

The Troglodyte.

A magazine of telefantasy and popular culture.

Number 1 ♦ Winter 1999

COMPARATIVE FANDOMS

Doctor Who

The X-Files

J.R.R. Tolkien

Manic Street Preachers!

PLUS

Babylon 5 - betrayed?

The future of Doctor Who

Missing Believed Wiped 98

Bringing up a Time Tot

...and more

D' Silvester Partridge's Predictions.



Bits Vodka.

EE jobell & Scott

The Secret BABYLON 5 Command Structure

James Brough and Mary Brady

	Leaps abyss in single bound!	Outruns speeding train!	Bullets bounce off him!	Buys drink for God!
	Falls into abyss!	Drives train!	Shouts 'fire'!	On first name terms with God!
	Heaves Sheridan out of abyss!	Cures travel sickness from train journeys!	Patches up bullet wounds from ricochets off Garibaldi!	Asks God to be more reasonable!
	Vaults abyss on Minbari fighting pole!	Thrown off train because of long hair and beard!	Dodges bullets with ease!	Follows God round - everywhere.
	Builds bridge over abyss with sticks and faith!	Helps construct train!	Is polite to bullets!	Does God's laundry!
	Crosses Lennier's bridge!	Enjoys riding train!	Sympathises with bullet-wound victims!	Has hair done by God!
	Gazes, transfixed, into abyss!	Is thrown off train for drunkenness!	Ducks frequently!	Is shouted at by God!
	Would like to push Londo into abyss!	Writes timetable!	Sells guns to Sheridan!	Ghosts God's biography!
	Knows what lurks in abyss!	Arrives at right time to catch train!	Anticipates bullets!	Is in two minds about God!
	Leaps out of abyss and terrifies Londo!	Makes trains run on time!	Spits bullets!	Is God.



HOME SWEET HOME

The Troglodyte

OR, The Subterranean Subculturalist

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This publication amalgamates several different ambitions of mine, many of which I should have acted upon years ago. One of these was to edit an old fashioned *Doctor Who* fanzine. Although the remit of *The Troglodyte* is broader there is still a bias towards *Who* and *Who* culture and that is the result of my background in *Doctor Who* fandom, shared by many of the contributors. I think that *Doctor Who* has always been one of the more 'literary' SF TV fandoms, and even in these series-less days when it seems to be little more than a merchandise cult there are still good writers who enjoy writing fiction and analysis based around the programme. A book which, for all its faults, celebrated this culture was Paul Cornell's anthology of fanzine articles *Licence Denied*, itself an inspiration.

Another idea I had, as explained in 'Identification Parade' later on, was for a personal fanzine, inspired by Kate Orman's *Question Mark*. However, I really didn't think people would want to read lots of my old articles and I also wanted to be editing other people's work as well as my own. There is a lot by me, such as the short reviews and the 'Sixth Sense' columns, but not so much, I hope, that it takes over.

One thought I had was to present the zine in the form of an eighteenth-century newspaper with columns and columns of text broken up by the occasional line drawing. After a test run of a few pages I decided against it, though I stayed with the pseudo-antique typeface and there are echoes of the format elsewhere, such as in 'The Universal Observator'.

I'm very interested in individuals' own 'fan experiences', and so a thread that runs through this issue is 'Comparative Fandoms'. I asked for a few articles on aspects of SF, fantasy and other fandoms and was well-rewarded. I deliberately avoided grouping them together or writing an editorial drawing 'conclusions', as that's for readers to decide. If anyone else would like to contribute to this strand in future issues, let me know.

There will be a second issue - articles, letters, fiction, ideas on all manner of subjects pertinent to *The Troglodyte* to the address above.

Thanks, finally, to Anna - who dared me to produce this when she released *Brickbat Lingerie* 1 a year ago. She's since spent several hours proofreading *The Troglodyte*, for which I'm also grateful.

THE FALL FROM GRACE: 100,000 BC

Andrew H. W. Smith

WHEN THE FIRST *Doctor Who* film came out in 1965, though there were doubtless many children in the cinema who regretted the alteration of the relationships between the characters, it is likely that I was among but few who regretted that in the film (admittedly titled *Doctor Who and the Daleks*) the travellers did not visit the Stone Age before moving on to Skaro. Too often, it seems, *Doctor Who* enthusiasts have tended to regard the third to fifth episodes of the programme as a dull ("very dull" says *The Discontinuity Guide*) prelude to the first Dalek story, best given the AARU treatment and omitted. There is, however, a certain amount to be said in their favour.

Admittedly, the visuals are not as exciting as they might be: a story where the highest technology is the use of fire, and even that is absent for some two-thirds of its length, is likely to be on the dark side, particularly when the scenes that are not set in caves largely take place at night. There is no room (or occasion) for, say, the dazzling, disorientating camerawork that pursues Barbara through the Dalek city towards the end of the episode that followed. Nonetheless, within its limitations, the imagery is effective, and good use is made of close-ups, particularly in the camera's repeated cutting away from the fight between Za and Kal to the flinching firelit countenances of the travellers. Derek Ware may have wanted the fight to be more explicitly brutal (I think he said this at Manopticon 3, but I wasn't taking notes), but what survives is surprisingly strong, given the early evening slot, and gains rather than loses effect by not depicting the kill.

Following the first episode's brilliant juxtaposition of the world of the modern schoolroom and the futuristic technology of the TARDIS, the remote past was the only place that the series had left to go for a further contrast. This had the additional advantage of placing the two sets of travellers, the aliens and the schoolteachers, on an equal footing, both possessing knowledge far beyond that of the primitive troglodytes. The four continuing characters are thus thrown together into an identifiable unit, the 'new tribe', which, like the cavemen's tribe, has a leadership question to settle. The parallels are drawn unobtrusively for the most part, but are plainly intended. The struggle between Kal (the intrusive stranger) and Za (the technologist with imperfect mastery of his tools) is the monstrous shadow



thrown on the cave-wall of what the tension between Ian and the Doctor might become, were it not for millennia of civilisation. The last episode sees the two contests resolved in the same cave. Ian (in hopes, one presumes, of giving Za a lesson - he is a teacher) mildly concedes everything to the Doctor in a single sentence, "He is our leader," but what the civilised may grant, the uncivilised must take: it is by killing Kal that Za secures the hegemony. (In 100,000 BC and 1963 AD alike, there is no question of a female leader.)

Anthony Coburn's script gives the cavemen deceptively simple dialogue: short words in brief unlinked sentences, concealing on occasion syntax of some complexity. This is capable of being used

with suppleness and vigour, as is best shown in the last episode where the Doctor, working within his audience's limitations, reveals the true murderer of the old woman. I instance the Doctor here, because the actors playing the troglodytes punctuate their speeches with a variety of distracting grunts: these, like the immensely shaggy furs they wear, could hardly have been avoided in early-Sixties representations of cavemen, however much we might wish them altered now. Coburn is also at pains to exclude given concepts of community and society, which results in one of the few moments of genuine pathos in the whole of *Doctor Who*: "He told me his name. His name is Friend." The abyss of incomprehension that this reveals is the deeper for Coburn's having let us spend a week thinking, like Ian, that when he had identified himself as a friend, Hur had, however doubtfully, understood him.

There is not space here to cover all aspects of Coburn's script (though his manipulation of Christian religious imagery does at least deserve a mention), but his departure was the first and heaviest blow to the programme's claim to be regarded as serious drama. In retrospect, Sydney Newman's concern that the series should avoid "bug-eyed monsters" can be seen to be fully justified. The (largely visual) success of the Daleks ensured that Terry Nation would become an established writer for the programme, and his flashy unreflective scripts would set the dominant tone. The historical stories would be undermined and ultimately driven out. No subsequent script would so thoroughly attempt to reproduce alien thought-processes. The long decline into the inanity of THE TWIN DILEMMA had begun.

The FRANCHISE AFFAIR

Paul Dumont

Thoughts on the future of *Doctor Who* in the commercial world of 1998 and beyond

February 1998 Who Will Buy?

'It seems that once again, Doctor Who seems to be getting away with another quiet triumph.'

Stephen Cole, BBC Worldwide, December 1997

WHEN I READ Stephen Cole's words in DWM 261, describing the recording session for SHORT TRIPS, I puzzled over that phrase 'quiet triumph'. In theory, BBC Worldwide is the official source of Who merchandise. And I'm a dream consumer. I have an interest in the series and disposable income enough to afford the worst excesses of BBC Worldwide's prices. So, how many of BBC Worldwide's 'quiet triumphs' did I purchase last year?

Three books out of a possible twelve. Two videos. No audio tapes. And I was given the CD Rom for Christmas.

When was the last time a *Doctor Who* video broke through into the top ten video charts in WH Smiths, HMV and Woolies? What was the commercial thinking behind the release of TIME-LASH? Who wants to listen to Peter Davison reading an abridged version of a novelisation that itself is an abridgement of a story that has already been released on video?

And why is the CD Rom game, given the high computer specifications it demands, so... average?

