller) and Shirley Cooklin (Kaftan) began their Q&A session. In a change to the regular format, they were both interviewed from their seats at the back of the auditorium due to the difficulty of getting down the long flight of stairs to the front.

Shirley was married to *Doctor Who*'s producer Peter Bryant at the time, and discussed some of the advantages and disadvantages this position afforded her.

"As a non-blonde, I didn't get offered many young parts at the time," she recalled. "Here, however, the part of Kaftan was created for me so that I could have something a bit more substantial to do."

"What it did mean, however, was that I had to be both an actor and the producer's wife for this serial. One thing that was expected was that I would throw a party after the final episode. So, after each day of filming, I'd come back and make something to put in the freezer so that when we wrapped I had everything I needed to cater for 70 people!"

Michael, meanwhile, discussed the challenges of appearing as the Cyber Controller.

"The brain inside the head actually pulsed," he revealed. "However, the batteries gave out frequently, so a technician had to come in, take the head off and change them. You couldn't really see it on screen, however, so it was all a bit of a waste of time!"


Robert Dick interviews Michael Kilgarriff and Shirley Cooklin

Image credit: James Ashway

Michael's naturally sonorous voice could also have been the voice of the character, something he very much would have liked to do. Unfortunately, the technology to allow a microphone in an aluminium outfit just didn't exist at the time.

"In the end, Peter Hawkins provided the Cyber Controller's voice," added Michael. "I was quite honoured that Peter would be doing it, as he was the top voice-over artist in the country at the time."

"However, they were planning to dock my salary because I didn't have a speaking part in the end. In the end, because I still had to move my mouth at the right time, they eventually paid up!"

"Patrick, Frazer and me all screamed, ran at each other, hugged and fell on the floor!"

After Michael and Shirley's session ended, the attendees headed out into Riverside's main foyer for the photo session. Apparently, the Cybermen must have invaded the venue during the screenings as a host of costumes and a tomb backdrop had mysteriously appeared in the interim! After everyone had got their fill of photos, they were then back into the screening room to watch the final part of *The Invasion*. Frazer Hines (Jamie) was sadly unable to make the following panel session, but it was still a lively affair thanks to the anecdotes of Wendy Padbury (Zoe) and Sally Faulkner (Isobel).

"Wasn't Patrick Troughton the best Doctor?" Wendy asked. "You can see every facet of his performance in that episode! I was a definite fan of his before I started and I used to watch him on all the BBC classics, so I was very nervous when I went into *Doctor Who* because I would be working with someone I really admired."

As it turned out, Patrick, Frazer and Wendy had a great time together on set. Sally recalls joining them in rehearsals where they all "never stopped laughing". However, as the end of the Second Doctor's era was approaching, she said there was also concern about what came next.

"All actors think that the job they're doing will be their last one ever," Sally admitted. "We were talking about that on set and Patrick said 'But this time it's true!' At that point, *Doctor Who* didn't give your career as much of a boost as it does now."

"Patrick was writing on cards in the rehearsal room during *The War Games* advertising his availability," added Wendy. "He said that he didn't know how it would go when he came out so he had to take precautions."

In the end, the Troughton trio decided that they would depart together, and asked for a leaving party to be put on to celebrate their time together. Zoe said it was a lovely occasion – until they were asked to pay for it themselves!

Party problems aside, Frazer and Zoe were delighted to be asked back to *Doctor Who* for *The Five Doctors*. Unfortunately, due to delays in deciding how long Frazer would be released from *Emmerdale* for, they only got to spend one day together in the end. However, their reunion was more than worth it.

"We walked into the rehearsal room and saw Patrick, Jon and Peter there," Wendy said. "Patrick, Frazer and me all screamed, ran at each other, hugged and fell on the floor!"

After the panel drew to a close, and the autograph session was finished, the day came to a close as attendees began to filter out of Riverside Studios. It was another excellent outing, with a great range of episodes, guests and stories to enjoy. To paraphrase the Cybermen, hopefully more events 'will be like this'!



Robert Dick with Wendy Padbury and Sally Faulkner



A packed auditorium for Jamie Foreman, Debra Gillett and Louise Page's panel with Justin Johnson

Image credit: DWAS

Convention Confidential: Time of the Tenth

Dominic Smith was at the BFI for 20 Years on: The Tenth Doctor

The area around the Southbank Centre was redeveloped as a result of the Festival of Britain, an event described as a post war "tonic to the nation". The event aimed to show not just to its own citizens, but people all over the world that it was a confident, forward-thinking nation looking to the future. At its heart was the Royal Festival Hall, which over the years that followed expanded into what we now know as the Southbank Centre, National Theatre and the BFI Southbank through a complex maze of concrete stairwells, walkways and buildings which seem to have been created to confuse the first time visitor. As such, it's perhaps the perfect venue for DWAS and the BFI's look back on 20 years of Series Two. David Tennant's second series was full of the confidence and forward thinking that the Festival of Britain wanted to celebrate, with the complex maze of clues, stories and links all building towards *Doomsday*. And, just like that episode, all the preparation for this event really paid off.

Despite being in the midst of the fifth heatwave of the year, fans young and old made their way into London to relive a time when Russell T Davies could do no wrong. I'd never actually been to the BFI before, and was really impressed by not just the facilities but also the atmosphere. Many in the audience originally watched these episodes when they were at school and know every word, so the joy and love was infectious. They had a spring in their step, keen not just to see both episodes but also to meet some of their stars.

Appropriately for the location we found ourselves in, the event kicked off with *The Idiot's Lantern*. Set just a year after the Festival of Britain, Mark Gatiss' tale of television and discrimination still hits hard today. After a special pre-recorded introduction from Dame Maureen Lipman, whose performance as the Wire is still command-

Images credit: DWAS



Carol Topolski, daughter of Cyberman co-creator Kit Pedler, also took part in a Q&A

ing all these years later, we went straight into the story. I can't say that I remember the last time I watched this episode, but it reminded me just what a great pairing the Tenth Doctor and Rose are. Maybe they are having too much fun at times, but they can spin their performance on a sixpence. I particularly enjoyed rediscovering the scene where the Doctor is interrogated by the police at the start only to end up with all the information he needs from the bobbies instead.

"...this festival of the Tenth Doctor... was just the tonic I needed."

We then went into the panel, where Jamie Foreman (Eddie Connolly), Debra Gillett (Rita Connolly) and costume designer Louise Page appeared. Louise was lovely, with a remarkable knowledge and memory of the events of 20 years ago. But I thought Jamie was the highlight, just as the blustering bully of a father he plays is in the story. He shined remembering the fun he had on set, the pride he had in taking on such a role and his love of *Doctor Who*. The audience was appreciative and responsive all the way through, so the panel just flew by.

We then got to see *Doomsday* before Andrew Hayden-Smith (Jake Simmonds), Shaun Dingwall (Pete Tyler) and the director, *Doctor Who* royalty Graeme Harper, took to the stage. As fans we all think of Graeme as the 'Governor' from the many stories he's directed across both of *Doctor Who*'s eras and these actors hold him in the same reverence, even now. Watching them on the stage, and off, it was clear they were still in awe of him. New and old fans alike combined to give him the biggest round of applause of the day, so it's no surprise that he had the longest line in the autograph session afterwards.

It just goes to show what a great day it was that I'm only now just getting to talk about the amazing props and costumes that were also on show. There was a portable Wire to see, a K-9 Mark Three, Rose and the Doctor's costumes from *The Idiot's Lantern* as well as one of the Tenth Doctor's iconic suits. This combination of episode screenings, panels, autographs and props reminded me of the massive Panopticon conventions DWAS used to run back in the 1980s. They were just as far away from 1960s *Doctor Who* as we now are from the start of Nu*Who*, reminding us that we need to be embracing the origins of the new series with the same sense of history and love that older fans had for the Hartnell era back then.

As I'd hoped going in, this festival of the Tenth Doctor at the home of the Festival of Britain was just the tonic I needed. Hopefully, it shows the way forward for events for the next 20 years of *Doctor Who* fandom.



Justin Johnson interviews Andrew Hayden-Smith, Shaun Dingwall and Graeme Harper

My *Doctor Who* rewatch – the set's the thing

Ian Peake discusses how the show's production informed the stories it could tell

"All the world's a stage,"
"And all the men and women merely players;"
"They have their exits and their entrances,"
"And one man in his time plays many parts..." – *As You Like It*

There comes a time in every *Doctor Who* fan's life where they decide to watch every story in order. We get to see how the show we know and love has evolved over the years as the keys of the TARDIS have been passed from one owner to the next. Rewatching is an opportunity to experience it all over again, with some stories and companions faring better than you remembered and others doing worse. But as I watched back over *Doctor Who*'s long run, I was particularly struck by how much the show's sets, and wider production, had changed over more than 60 years.

"...*Doctor Who*'s stage could now be different every week."

When the show first aired in 1963, television was very much seen as an extension of theatre. Videotape was expensive, editing was complicated and recording breaks were only allowed as and when necessary. Each studio session was treated as a live theatrical performance and this is reflected in the 1960s adventures I was watching. *Doctor Who* from this period consists of several long scenes sparingly edited, with many little fluffs making their way in to the final cut to avoid retakes. Studio space and actors are similarly limited, with the stories using a few sets and characters to get by. They also seem to cut back on how often the actors appear, presumably in an attempt to cut costs further. Indeed, it's not uncommon for a character to make an entrance in the first episode, their exit in episodes two and three before entering once again for episode four.

While the show's style changes somewhat as it progresses, with the introduction of outdoor filming on occasion, it's largely the same until the arrival of colour in the 1970s. Better editing facilities, a change in production techniques and Colour Separation Overlay meant that *Doctor Who*'s stage could now be different every week. The latter was transformative, making something unheard of on British television just a decade earlier into a familiar part of the show's fabric. It enhanced the appearance of sets and characters, but it wasn't the only major change. The number of locations significantly increased in each story, with familiar locations like UNIT HQ and the TARDIS joined by more elaborate, custom-built sets. It was also more common for stories to be set largely on location, adding a new dimension to many Earth-bound stories.

These changes also meant that the sound of *Doctor Who* was completely transformed. No longer were there dialogue rich scenes lasting several minutes at a time. Instead, the dialogue is snappier and more naturalistic as our heroes move from place to place. With jumps between location, there's also a greater reliance on incidental music to build up tension and set the tone. While an actor's words and actions might once have fostered a sense of mounting dread as a scene continued, the music now kept the

Art credit: **Paul Pickford**

pace going as our heroes travelled around. *Doctor Who*'s players were now making their entrances and exits more frequently, and the stage adapted accordingly.

"...it's been a privilege to appreciate just how much has changed along the way."

After this transformative period, *Doctor Who*'s stage remained fairly similar throughout the 1970s and 1980s. The man called the Doctor played seven different parts. The companions made their various entrance and exits. The stage changed, but not too much. Overseas location filming became a possibility, while model work and more advanced visual effects gave new opportunities for sweeping vistas and title sequences. The overall production process, however, would have still been pretty similar to someone working in Jon Pertwee's era. That remained true until, in 1989, the final curtain came down on *Doctor Who*.

It was another 16 years until the curtain was raised again. When it was, the stage had changed beyond all recognition. The TARDIS set alone now took up the same kind of space that might have accommodated an entire episode back in the 1960s, while the style of filming was entirely changed. In the past, appearing in an episode of *Doctor Who* would mean at least a week's work for the actor involved between rehearsals and filming. Now they might only be on set for a single day before making their exit.

Behind the scenes, things have changed even further. The number of people working on the show has increased dramatically, from costume and makeup to cameras and carpenters. While there might have just been one person working on effects in Classic *Who*, there are now teams working on expansive computer graphics for not just locations, but even characters. It's all on a budget and scale that would have been unthinkable to anyone working on the original incarnation of the show, who must look on enviously at the amounts of money involved.

Having reached the end of my watchalong, with almost 900 episodes of *Doctor Who* under my belt, it's been a privilege to appreciate just how much has changed along the way. The show has taken everything from recorded theatre to animated characters in its stride, and I have no doubt it will continue to do so. *Doctor Who*'s stage will continue to transform as long as there are players willing to step out onto it.

Davros has undergone several changes over the years, from new actors to different designs.



Alternate places – buffer zones in *Doctor Who*

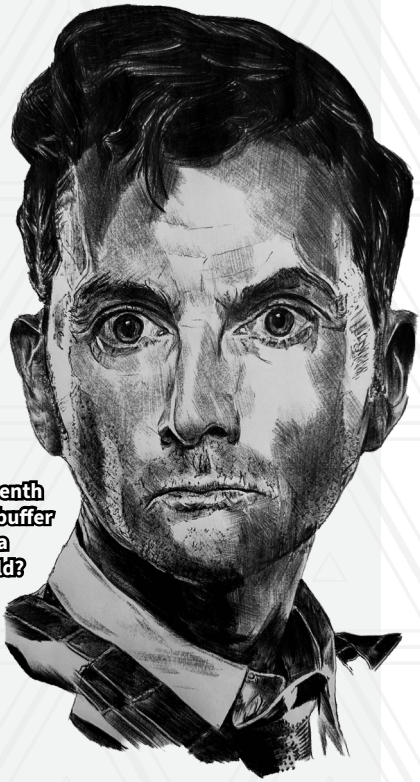
Jez Strickley explores the worlds you can't easily find on a map

There is something of a tradition in *Doctor Who* for exploring those places that exist *within* or *between* larger expanses of space-time. Some, such as the parallel Earths of Project Inferno and Cybus Industries, function as realities parallel but equivalent to our own. Others, such as E-Space, exist alongside our own universe. And then there are those, such as the Land of Fiction, which exist in worlds of their own. Whatever their form, these spaces have come to define some of the Doctor's most profound, and strange, adventures.

