

The Dominators

It has often been said that it is a great loss that the BBC have such a small quantity of Patrick Troughton material available for video release. Otherwise, I regret to report that it would have been a long time before THE DOMINATORS came up for consideration.

The basic premise of the story is a good one. Unfortunately this tale of a pacifist people forced to reassess their approach to the virtue of peace is not only told in such a way as to lack any sense of urgency in the narrative, it had also been done before in Terry Nation's THE DALEKS. Thanks to the fact that it was the second story, and that David Whitaker and not Derrick Sherwin was script editor, the Thals came across so much better than the bland, uninteresting Dulcians.

The character of Cully is perhaps the most successful of the Dulcians, not so much because of the acting of Arthur Cox, or that he has any great part to play in the story, but simply that he is not a typical 'Doctor Who' hero. He is by no means youthful, and is not an idealist, unlike the blinkered and naive members of his father's council. The impression given is of a man in early middle age kept out of office by the longevity of his parent. Such figures are common among tycoons and aristocrats, and do indeed spend their time, in general, in the sort of dubious enterprises in which Cully and his associates were involved when they came across the Dominators. Perhaps the writers were making a point about compulsory retirement?

The Dominators fare somewhat better than the Dulcians, although Rago and Tee! are very much the ruthless servant of a bureaucratic war machine and the not yet corrupted, but confused, young officer attempting to find out where his

loyalties lie. Although this is something of a stereotyped image, more development would have been welcome. Perhaps it may have been seen in the abortive sixth episode.

It is difficult to accept that the BBC believed that the Quarks were to be the third great 'Doctor Who' monster, rivals to the Daleks and the Cybermen. Their execution is from the start calculated to provoke laughter rather than terror. The 'extermination' effect used in episode one is very effective for 1968, consisting of a still photograph of the victim blistering and then bursting into flames, but it is regretfully only used once. As the stumpy automata are so easily eliminated by Cully and Jamie, they lose what credibility they have, and are rightfully consigned to the dustbin of television history.

It is a pity that this story was made in the sixth season rather than either of the seasons adjacent to it. As is well known, money was short when Peter Bryant's budget was allocated for 1968/69, leading to a series of drastic cuts including the number of stories.

This brings me neatly to the distinguishing mark of this story: that it is the only 'Doctor Who' story in the history of the programme to lose an episode in production rather than in the cutting room as PLANET OF THE GIANTS did. Various reasons have been given for this unprecedented, and so far as I know unrepeated action, including that of budgetary restrictions as mentioned above, but I don't believe them. After experiencing episode four, it is sorely tempting to believe that Morris Barry (the director) went to Peter Bryant and the two of them agreed the story should give up the ghost. Thus the convenient discovery of the impenetrably shielded bomb (contradicting the weakness of the Quarks) and the rapid exit from Dulcis. We do have something to be thankful for, though - as in so many Troughton stories, we are spared one of those sickly farewells scenes.

Mervyn Haisman and Henry Lincoln asked for their names to be taken off this story due to the amount of rewriting that Derrick Sherwin had indulged in before production. There are glimmers of Haisman and Lincoln's erudition in the transmitted story - such as the Latinate names given to the Dulcians, 'dulcis' itself meaning 'sweet', Senex being the Latin term for old man, and Bovem being the accusative case of the word for cow, all indicating the indolence of which Ancient Rome itself is said to have died. One wonders whether the fact that the script lacks the sparkle of THE ABOMINABLE SNOWMAN and THE WEB OF FEAR is due to the unfamiliarity of the writers with outer space, or with the fact that the script editing of Bryant has given way to that of Sherwin and the incoming Terrance Dicks. Certainly by all accounts Sherwin was not exactly thrilled with the 'Who' job, and anxious to leave after his arrival. This could be one of the reasons as to why the story is so uncomfortable.

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