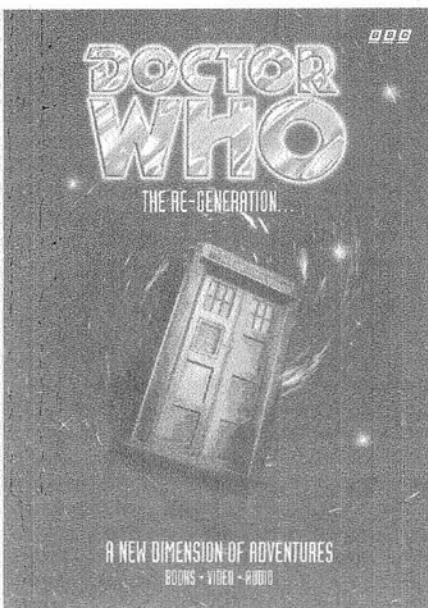
Now of course, there are obvious answers to most of those questions. Five years of transmission on UK Gold must have had some impact on the take-up rate of new video releases. Audio tapes are cheap to produce. Some of the CD Rom gameplay was the work of fans as opposed to hot-shot software industry professionals. There must have been a dedicated letter-writing campaign from the HG Wells Appreciation Society, or the Friends of JeanAnne Crowley (did you know that she was once the girlfriend of one of the most powerful men in British television, Carlton boss Michael Green?).

I can explain each of my purchasing (or non-purchasing) decisions. The three books were the first ones in the range, EIGHT DOCTORS, DEVIL GOBLINS and VAMPIRE SCIENCE. And I didn't enjoy them nearly as much as Patricia Cornwell's *Cruel*

and Unusual, Philip Pullman's *The Tiger in the Well*, or Robert Littell's *Walking Back the Cat*, or Michael Connelly's *The Poet*... none of which have anything to do with *Doctor Who*, but all of which are in the same price range as Worldwide's offerings. And then I read the reviews of WAR OF THE DALEKS, and noticed the recurring formula of Doctor / BBC copyright monster, and decided that I could probably live without the BBC Books range on my shelves for now.

My two videos were THE AWAKENING / FRONTIOS, and THE WAR MACHINES. The first, because of the excellent *In-Vision* issue on it, and the second... well, because this really can be described as a 'quiet triumph'. Fascinating, extensive sleeve notes, stylish presentation and the frisson of seeing something new. If, as a relatively dedicated fan, a sometime convention goer, proud owner of every Marvel magazine from its Fantastic First Issue, an op. cit. in LICENCE DENIED, (page 40... I think)... if I'm not being titillated and parlaved into parting with my moolah for all this stuff, then who is?

I can't believe that it's Jo(e) Public. Without the free advertising and publicity of free-to-air transmission, the *Doctor Who* merchandise fran-



chise is surely, firmly in the fan-only ghetto. It just isn't crossing over the way that *Trek*, *X-Files* and *The Simpsons* are doing.

This is not a bad thing, as such; it's wonderful to be in a minority that is being catered for to some degree. I'm also a fan of Dar Williams, a young American singer/songwriter whose most recent album has not been given a UK release because, in the minority market for unclassifiable contemporary folk, only a 'name' such as Joan Baez can be marketed.

And it's also wonderful that the engine for a lot of this product is the fans - fan creativity has given us *GHOST LIGHT*, *HUMAN NATURE* and some of the best, most thoughtful issues of *DWM* in recent memory. And there are some upcoming attractions in the BBC line-up - I'm definitely going to get hold of *CATASTROPHEA*, *LAST MAN RUNNING* and *THE ICE WARRIORS* in 1998.

BUT... I still want to know why the franchise is being sustained by such average product as the *BOOK OF LISTS*. Surely, given *Who's* extensive presence on the Net, there are some fascinating multimedia opportunities to realise. Why can't we have those pristine audio copies of *THE MASSACRE* or *THE CRUSADE*? Indeed, let's have annual, original, BBC Radio Collection adventures! (Of course, the last time that idea was mooted somebody at the Beeb misheard the collective shout from fandom of "Yes! Lets!!" ... with hilarious consequences.)

There are probably sound budgetary reasons for none of that to happen. The attitude seems to be that it's enough to keep the franchise ticking over with books (because Virgin developed the readership) and audiotapes (because it seems to work for *Trek* & *X-Files*) and videos. But what happens, in six years time or so, when the videos have run out?

You can bet that in six years time Fox will still be reaping the benefits of their *Simpsons* and *X-Files* brands. And that CIC/Paramount will be packaging *Next Gen* episodes with remastered CGI, five episodes to a tape...

The *Who* franchise has the potential to survive past its fortieth birthday as a generator of revenue for the BBC. It just requires a bit more imagination, a little bit more exploration of the market. And if that means I use all of my disposable income buying BBC Worldwide's *Who* merchandise in 2004, then that really will be a quiet triumph worth shouting about.

July 1998 Only in Theatres

One of the most cherished statistics associated with *Doctor Who* concerns the hundred plus countries that, at one time or another, bought the series for transmission. By the mid-70s *Who*

could be described in that 90s phrase, so beloved of the Corporation these days, as a Global Brand.

By this I mean that the series, as marketable property, had a proven track record in international sales. As early as season two, the programme makers were leaving edit points in episodes so that advertisements could be inserted by overseas television companies. The seemingly - at least up to 1984 - immutable running time of 25 minutes becomes a convenient scheduling block of half an hour when commercials are added.

What became of this international reputation? For the BBC at least, it never dissipated. The recent non-announcement of a BBC film at Cannes provides insight into the way the Corporation views *Who*. Like the Teletubbies, wildlife documentaries and Noddy, *Who's* future is seen in terms of Global Brand Development. And, sadly, this is the trap the programme, rather than the concept of *Who*, is caught in.

Why does it have to be a film for cinema release? Timing is one answer. In August cinema marquees are going to resemble the Cult TV bookshelves in Waterstones, as *The X-Files*, *Lost in Space* and *The Avengers* reach the big screen. We have Stanley Kubrick's endless shoot for *Eyes Wide Shut* with Tom Cruise to thank for sparing audiences *Mission Impossible II*. 1999, though, will give us *Star Trek IX*, with *The Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* on course for the year 2000. (The casting of Jim Carrey in this picture is as good a guarantee that a film of this particular series will finally be made.) And we shouldn't forget the prequel to the film that supposedly first led to the long slow death of *Who* - *Star Wars: Episode One*.

Any *Who* film on the scale of the movies I've listed above would have to be co-financed by a major studio. To protect their investment, any possible TV production would have to take place after a movie had been made.

The potential ancillary profits, should the film do well, are far in excess of anything that can be generated by, say, a 90 minute pilot for an American TV network. The BBC, by embracing the digital age of multi-channel TV so zealously, needs those profits.

Perhaps it's for the best. The days when the nation cowered behind the sofa at anything on a TV screen seem long past. The Daleks are part of our collective television consciousness - our 'mediaspHERE' - thanks to a monopoly of broadcast entertainment that no longer exists. I would far rather the Doctor return in a form that can be accessible to the greatest number of people possible. UK Gold, Sunday morning; WH Smith, every two months or so, or Screen One of the 300 or so multiplexes in the UK. I know where I would rather be experiencing new *Doctor Who* for the millennium.

See page 47 for Paul's views at the end of the year.

Paul Magrs

Does It Show?

and

Could It Be Magic?

THE NAME OF PAUL MAGRS may be familiar to many readers from his BBC Books *Doctor Who* novel, *The Scarlet Empress*. Many will also know that he is an accomplished non-genre novelist. I've so far read two of his novels.

In *Does It Show?* Magrs tells the story of Liz and her daughter Penny, who move to a council estate in Newton Aycliffe in County Durham - not far from where the editor of this publication has relatives. There Penny befriends a young schoolteacher called Vince, while Liz, to the amusement of the other women, encourages the advances of a local bus driver, who isn't at all perturbed when... but that would be telling.

Could It Be Magic? takes as its lead character Andy, sometime boyfriend of Vince, who after a sexual encounter with another gay Aycliffe finds himself pregnant. Both books play with perceptions of gender and sexuality, sometimes to disturbing effect, and display a genuine understanding of North-East ex-working class culture. The drama is played out against a matter-of-fact background that nevertheless includes magical elements, represented by Penny's reality-bending powers, which manifest themselves most extremely in the delivery of Jep, the leopard-human hybrid son of Andy. There are one or two nods to a *Doctor Who* childhood - Andy, for example, has a shelf-full of novelizations by Mr Terrance Dicks. A club Andy goes to in Edinburgh is called The Scarlet Empress, and he has an elderly relative called Iris who probably overlaps in Magrs's imagination with Iris Wildthyme, the Doctor's old flame from his *Who* novel.

Does It Show? is available in Vintage paperback; *Could It Be Magic?* in Chatto and Windus trade paperback. If Magrs is a representative of the magic realist tradition, then he is a very effective one. Some of his middle-aged women may occasionally seem like men in drag, but both novels ultimately convince.

ON THE SUBJECT of gay-themed literature, I've also been enjoying Alison Bechdel's collected cartoons in the 'Dykes to Watch Out For' series. I gather that they are published in several LGB newspapers but I've come across them in book form, published by the US firm Firebird. The latest is *Split Level Dykes to Watch Out For*, and it is available from London women's bookshop Silver Moon and presumably similar outlets. Bechdel's viewpoint on the world is genuinely enlightening for this man and also very amusing. Seek out, read and laugh.