"...these spaces have come to define some of the Doctor's most profound... adventures."

The earliest example of an alternate space-time phenomenon dates back to Season Three and the sinister Toyroom – the domain of the god-like Toymaker. This dimension is depicted as a series of rooms, each containing a deadly game. The Doctor, Steven and Dodo must compete in these games against the occupants of the rooms, including the Toymaker, to regain their freedom. Such a reality returns alongside the Toymaker in *The Giggle*, when the Doctor and Donna enter what appears to be a toyshop in 1925. In actual fact, it is the Toymaker's world, "[…] a hollow beneath the under-universe, where science is a game and all of us are toys." Crucially, this bizarre setting is predicated on the existence of the Toymaker. Without its inconceivably powerful creator, this reality is lost.

The idea that these sites can be mind-dependent continues in *The Mind Robber*, in which the Land of Fiction is populated by imaginary characters, such as Rapunzel, who are the products of an enslaved human mind. Not unlike the Toyroom, the TARDIS crew faces entrapment in this fantastical place, where the Doctor risks becoming the next imprisoned mind. *The Three Doctors* uses a similar conceit. Here, the marooned Time Lord engineer, Omega, is caught in a universe of anti-matter, which is given form and substance by his mind. As he observes, "[…] Without me and the unceasing pressure of my will, the work of thousands of years would collapse into chaos in microseconds. I am, if you like, the Atlas of my world."



The Fourteenth Doctor – a buffer Doctor for a buffer world?

Art credit: @Artfully Liam

Image credit: James Ashway

Instability isn't uncommon in these interstitial places. In *The Doctor's Wife*, for instance, the Doctor, Amy and Rory find themselves in a collapsing bubble universe, where the artron energy of TARDISes is food for a sentient asteroid. Elsewhere, *Full Circle* sees the TARDIS inadvertently enter E-Space before discovering a void-like exit point, also on the edge of collapse, in *Warriors' Gate*. And even the pocket dimension within the Doctor's Confession Dial in *Heaven Sent*, in which the Time Lords place the Doctor to try to find out about the legendary Hybrid, degrades over time – even if it takes billions of years.

The Time Lords aren't averse to alternate realities of the virtual kind, either. The Matrix offers a complete mindscape, as seen in *The Deadly Assassin* and *The Trial of a Time Lord*. Later, in *Dark Water*, Danny Pink's harrowing experience of this inner space, via a "[…] Matrix data slice, a Gallifreyan hard drive…", reveals the bleaker side of these contexts, contrasting sharply with what we see of River Song's digital fate in *Forest of the Dead*. The Master, meanwhile, is fond of creating silo-like locales that blur the line between virtual and reality – such as the block transfer-generated Dwellings of Simplicity in *Castrovalva* or the TARDIS-within-a-TARDIS recursive trap in *Logopolis*.

"The Time Lords aren't averse to alternate realities of the virtual kind, either."

Indeed, it may be fortunate that the Time Lords are well-acquainted with such quirks of reality, as Gallifrey ends up in its own niche in space-time following the events of *The Day of the Doctor*. This refuge is created by the combined efforts of the Doctor's thirteen incarnations and their TARDISes, in order to hide Gallifrey inside an "[…] instant in time." In doing so, it is made to look as though the Daleks and the Time Lords have annihilated each other, whereas in reality the Daleks "[…] destroy[ed] themselves in their own crossfire." Within this 'instant', Gallifrey remains out of reach to the Doctor. However, in *The Time of the Doctor*, the Time Lords partially transcend this limit by transmitting a signal into their home universe via a temporal fissure. Later, the Time Lords send a stream of regenerative energy through a fissure to restore an ageing Doctor, triggering a new regeneration cycle in the process.



The Genesis Ark – a world travelling through the Void

Far from being a source of shelter, *Timelash*'s titular Kontron tunnel is used as a means of retribution, consigning its victims to an unknown fate in some far-off place. This time corridor-like environment acts as a passageway between the Citadel on Karfel and random destinations across space and time. The Doctor, intent on obtaining Kontron crystals, is lowered into the tunnel on a rope, where he discovers a glittering space, lined with hexagonal structures, through which passes a wind-like disturbance. We do not see what lies directly below him, but as Vena puts it, "[…] he's dangling on the edge of oblivion."

Oblivion is a good way of describing the Void, the timeless and spaceless gap between realities, which hides the Cult of Skaro in *Army of Ghosts*/*Doomsday*. Remarking on this uniquely absent setting, the Doctor explains that "[…] the Eternals called it the Howling. But some people call it Hell." This observation emphasises how alternate places are frequently shown as sites of punishment or exile. We see this in the case of the Carrionites' banishment to a prison dimension in *The Shakespeare Code*, the Nimon-like creature confined to an endless maze in *The God Complex* and the pocket reality where an alien child hides his deepest fears in *Night Terrors*.

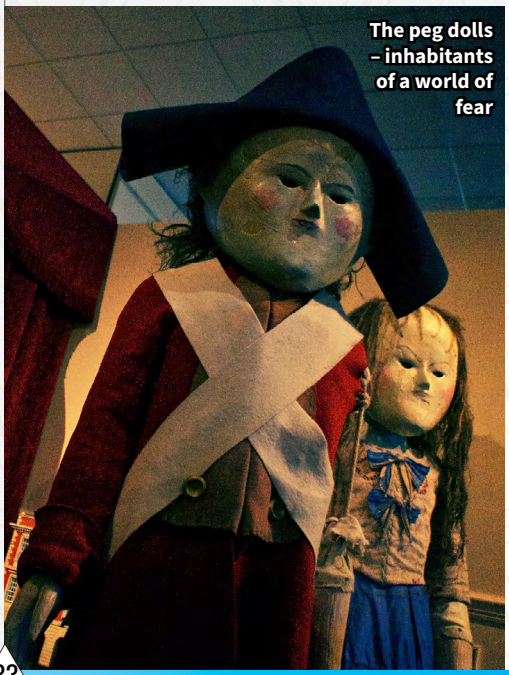
"The places in between, actual or virtual, have many forms and meanings."

Another example of the darker side of these phenomena appears in *Hide*, where the Doctor and Clara investigate the ghostly goings-on at Caliburn House. In reality, the mansion's ghoulish visitant is a pioneering time traveller, who has become caught in a grimly fogbound forest in a micro universe where time moves more slowly. Making time the point of difference here opens up a new perspective on these places and presents an extra layer of novelty, much like the parallel but asynchronous time streams in *The Girl Who Waited*, thus demonstrating that some such environments are distinct in terms of both time and space.

For all the scarifying that these alternate worlds lean into, it is the perplexing nature of some examples that is often their most memorable aspect. Series 11's *It Takes You Away* is a prime example. The Doctor, Yaz, Ryan and Graham investigate a cottage on the edge of a Norwegian fjord, in which they discover a portal into the Antizone. This is a dark, cavernous place, which acts as a buffer between realities and contains its own lifeforms. More puzzling still is what lies on the other side of it. For it is here that the Doctor confronts a conscious universe, the Solitract, depicted as a frog sitting on a chair in a virtually empty space.

The concept of sentience as a general feature of reality is not unlike the idea of panpsychism, discussed by Australian philosopher David Chalmers. It also echoes some elements of the character Saul in Paul Cornell's New Adventures novel *Timewyrm: Revelation*, who is presented as a consciousness housed within a church. Along with the Solitract, this rendering of alternate places as phenomena that can be cognisant of themselves, adds a profoundly intriguing ingredient to these nooks in space-time.

The places in between, actual or virtual, have many forms and meanings. From silos, traps and ordeals to refuges, passageways and even self-aware realities, they challenge our conceptions of space and time, upending conventional logic and reminding us that things are not always what they seem. Rips in reality can hide planets; void spaces can be doorways and cave-like buffer zones can contain ecologies all of their own. And yes, a universe can be portrayed as a talking frog on a chair, who comes to understand that its solitude – where "[…] I will dream of you out there, without me" – sustains its existence.



The peg dolls – inhabitants of a world of fear

Image credit: Paul Hudson (flickr.com/photos/pahudson/6502049039, CC BY 2.0)

Art credit: **Paul Pickford**

The last laugh – looking back on *The Giggle*

Eoghan Daly reconsiders the end of the Fourteenth Doctor's run

Serving as a 60th-anniversary special, and wrapping up the Fourteenth Doctor's storyline while also setting up his successor, it's safe to say that *The Giggle* had a lot on its plate. As the dust settles on Russell T Davies' second tenure as showrunner, this story provides a perfect case study for examining what went right, but also where things started to go amiss.

One thing that particularly struck me this time around was *The Giggle*'s approach to continuity. While *Doctor Who* has relied on its 60-year past as a crutch in the past, it can also sabotage new ideas if relied on too heavily. *The Giggle* ends up taking a surprisingly light-touch approach reintroducing the Toymaker, who, despite appearances in expanded media, is a relatively obscure villain for the public at large. Crucially, his return isn't held back for a shock reveal and is instead introduced casually in the pre-title sequence. For viewers unaware of his history, the character doesn't come with a barrier to entry, yet well-seasoned fans can still relish his return. Building on this, the Toymaker's involvement in the story doesn't solely rely on plot threads from the past. It quickly becomes clear that he is simply another enemy the Doctor has crossed before, and they are going to go at it again. Compare this to Sutekh's cliffhanger reveal in *The Legend of Ruby Sunday* and his later role in *Empire of Death*. There, the reliance on familiarity with the character and the show's past gets in the way of the story being told. While *The Giggle* sets a strong foundation for dealing with continuity, it unfortunately doesn't set a precedent for RTD2.

The Giggle is also the culmination of not just the Fourteenth Doctor's arc, but also a thread relaunching UNIT. Having been temporarily disbanded for some of Chris Chibnall's tenure, RTD places them in the middle of the action once again. With just two episodes, however, there's only so much that can be done to set up and pay off a story for the UNIT characters. While each has their moments, Kate, Shirley, Mel and Ibrahim ultimately become surplus to requirements as the story progresses. We find them awkwardly standing on the sidelines during the final confrontation with the Toymaker, denied the very teamwork that makes collaborations like these worthwhile. Rather than feeling like an ensemble working together, this iteration of UNIT quickly becomes little more than a weak attempt at world-building. This consistently inconsistent family only get more so across the series that followed, even to the extent that characters like Morris seem to get forgotten entirely. That's not to say that attempts at world building are a bad idea – in fact, quite the opposite. If you were to ask



Not long after he started, the Fourteenth Doctor's arc comes to an end

the average viewer of Nu*Who* to pinpoint the revival's peak, many would point to *The Stolen Earth/Journey's End* – the crossover event before crossover events were cool. That climax had been earned after four years of world-building across three different shows, and its success felt like a reward for both the audience and the production team. In contrast, the recent use of UNIT feels as though it is attempting to manufacture the same sense of occasion without having earned it.

Last, but by no means least, we should talk about bigeneration. Regeneration has always been a state of change (obviously!). Whether it's K'anpo's push, the Watcher's involvement or the Meta-Crisis, quirks have been introduced only to be as quickly forgotten or ignored. With regeneration becoming all too familiar to audiences, this viewer finds it hard to blame Davies for shaking things up. However, the debates that it was guaranteed to cause maybe should have been given greater weight in the decision-making around it. In the age of streaming, where viewers have so many shows to choose from, you can't really blame them for ignoring one whose own fanbase is so publicly scrutinising it. This was only compounded later on with the reactions to *Empire of Death* and *The Reality War*. RTD seems to enjoy ruffling feathers, and, for a show as old as *Doctor Who*, the status quo needs to be challenged. But, by leaving lingering negative discussions between seasons, the show's perception was inevitably damaged.

Even as we near three years since its broadcast, it still feels like there's still plenty more to be said about *The Giggle*. Yet, what perhaps makes it most fascinating in retrospect is how it embodies both the potential and the cracks of RTD2. It demonstrates how continuity can be embraced without becoming a crutch, how familiar characters can be reinvented and how the show can still take genuine risks. At the same time, it foreshadows an era increasingly reliant on spectacle, nostalgia and the promise of a larger universe. As the dust settles on RTD2, *The Giggle* stands as a fascinating turning point in *Doctor Who*'s history – a story that shows both what this era could have been and where it would ultimately begin to stumble.