Sixth Sense



The Twin Dilemma

THE TWIN DILEMMA was conceived and produced at the height of the programme's self-congratulatory era; *Doctor Who* believed itself to be an immortal and venerable institution which would and should run forever, lauded by an international fan base. The loudest fan critics, who believed the original Doctor to have been a semi-malicious figure in the background most of the time, seemed to have the ear of the production office. In depicting the sixth Doctor as an inhuman sociopath within the context of John Nathan-Turner's 'action-drama' ethos the production team bit off more than they could chew. It is difficult to believe in Peri as aide to the Doctor after he attempts to kill her; most viewers would have fled into the depths of the Tardis.

As his producership continued into the mid-1980s John Nathan-Turner's 'new blood' policy too often meant that he employed writers and directors of the previous generation who had not worked on *Doctor Who* because it wasn't in their line. Anthony Steven's writing appears dated. Depicting the twins as girls would have been topical in the light of the contemporary publicity given to Ruth Lawrence, but timidity won out. The Sylvester twins have an archaic rather than a futuristic lifestyle, comparing Azmael's appearance to that of a conjuror at the theatre; the reference would have been more at home in *Fanny by Gaslight* or *The Forsyte Saga*. THE TWIN DILEMMA is not irredeemable - perhaps Nathan-Turner and Saward should have played to Anthony Steven's strengths and introduced the twins in Victorian London, tutored in mathematics beyond the knowledge of their era.

Hugo Lang is also an old-fashioned character; he is used to satirise the police but the depiction seems wide of the mark, more appropriate somehow to the age of *Fabian of Scotland Yard*. Fabian, of course, is the name of Hugo's senior officer in the unconvincing police HQ - a waste of money in building the set, writing the dialogue and hiring the performer.

Colin Baker's zeal for the part is evident, despite the shabby way the script treats him. Sadly he is overshadowed far too often by Maurice Denham's excellent world-weary performance as Azmael, a figure imbued with far more credibility than the misconceived sixth Doctor.

THIS undeath

John Wilson

You could be forgiven for feeling less than enthusiastic, as I did, on hearing that Channel 4's first excursion into home-grown telefantasy in some considerable while, *Ultraviolet*, would be about... vampires. It's a genre that has been mined to the end of the seam, hunted to extinction, and polished to perfection many times before. Yet still there are regular fresh bites at the apple (two big budget films on the subject, *Blade* and *John Carpenter's Vampires*, are here or on the way). What could C4 do with the genre that would be novel?

As with that other great Victorian horror creation, *Frankenstein*, there are perhaps two ways to tackle the subject: you can either play up the Victorian Gothic imagery for all it's worth, as was done in the Anne Rice novels and Neil Jordan's film of *Interview with the Vampire*, as well as Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, or, you can strip them of all the mythical pseudo-historic Central European baggage and present them in a wholly rational light, with credible scientific justifications for the vampires' supernatural powers. In both approaches you can choose which elements of the collective über-myth to keep and which to discard, depending on your own particular preferences and the demands of plot and (more pressingly) budget. Sunlight being fatal is pretty much a given, but as for holy water, running water, crucifixes, and stakes; well, you've got some leeway.

It is the latter, consciously rationalist, approach that writer-director Joe Ahearne takes in *Ultraviolet*. Set in modern-day London, the series' hero is Michael (Jack Davenport), a cop whose partner Jack, played by Stephen Moyer, disappears on the night before his wedding. Yes, he's joined the Walking Undead, and soon he is under investigation by a very strange bunch of people who claim they are cops (but clearly aren't) and seem to be taking their orders from somewhere very near the top... These 'cops' are armed with guns that fire carbon graphite bullets and have little LCD TV screens attached. In *Ultraviolet*, the vampires' legendary invisibility in mirrors is extrapolated to their being invisible to any electronic recording device; so they can't be heard on the phone, can't be picked up on CCTV systems or X-ray machines, and don't appear on TV (although thankfully there are no post-modern complications, with the programme's own cameras being able to pick up the vampires very well, thank you). Hence the guns with the LCD cameras: if you can see something that doesn't show up on the screen, than shoot it! They also have tear-gas grenades made from garlic (a nice touch), although holy water is not effective. Personal faith, though, is also abhorrent to *Ultraviolet's* undead.

A further little nicely is that the vampires are never referred to as such, but are given the name 'Code Five' (think of the Roman numeral). Such is the way in which the programme reorders the elements of the myth to suit its own agenda. But this is not a particularly difficult thing to do. What is difficult is to create your own version of a myth in order to tell a story, and then play that version down, instead of concentrating on it as your main selling point, and place the burden of the

story where it should rest naturally, upon the shoulders of character, plot and (in TV drama) direction. In this I think that *Ultraviolet* succeeds admirably. (I could contrast the same channel's recent drama *Killer Net*, written by Lynda La Plante, which overplayed the contribution the Internet made to the plot.) I can't think of another British telefantasy serial this decade that matches *Ultraviolet* in terms of storytelling. In deliberate contrast to SF and fantasy film, in telefantasy understatement is everything. This isn't so much a question of budget (computer-generated SFX these days are affordable enough, as *Babylon 5* has shown), nor even a question of the size of screen or sound quality (TV sets are ever larger and more complex); it is a question of context. In the cinema, the screen subsumes all attention; but at home the TV screen's ability to convince or connect, especially when dealing with the fantastic, is affected by its familiar surroundings. So, writing (arguably), dialogue and acting are more important to the TV drama in general, and telefantasy in particular.

Ultraviolet's script is razor-sharp, only vary rarely are we told anything more times than we need to hear it, which in most cases means more than once. There is a good deal of refreshingly black humour, which may be too morbid for some, but then the best black humour always is. I particularly liked the plotline of the third episode, 'Sub Judice', where a mortal woman whose vampire hybrid foetus is unwittingly aborted by the faith of a pro-life campaigner, and the fourth episode's paedophile, exploited by a vampire child who will never grow up. The series properly updates the myth, replacing Stoker's Victorian concerns with the late twentieth-century fears of AIDS, BSE, paedophilia and cancer, and concluding with the ultimate, the inescapable threat of our century: nuclear holocaust. The extremity of their situation does not obscure the characters' humanity, and although they at first seem cold and remote, by the conclusion we care for these people, and can understand their aloofness. Ahearne takes care to explore the morality of their mission: is it right to seek to exterminate the 'Code Fives', rather than to try to make some sort of accommodation with them? This dilemma is kept alive well after the credits of the last episode have rolled, and will no doubt be further explored in the second series, which I believe has already been commissioned.

I recommend *Ultraviolet*. It took courage for Joe Ahearne to move from the successful *This Life* to a genre series, and Tony Garnett and World Productions deserve credit for backing him and producing a programme that is better and, despite my initial misgivings, much more inventive than BBC2's soap. It cheats in only one way: when vampire Jack is reincarnated from a reddish-brown powder at the end of the final episode, 'In Nomine Patris', his clothes are mysteriously recreated as well. Have they become, in some way, vampire clothes? No matter. I'm looking forward to the second series already, and until then, C4, World and Joe Ahearne in particular, fangs for the memory...

Terminate! Terminate!

An account of Manic Street Preachers fandom by one who (in the grand tradition of fandom) 'wuz there.'

— *Clair Nightingale* —

Authorial disclaimer: I was requested by the editor to write this specific article. Any irrelevance to *Doctor Who* and other telefantasy which it may display is therefore entirely his fault!

"This is the last tour I'm ever following." – a Manics fan 1992

"I'm never going to follow a whole tour again." – another Manics fan 1994.

"There's just no point in going to Norwich and Leicester if it's going to be like this." – a third Manics fan, 1996.

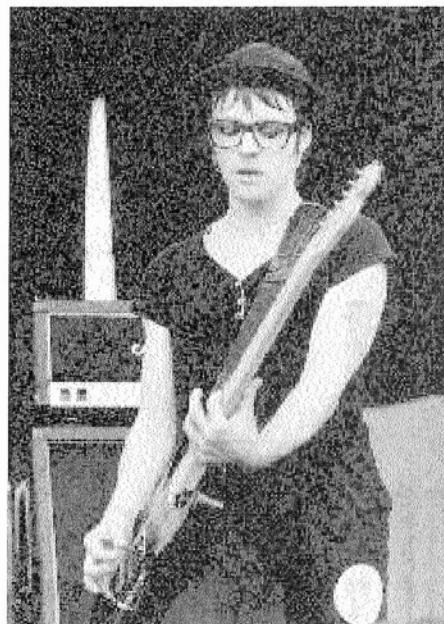
"Weirdos." – a Manic member on the Manics fans, 1997.

The Manics have a song called 'Stay Beautiful'. It's an essential part of their live set. At one point the lyrics go 'Why don't you just [loud guitar bit]'. Over the guitar bit, the audience shouts 'FUCK OFF!' in tones of gleeful adulation.

In the early days of the band, this didn't happen. Most of the audience either stared stonily, repeatedly yelled 'Fuck off' for real, or occasionally threw bottles. Only a small section of the crowd – the fanbase – knew the moves. Like most (sub)cult(ure)s, Manics fandom started as a small, fanatical group of people who Understood, and used that shared experience to define themselves against a hostile universe.

The really wonderful thing about it was, it consisted almost entirely of teenage girls. OK, so does Boyzone's fanbase. But Boyzone don't bomb their record sleeves with quotes from writers from Philip Larkin to Nik Cohn, wear dresses onstage, urge their audience to get a good education and say things like 'we are the suicide of the non-generation'. When asked by the indie-boy music press, they said they were 'honoured' that many of their fans were teenage girls.

And would you know it, at first they actually *were* honoured. They replied to letters. After gigs they engaged in long discussions with us about anything and everything from Irish politics to whether cats are better than dogs. I once



Richey Edwards on stage in 1994

wrote a little satirical verse about their touring arrangements: it was included in the tour itinerary and according to the tour manager the band laughed their heads off, something which I wished I'd seen. They actually thought their fans were human.

Compare, then, the two competitors for my affections. Number One: boys at school, spotty, several years behind the girls in social development and utterly opposed to anything more intellectual than football in case it interfered with

their cool (of course, there were a few boys who weren't like this, but not very many... I think they were all at home watching *Doctor Who*). Number Two: men in eyeliner and frilly shirts who talked about Camus and Plath, wrote lyrics that stood up to literary analysis and repeatedly asserted that women were the superior gender. Not much of a battle.

Year Zero for the Manics was 1990, when they released their first real single and began their assault on the press, which resulted in a series of music press covers in 1991. As you might expect, if as many people really were into the Manics in '91 as now claim to be, 'Stay Beautiful' would have shot straight to Number One. In fact it peaked at the somewhat tepid Number 40. Manics fandom as such didn't really exist at that time. There were people like me, getting into it in their bedroom, and a small group of devoted fans who went from gig to gig. It is a little-known but amusing fact that Shampoo, this decade's Big-in-Japan pop phenomenon, were among the first members of the Manics fanbase, and they produced the band's first fanzine, *Last Exit*, from 1991-92.

In 1991, Manics fans, like the band, wore leopardprint fur coats, white jeans, t-shirts with sprayed-on slogans, and several tons of eyeliner. This image has stuck as most people's favourite period of the band's history. It was certainly the most glamourous. The legendary '1991' didn't seem as romantic at the time as it has since been made out to be, as (like most golden eras) it just sorta happened. It's a lot easier to package and label a time in retrospect than it is when you're in the middle of it. Still, there's no denying it was something special.

The fanzine circuit grew gradually and exploded in around 1994. Titles were usually taken from Manics' lyrics - *Last Exit*, *Methadone Pretty*, *Assassinated Beauty*, *4 REAL* are some typical examples. There were also what became known as rantzines, like *No Future* and *Cultural Apocalypse*, which grew out of the Manics fanbase but were devoted to politics and culture rather than the band itself. *Cultural Apocalypse* celebrates its fifth birthday this year, and is the longest-running Manics-affiliated zine, though the editor now expresses extreme reservations about the Manics. On occasion she curses them at some length.

To start with the usual format for zines was



*The lager and mascara look:
Richey in 1991*

live reviews, lyrics, fans' poetry, satirical pieces and occasional academic discussions on lyrical content. As the years went by and the fanbase grew, 'how I met the band', astrological and fantasy pieces started appearing, marking a gradual change from a gig-going to a bedroom-worship culture.

You can probably tell I didn't approve of this development. Those of us who had met the band for more than a 'wot you're my hero, will you sign this' five seconds were all too aware of their shortcomings. We revered them in spite of their failings. Reading awed accounts of how Richey is the god of purity and integrity when you've just come back from a gig where he slashed his chest open on stage, got blind drunk in the bar and then attempted to have his way with a member of your party does not incline you to be sympathetic towards wide-eyed New Fans (© the music press), however much they may argue that they have as much of a right to be fans as you do.

Over time, a palpable difference grew up between two groups, who for convenience I will call 'touring' and 'bedroom'

fans. Bedroom fans, who started appearing in numbers in 1993 sometimes attended gigs and went down the front, but too often they did everything with an expression of awe on their faces. They went to their local gig and went straight home after it, or possibly hung around the backstage door for an autograph. They were/ are distinct from fans who just don't happen to go to gigs very often. I myself didn't start touring in earnest until 1993, but I don't recall ever displaying the disturbing passivity of 'bedroom' fandom. The point of the Manics was that they inspired you to write your own poems, form your own bands, etc and they provided a forum for likeminded people to meet through fanzines or at gigs. We loved them, often with an unhealthy violence, but we never took them for popes. The first rot set in when more and more fans began to assume the band's infallibility. The notorious 'Old Manics Fans vs New Manics Fans' music press war is a simplification of a more complex divide between fans who are prepared to question their heroes and those who adoringly accept their every fart. In general, I have found that the former correspond with the older fans, the latter with the newer, but this is by no means a concrete rule.

The real fanatical, possibly 'scarily obsessed' (to quote another of our number) but definitely self-reliant hardcore was always the touring fans. We lived for the next gig. The group had no distinct boundaries, you could just be sure that at any Manics gig in Britain at least two-thirds of a certain set of familiar faces would be there. Many of us were still in school, not to mention being broke: if it hadn't been for this I would've gone to every gig they played in 1993 and 1994.

There were individuals, like me, and a few well-known gangs. I was a kind of associate member of the 'Irish girls', a bunch of, logically enough, girls, who were, less logically, not all Irish. Of all the fans around them, for some reason the band and senior road crew decided they liked the Irish girls best, and they helped us out by letting us sleep in their spare hotel rooms and arranging for some of us to work on the t-shirt stand. Of course the upshot of this was that all the other fans hated us and rumours abounded that we were shagging the band, the tour manager, the road crew and very probably the tour bus, but that was only to be expected. Tensions ran high on the full-length tours. Bitching rose to an exquisite art form.

One of the many things neglected by those who perceive the female music fan as a giggling violet is the fact that to follow a tour you have to be both tough and extremely well organised. Unless you get lucky with someone's floor, your best option is to scour the town for the cheapest and grimmest B&B in the place – and that's if, after paying for train fares round the country, your grant, dole or pocket money extends to accommodation at all. Otherwise it's the bus station for you. Some bus stations are OK. Birmingham Digbeth has a wonderful ladies' toilet where you can spend most of the night. Leicester has a disabled loo which smells, but you can barricade yourself in there if you get any hassle. Other places aren't so good. My willingness to spend the night on the streets of Cardiff can only be taken as testimony to the unmissable brilliance of the Manics in 1994. And added to the physical difficulties of touring, there are the emotional strains. Violent rivalry broke out among touring fans as often as Manic-inspired bonding. Manics fandom was a resting place for misfits, and quite a few of our number had problems such as eating disorders or bad home lives. Some of the things which happened in 1994 were enough to send some of the people I knew over the edge into temporary collapse. Occasional self-mutilation was scrupu-

lously hidden from the band by the perpetrators, who didn't want to be thought of as Richey imitators. If someone collapsed into tears or hysterics because her bag had been stolen, or she'd been rejected by one of the band or her gang, or simply because of tour fatigue (lack of sleep, food and emotional stability, and excess of moshpit bruises, catfights and drunk-dodging) she was immediately carried off by her friends so as not to inconvenience the band. This is the one thing I regret most. If I were to have that time again, I would march up to certain individuals and give them a piece of my mind on the subject of fans being people too. But we were all so afraid that if we made even a small nuisance of ourselves we'd never be allowed backstage again.

The nub of it, and the central attraction when it came down to it, was that you were certain of your mission in life – to get to the next gig. Occasionally you had the scary sensation of things being out of control. In fact, I spent much of 1994 swearing that this was too much, I was going to get out if I possibly could. Ha. Ha. Ha. Make no mistake, being a touring Manics fan was horrible. But the rest of life was and still to an extent is a bland dream by comparison. Love, death and passion don't even come close.

How did everything come to go so horribly, intensely wrong with our little scene? By 1994, the wonderful band I have been eulogising above was undergoing some dubious changes. That year they released their masterpiece, *The Holy Bible*, a record which is unmatched in rock music for its combination of bleak elegance and intellectual rigour. The side effect of this, as is so often the case with 'great art', is that the chief lyricist went mad and the whole band became miserable bastards. By 'mad' I mean that the depression, anorexia, self-mutilation and alcoholism which Richey had so far managed to keep more or less under his control finally got the better of him. He spent the summer of 1994 in a psychiatric hospital. They toured a few months before this event, and shortly after. Some of us fans knew more than others, but none of us knew very much. Our love for the Manics was already dangerously intense and the conditions of touring not conducive to peace. The concern which permeated everyone in the touring entourage, from the band – all four of whom had been friends since primary school – to us lot, could only make things worse.

On top of that, the rest of the band decided that Richey should be kept away from us girlie fans in case we

Well, what sort of Manic Street Preachers retrospective would it be without this picture?



were a bad influence on him. They knew that some of us were anorexic or had suffered from depression, so in their fear for their friend they imagined that we would somehow encourage him in his downward spiral. All that we picked up was that the band didn't want us around any more, and it made for a pretty unpleasant atmosphere. Especially when, after all the cotton-wool-swaddling of Richey to protect him from us, he began picking out the more adoring and therefore more vulnerable of us to use as groupies.