Inside DOCTOR WHO APPRECIATION SOCIETY

Updates from the Exec

As we look back on a busy and rewarding few months for the Society, we would first like to offer our sincere thanks to Tony Jordan for his many years of dedicated service to DWAS. Tony's contribution to the Society has been greatly appreciated by members and the team, and we very much hope to see him regularly at future events.

The summer has been particularly memorable. June's Black & White & Silver event at Riverside Studios, celebrating 60 years of the Cybermen, was a tremendous success, while August's special BFI event marking 20 years of the revived series attracted another superb audience. Our thanks go to everyone for supporting us by attending.

We know how popular these events are and can assure you that there is plenty more to come. We will continue with a screening of **Battlefield** in September, followed by a special **Miss Marple** screening featuring guest George Gallaccio, remembered by **Doctor Who** fans as production manager and 'Morbius Doctor'.

We are also delighted to have launched the latest DWAS publication, our new annual celebrating **Doctor Who** in the 1970s. Bruce Nicholson, Paul MC Smith and Andy Lambert have produced a marvellous volume, with ordering details available via our website and social media.

Looking ahead, James will be stepping down as editor of **Celestial Toyroom** in December. James has taken the magazine to new heights and has our sincere thanks for his dedication. We are now working to find a successor and will share further news in due course.

Finally, tickets are available for Aldbourne 2027 on Saturday 8 May 2027. For booking details, publication information and all the latest news, keep an eye on our website and social media channels.

We look forward to seeing you soon.

Keep your distance – a *73 Yards* retrospective

Kara Dennison reassesses the haunting Doctor-lite story

Prior to the sudden finale that was *The Reality War,* I would have maintained that the RTD2 era of *Doctor Who* felt like it was either going somewhere or *wanting* to go somewhere. Which of those it was depended on which specific episode I was watching. *The Church on Ruby Road?* Going somewhere. *Space Babies?* Wanted to go somewhere but was still figuring out where. And then there's *73 Yards*. It said exactly what it wanted to say in a beautiful and resonant way, but tripped itself up by trying to connect to the riddles embedded in the broader narrative.



Is *73 Yards* Ruby Sunday's finest hour?

Art credit: **Paul Pickford**

Doctor-lite stories are always a challenge, especially with the spectre of *Blink* always looming. If you can make *Doctor Who* that good in the Doctor's absence once, you should be able to do it again. And while Doctor-lite episodes are technically nothing new – *The Time Meddler*, for example, notably features a Hartnell-free instalment – writing them with purpose is much more a function of the twenty-first century series. Fortunately, Ruby Sunday is an excellent character to centre an episode on, and placing such a story early in her (admittedly short) run gives us a wonderful insight into who she is and where her character is headed.

As a 'Doctor-lite' episode, *73 Yards* is well done. It tells the story that such episodes, at least in the contemporary run, are designed to tell: what happens in the Doctor's absence? In this case, we have Ruby, a character whose life so far is defined by the family that chooses her. The Doctor has, only recently, become a part of that found family. And now he's gone, just like her birth mother. Just like *anyone* could be, with no warning. This isn't, like past episodes, a study of who a person becomes without the Doctor's influence, or what happens to the world without its self-proclaimed hero. It's more a story of what-ifs: what *if* the person who promised to help us vanished without warning? What if something intrinsic to who we are simply fates us to be alone?

The problem comes when we couch such a symbolic story in an era that encourages puzzle-solving over symbolic thinking. We already come into this episode with things that need 'solving' – who is Ruby's biological mother? Who is Susan Twist, and indeed who is Mrs Flood? Why does it snow at random? And why is the TARDIS making that funny noise? So, it's understandable that, when presented with an episode full of mystery, we'd go into 'solving' mode. But, in our

oversensitivity to potential clues, much is lost. *73 Yards* benefits so much more from hearing what it has to say than trying to 'crack' it.

Who is the old woman who follows Ruby? The end of the episode would seem to indicate that she's Ruby herself. It fits into the symbolism of the piece, too – at the end of everything, Ruby is haunted not by a paranormal spectre, but by her own fear of dying alone… a fear that does indeed settle subconsciously in the hearts and minds of those abandoned as babies and children. But, some viewers argue, the actress playing the *semperdistant* woman and the actress playing old Ruby are two different people. Thus, the obvious and resonant conclusion simply can't be true.

This seems a little preposterous when talking about a character who is, by definition, not meant to be seen clearly at a distance. It would be like asserting that, because a stunt double has very obviously stepped in for Peter Capaldi in the *Robot of Sherwood* duel, it's not the Doctor that Robin Hood is fighting. However, *Robot of Sherwood* doesn't fill its day cast with Scottish actors and ask us to keep tabs on them. So, it's very hard to blame viewers for this misinterpretation, when this run of episodes actively encourages us to play *Where's Wally?* with Susan Twist and Anita Dobson. The relevance of Roger ap Gwilliam to the overarching Sutekh metaplot doesn't help matters, as the depth of the story is further buried under questions of how and why Ruby remembers this alternate timeline.

It's something that feels standard for Russell T Davies in his second stint as show runner – he has something to say that's very worth saying, but something often trips it up. Whether that's a line or plot point that doesn't land, a theme becoming overshadowed by deep *Who* lore or something else entirely, it's present throughout the Fifteenth Doctor's era. I can hope that *73 Yards,* my personal favourite story of this era, will be remembered as a powerful metaphor for the plight of lonely and abandoned children, but I fear it may go down in *Doctor Who* history as merely a set of clues that failed to serve the greater narrative.

Dear CT,

A change of plans for the summer meant I found myself heading to Hexham to help with a children's activity. The bonus, however, was that I was just a few miles from Neil Cole's Museum of Classic Science Fiction in Allendale. Needless to say, I fitted in a trip. For those who have not been able to explore, the museum is on the lower level of what appears to be a perfectly normal house. Daleks are on guard duty outside but Neil gives a friendlier welcome without the threat of extermination.

I had visited a few years ago and doubted things would have changed much, as the museum was compact and seemingly without space for much change. As soon as I entered, I was proved wrong. The first cabinet contains a number of props from various *Doctor Who*-related video productions which had not been there last time. This was followed by displays of non-*Who* stuff, which I was only mildly interested in, before passing through a TARDIS door into the section that had drawn me there.



Envelope adapted from Talbhseoir (commons.m.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Brown_envelope_2.jpg, CC BY-SA 4.0), paperclip adapted from: Jan Ainali (commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Paperclip.svg, CC BY-SA 3.0) and museum photo credit: Museum of Classic Science Fiction

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The Museum of Classic Science Fiction

Art credit: **Paul Pickford**

All aboard – reflections on *The Story & The Engine*

Owen Taylor reexamines this tale of narratives in Nigeria

When I look back on the past two series of *Doctor Who*, *The Story & the Engine* immediately stands out to me as a highlight. It has a classic feel to it thanks to its reverse base-under-siege plot coupled to the dynamics between the Doctor and his friends outside the TARDIS. But rather than being in a lonely research station or a far-flung outpost fighting against monsters unknown, *The Story & the Engine* takes *Doctor Who* inside a seemingly ordinary barbershop that's already been taken over. By subverting the traditional *Doctor Who* format, Inua Ellams creates one of the highlights of the show's most recent era.

"...a solid episode that ebbs and flows like the stanzas of a poem."

When Russell T Davies returned to *Doctor Who*, his stories quickly outlined a more fantasy-focused approach of gods and humanity's interaction with them. *The Story & the Engine* is a story about the power of story-telling, focusing on the idea that gods are powered by belief. As an idea this isn't anything new, but there's an added twist to the tale. Rather than being one of the various storylords that he tries to pass himself off as, such as Anansi or Loki, the Barber is instead a middleman who connects them all through his web-like Nexus. Having been elevated to immortality himself, he's now trying to destroy the gods who betrayed him by severing the Nexus using a machine powered by the oral tradition of storytelling. The Doctor's life is the ultimate story, a series of events that could provide him with the power to achieve his aims, and there are even suggestions that he's manipulated events to bring the Doctor here. However, even the best laid plans don't always work out – and there are plenty of twists in this particular tale.

The Story & the Engine additionally filters these themes through an exploration of race. The Doctor is finding it increasingly difficult to interact with his favourite planet simply because of his skin colour, and is looking for a place of refuge in Omo's barbershop. While *Doctor Who* has previously dealt with similar themes surrounding Bill in *Thin Ice*, focusing on its main character gives these discussions of contemporary issues additional heft. It also neatly highlights the Doctor's struggles with the idea that, perhaps, he might not actually be a Time Lord at all and doesn't 'belong' anywhere. All these insecurities are brought



The Story & The Engine takes Doctor Who into new territory

to the fore when Omo's seeming betrayal of the sanctity of the barbershop forces the Doctor into an unwanted conflict in his safe space. While this leads to some scenes that can be seen as over the top in places, it allows Ncuti Gatwa to show off his range while giving the audience a closer look at the Fifteenth Doctor beneath the mask.

Abby, the Barber's assistant, also hides hidden depths. While she may seem like a kindly bringer of food, she's actually Abena – daughter of Anansi and a very old acquaintance of the Doctor. We've already heard that Anansi once deliberately lost a game with the Doctor to make him marry one of his daughters, and here she is in the flesh. In a story of stories, she opens up another thread as the camera pans around to reveal that the Fugitive Doctor was the incarnation that abandoned her. Jo Martin steals the scene with this small cameo, and provides additional material for an incarnation whose story is still yet to be fully told.

While there's a lot to recommend in *The Story & the Engine*, it's not perfect. There are parts that jar, especially when Belinda comes to the barbershop. She and the Doctor have a manic moment together laughing at the Barber after he claims to be one of the gods, which seems off not just for the character but for the pair's relationship at this point. She also feels like something of a passive observer of the story, never becoming too deeply involved in its events.

Concerns around the role of Belinda aside, this is otherwise a solid episode that ebbs and flows like the stanzas of a poem. Stories have power, and this episode reminds us of how they shape both our knowledge of the past and reality around us. The tale of Yo-Yo Ma and the shaman, who cannot sing the same song twice as the reference has moved on, is almost a reflection of how *Doctor Who* itself changes with each regeneration. Each new episode generates new belief and passion from among its fans, pushing the show's own story engine onward. But come back to the same episode again, and changes in your own story might affect your outlook on it. Give *The Story & the Engine* another viewing, and see if that's the case.

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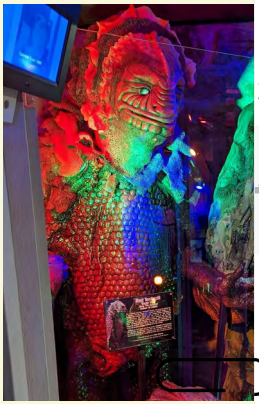


Image credit: Museum of Classic Science Fiction

This corridor may be narrow, but it is only so because of the cases crammed with masses of original costumes and props dating from the present all the way back to Troughton's era. So full are the cabinets that it's easy to miss things at first. It was only on a second look around, for instance, that I saw a Pertwee shirt! The museum's fascinating collections also benefit from their great variety – full costumes, bits of outfits, effects models, props – and from being lovingly cared for and preserved. I did wonder how many other shows had fans who would eagerly visit a museum and marvel at a silver-painted boot (from a Cyberman)!

Between visits, not much has been removed but things have been moved around a bit to allow the inclusion of new items like an exquisitely restored Skarasen and a case of new series items. I have no idea how you can add more to an already full exhibition but Neil has succeeded – it really is bigger on the inside!

Before I departed I had another chat with Neil, who genuinely cares that his visitors enjoy themselves. It's great to hear his passion for sharing his collection and to see the effort that goes into preserving and caring for them. Do make sure you visit if you are in the area.

From Alan Darlington

The Museum of Classic Science Fiction

Art credit: **@Artfully Liam**

Fan face off: In favour of *Who*'s most recent era

James Ashway makes the case for Russell T Davies' return to *Doctor Who*

It's hard to believe that it's been almost five years since Russell T Davies' return to the TARDIS was announced. At the time, I remember people being largely positive about the move, nostalgic for what they thought would be a return to the style of the Ninth and Tenth Doctors. Instead, after a trio of specials that capitalised on that nostalgia by bringing back David Tennant and Catherine Tate, Ncuti Gatwa's era pushed *Doctor Who* into new areas while retaining a link to the past. It wasn't perfect by any means, with some mixed messaging and stories that seem to have ended up in narrative cul-de-sacs. But, ultimately, I think the show would be the poorer had RTD's second stint as showrunner not gone ahead.



Thumbs up adapted from: Pratheeps (commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Symbol_thumbs_up.svg, Public Domain)

James argues RTD2 follows *Doctor Who*'s tradition of reinventing itself

For one thing, the calibre of CGI in these series was a major step up on anything that had been seen in *Doctor Who* before. Don't get me wrong – I love a good wobbly set as much as the next Whovian. But for an era making a concerted effort to draw in new audiences, it has to give casual viewers what they expect from a sci-fi show being made in the 2020s. So, audiences got to marvel at some particularly arresting visuals, from the audience of the Interstellar Song Contest being vented into space to a cartoon brought to life in *Lux*. But there was also plenty of *Doctor Who*'s homegrown spirit, with physical puppetry, costumes and props augmenting the visual effects to provide something greater than the sum of its parts. I'm almost certain that if previous eras of the show had the ability to use these techniques, they would have done.