Somehow in 1994 Richey became defined by his problems, and this is how, largely thanks to the media, fans who got into the band at a later stage are always likely to see him. He disappeared from the band's hotel on February 1st 1995, leaving no trace. At the last gigs they played, in December 1994, he'd looked totally vacant. I was in the front row on Richey's side at their last gig and will always remember him at the very end of the gig, standing staring out into space, striking himself repeatedly on the forehead with half a broken guitar.

A poignant moment, I suppose, and a good fan credential for me to have. Only, truth be told, I did not spend that moment thinking 'Oh my angst hero, I love you'. I thought 'That thing looks loose. If it goes flying and clobbers me, I'm going to sue you for every penny you're worth, you mad bastard.'

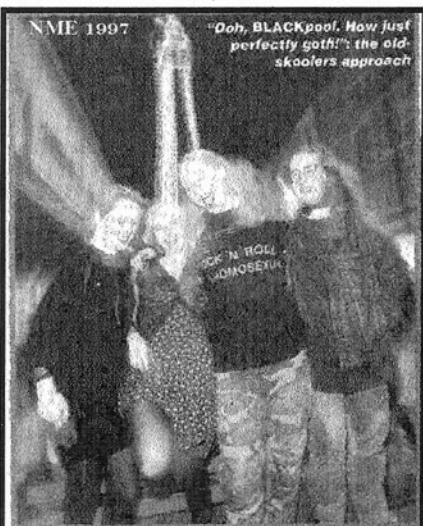
Not until he disappeared and became a myth did Richey finally stop being *Richey*, the cute, hyperintelligent one with the Camus fixation and the innovative use for razorblades. The man as we knew him and the media creation have very little in common.

The emotions produced by Richey's disappearance would not make nice reading. A brief list: feeling of utter suspension, being stuck in a nightmare with no end, not wanting to eat or sleep or move until he came back because he would be back soon, he would, and only that could break the dreadful spell. Moving swiftly onwards, we come to... oh well, we come to the even worse bit. The grief itself wasn't as bad as the contempt which was meted out to us for feeling that way. In the music press the fans were variously accused of driving Richey to distraction by happening to share the same problems as him (anorexia and self-

mutilation are overwhelmingly female problems), deliberately having problems in order to imitate Richey and thus insulting his suffering, not understanding the depth of his pain (him being an artist and us being gillies) and finally of creating the stereotype of Richey-as-angst-god which the press themselves were so busily embroidering. The letters pages of *NME* and *Melody Maker* were inundated with Richey-related letters of all kinds and some younger Manics fans, seeing in this a chance to prove the trueness of their fandom and not really understanding what was at stake, took the opportunity to put on overblown displays of lamentation. Of course these were the letters which got the music press' attention, and the stereotype of the Manics fan – forearm adorned with carved-in slogans, devoted to Richey, God of Suffering and dieting on an apple a day – reached its zenith. To admit to being a Manics fan was to have all this instantly dumped on your head. Rest assured, O telefantasy fan beleaguered by cries of 'nerd!', Manics fans had it even worse. Not surprisingly, I scrupulously concealed my distress from people in my everyday life, only letting it out in the long, inter-fan letters characteristic of our scene.

At some time during the above, a picture of the Manics as they are now has probably floated across your mind, and you may have doubted whether the doe-eyed rebels I am talking about can possibly be one and the same with the Fred Perry-clad chuggers of 'A Design for Life' or 'If You Tolerate This Your Children Will be Next', which is a windmill masquerading as a giant if ever there was one. The blinkered determination of the Manics' current belief that they are an oppressed minority would be touching if it weren't so offensive, coming as it does from a bunch of white male millionaires.

During 1996-7, the era of the *Everything Must Go* album, received wisdom was that the new-look Manics, who reformed as a threesome when at the end of 1995 it became clear Richey wasn't coming back, are better than the previous version. Granted *Everything Must Go* had a couple of whistleable tunes, so perhaps it's no wonder casual listeners prefer it.. But it was also more pompous, less intelligent, more self-indulgent, less challenging and utterly inferior on every level except that of vague



niceness. Imagine if the TARDIS was replaced by an IKEA wardrobe. It might be prettier and easier for a contemporary audience to relate to, but would you call it an improvement? Much as it pained me to slowly realise, the post-Richey Manics are arrogant, flabby-minded, and self-pitying. The loss of a loved one can either force you to grow, or diminish you, and the latter (in spite of press sycophancy) seems to be what has happened to the Manics. Now, when they deign to have contact with the fans at all, they treat us with condescension or open contempt. As a result, very few of their old fans have hung around to be insulted, and the Manics have ended up with the kind of slightly dippy, undemanding and adoring fanbase who they seem to want. Presumably the attraction is that dim and docile followers confirm the band's prejudices and allow them to feel superior. They now devote a great deal of time to making it clear that Richey is their property and no-one else has a right to talk about him or miss him. Galloping guilt, anybody?! The saddest thing of all is the emperor's new clothes state of their music. A recent comment by the journalist Caitlin Moran on the subject of 'Tolerate' hit the nail on the head: '[it has] no power save that of repetition'. This band who once declared their intent to unite The Clash and Joy Division and up the glamour content have been reduced – or, and this is the crunch, *reduced themselves* – to believing that 'ah ah ah ah ah, aah-aah-aah' (the repeated closing refrain of 'Tolerate') is a statement of great emotional and political depth. Weep.

Manics fandom still exists, in fact physically it's thriving and larger than ever. Now though, the fanzines are all full of wide-eyed 'the day I touched James' shirt' type accounts. Satire exists, but in very diluted form. The essential fact, that the Manics should be questioned and perhaps even criticised, has apparently vanished from fan consciousness. I once loved them precisely because they stood against everything which both they and their fans now represent.

On the occasions I find myself mentioning



to new fans that I've met the band there is a flurry of excitement. If I go on to explain that I don't mean just in a signing queue, that I'd been at the band's hotel on several occasions, talked to them at length and seen them in various compromising situations, (it is not a part of Our Gentleman of Angst's mythology that he was fond of the occasional joint...) eyes widen and I am begged to Tell All. So I do, and it's not what they want to hear. The new fans look disappointed. The last one even said she was 'crushed' by my account of the serial and sometimes underage groupie sex which went on for years but has been so perfectly expunged from the Richey myth. At such times I am the Ancient Manic, Destroyer of Innocence, and I feel rather silly. Better to stay away from Manics fandom altogether, but I can't help going back again and again in the deluded hope that one day some of the old fire will show through in either band or fans. If there were some better alternative I'd take it, but the music scene is peculiarly flat at the moment. Even bloody Kenicke have split up, leaving the Manics, Embrace and their bilgy ilk to lumber unchecked across the airwaves.

When I needed money for my MA course fees I sold my desultory collection of setlists, photos and laminates to a lunatic who gave me over £350 and seemed to think she'd got a bargain. If I'd known this was going to happen, I told another old fan. 'I'd've followed Richey round the hotel picking up his nail clippings!'

I will always be a Manics fan, but on my own terms. The scenes of my fandom are concert halls, backstage corridors, B&Bs and bus stations up and down the nation. Richey is the person who taught me how to be cynical, possibly the greatest gift anyone's ever given me. The stereotypes, of saintly, suffering Richey and his sheep-like girlie army can go their own way, and the bloated cod-political pap of the current scene can go up its own arse (something it is doing very well). For what it's worth, I woz there, and the rest is speculation.

Three Grey Men in a Formless Void? The Manics, 1996 on..



CHAIN REACTION

JOHN CONNORS

Thirty-odd years of Doctor Who fandom dissected, from someone who's lived through much of its turbulent history.

AT THE BEST OF TIMES the relationship between a fan and the object of their fandom is a tricky business. For example, when does a loyal fan cross the line and become an obsessive one or even a stalker? With *Doctor Who* things are no different except that instead of a film star or a pop star the 'idol' is an ongoing television show, something that changes staff and stars. For these people who helm or appear in the series, life is never quite the same again. Consider: you're a reasonably successful actor who's appeared in countless TV series as well as films and plays. Most of these roles are forgotten whatever the quality of the performance yet the time you played the Chief Zobbin in episode 6 of 'Terror of the Zobblins' is etched forever in your memory because every month you receive at least one letter about it. Temptingly you're invited to conventions where your 20 minute stint in green rubber is the currency of stardom; people want to talk to you about it, they want your autograph, they want... everything, really. Being a part of *Doctor Who* (and I suspect this is true of other telefantasy shows) is for life, a thing that can unnerve some actors (like Paul McGann?). Yet this is the key to understanding the programme's fandom which is all about ownership whether it's tangible things such as books, action figures or Styggiom Soap-On-A-Rope to the wider agenda of the programme itself.