"...the show would be the poorer had RTD's second stint as showrunner not gone ahead."

This combination of past and present was also something that could be seen in other aspects of RTD's second run. *The War Between the Land and the Sea* was the first televised *Doctor Who* spinoff in almost a decade, while *Doctor Who Unleashed* provided a more in-depth look behind the scenes of the show than we've enjoyed in many a year. There were also a flurry of promotions and special events, such as the return of the *Doctor Who* Prom, to build anticipation and allow fans to celebrate their favourite show together.

Within the show itself, despite the rebrand of Series 14 and 15 as Series One and Two, there were plenty of links to the past. The return of the Toymaker, the

Rani, Omega, Sutekh, Mel, the Nobles, UNIT and Susan all show that this is very much a continuation of *Doctor Who* rather than a reboot. It's true that some of these returning characters were handled better than others, but that's not an issue exclusive to this era. *Destiny of the Daleks* isn't Davros' finest hour, *Arc of Infinity* could have done more with Omega and *The Two Doctors* isn't the smash hit for the Second Doctor and Jamie that it could have been. So while I'd have preferred Omega and Sutekh to stay in their classic designs, it's not something I'm too concerned about – there's every chance they'll be different again next time.

"...RTD's return to *Doctor Who* has its flaws, [but] there's still plenty in it to appreciate."

While those characters were central to series finales that are unlikely to ever number among my favourites, they don't erase the wealth of strong episodes that this era brought to the screen. I enjoyed all of the Fourteenth Doctor's stories, which manage to effortlessly pick up on decade-old plot threads while trying something new. Ncuti Gatwa's first series has a strong core in *Boom*, *73 Yards* and *Dot and Bubble* that allow *Doctor Who* to tell stories in a variety of ways. The series that follows is even more experimental at times, from the animated antics of *Lux* to the thematic depth of *The Story & the Engine*. There are plenty of stories here that I've enjoyed watching and rewatching, and will continue to do so in the future.

While I acknowledge that RTD's return to *Doctor Who* has its flaws, there's still plenty in it to appreciate. It has great actors, strong production values and some weighty themes as well. Even when its episodes don't completely succeed, there's always an ambition for the show to keep exploring new approaches and telling different stories. And that's only right. *Doctor Who*'s innovative spark has been a vital part of its ethos since 1963, and we cannot afford to let it go out.

Dear CT,

Whilst we wait to find out the future of *Doctor Who*, even if the future looks considerably brighter than it did in 1990 or 1997, there are plenty of ways we can still get our fix without relying on repeats. Of course, there are plenty of new audios, books and comics being released, but I'm talking about visual *Doctor Who* that you can see onscreen.

The first way you can watch 'new' Classic *Who* centres on the omnibus editions contained on the Blu-ray Collection releases. These are stories edited down into a single omnibus format similar to those that used to be shown around Christmas – think *Tales of the TARDIS* if you haven't seen any before. Yes, you know these stories, but you now have the opportunity to view them in a new way. There's also the opportunity to see the newly edited omnibuses of *The Daleks*, *The War Games* and *The Sea Devils*, if you haven't seem them already.



Norris Castle, used as the exterior of the Master's prison in *The Sea Devils*

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Watching new Doctor Who

Image credit: Mark Pilbeam (geograph.org.uk/photo/545339, CC BY-SA 2.0)

Comic credit: **Michael Crouch**

Fan face off: Opposed to *Who*'s most recent era

Michael Crouch makes the case against RTD2

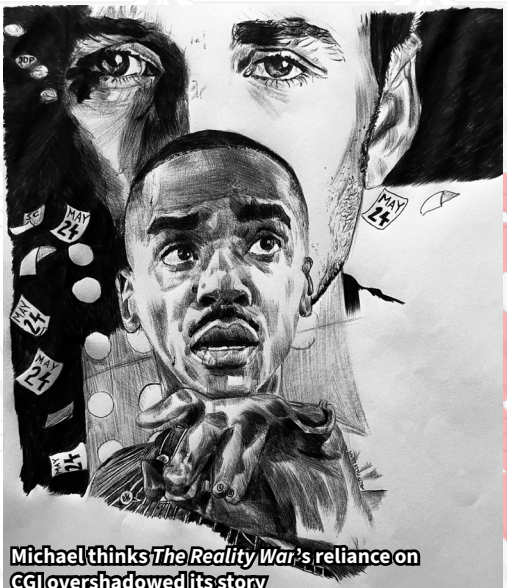
Once in a while, everything needs a fresh start. But when Ncuti Gatwa's first series was labelled a new Series One by its creators, renumbering *Doctor Who*'s canon yet again, it sent a message. It was intended to present the new series as a jumping on point for new or lapsed fans of the show, but at the same time suggested an eschewing of the past like so much excess baggage. While I thought there was much to love in Ncuti Gatwa's short run, including standout episodes such as *The Story & the Engine*, I ultimately think this assessment proved to be true. *Doctor Who*'s past, particularly its production, was thrown out with the bathwater in this rush to attract the perceived hordes of new fans that didn't come.



Thumbs down adapted from: Pratheeps (commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Symbol_thumbs_down.svg, Public Domain)

I think this can clearly be seen in the amount of CGI used by the recent series. In short, there was a lot – CGI sets, CGI monsters and CGI effects. For a show well-known with making do, the vast sums presumably spent on this doesn't sit well with me. Take the recently rediscovered episodes from *The Daleks' Master Plan* as a good case in point. Both *The Nightmare Begins* and *Devil's Planet* involve world-building within their storytelling despite being made on a shoestring budget with a small cast and limited sets. Such inherent disadvantages aside, we intuitively understand the scale of the threat to the universe even though we see so little of it. Our imaginations have to build the picture we think we are seeing through what is essentially audience participation. We become intimately engaged, drawn into the story and emotionally invested in its characters. CGI would have filled the screen with such a complex and busy array of images that our eyes would never have had time to settle on anything. In modern *Who*, I feel the digital wizards and series showrunners do our imagining for us, disenfranchising us from becoming involved. As a result, we're left as passive observers rather than active participants.

The scale of the eye-watering CGI also had its impacts on the stories themselves. While I've already mentioned some exceptions, I feel some episodes could have been scaled back to let the script, rather than the screen, do the work. Though modern audiences expect more than those of decades past, it's ultimately still stories, rather than effects, that captivate us. So, rather than see Sutekh or Omega defeated by wits or guile, these A-list villains were diminished by being defeated through CGI spectacle. Why debate when you can just have CGI remove the threat?



Michael thinks *The Reality War*'s reliance on CGI overshadowed its story

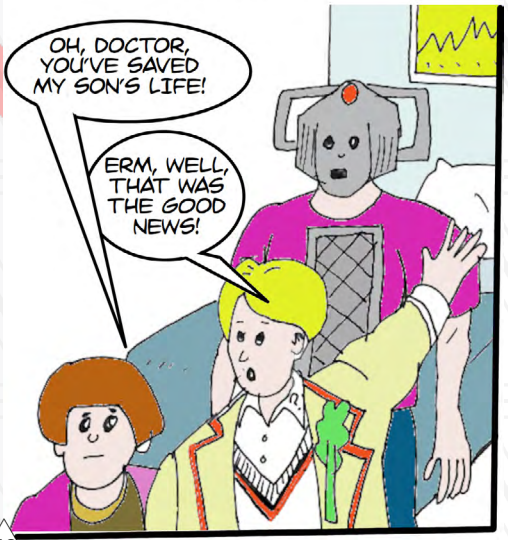
Comic credit: **Michael Crouch** and sketch credit: **@Artfully Liam**

I think these CGI adversaries must have an impact on the performers too. Jon Pertwee famously said that he never liked the Daleks because you couldn't look them in the eye and there was no humanity to connect with. I imagine it's similar today, when all the actors have to play off is a green screen and a man running about with a ball on a stick. Having someone there in a costume provides opportunities to workshop a scene and create new ideas that just can't come from what's effectively a digitally-enhanced monologue.

The technological shortcuts also seem to have leached into the themes of the era. Where previous incarnations of the Doctor always arrived as strangers with no idea of where they were and no foreknowledge of events in any given story, we now have Doctors who seem to have been everywhere, know everything and can employ any old jiggery-pokery to resolve a situation. We knew from the Fourteenth Doctor's episodes that Series One and Two were going to introduce magic and gods into *Doctor Who*'s mix, but we didn't know that the Doctor himself would effectively become one. It's not an idea that's entirely unheard of – *Death Comes to Time* saw the Time Lords elevated to 'Gods of the Fourth' with reality-shaping powers they chose not to use. Importantly, however, this was a one-off story – not something that an entire series was based on. Instead, modern incarnations of the Doctor have a cavalier approach to changing time. In *Space Babies*, for example, Ruby steps on a butterfly in the era of the dinosaurs and time is immediately changed. There's no discussion or philosophical debate in the style of *The Aztecs*. While we got to see Barbara make her choices, wrestle with her conscience and witness the societal upheaval that followed, the modern Whoniverse doesn't show any of that. Where is the peril, the threat, the consequence? Instead, it's just a throwaway scene that involves the Doctor's seemingly unlimited supply of regeneration energy.

Going forward, I honestly believe the series needs to take inspiration from its past. *Doctor Who* needs to scale back and give us stories that have emotional depth, audience engagement and food for thought. The Doctor too needs to change. They have to become a stranger again, to wander a universe that doesn't know them and where they don't know everything in advance. In short, storytelling needs to usurp spectacle.

What if **Doctor Who** was made by... **Casualty**?



Doctor Who and the Problem with Time

Neil Kenny tells us how he'd bring back *Doctor Who*

Like many fans, I have often wondered what I would do with *Doctor Who* if I were fortunate enough to be given a moment of power. Now, thanks to a wave of the DWAS wand, I can now present my plans here – so please indulge me.

My proposal is not for a traditional episode but an odd mixture of history, recreation and celebration. So, we open not with the classic vortex but instead with an illuminated bottle drifting to Brian Eno's 'Another Green World' – for this is an episode of the BBC arts programme *Arena*.

During the episode, *Doctor Who*'s history is recreated using the same actors playing the Doctor and companion throughout, while a voice-over tells the story of the programme as the actors and crew work. At first this is simply an *Arena*-style production device, but the repeated reconstructions begin connecting eras that ordinarily remain separate. As those boundaries weaken, the performers start experiencing the scenes rather than merely acting in them.

"The recreations will be shown as a mix of rehearsals, filming and... finished sequence."

The recreations will be shown as a mix of rehearsals, filming and, occasionally, the finished sequence. As we progress, we will start to question the actors' performances as they seem genuinely surprised at times – as if they are experiencing these moments for real. The actor portraying our Consultant Doctor – being both the Doctor and, at the same time, not quite – will start behaving as the Doctor outside of the scenes. At first, this will be attributed to method acting but begins to develop into something more. The companion will also start acting the role outside of the scene as well, but tries to disguise this so they can better integrate with the crew. I'd pick Reece Shearsmith for the lead role, with Maisie Adam as a long-suffering sidekick named Maisy. Anyone who saw them together in *Taskmaster* would agree that they had a certain, if delightfully combative, chemistry.

At various moments, we'll cut to a domestic front room where we have a trio commentating on how the show has changed and pointing out areas of contradictions, such as UNIT dating. I've named these three Ivy, Jay and Kay – think Arak and Etta from *Vengeance on Varos*. They'll be sat around an occasional table with an odd looking dice on it, and their attire will change to reflect the era of the recreations they're commenting on. This trio come across like a *Gogglebox* panel, but they will be revealed as the Thunder Mentals – a play on 'fundamentals' – who represent the personification of physical forces or properties. At the end of their sequences, they will sometimes roll the dice and advance the *Who* history recreation into different eras. The eventual reveal is that they want to know the underlying rules of reality, control probability and, hence, entropy. To do this, they've been using *Doctor Who* and its observers as a giant experiment, using the belief of the show's viewers to generate a kind of quasi-reality. By rolling the dice, they change the parameters when they decide the current arrangement needs a refresh. These 'Gods' are literally playing dice with our favourite show.

As the recreations continue, the Consultant Doctor becomes aware that someone is observing him through the production monitors. By playing different incarna-

tions across the programme's history, he has become a living bridge between eras. The Consultant Doctor realises that, if the filmed stories can be turned back upon their observers, the recursion (which I've named the Epimenides Effect) may break the Thunder Mentals' control. As a result, the other Doctors would be freed from the single continuity being imposed upon them.

"Every incarnation of the Doctor is freed to continue their narrative..."

The conclusion is set atop the BT Tower, a structure whose history falls neatly within that of *Doctor Who* and which conveniently resembles a giant sonic screwdriver. Once used to carry television broadcasts, it is repurposed to absorb the competing signals generated by the recreated eras of *Doctor Who*. From the rooftop, the Consultant Doctor reverses the polarity, allowing the Tower to separate those signals and transmit each one back into its proper continuity. With a cry of "Doctors, I set you free!", the Epimenides Effect is unleashed. Every incarnation of the Doctor is freed to continue their narrative within their own contemporary canon. Somewhere out of shot, we hear the Consultant and companion exchange a few hurried words, followed by the familiar wheezing departure of the TARDIS. When the TV crew arrive, all they find is the prop police box from the reconstructions left standing where the 'real' one had been.

By the end of the adventure, a common baseline has been established for whatever comes next. Every Doctor is preserved within their own continuity but the need to try and fit together all of *Doctor Who*'s contradictions has gone without a hard reset of the show. The Consultant, meanwhile, has fulfilled their appointed purpose even if the adventure's own canonicity remains open to question. Does it count, or is it simply another roll of the dice, or a *Who*-like docudrama about the problem with time? That's for the fans to decide.

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The Catkind and New Earth return

Image credit: Jordanhill School D&T Dept (flickr.com/photos/designandtechnologydepartment/4006159460, CC BY 2.0)

There's also some Nu*Who* that you may not have seen as well. While all of the episodes have been released, there are some holdouts that are yet to be made available as downloads or physical media. The most notable are the Lockdown stories made during the COVID-19 pandemic, which are mostly available on YouTube. In total there are 19 minisodes acting as introductions, prequels and sequels to stories that formed part of the Tweetalongs. Many include the actors involved in the stories themselves, so are well worth seeing if you've not dived into them just yet. Some of my personal standouts are *Doctors Assemble*, *The Secret of Novice Hame*, *The Best of Days* and *The Shadow in the Mirror*. While you're watching them, it's worth keeping a look out for all kinds of other visual *Doctor Who* ephemera available on YouTube too.

While we wait in hope for recovered episodes and new animations to help bridge the gap, those are some 'new' stories to seek out if you've not seen them before. It's certainly given me plenty to keep myself busy!

From Peter Witney

Watching 'new' Doctor Who

Image credit: Kejoxen (flickr.com/photos/21518880@N00/3213390422, CC BY 2.0)

The Wilderness Years: *Dimensions in Time*

Don Klees examines the place of the *EastEnders* crossover in *Doctor Who*

Of the many words one could use to describe the *Doctor Who* charity special *Dimensions in Time*, trailblazing almost certainly ranks among the least obvious for fandom at large. The 1993 story, which marked long-time producer John Nathan Turner's last on-screen contribution to the programme, started out as a profoundly unloved instalment – described by some fans as "unwatchable, lamentably bad television" – and opinions haven't especially softened in the intervening decades. However, *Doctor Who's* history is full of occasions where 'good' and 'significant' proved anything but synonymous, and in this respect *Dimensions in Time* holds an undeniable place in its tradition. It's ironic, because many fans undeniably wish that they could wipe this particular episode from the show's history.



What dangers lurk inside The Queen Vic?

This sentiment took hold almost immediately after broadcast. Shortly after the story's premiere, the editors of *Doctor Who Magazine* stated their position about whether the story was canonical. "As for the production's acceptance into the *Doctor Who* canon," the editors wrote, ostensibly in response to questions from readers, "*Dimensions in Time* will be classified along with items such as *A Fix with Sontarans* and *The Time Machine,* which, whilst made with actors from the series as a dramatic narrative, were intended for transmission as an insert or edition of another programme and not an edition of *Doctor Who* itself. In addition to this, it bore no serial production code (as far as we are aware) nor any closing credits showing it to be a programme in its own right."

"...opinions haven't especially softened in the intervening decades."

It's unclear to what extent *Doctor Who Magazine's* declaration reflected fan consensus versus actively shaping it. However, when the magazine asked fans to vote on the best and worst things about the anniversary year, the percentage of fans who cited *Dimensions in Time* as the worst outweighed those who considered it the best by a nearly three to one ratio. Still, with *The Five Doctors* having first aired on the BBC as part of 1983's Children In Need broadcast and fan awareness of production codes being a relatively recent phenomenon, the editors' position comes across as somewhat arbitrary. Regardless of whether their view was sincere, or they simply wanted a justification not to count *Dimensions in Time*, it's hard to envision other ideas for the special, such as the Doctor reuniting

with Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart to battle the Cybermen or a rematch with the Toymaker, being treated so dismissively.

As much fun as it is to ponder *Doctor Who's* what-ifs, the show's history is ultimately defined by what is. By that measure, *Dimensions in Time* is the first true fracture in the program's canon, even if that wouldn't become fully apparent for many years. Prior to this, there was no significant debate about whether an episode of *Doctor Who* produced for the BBC counted as a 'real story'. Comics, novels, and other spin-offs might have held an ambiguous status, but as a rule the ones made for television were on solid canonical footing. Even the incomplete serial *Shada*, by virtue of the clips used in *The Five Doctors*, held this status.

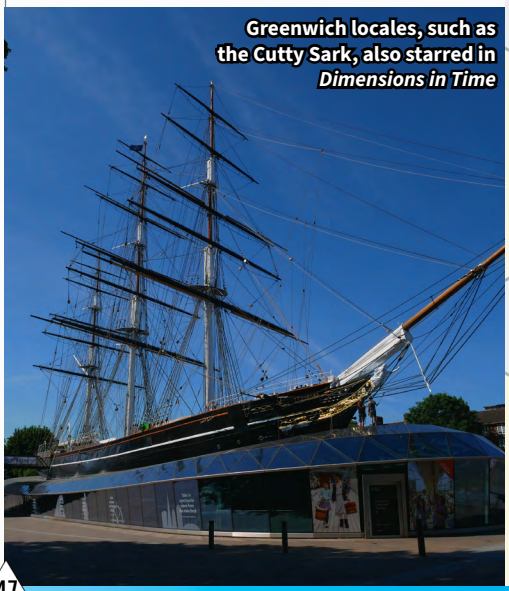
"...this well-intentioned mess represents a challenging frontier..."

In a canon where many of the original Doctors have now appeared in more stories on audio than they ever did on TV, the idea that *Doctor Who's* fictional history was ever a simple thing seems rather quaint. Likewise, the debate about how *Dimensions in Time* fits in this canon seems almost genteel when compared to the past decade of arguments about whether *Doctor Who* 'died' in December 2017 when Peter Capaldi passed the role to Jodie Whittaker. It's not just *Doctor Who* fandom either – that same year, similarly vocal segments within the fandoms of both *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* decided that particular movies or series didn't count for them either. Political events in the real world aside, there was clearly something in the air.

Arguments about which stories count as real within a fictional universe, when, (as Alan Moore reminded us) they're all imaginary anyway, must seem ridiculous to those outside of fandom. There's also no getting past the strands of prejudice driving many of them – often making thoughtful criticism all the more difficult – but even the more toxic proclamations speak to a fundamental point about canon. The whole concept hinges on people who enjoy the stories set in a given fictional universe being sufficiently invested in them that even those designated as 'imaginary' still matter.

Were it not for some of the more odious efforts to dismiss post-2017 *Doctor Who*, it would be easy to dismiss *Dimensions In Time* as a latter-day equivalent to DC Comics' 1961 'imaginary story' *The Death of Superman* or even Marvel's *What If?* series. For better or worse, though, this well-intentioned mess represents a challenging frontier in mapping *Doctor Who's* ongoing narrative. Like so many events in *Doctor Who's* history, that wasn't the intention when the story was made. In that spirit, it seems fitting to let John Nathan Turner have the last word.

"I don't need to defend *Dimensions in Time* – it should be taken for what it is: a jolly romp to celebrate *Doctor Who's* 30th birthday. If you didn't like it, fine; if you did like it, that's equally fine. But if you can honestly say that the 30th anniversary of *Doctor Who* would have been better without it, without its publicity, without its *Radio Times* front cover, without the colossal audience figure, without its individual effect on the final amount raised for such a worthy charity, then I feel sorry for you."



Greenwich locales, such as the Cutty Sark, also starred in *Dimensions in Time*

Image credit: Ethan Doyle White (commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Northeast_View_of_the_Cutty_Sark_in_Greenwich.jpg, CC BY-SA 4.0)

Cover image credit: Virgin Books

The Wilderness Years: *Oh No It Isn't!*

John Ashway revisits the start of Bernice Summerfield's solo adventures

After producing 61 New Adventures following the ongoing adventures of the Seventh and Eighth Doctors, and 33 Missing Adventures featuring previous Doctors, Virgin Publishing found themselves with a problem. The BBC had taken their *Doctor Who* license away in order to produce an ongoing range of *Who* novels themselves. While some might have simply given up at this point, Virgin decided to continue the New Adventures with a new lead. Namely, one Professor Bernice 'Benny' Summerfield who had been introduced as a companion to the Doctor all the way back in *Love and War*. That novel's author, Paul Cornell, was invited back to pen the first instalment in this new era. The stakes were high – could *Who* readers be encouraged to stick with the New Adventures without *Doctor Who*, and in the face of direct competition from the BBC? With the Benny-led NAs continuing for another 22 novels, the answer was evidently yes, and this branch of the Wilderness Years would go on to cast a long shadow…

Released in September 1998, *Oh No It Isn't!* does a great job setting up the new status quo for the range. Benny is reintroduced, now installed at her new home of St Oscar's University on the planet Dellah following the events of the last New Adventure – *The Dying Days*. Benny had always been written as a dynamic personality with a detailed backstory, so it feels like a natural progression to have her in the lead here. Cornell also establishes plenty of avenues for new plotlines to emerge from in this first book, whether that's from Benny's work as an archaeologist; shadowy goings on at the university or the mysterious and powerful race known as the People. I was pleasantly surprised that the author also picked up on Menlove Stokes, a deluded artist from the Missing Adventures who was last seen on his way to St Oscar's. While I might have expected a small cameo, he has a major role in the plot of *Oh No It Isn't!*. It's another great way to maintain some continuity with the previous era of Virgin Publishing and provide a little treat for regular readers, but without needing any prior knowledge to comprehend.

Ironically for the first release without the Doctor, *Oh No It Isn't!* feels more like *Doctor Who* than many of the previous NAs. Cornell's plot is a funny, uniquely British adventure as what should be a routine expedition devolves into a world of pantomime tropes and rules. Her journey is made more troublesome by the Grel, who I truly believe are



one of the all-time great *Who* villains. Relentless in their pursuit of knowledge, these data pirates have a unique communication style that sees them declare developments as "Good Fact!" or "Bad Fact!" depending on how they might aid or hinder their cause. They're a threat when they need to be, but also very silly and *always* iconic. And, eventually, they even made their way to *Doctor Who* proper in Big Finish's *The Doomwood Curse*.

While this novel has gags galore and a generally light tone, there's plenty of room for seriousness as Benny struggles to convince her friends and colleagues trapped in panto that things just aren't right. Of particular note is her cat Wolsey, now transformed into an anthropomorphic Puss-in-Boots figure. As a lover of cats myself, I particularly enjoyed Benny's joy at finally being able to communicate with her furry friend counterpointed with the realisation that they'll never be able to understand each other in this way again. Cornell must surely have had a cat himself based on just how well he depicts the bond between cat and owner.

Even writing about this book more than a quarter of a century later, I'm still loath to delve into the plot of *Oh No It Isn't!* in too much detail for fear of spoiling this truly excellent novel. At a time when *Doctor Who* is off our screens for the foreseeable future, it's a good opportunity to delve into a story strand that you might never have experienced before – and I'm slowly working my way through these stories myself! The other benefit of reading this novel is that it kicks off not just a range of audios at Big Finish, but also the company too. Their audio adaptations of some novels featuring Benny started with *Oh No It Isn't!* in 1998, and directly led to the BBC giving them the *Doctor Who* license. It's a fascinating game of consequences. Without the BBC taking the book license away, Virgin would never have developed the Bernice spin-off range, but without that spin-off Big Finish wouldn't have had the *Who*-adjacent material that gained them the license. Putting its place in *Who* history to one side, I still cannot stress enough how enjoyable *Oh No It Isn't!* is to read. Get your hands on a copy right now!

Blast from the past

An excerpt from an interview with New Adventures Editor **Rebecca Levene** in *CT* 242, where she discusses the Benny-led series

When did you decide to go ahead with the Bernice Summerfield New Adventures?
"Well, it was always something we talked about doing. Not long after the imprint was established we knew we were building up our own cast of characters, and we had always felt their was some spin-off potential for them. I think it was six or seven months ago that we started seriously talking about the New Adventures as their own brand. I called various of my authors and we had discussions about what the series could be like, and what made the New Adventures unique, apart from the *Doctor Who* logo. We had come to believe this was the least significant part of their style, if not their appeal."

But the withdrawal of the licence was what spurred you into doing this?
"Oh yes definitely. We were already talking about bringing Bernice into her own set of stories, but we would not have started to put them into the publishing schedules at this point had it not been for that."