In order to see how we got here it's necessary to go back to the start. *Doctor Who* fandom began like any other with a fan club that people paid an annual subscription to join, for which they received a monthly newsletter and, er, that's all really. One person ran this club and because it was officially recognised by the BBC, it was they who paid the costs of mailing out the newsletter; all very cosy and of course any fan criticism was of the mildest nature. Most fandoms never progress further, but by the mid 70s *Doctor Who* was so popular (and the fan club stalling) that a college based *Doctor Who* Appreciation Society decided to expand and become a nationwide one. It's at this point that fandom began to grow into an altogether different beast. In a now infamous review, the DWAS' president Jan Vincent-Rudzki slammed *THE DEADLY ASSASSIN* for wrecking the mythos of the Time Lords by showing them as fussy politicians prone to backache. Nowadays the story is recognised as a master-stroke, lifting the curtain from the facade of

mighty civilisation and showing its decadent core, but that review set in motion fandom's knee jerk response to new stories that was to continue for a long time afterwards. Fans thought they knew better than the production team who, lest we forget, were Philip Hinchcliffe and Robert Holmes at this point. The precedent stuck so we subsequently had the Graham Williams era dismissed as "silly and pantomimesque", while John Nathan-Turner was, at first "the fans producer", then there were even campaigns to get him sacked. In tandem with this, we were told the first three Doctors were the best while *TOMB OF THE CYBERMEN* and *THE DAEMONS* were the top stories of all. There's nothing inherently wrong with fandom reaching its own conclusions about the series and while both Hinchcliffe and Williams took note of these opinions they did not let them affect the product itself; indeed Williams once noted that the stories which went down best with the general viewing public were often those which ended up at the foot of the DWAS's annual season polls. This really does show up the difference; not only did some fans feel they knew better than the producer, they also felt they knew better than the public - 10 million people could be wrong! As someone who loved the Williams era stories and felt that the Hinchcliffe ones were superior to most of the Pertwees, this fan lore sat uneasily with me and may well have been the reason why I started writing letters to DWAS's zine *Tardis* stating the contrary view. In those days this was OK to do; it was during the tumultuous 80s that expressing a view opposed to 'what fandom thought' was seen as being the sign of not being a true fan of the series.

John Nathan-Turner produced the show for a decade and thus it's reasonable to assume he presided over a fair number of clunkers as well as classics but the producer/fan relationship became very muddled during this period partly because some fans who felt themselves to be as much keepers of the flame as the producer, began to infiltrate the programme for the first time. A review in a fanzine, however corrosive or influential the views expressed, is not going to find it's way to more than about 0.05% of the audience. A fan working as an unofficial adviser and a producer who goes out of his way to give fans more of what they think they want (which he did despite recent denials) is another matter. I say "think" because for all the flak JNT would later get for his style of *Doctor Who*, many of the fan

pleasing elements he included were directly drawn from things fans had been calling for while vilifying Williams' output. Nathan-Turner must have been shellshocked when all of a sudden fans decided they didn't like his version of the show; after all at the 1982 Panopticon he'd been presented with a special award. As for Ian Levine, were his outspoken attacks on the producer simply based on the guilt he felt at having helped convey fandom's earlier wishlist in his post as unofficial advisor?

It's important to mention here that there is no right or wrong way to make *Doctor Who* even though we all have our ideas about what we'd like to see. Nostalgia plays a significant role in our perception of what is 'good' about the series - talk to any fan about how they'd like the show to return now and they'll cite the 'traditional values' that made it great which will almost always correspond with when they first grew to love the series; whether in the 60s, early/mid 70s, the Davison era or, increasingly, those who were only old enough to tune into the McCoy seasons. Also, the vocabulary of fandom's criticism is limited; all the behind the scenes insights in the world have made successive generations think they know how to make a TV programme but often fan reviews praise and criticise all the wrong things; I'm as guilty as anyone of citing, say, great direction when what I probably mean is cinematography or camera work or acting.

Fandom became more and more proprietorial about *Doctor Who* and this reached a peak during the 'cancellation crisis' of 1985/6 when the series was rested for 18 months, a decision that saw fans spend all their ammunition, with the result that when the programme was actually cancelled for good the BBC were able to second guess the reaction and killed *Doctor Who* as slowly and quietly as they could. While I don't agree with those who claim the 18 month gap was the fault of fandom (the programme was in a ratings slump and the BBC needed to divert money to the launch of its new daytime schedule) it would be true to say that the undue fan influence earlier in the 80s had helped change the producer's perception of what was right for the show at that time. I would say though that fan reaction may have helped stop the 18 month gap getting wider which, after the misfire of the *TRIAL* season did give us the popular McCoy years. The cancellation crisis divided fandom, after an initial show of solidarity into pro-

and anti-JNT factions and led to ugly and abusive tirades against the BBC and individuals that did much to shore up the public and press view of fans as deranged obsessives, an image that 90s fandom has shaken off to some extent if only partly thanks to the 'cool by association' influence of *The X-Files* success.

Since regular *Doctor Who* finished, fandom has swarmed all over its legacy a little like vultures. This may not be a bad thing per se; it's been the plethora of coffee table books, the Virgin/BBC fiction ranges, *Doctor Who Magazine* and a still vibrant fandom that's made *Doctor Who* seem as if it's still going, still vital in the 90s; but old tricks die hard and the reception that met 1996's TV Movie was depressingly familiar for those of us who'd felt fandom had sorted itself out a bit in the interim. Y'see, all those received wisdoms that had been carved in stone in the 70s and 80s by hypercritical fans were usurped as the lack of new episodes allowed a more level headed

generation of fan writers to reassess the canon. Thus nowadays the 60s are not so great even though individual stories are still seen as classics, the Pertwee era has taken a hammering, *GENESIS OF THE DALEKS* and *TALONS OF WENG-CHIANG* are the best ever stories while both the Hinchcliffe and Williams periods are now seen as high points in the series' development even if the latter is still more of an acquired taste. As time goes on we've learnt, too, that the easy way the series could be carved up into neat eras is no longer strictly applicable. Yet when it comes to

the TV Movie the same attitude of old returned as fans once again claimed it wasn't proper *Doctor Who* and, partly because a new series never followed, the byword on it now seems to be that it was neither good nor successful. I'd say the latter isn't true (biggest UK audience since early Davison, biggest US audience yet) and, as for the former; well, it probably wasn't ideal as a pilot, but as a slice of television it was quite superb. The more interesting thing is, though, that fandom has almost always proved itself wrong a decade later, so one suspects the TV Movie (lowly placed in the recent *DWM* poll) will have its renaissance some day.

The other aspect of fandom is its existence as a subculture with its own traditions and prejudices like a microcosm of society. There's a danger of muddled thinking that was brought to the fore by some spurious remarks in Paul Cornell's



book *Licence Denied*. While the world of professional *Doctor Who* writing is now engulfed by people who cut their creative teeth in fandom, and *DWM* has moved closer to fanzine style observations, this book was the first time that hard core fan writing had hit the high street and with it the opportunity to explain what fandom was about. Cornell has proved himself an awesome writer when it comes to emotions and morality but faced with the nature of fandom he misrepresented it to some extent, choosing to say that it was essentially gay in nature. One thing that unites fandom is its relative lack of political and social divide; no ideology or lifestyle dictates its moves and while there are as many personality clashes and petty fan politics, (as opposed to proper politics) as you'd find anywhere, the arguments about the different periods of the series and so on are never that serious. Cornell may know a lot of gay fans but that's not the same thing at all; it's rather like the old myth that most fans were middle class which isn't really true either. Fandom is very much defined by the programme; whether that has a political or social agenda is something else altogether. I wonder how new people weigh up this tangle though; will the next generation who come to *Doctor Who* as a series long ended rather than ongoing, rewrite fan thinking again?

What conclusions can we thus reach about fandom? In a lot of ways the traits its consistently shown do betray a deep love of the series, perhaps an irrational one. Then again, think of football fandom - the emotional highs and lows of a cup final, the endless post match discussion of just what the manager and team should have done, the fanzines, the merchandise. It's essentially the same thing albeit on a larger scale; and soccer fans do get to influence the object of their passion in a way that must have those who campaigned to force the BBC to make the show again seething with jealousy. Plus there must be something worthwhile about anything that inspires such a following.

If *Doctor Who* fandom has proved anything, it's the dangers of too much fan/idol interaction. The very thing that makes us fans is our appreciation, awe maybe, of something distant and packaged and great. Get too close and you can see the glitter peeling off, become involved and you'll lose the wonder that made you a fan in the first place. *Doctor Who* has sometimes sat uneasily in the 90s realm of barriers breaking down; from historic events like the collapse of the Iron Curtain to artistic developments like sampling; the DJ mixers and so on which seek to make music accessible to all, regardless of talent. Maybe *Doctor Who* will only last while there are fans who are prepared to look up to a universe striding yet fallible hero who saves planets mostly. We need *Doctor Who* and it needs us - but keep your distance.



Attack of the Cybermen

ATTACK OF THE CYBERMEN is a riot of potentially good ideas that fail to coalesce. *Doctor Who's* decline into unintentional self-parody is embodied in Peri, whose new 'uniform look' surrenders to the stereotype of the assistant in a way not seen in the series before, except perhaps when Peter Bryant was producer. The constant arguing in the TARDIS, overdressed Doctor and underdressed assistant might have been a deliberate act of self-parody on the part of a production team at least one of whom might have been swayed by *Doctor Who - The Unfolding Text*.