Do you think that Bernice is one of the strongest characters you have invented?
"Certainly she seems to be one of the most popular. More popular than the Doctor in some circles. But there seems to be some misapprehension about the series. The books are not going to be the Bernice Summerfield New Adventures, but a series of New Adventures featuring Bernice and later some of the other New Adventures cast. There is a book coming up in October which, while Bernice will be in it, she will be a supporting character to Jason Kane and Chris Cwej who are the main protagonists. So whereas the books are based around the part of the galaxy where Bernice is, and she will take the lead in a lot of them, we are not seeing the New Adventures as her series of books. I think the New Adventures are more than that."



Art credit: **Ben John**

The Wilderness Years: *The Curse of Fatal Death*

Eoghan Daly sees the seeds of *Doctor Who*'s future in the Red Nose Day special

It's the late 1990s. *Doctor Who* has endured almost a full decade off the air, existing mainly through a more mature world of novels and comic strips. Fans have almost given up hope of a return; televised *Doctor Who* is all but a distant memory. But for one night only, he's back and it's about time! No, it's not the TV Movie – plenty has been said about that. Instead, what I'm referring to is Comic Relief's 1999 special, *The Curse of Fatal Death*!

Unlike previous attempts at *Doctor Who* spoofs, *The Curse of Fatal Death* largely connected with fans and almost three decades later remains in their conversations. But why is this the case when so many others, like *Doctor Emu*, *Doctor Eyes* and Thatchos, have been largely left behind? There's a simple answer to this, and it's to do with delivery. Director John Henderson and writer Steven Moffatt weren't trying to send up *Doctor Who*, but make a comedy about it. Crucially, at a time when easy jokes could have been made about the show, the team constructed a spoof that felt affectionate rather than dismissive – laughing with its audience, rather than at it. It also offers a glimpse of what was to come from Moffat's era as *Doctor Who*'s showrunner, previewing many of the ideas, character traits and narrative obsessions that would define his eventual era.

Take, for example, romance! Historically, the Doctor had been presented as asexual, with John Nathan-Turner stating there was "no hanky panky in the TARDIS"! With the TV Movie shaking up the status quo, Moffat revisited the Doctor's romantic side through a series of innuendos aimed at Emma and the Doctor's betrothal. Despite being a gag, this angle of the character was clearly something of interest to Moffat, as it would recur with River Song during her appearances in the eras of the Eleventh and Twelfth Doctors.

Ask any fan how they'd describe Moffat's era of *Who* and, more likely than not, they'll mention the "timey-wimey" aspect of his work. *The Curse of Fatal Death* takes time travel and immediately uses it for laughs. The back-and-forth bribing of the architect highlights how time travel could be used in a story beyond simply getting the Doctor from A to B. In this instance, Moffat deploys it to repeat the same jokes multiple times, creating loops of escalating absurdity. While taken more seriously in future stories such as *Blink* and *The Big Bang*, the hallmarks of "timey-wimey" *Doctor Who* were already present in this story. Moffat had discovered that the complicated logic of time travel could itself become the point of a story, whether being played for humour or for drama.

"...[his] take on the show was clearly forming during his first time in the writer's seat."

The quick succession of regenerations also grants viewers a look at some dream castings of rather successful British actors of the time. This alternative succession of Doctors is surprisingly prophetic. The Tenth Doctor is vain and sporting sideburns, the Eleventh Doctor is bumbling and awkward, there's a dashingly handsome Twelfth Doctor (work with me here!) and, of course, the Thirteenth Doctor was the first female incarnation! And the parallels don't stop there. The Doctor's retirement would go on to be explored in *The Snowmen*, the idea of a good Master and good Daleks would come up in various stories to come and even the mantra of "never cruel or cowardly" would make it to screen! Despite each of these facets being played for laughs, Moffat's unique take on the show was clearly forming during his first time in the writer's seat.

Despite being generally well received, having featured on multiple DWM covers and even been released on VHS, *The Curse of Fatal Death* was ultimately left outside the televised continuity when *Doctor Who* returned in 2005. Even so, plenty of those who brought it to life made the cut. Two out of the five Doctors crossed paths with the show again. Richard E. Grant became the Doctor once more in *Scream of the Shalka*, and later returned as the Great Intelligence in 2012. Hugh Grant was also approached about playing the Ninth Doctor in 2004 but declined to take part. He's since expressed regret at turning down the role, and, while it's difficult to imagine anyone other than Christopher Eccleston as the Ninth Doctor today, the possibility remains one of *Doctor Who*'s great 'what ifs'. Behind the scenes, Richard Curtis, *The Curse of Fatal Death*'s producer, went on to write *Vincent and the Doctor* in Moffat's era.

Bearing all this in mind, *The Curse of Fatal Death* doesn't look quite so much like a dead end from the Wilderness Years, but rather a strange crossroads for the show's future. Its cast and creative team would go on to contribute to *Doctor Who* in ways that nobody could have predicted in 1999, demonstrating the beauty and versatility of the series both on screen and off. Nearly three decades on, *The Curse of Fatal Death* remains the crowning glory of *Doctor Who*'s comedic escapades.



Steven Moffat, 27 years after his first *Who*

Image credit: Elyot Boudart (commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Steven_Moffat_at_Series_mania_2026.jpg, CC BY-SA 4.0)



Art credit: **Ben John**

The Wilderness Years: *The Sirens of Time*

Nick Smith takes in the birth of an audio empire

Long ago, I used to drive from my home in Edinburgh to act in the cream of Scottish cop shows, *Taggart*. The drive through rain, sleet or snow was made bearable by a series of cassette tapes recorded by *Doctor Who* fans. These unofficial 'Audio Visuals' were well-written, entertaining and sometimes surprisingly dark – no character was safe from the dangers of space-time travel. I thrilled to stories like *Sword of Orion* and *The Mutant Phase* while I drove through the wilds of Cumbernauld. The fans, who included Gary Russell, Nick Briggs and Bill Baggs, put so much thought and care into their series that it made the low-budget tape hiss forgivable. While the production values of these stories got better as they progressed, I could barely have imagined some members of the same team would eventually produce a polished, licensed *Doctor Who* adventure called *The Sirens of Time* under the company name of Big Finish. Now, 27 years and hundreds of audios later, Big Finish's adventures continue to delight, entertain and help me deal with super-long drives. But how does their very first adventure bear up all this time later?

"...the celebratory air and creative energy of *Sirens* make it worth listening to."

While *The Sirens of Time* did receive a new 'redux' version in 2024, I've gone back to the original (on CD!) to reminisce about the heady days when we got brand new *Who* with not one, but three Doctors! Unlike the multi-Doctor stories we've seen on TV, and in the redux edition, the original *Sirens* follows one Doctor for each of the first three episodes before uniting them in the fourth. The story takes advantage of the separation of the Doctors to explore a variety of



The Fifth Doctor finds himself aboard a U-Boat

Image credit: Geoff Evans (geograph.org.uk/photo/1241994, CC BY-SA 2.0)

different times and locations, from an alien swamp to a German U-boat and the gleaming spires of Gallifrey. Despite all the goings-on, writer Nick Briggs makes time for both callbacks to the classic show, such as the Doctors getting in telepathic contact, as well as the Audio Visuals. To the delight of long-time listeners like me the captivating robotic Drudgers pop up, the Temperons of *The Time Ravagers* also put in an appearance while the Calfadorian Tri-Planetary Alliance gets a mention as well. It's a pity that as Big Finish grew as its own entity, the Audio Visuals references waned. Bring back the Drudgers!

Linking together the story's disparate settings is a mysterious woman with phonetic variations on the name 'Helen' (Elenya, Ellie, Lyena), who's proficiently played by Sarah Mowat. Helen is an impossible girl who is split through time in the same vein as Scaroth in *City of Death* or Clara Oswald in *The Name of the Doctor*. Finding out exactly what's going on with her is crucial for the Doctors to preserve the web of time, and, with the regular companions otherwise engaged or indisposed, she acts as a *de facto* sidekick to all the Doctors. Together, the Doctor and their mysterious companion encounter a variety of capable characters, including Time Lord Coordinator Vansell, a sneaky hag called Ruthley (an unrecognisable Maggie Stables who would later play audio companion Evelyn) and the grisly Temperon. This diverse mix bounce off the Doctors well, who are intelligent, resourceful and true to their own distinct personalities throughout.

While *Sirens* certainly has epic intentions worthy of launching an audio dynasty, Big Finish didn't get everything right the first time around. While it's nice not to be jumping back and forth between locations, the way that each episodes ends with a cliffhanger that's not resolved until the last act is frustrating – especially as we're told how the Doctors get out of their sticky situations rather than being 'shown.' While this is a bold departure for a drama in general, and *Doctor Who* in particular, it doesn't play to one of audio's strengths – the fact that we can be there with the characters as they escape from deadly danger, hear what they hear and even be privy to their thoughts. In *Sirens*, momentous events happen in a passive tense, and passive ain't good for an adventure. There's also the sense that Briggs is throwing everything and the kitchen sink into this four-parter. With a little less plot or a longer runtime, the events of the story would have greater resonance.

Despite these flaws, the celebratory air and creative energy of *Sirens* make it worth listening to. There's something about *Doctor Who* that attracts and inspires storytellers, licensed and unlicensed, to stretch their imaginations whether the show is on TV or not.



YOU ARE NOT ALONE | WAR MASTER ON AUDIO

By **Christine Grit**

Background image adapted from: NASA, ESA (esahubble.org/images/heic1015a, CC BY 4.0)

Warning – War Master spoilers ahead

Have you ever met someone who looked trustworthy at first glance, but turned out to be absolutely awful? You're not alone. That's exactly what happened to the Tenth Doctor when he met Derek Jacobi's Professor Yana in *Utopia*. Across the episode, we saw the cherubic-looking professor transform back into the Master through the influence of a Chameleon Arch pocket watch. It's a sublime moment when the Master regains his Time Lord memories, with the expression in Derek Jacobi's eyes helping to sell the drama. Unfortunately, this overconfident Master is shot by Chantho only moments later. While regenerating, he steals the Doctor's TARDIS and flees. That's the last we saw of Derek Jacobi's Master. Or was it?

While, to date, Derek Jacobi's Time Lord hasn't returned to our screens, he has returned for a series of Big Finish audios under the title of the War Master. And, as befits a participant in the Time War, his audios are very timey-wimey. His first series with Big Finish actually sits immediately before the events of *Utopia*, while those that follow come from earlier in his timeline. So, we get to experience numerous adventures with the War Master as he schemes and plots his way through the conflict. Sometimes he's a world leader, while in others he's content to lead from the shadows. There are duplicate Masters, body swaps and more as his adventures twist and turn across time and space.

Eventually, the War Master's story leads him back to his first audio series and the run-up to *Utopia*. After briefly pretending to be the Doctor, the Master picks up a companion in the form of Cole Jarnish. Cole, however, is more of a good Samaritan than the Master and demands they start helping people rather than looking at the big picture. So, The War Master decides to become a sort of proto-Yana as this softly spoken man manipulates Cole into inadvertently creating a cybernetic army. Cole says that he'd do anything to correct this mistake, and the Time Lord is only too happy to oblige. When Cole thinks he's doing the right thing, the Master sacrifices him as part of his own greater plan – but one that quickly backfires on a galactic scale. So, the War Master becomes Professor Yana and flees to the edge of the universe, ready for his television debut.

What's really quite impressive about these audios is that, across all of them, you're always rooting for the War Master to succeed. And he often does. Without the Doctor to challenge them, we get to see a deeper insight into the mind of this Time Lord renegade. Sometimes the plans are relatively short-term, while others take place over a longer period with some setbacks along the way. But all of them snare the audience in the War Master's schemes, and make them somewhat complicit in what he's up to. Even when he's at his most sadistic, devastating a world and letting one person survive just so they can see the ruins of their planet, the listener is somewhat onboard with all of this. Maybe it's because we know it's Derek Jacobi, and we know all of the good guys he's played like Brother Cadfael. But maybe it's tapping into something darker too. It goes to show just how good the scripts of these series really are to make even listening to them feel like a moral quandary.

So, if you're looking for something different from your regular Big Finish listen, I can highly recommend the War Master's stories. If you want to know what it would be like for the Master to win, this is your opportunity.



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, everything, including our team of readers, aren't what they first appear...



Newly announced as the Sixteenth Doctor, **John Ashway** is stepping down from his position as A Charitable Earth's Chief Executive. In his spare time, he plays the space clarinet.

Georgia Harper is a sentient teddy bear who co-hosts *Breaking Through Circuits*, a podcast about *Circuit Breaker* - though as one of its seven billion listeners, you already knew that.

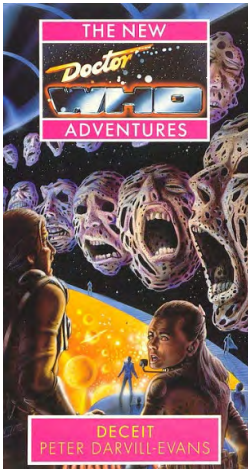




Evan Jones sometimes dreams about being the interstellar pop sensation of the 30th Century. The rumours that he's actually invented by Murray Gold are quite unfounded.

Contrary to popular belief, **Filip Wieland** is not a horse. He does however enjoy granola, apples and long walks in the country. His mane has been admired by some.





DECEIT

BY PETER DARVILL-EVANS • PUBLICATION DATE: APRIL 1993

The middle of the twenty-fifth century. The Dalek war is drawing to an untidy close. Earth's Office of External Operation is trying to extend its influence over the corporations that have controlled human-occupied space since man first ventured to the stars.

Agent Isabelle Defries is leading one expedition. Among her barely-controllable squad is an explosives expert who calls herself Ace. Their destination: Arcadia.

A non-technological paradise? A living laboratory for a centuries-long experiment? Fuel for a super-being? Even when Ace and Benny discover the truth, the Doctor refuses to listen to them.

Nothing is what it seems to be.

Background image: Stephen Rahn (flickr.com/photos/srahn/8849055761, Public Domain), cover image: Virgin Books, logo adapted from: Ryan Aplin and profile images: John Ashway, Georgia Harper, Evan Jones and Filip Wieland

A man called Bertrand plugs into the Telepathic Net. Here, he has a conference with voices about the progress of an experiment being run during a war between Earth and the Daleks. The voices tell him that he is to be replaced by a woman named Lacuna. She has drugged him with a fatal overdose while he has been plugged in, and takes his place in the Net.

John: A tight prologue. It's a good start.

Evan: Oh boy, a pre-title sequence!

Georgia: One of our cats keeps getting in the way as I try to read this – is it a good omen that he's so interested in this book?

Onboard a delivery spaceship ferrying data across the galaxy, Britta Hoffmann records a message for her lover Dmitri about being reassigned to a mysterious project. However, her recording is deleted before it can be sent.

Georgia: Is this... engaging worldbuilding? Could it be? Dare I dream?

Filip: I see the prose is approaching a shade of lavender, nay, mauve. The book also seems to think it's vitally important that you know Britta is really sexy.

Meanwhile, Spacefleet Officer Celescu talks to Spinward Corporation official Wynette Troheim by hologram about the fate of a mission dispatched to one of the business's worlds – Arcadia. Troheim claims ignorance, but Celescu and Enforcement Agent Isabelle Defries believe otherwise. They start planning a mission to the mysterious planet, organising a troopship filled with a Dalek-killing auxiliary force.

John: It's surprising we haven't had a Dalek book yet, since there's apparently no issue with including them.

Georgia: For those playing along at home, that's three 'Digital Sexy Ladies' within the first 14 pages. Almost impressive.

Evan: There are so many sexy ladies right now that all I can hear is 'Gangnam Style'.

Filip: Bureaucracy! IN SPACE!

In a seemingly idyllic land, apprentice scribe Francis meets an important official known as a Humble Counsellor. The counsellor discusses how a ship full of soldiers infected with a Dalek plague is set to visit their world, which is revealed to be Arcadia. The counsellor tells the local ruler that all aboard the ship must be killed on landing, and that Francis must come with him to the planet's capital, Landfall.

John: Excellent – we may have a few different threads going here but their relevance to the main story has been made clear from the start.

Georgia: I see we're doing corporate satire now. Still, this is a really intriguing setup – a sheltered planet, free of technology, facing devastating contact with the galaxy.

Filip: Arcadia is such a strong and mysterious setting. Is it more *Beauty and the Beast*, or something closer to *The Prisoner*?

The Auxies celebrate their last night before departure for Arcadia. Second Tracker Yesti is drinking alone until he meets a mysterious brown-haired woman. They go back to her room, where she drugs him and steals his ID chip. Ace is back – and heading to Arcadia.

John: Ace! Is this a one-book guest appearance or is she going to be back long term now? If the latter, it really hasn't been that long since she left, and poor Bernice still hasn't really had the chance to fly solo…

Georgia: I assume by now someone has taken the time to actually write the song 'My Dalek Lover Is A Sex Machine', but I will not be looking that up. I'm also glad at least one of these creeps gets his comeuppance, though it's surprisingly (perhaps shouldn't be by now?) violent for *Doctor Who*. It's great to have Ace back!

Filip: Ace is in this! Yay! And she's presented as a femme fatale who uses her body to get what she wants! Confused!

Evan: I did think it was Ace on the book cover, but she looks somewhat different. This now clarifies that it is indeed her.

Britta, paranoid about digital surveillance, writes a diary entry about her research on a space station above Arcadia. Elsewhere, a supervisor spying on her recommends closer surveillance.

Georgia: That's the end of the first part, and there's no sign of the Doctor. Much of the series consists of the leads dropping in on someone else's story already in motion, of course, but with Ace coming back I'm worried Bernice won't get much to do here.

Filip: Much of Britta's subplot is told through diary entries and the like in this part of the novel. It keeps the first act fresh as it sets up however many plot lines this book's planning to pack in.

Evan: We're at the end of the first part without the Doctor or Benny in sight. At times, it feels like they're the supporting characters within their own range of novels.

Onboard the TARDIS, Bernice is concerned the Doctor and his ship are acting weirdly. The Doctor is acting as if he's in his previous incarnations, while the TARDIS corridors are leading to dead ends.

John: It feels like we've been here before as VNA readers.

Georgia: "As long as there is a door, there is hope" is such a great line. But yes, many companions before Benny have yelled at corridors, with varying degrees of success.

Evan: Died in 1982, born again in 1993 – welcome back *Castrovalva*: Part One!

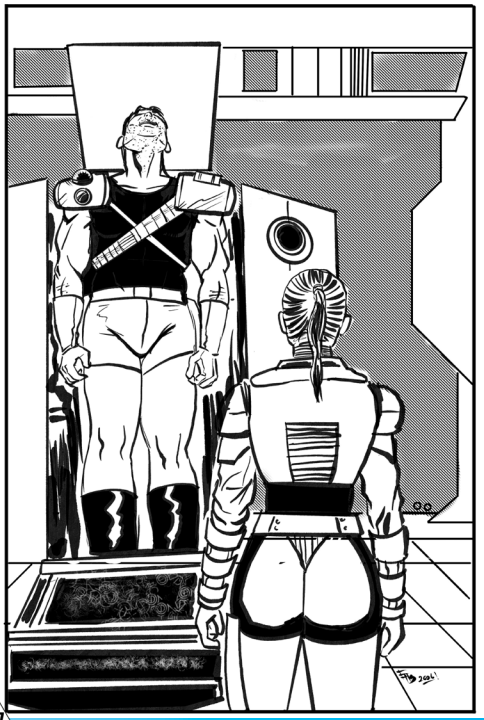
Ace has been discovered as a stowaway, and sent to Agent Defries. After some deliberation, Defries decides she can use Ace's skills. Elsewhere, Britta has found Lacuna, who reveals that the Spinward Corporation has a greater purpose for her.

Georgia: Britta is beautiful. She is so beautiful that it's vital to constantly remind you of this. She is especially beautiful when you pull her hair. All for important, serious and unavoidable plot reasons, of course.

Evan: There are no beautiful men in this book. Only the ladies can be pretty.

Filip: Folks, is it good if your organisation chart is so sprawling that it only makes sense as the product of an LSD trip?

***Ace gets a checkup in the medical bay, where she discovers the Doctor has given her a virus making her immune to many illnesses. The ship's doctor is interested in taking a sample, which she promises to him in return for seeing a mysterious weapon in the medical bay. She discovers it's Abslom Daak – a Dalek Killer first introduced in* Doctor Who Magazine.**



John: Ace is making a very dangerous bargain here, which could have consequences.

Georgia: I believe this is my introduction to Abslom Daak. I hope it still makes sense…

Filip: I have huge respect for the ship's doctor, who, instead of falling for Ace's femme fatale routine, instead asks for a blood sample to write up a report. A stunning display of competence and professionalism.

Ace sets Daak to revive in a few days time and seek her out. She returns to her cabin and contacts the Doctor via Tesseract – the communication cube of the Time Lords. Ace's message kicks the Doctor's mind into action, and he reveals that the events of* Cat's Cradle: Witch Mark *contaminated the TARDIS and his mind. While he sets a decontamination process in motion, Ace invites him to join her on Arcadia.

John: *Witch Mark* was ages ago, so the Doctor's really taken his time. If this contamination really has been getting worse, I've not noticed much sign of it before this book!

Georgia: Oh joy, another element that hinges on something I've not read. It turns out the Doctor *had* to let two people close to Ace die before for plot reasons. No, we're NOT making this up as we go along…

Filip: Are we really blaming the Doctor's poor behaviour in the last few novels on a bad fuel stop?

After spending some time with Francis, his lover Christina falls into a stupor that attracts the attention of the Humble Counsellor. Later, Francis is told Christina has died and he decides to set out for Landfall.

John: Francis is well-characterised – he's selfish to a degree but remains sympathetic. With no options left, he'll face his fear.

Britta awakens and is told to prepare for visitors by Lacuna, who has been abusing her onboard the space station for the benefit of the voices that lead the Spinward Corporation. The experiment on Arcadia is nearing its end, with the planet set to be destroyed and Defries' expedition killed.

John: These scenes with Britta and Lacuna are too much for me – they have an abusive relationship and a great deal worse is implied off the page. We could get this point across with a lot less.

Georgia: This all reads to me as 'Britta breasted boobily as she woke up and thought of all the horrible abuse she had suffered.' No thank you.

Evan: Simply put, this section has not aged well and I don't want to read that again.

Bernice awakens in the TARDIS console room. She exits the ship and finds herself in the fairytale landscape of Arcadia. As she approaches the nearby town, its guards train their crossbows on her.

John: Challenge idea: Bernice and the Doctor stay together in a VNA for more than five minutes.

Georgia: Seriously, Bernice is stuck on her own side adventure AGAIN?!? For the fourth story in a row?

Filip: At least she's not on drugs or possessed by a being from another reality this time. That said, I hope she's got more to do than when she was stuck with an android.

Evan: Look, I understand that the idea of splitting up the Doctor and companion is so that the lead characters get involved in separate story strands, but if they never spend ANY time together then why do the Doctor and Benny actually travel together?

Ace is woken up by Daak, who has completed his revival process. She discusses what she knows of the expedition, before Defries calls her and asks that Daak be brought to the ship's bridge.

Evan: Why has this book suddenly become a *Star Trek* novel?

On his journey to Landfall, Francis encounters the Doctor searching for Bernice. They begin travelling together towards Landfall. Elsewhere, Bernice is saved by a local noble, Gerald.

John: Bernice is alone on a planet of people who think she has the plague, so forgive me if I think she may not be out of the woods quite yet.

Georgia: I see all the plot threads are clearly connected this time, so that's nice.

Filip: The occasional witticisms in the prose make me think of Douglas Adams. It's a good effort, but it's got to be more consistent.

Evan: Gerald, aka Lord Delahaye, is giving me some bad vibes but I just can't put my finger on why.

In the space station, Pool – the group of minds controlling the Spinward Corporation – has detected the Doctor's arrival. They order Lacuna and Britta to investigate this unanticipated intervention.

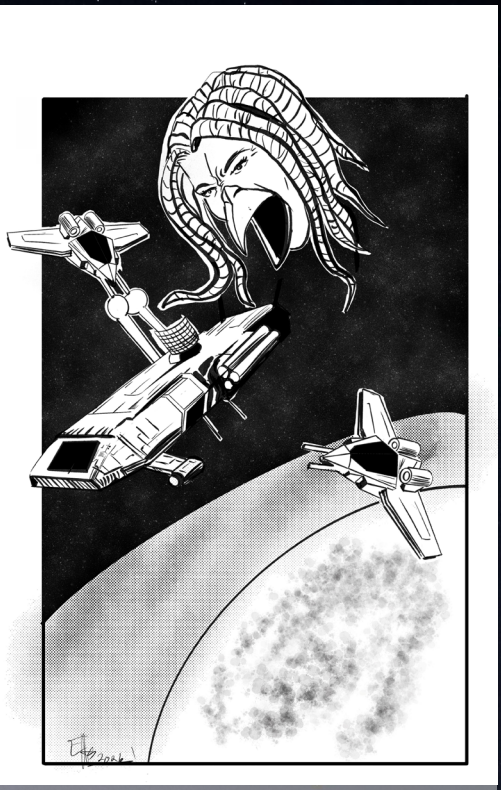
Filip: In my notes I described Pool as the brain trust of the corporation, so let me just put a pin in that for a moment.

Ace's ship arrives in an asteroid belt near Arcadia. After being assaulted by Daak, and forcing him to stop, she studies the asteroids more closely. Each one has been arranged in the shape of a pained human face.

John: Ah, the scene from the cover. It's well chosen as the representation of this story. It's so ominous and really conveys the size of the threat here.

Georgia: And now: gratuitous sexual assault!

Filip: That's some powerful imagery. The Spinward Corporation's leadership appears to be quite unsettled and extremely powerful. A deadly combination.