Much has been made of the painted wall flats that make up the sewers in part one but thanks to the lighting I've always found them convincing. It's a pity that the designer didn't have a more successful response to the challenge of the tombs. From reading *IN-VISION's* issue on ATTACK, I suspect that meeting the story's demands may have been beyond the budget of the series all along, never mind the once-mooted Halley's Comet scene - another instance of the producer believing his own propaganda, perhaps.

The Doctor is written inconsistently - Colin Baker performs the part with authority, but his lines and scripted actions are those of an unsophisticated wisecracking thug. The first episode is commendable for trying to intermesh *Doctor Who* trappings with those of crime drama, but the characters of the Doctor and Peri betray this intention; they are gaudy cartoon characters let loose in a sort of junior *Sweeney*, and undermine the 'seriousness' that the script is attempting; a sign, perhaps, of the Pushme-Pullyou entity of Johnnathanturner-Ericsaward that lived in the production office.

One of the more successful aspects of the story is its structuring. This probably benefited from ATTACK's place as the first story of season 22 and from Eric Saward's close involvement with scripting. The two episodes are divided between different scenarios, the Bates-Stratton Telos scenes providing a bridge; one might almost have wished for the reintroduction of individual episode titles.

As for the Cybermen - great prizes sought, few achieved. An epitaph for the serial, really.

POST-MULDER PROMETHEANS

Elspeth Jackson

The X-Files enjoys a thriving internet fan fiction scene, as one who knows tells us at great personal risk. She took the photos too!

"My name is Elspeth, and I write X-Files fan fiction on the Internet."

SOMETIMES IT SEEMS as if, like alcoholism or drug addiction, this is indeed a secret to be ashamed of. Very few people know how I choose to spend my spare time. Those that do know, misunderstand. All fans are sad, of course; Internet users are losers who can't make friends with real people; *The X-Files* stopped being cool sometime at the end of 1996... And so it goes on - images perpetuated endlessly, condescendingly, in the press.

Even those who get beyond such stereotypes still often have a false idea of what the average "X-Phile"

is like. When I was lucky enough to meet a group of fans in Washington DC this May, one thing was clear: these people were *normal*. There were all ages, all backgrounds. No-one dressed in costume, or came in character. No-one seemed the remotest bit confused about what was reality and what was fiction. Most of all, no-one seemed to believe, even the tiniest bit, in UFOs.

With the show now approaching its sixth year, everyone, even those who have never watched it, know what *The X-Files* is about. Two FBI agents, Mulder and Scully, investigate the paranormal, while various sinister government conspiracies attempt to stop them. "Conspiracy" and "paranormal" are the key. Thousands of column inches have been filled with attempts to explain "the *X-Files* phenomenon", focusing, for the most part, on *fin de siècle* insecurities, a need to believe, distrust of government, and the like. We all "want to believe."

Not a word of it is true.

It is a curious thing, but a very large proportion of Internet fans seem to have ignored the show for months, even years, believing that a show about the paranormal would be of no interest to them. Many have stories to tell: stumbling

on an episode by chance when they had nothing better to do; being forced to watch by a friend; seeing a clip on an awards show.

Once they watched, they were hooked.

It was not usually the paranormal that hooked them. Many post-episode discussions on the Internet seem to take it as read that the actual 'X-File' part of the episode is downright implausible, often with plot holes a mile across. Few care. No, what attracted most people was the air of menace, perhaps, and the visual atmosphere. It was the whole fictional world that Chris Carter created. It was, above all, the characters.

A good eighty percent, perhaps, of all Internet discussions are on character issues. A good ninety-five percent of fan fiction is about character issues. The fictional world, with its dark background of conspiracies and unearthly danger that can strike unseen from any dark brooding corner, helps. As for me, I have always loved my heroes dark, striving heroically against the odds in a dangerous world. *The X-Files* was the apotheosis of every

dark heroic quest that has ever inspired my imagination. The paranormal is the setting; the characters are the heart.

It is an issue where the fans and the series' creator seldom see eye to eye. Chris Carter has frequently stated that the show is *not* about the characters, but about the plots. To the fans on the Internet, the opposite is true. It is from this dichotomy that fan fiction, or "fanfic", emerges.

When I first discovered fanfic, I was horrified - a reaction mirrored by a surprising number of fellow writers. I expected to stories that read like the "monster of the week" episodes I was seeing on television - paranormal detective work with minimal character development. However, I found little of that. In all the 10,000 stories that are archived on the Internet, there are probably under a hundred that fit this description. *X-Files*



FBI Headquarters, Washington DC

fan fiction and *X-Files* episodes are very different things.

In fact, it is possible to argue that fans write fiction in response to the flaws of the show. Far from being unquestioningly adoring, fans can be the harshest of critics, and *The X-Files* lays itself open to some pretty harsh criticism. Fans love it dearly, but, like an adoring mother with a naughty child, are driven to distraction by it.

Notoriously, the show does not have a 'character Bible.' Characters' middle names, dates of birth, and addresses have changed between episodes. Dates and times are assigned with a casual disregard for plausibility, and whole alien species are introduced, trumpeted as deeply important, then apparently forgotten. "The truth, the truth... There is no truth. These men just make it up as they go along," said a character in an episode once, and fans the world over laughed knowingly. The 'mythology' - the underlying great conspiracy that is slowly uncovered, piece by piece, throughout the series - is already so full of contradictions that there is no way that it can ever be pulled into a coherent whole.

More vexing still is the lack of proper continuity regarding the characters. Despite the 'mythology', *The X-Files* remains episodic television. Thus, characters suffer deeply in one episode, then apparently have forgotten it all by the following week. Life-changing revelations are never mentioned again, and life goes on as if they had never occurred.

A lot of fanfic, therefore, is written out a desire to fill these gaps. Sometimes it seems as if half the stories written are 'post-episode vignettes', in which the characters think about, or discuss, the events that have occurred, and reach some sort of emotional closure. More ambitious, yet almost as common, are longer, more complex stories, set against the backdrop of the aftermath of a particular episode. For example, I always felt the character development in the early episodes jarring. In the second episode, Mulder and Scully acted as if they barely knew each other, and Scully openly laughed at Mulder's theories; in the third episode, they trusted each other, and she defended his theories to the FBI. To bridge the gap, I created an intervening case, putting them

into situations which forced them to think about and develop their burgeoning partnership.

The style of *The X-Files* also contributes towards fanfic. Critics of the show frequently say that the acting is "wooden." While any fan would dispute this, it is true that the acting is often understated. Many American television shows go for the histrionic style of acting, using scripts that leave no room for ambiguity. The *X-Files* acting style tends to convey a lot in a simple look, to leave a lot of plot points hinted at but not spelled out.

The result, of course, is conflicting interpretations. The truly brave tackle the 'mythology', poring over every vague and allusive hint, struggling with the fact that most of those hints are said by characters with a tendency to bluff. Most fans, though, admit defeat on such matters. Instead, fierce debate rages about characters' motivations.

Needless to say, factions have arisen. 'Shippers' (short for 'relationshipippers') look at Mulder and Scully's body language and facial expression, and believe they are deeply in love. 'NoRomos' look at exactly the same scenes and argue that, no, they are not in love, except as close friends and partners. 'Angsters' tend to read deep suppressed suffering beneath Mulder and Scully's stoical exteriors, and write stories which test the characters to breaking point.

'Slash' fans see chemistry between various characters of the same sex, usually between Mulder and his arch enemy Krycek, or Mulder and his boss, Skinner.

None of this is helped by the fact that Chris Carter is apparently aware of all these factions, and likes to tease them. Scully and a Mulder look-a-like once *nearly* kissed, but not quite. In the recent movie, Mulder and Scully *nearly* kissed, but not quite. Even Krycek got to kiss Mulder on the cheek, though hot debate has raged about his motivations.

When it comes to fiction, however, most writers can make a distinction between their fiction, and the show itself. Although most fans wish the show's writers would pay more detail to character continuity, few authors write what they wish the show would become. Instead, they are exploring 'what ifs.' As mentioned above, few stories are straight-forward case-files. The reason

Chilmark Store, Martha's Vineyard - where Mulder might have shopped when growing up.



for this is, quite simply, that the show does the case-files better than any fanfic writer can, since they can do them with visuals, and colour, and music, and actors to drool over. 'I don't want to read something that's exactly the same as what I see on television,' is a sentiment expressed by many.

Interestingly, few fans who have ever read fanfic enjoy the official published *X-Files* novels. They are so official, they're lifeless. The authors have clearly been told not to touch any ongoing mythology plot line, or to tackle *any* character development. They are simply poor episodes on paper, without the vibrancy of an audio-visual medium, where even bad scripts can be transformed by good acting or direction. It remains to be seen whether the tight control that Chris Carter exerts on his creation will be relaxed when the series has run its course, and if a more creative style of novel writing will be authorised.