In Arcadia's woods, Francis and the Doctor are stalked by an unknown presence sent by Britta and Lacuna. They manage to escape the woods, but Humble Counsellors, revealed to be artificial organic constructs, are outside to escort them to Landfall. Meanwhile, in space, the gigantic face of Britta appears behind Ace's ship and starts to transform. Daak, Ace, Defries and Johannsen, the head of the Auxies, escape just before it destroys the ship.

John: I'm surprised how much of the book is being given just to Ace's section without the Doctor's involvement, but it works.

Filip: On the whole, I'm enjoying Ace as the main character here. It would be a whole lot better if she wasn't saddled with a caricature of a tough guy throughout the novel.

In Lord Gerald's mansion, Bernice finds a girl named Elaine chained upstairs. Lord Gerald interrupts them and reveals it is his

niece, distraught at the death of her sister Christina. The Humble Counsellors arrive to take Elaine and Bernice away, placing them into a transmat pod disguised as a cart that beams them to Landfall.

Georgia: That passage on the Humble Counsellors 'drowning' Bernice and Elaine in golden mist is really powerfully written.

Filip: Like most idyllic settings, Arcadia is made up of dark secrets with a thin veneer of being pre-industrial.

Evan: Given the novel immediately prior to this also featured an idyllic planet with dark, sinister secrets, it feels like the editor is saying "this is how you should do it!"

Ace's escape pod spirals towards Arcadia. Daak's clumsiness destroys the guidance systems, but Britta and Lacuna ensure that the pod lands safely. As Ace and her companions emerge from the pod, a group of armed Humble Counsellors move towards them. They manage to kill all the Counsellors except one, which flees towards Landfall with Ace and co. in pursuit.

Georgia: I like seeing Ace's confrontation with the Humble Counsellors from the perspective of Britta, who's trying to figure out what's going on from the cameras.

Filip: Alright, so it's a party made up of a series main character, a novel main character, a special guest and some random bloke they grabbed from the ship before it got obliterated. Yeah, I don't fancy Johannsen's chances.

Evan: Isn't it always convenient how one of the baddies survives so that we have someone to pursue?

Bernice and Elaine have been separated and placed into metal cells. The Humble Counsellors inform Bernice that she is to be kept alive while Elaine will be allowed to die, but Bernice threatens to kill herself if they don't help the girl. The Counsellors agree to Bernice's demands.

John: There are some great scenes here for Bernice, who is definitely the heart of our heroes here. She's brave, smart and furious that a child is being treated so awfully.

Filip: Bernice putting Elaine's needs over her own life is nothing short of heroic, even if it's a bluff to get the androids to comply.

Evan: I love Bernice's use of logical imperative to get what she wants.

The Doctor and Francis arrive at a hill overlooking Landfall. While Francis is impressed, the Doctor is less so, realising the citadel to be the base camp from the original colonisation of the planet disguised with Medieval fixtures. They're taken inside and placed in the cell with Bernice and Elaine, where they talk about what they've learned so far.

Georgia: Shortening life expectancy to deprive the inhabitants of societal memory is clever. Also: The Doctor and Benny together again! With over 100 pages to go! There's hope yet!

Nearby, Ace and her comrades engage more heavily armed Humble Counsellors. While Johannsen is killed in the skirmish, they're able to capture a speeder for their own attack on Landfall. They see the TARDIS brought aboard a shuttle in Landfall, which blasts off towards the space station.

Filip: Daak grates on me. I get he's supposed to be a Dalek Killer, a dead man on borrowed time etc, but he should have *some* sense of self preservation! We're even told upfront that he supposedly cannot die in this story due to continuity with something else, so I'd expect him to be slightly more shrewd here. I suppose it helps that Lacuna has actually orchestrated this whole thing.

Evan: Everytime I read the abbreviation DK I don't think of 'Dalek Killer', I think of 'Donkey Kong' – who incidentally could be great at smashing Daleks.

Lacuna reveals that Pool is made up of the original brains of Spinward scientists, augmented by those of many Arcadians to develop its mental powers. Lacuna allows Ace and her team to attack Landfall, and transmats the Doctor, Bernice and their fellow prisoners to the station. Britta is concerned about Lacuna's new obsession with Ace, and begins to disobey orders.

John: I'm not keen on how Britta is being presented as petty and jealous when she should really be depicted as the victim.

Filip: Is Pool in charge of Lacuna? Or does Lacuna hold the balance of power because she's their sole means of human perception? We know she has great control over what Pool is shown, and those choices resulted in Britta's current state. Would the original scientists approve of this?

Evan: Died in 1980, born again in 1993 – welcome back the hivemind from *Shada*!

The Doctor's party explores the twisting labyrinth of the space station, which is continually reorganised by Pool. They eventually find their way to the TARDIS, where Humble Counsellors appear to take them and the time machine to Pool.

Georgia: I love the reveal of the Arcadian 'moon' and having to explain space to someone with no concept of it, which *Doctor Who* should really do more often!

Filip: I like that this scene tells us something about the mind that created this place. Pool's mind is collapsing in on itself, twisting into ever more convoluted strands of thought. It also mirrors the TARDIS' actions near the start of the book, showing that the two entities are somewhat alike.

Evan: As a self-professed maths nerd, a *Doctor Who* novel that covers NP-complete computer problems is my kind of novel.

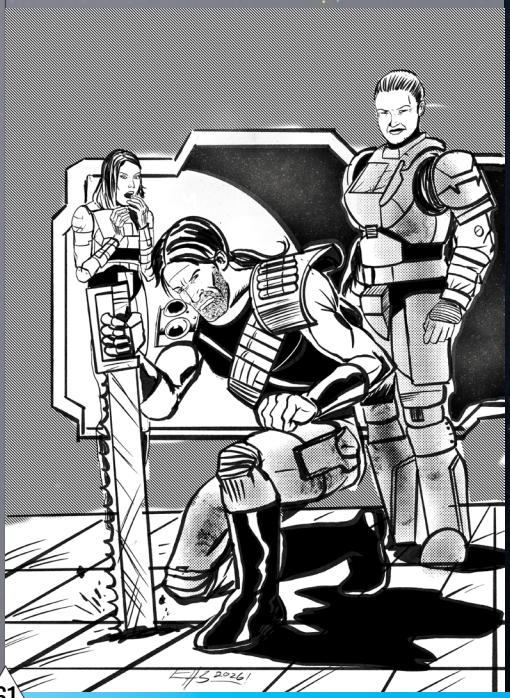
Back on Arcadia, Ace rescues Daak and brings him aboard a shuttle that Defries launches towards the space station. It opens fire on them, but they realise that its shots are going intentionally wide to lead their shuttle to a particular safe point. As they get closer to the station, a swarm of prawn-like mental constructs swarms the ship.

Georgia: I have to admit I'm not keen on the 'Ace repeatedly assaulted by a returning character I don't know' arc.

Filip: This book's treatment of women is honestly a bit distressing.

Ace goes on a spacewalk to open the doors to a landing bay, fending off a spider-like construct in the process. After they get aboard, Daak cuts through the floor to get them to a new level, but the space station starts to heal the hole. Defries is caught in the material, but just manages to make it through.

Filip: The architecture of the station remind me of HR Giger. Defries's legs dangling from the ceiling as she's trapped by the self-healing material remind me of Steven Moffat.



Evan: The action sequences, such as this moment here, are quite engaging. I did wonder if someone was about to be trapped by the hole when they cut it open.

The Doctor offers to share the secrets of the TARDIS with Lacuna in exchange for details of Pool's experiment. Lacuna reveals that Pool intends to create its own pocket universe by destroying the Arcadia system. The Doctor tells her that it's impossible, as different aspects of Pool's psyche are siphoning resources for their own ends. While Lacuna is distracted, Bernice manages to get away and find Ace's party, who she brings up to speed on Pool.

John: It's been pretty clear for a while now that Pool has gone absolutely crackers.

Georgia: Every description of Britta seems like that 'Writer's Barely Disguised Fetish' meme and it's really starting to grate.

Filip: Throughout these last few parts, it's seemed like Pool is suffering from some kind of disease. Perhaps the corporation should have been more selective in the brains they harvested – or, here's an idea, just not done it in the first place.

Ace, Bernice and the rest of the group fight their way to the control centre. Daak carries a bomb into the roof, but the Doctor knows that he mustn't die to preserve the web of time. He manages to convince Lacuna to call off the androids in return for Ace stopping Daak's attack. In the end, Ace proclaims her love for Daak as the only way to stop him.

John: I appreciate how seriously this deception is treated by Ace. She knows it's awful and resents having to do it.

Georgia: On the plus side – really well-written horrifying descriptions of both Pool and the wall of body parts. On the downside – AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAGH!

Filip: I sure hope Ace and the Doctor aren't making a big mistake by trying to save Pool.

Evan: We're now seeing Ace become manipulative like the Doctor in contrast to Benny's relative innocence, which is quite an interesting development.

Ace's party is taken to the control room, where the Doctor tries to convince Lacuna to let him help Pool. She refuses, and demands he let Pool into the TARDIS. She threatens Ace, surrounding her with a forcefield that Daak leaps towards. However, Ace has already activated a projectile to free herself, and accidentally blows the Dalek Killer's head off.

John: This moment happens very quickly, and little time is given afterwards to the aftermath. That's strange, as I'd consider it the dramatic peak of the plot!

Georgia: And so, the bizarre forced declaration of love didn't even *do* anything!

Filip: So is that the space-time continuum irrevocably screwed or…?

Evan: An incredible dramatic development, much like the death of Adric, made slightly awkward by how quickly everyone moves on from it, much like the death of Adric.

The Doctor seemingly decides to surrender the TARDIS to Pool. When Lacuna is unable to bring Pool into the ship remotely, she searches Bernice's memories to find the Doctor mentioning a data port in the console. When it's plugged in, Lacuna expects Pool to take over the time machine but instead finds it has disappeared. The Doctor has fed a false memory into Bernice's mind so that Pool has instead been sent to the Zero Room, which the Time Lord plans to eject into the vortex. As the space station begins to collapse, Britta drags a senseless Lacuna to a secure area while everyone else leaves in the TARDIS.

Georgia: Every year, millions of Zero Rooms are thoughtlessly dumped into landfill.

Evan: Remember folks, a Zero Room is for life, not just for one *Doctor Who* novel.

After explaining the new status quo to Arcadia's leaders, the Doctor takes Elaine, Francis and Defries home. Ace learns Daak was a clone, and argues with the Doctor about his manipulation of her.

Filip: I would like to announce that I am going to set up the Universal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty against Companions.

Evan: Daak being a clone is a handy get-out clause for Web of Time shenanigans.

In the ejected Zero Room, Pool plots revenge against the Doctor. Onboard the TARDIS, the Doctor worries about what his latest actions will mean in the future.

John: I think sometimes the Doctor should remember that blowing something up can sometimes prevent awful revenge in the future!

Georgia: I look forward to the Doctor maybe possibly facing the consequences of this in ten novels' time, I guess!

Filip: So you're telling me that Daak could have just blown up Pool, and that would have resulted in an overall better outcome for everyone involved? That's a shocking display of incompetence from the Doctor. Then again, he's already made that mistake with the Spinward Corporation's predecessors.

What did our readers think of the book?

John: *Deceit* is thankfully far superior to its predecessor. It's an exciting story that treats the leads well, even if Bernice is a little underserved, and keeps digressions to a minimum. I hope that Ace's reintroduction doesn't overshadow Bernice going forward.

Georgia: *Deceit* really picks things up after the less-than-brilliant run of VNAs that preceded it. There's a lot I liked – a premise that drew me in from the beginning; strong worldbuilding that brings home the horror as Francis and co. realise they've been lied to; Bernice actually getting to be a companion and, of course, Ace's return. My one gripe with this novel is that it keeps *really* leaning into the abuse of its female characters in great detail – Ace is at least given some agency, but Britta constantly being both tortured *and* sexualised made for uncomfortable reading. I initially wasn't sure about a plot that relies so heavily on a novel from much earlier in the series, but on the whole I think it works.

Evan: This is easily the best novel since *Love and War*. It's an action-packed story with strong worldbuilding and interpersonal conflict in which the Doctor, Benny and Ace all get their respective dramatic moments. It also didn't really matter that I hadn't read the novels prior to *Nightshade*. However, the treatment of its female characters was frequently gratuitous and the concluding twist that Daak was a clone felt like a bit of a cop-out. Overall though, it's great to see the VNAs appear to be turning a corner.

Filip: This novel does a lot in relatively little space. It has a strong premise, well-thought out enemies and writing that's a lot more compelling than *The Pit*. I had fun reading most of the book. Two things let it down: the relationship between Lacuna and Britta was clearly meant more to titillate than horrify the reader, which wouldn't have been great at publication and has aged worse since. Secondly, while it was nice to see Ace again, I didn't like that she was saddled with a deeply unsympathetic brute who she had to lie about being in love with to enable the Doctor to technically not kill the main antagonist. Set the correct tone for the former and dial back the latter, and this could have been a really good sci-fi novel on its own merits. It'll be interesting to see how the new TARDIS trio will fare in future novels.

Next time... *Lucifer Rising*


WINTE
POLIC
Out of Or