And fanfic writers are creative. They write anything, and everything. Some write "crossovers", asking what would happen if Mulder and Scully met the characters in *ER*, or if they investigated Doctor Who. Some write 'alternate universe', asking what would have happened if Mulder had been abducted by aliens instead of his sister, or how Mulder and Scully would survive if aliens invaded tomorrow. Many shippers enjoy writing Mulder and Scully 'realising' their love - although, interestingly, some such writers are quick to point out that they would never want this to happen in the show itself, as opposed to fiction.

Sometimes, it seems as if the show, and its characters, are the least important thing. There are a number of pure erotica pieces, in which Mulder and Scully (or Mulder and Krycek, or any other possible couple) have graphic sex. A common complaint about these is that, often, the participants could be anyone - that only the names tell you that you're reading an *X-Files* story. In this case, it is bad writing. Sometimes, though, the best of stories have external motivations. Authors want to explore a particular emotional issue: guilt, perhaps, or suicide. Mulder and Scully are used as a medium for exploring the issue. It is, perhaps, a half way house to 'real' writing. Many authors have things they want to say, but, by using ready-made characters, they have a place to start, and an audience who wants to hear them.

Not that fan fiction is an easy option. Taking ready-made characters means that an author doesn't have to start from scratch, but it does mean that all the readers have their own ideas of what is "in character", and can be quick to criticise. They can be quick to praise, too. If asked what started them writing, most fanfic writers would say something like "fascination with the characters, and the desire to explore them further." When asked what *keeps* them writing, most

would say, simply, 'feedback.' There are no rejection slips in fanfic. Those who like a story, write and say so, and most writers have made deep and enduring friendships through feedback.

Copyright is a bad issue, in *X-Files* fandom. Quite a lot of sites have been shut down, often with little or no warning, while others that are just as much in violation are ignored. Mainly, Fox only attack sites with audio or video files, but have come down heavily on movie pictures, too. Fanfic is ignored, at present, but they have made a few vague rumblings of threats. We all, without fail, write a disclaimer at the start of our stories, in which we state that we don't own these characters. Chris Carter, Ten-Thirteen and Fox own it (we're not quite sure exactly who, so we name them all), and we're only borrowing them, without permission, but not for profit. I have no idea if it has any standing whatsoever, legally, but it feels polite. We are very aware of the utter necessity not to make any money, even if it's only accepting advertising or donations to fund the (huge) archive. We feel that, if we were taken to court for what we're doing, the disclaimer would show we had at least tried to play fair.

Fanfic is a truly rewarding experience. It is hard work, undoubtedly. While some stories are truly terrible, a surprisingly large number are of publishable quality.

As a librarian, I can say, without bias, that I read better writing, by amateurs, in fanfic, than I do in many of the new novels I have to read and review at work. Many writers undertake lengthy research, both into the background of the characters (a thing that the show's writers singularly fail to do), and into any 'real-life' issue - settings, medical information, police procedure etc.

It is hard work, yes, but it is worth it. We are creating something, and sharing it. With our words, we can move people on the other side of the world to tears, or reduce them to shivering fear, or hysterical laughter. We are *creating*. If I told people that I'd spent my weekend watching football on the television, that would seem 'cool'. When I tell them that I write stories about *The X-Files*, that is 'sad.' Yet, writing, I am thinking, learning, and creating. Writing, I am moving people, and inspiring them. How can that be 'sad'?



See Elspeth's superlative web resource
Deep Background at: <http://www.astolat.demon.co.uk>

Watch with Mother

Mary Brady

YESTERDAY MY TWO-AND-A-HALF year old son took me for a ride in the TARDIS. At first I thought he might be the latest incarnation of the Doctor, but Séamus informed me that the Doctor was *there*, pointing at empty air. Obviously someone was present, for Séamus was involved in a fascinating conversation with the invisible Doctor, most of which I couldn't understand! The translation circuits obviously weren't working very well. Also, the chameleon circuit was playing up, and the TARDIS was stuck in the guise of a playpen. This made sense in our living room, but when we found ourselves, with the Doctor, in what I can only assume was the Roman Empire, removing a thorn from the paw of Androcles's lion, the playpen was an unusual sight – as was the Huggies nappy! What future archaeologists would think, should this artefact be discovered amidst the ruins of Pompeii, I have no idea.

As you can tell, we got him young – give us a child for the first seven years, and he's ours for life, as the Jesuits sort of said. James and I are big *Who* fans – my first memory of television is Tom, when I was three, playing make-believe, dressing up from his magic cupboard. I fell in love with him then, and although I'm twenty-seven, I never fell out of love with him. Séamus calls him 'Uncle Tom Tom', and when *Aesop's Fables* is on the telly, narrated by said avuncular figure, he rushes to the living room – and plonks.

I realised that Séamus would like *Who* before he was born – he would turn round in my womb to the music. After he'd been around a year, James and I did a deed that my father has never quite forgiven me for – we edited together all the title sequences to the show (not seven hundred odd, just the ten basic designs – for non-*Who* fans, Pertwee and Tom got two each) with some trailers for the show inserted. This brought us about twelve minutes in which we could run around tidying up while Séamus was otherwise engrossed. As I write Séamus is watching it, singing the theme to himself, and drawing, so it no longer commands his full attention, but he still enjoys it.

And why shouldn't he enjoy *Who*? What's wrong with James and I sharing our favourite show with our son? Despite how this article might have read so far, we are not *Who*-obsessed to

the point where we watch it all day long – but we do enjoy it. It is still, after all this time, the best fantasy sci-fi British television has ever done – and I challenge anyone to find better anywhere. (*Babylon 5* is the only possible contender from my point of view: Séamus used to consider *Teletubbies* a possibility, but seems to be growing out of them.) Good fiction – whether it is 'gritty realism', romance, tragicomedy or science fiction, enlarges the imagination – like the TARDIS it takes us to "fe-wen halles, couthe in sondry lades." (Forgive me if that is mis-spelt, it's been years since I used Middle English, and maternity has sucked my brains dry – never let it be said, however, that I let ignorance stand in the way of an opportunity for pretension.) Séamus's imagination has been enlarged by *Who*: if anyone asks me, as occasionally they do, how I can justify watching crap sci-fi with my infant I'll point out that not many kids his age could have told the story I recounted at the start of this article. Séamus is not a big talker, but when he does talk it's worth listening. He's turning into a storyteller – he has an invisible life. Obviously he would have been as thoughtful, and as much of a storyteller without *Who*, but the show has given him spaces to play in that he might not otherwise have had: the magic boxes that open up into the worlds he's read or told to him (thus Androcles's lion); monsters into which he can channel his fears, and a hero who always defeats those monsters.

Of course, Séamus has a hero anyway: when I was trying to figure out which Doctor we were travelling with yesterday I had it explained to me – we were with a new Doctor, and Séamus showed me his picture – Daddy. James, on coming back from work, was mightily chuffed to realise he was the ninth Doctor! Those who know him suspected it anyway – six foot five, that nose, that hair... What pleased me most was that Séamus, like the BBC, doesn't need great special effects to be in a new world: they build a corridor and call it Atrios. My son sits in a playpen, or a cardboard box, or hides in the cupboard, and travels to the Land of Fiction, where everything is real. He has an invisible friend called the Doctor, and even though the show has been shelved by the BBC, the stories are still being told, by us: the fans, the storytellers.



Power Games by Paul Groves

LIGHTNING FORKED ACROSS THE BLOOD RED SKY as Sir Gegrogoth raised forth his mighty sword with a great lunge and a loud roar. He yanked the starter cord and, with a thunderous cough, his Balson Conqueror chain sword leapt into action.

"Prepare to meet thy doom!" his deep tones echoed across the windswept landscape.

"No chance, chicken feed," responded his black-clad foe, the evil Lord Bavelard, as he disappeared through a side door in the walls of the dark imposing castle.

With a second mighty roar, Sir Gegrogoth charged forward, his great strides making mincemeat of the rocky terrain beneath his steel-clad feet. A passing bat provided welcome target practice as the chain sword sliced it into two neat segments.

With hardly a break in his stride, he leapt over the inadequate moat and was at the great castle's side door. With a roar more powerful than the previous two combined, he swung the Balson Conqueror and the door's lock was no more.

A howling creak accompanied the swinging open of the heavy wooden door, which hadn't actually been locked in the first place. Sir Gegrogoth was met by the sight of a great lift shaft descending into the darkest depths of the rock.

He may have been a brave and daring warrior, but he wasn't a complete idiot. He reached for his mobile phone and selected the first preset.

After a series of incomprehensible beeps and clicks, a voice finally reached the phone's speaker. It was a wise and educated voice. *"This is Volporth Heronymous, Wizard of the Fifth Gadang and sorcerer to the great and good. I'm afraid I can't come to the phone right now, so please leave your message after the tone. BEEEP—"*

"Bugger!" bellowed the warrior knight, shaking his chain sword in anger and, with that, he slammed the phone shut. Without his allocated spell, his task was going to be all the more difficult. He didn't even know where his opponent was. He swatted at a nearby video drone in frustration.

As if to answer his thoughts, the lift began to whine. A lesser warrior would have stood in wait, chain sword at the ready. Sir Gegrogoth, though, was expecting a trap. Scanning the surroundings, he spied a large rock, charged over and hid behind it.

Sure enough, moments after the lift doors had growled open, a mighty flame belched forth, singeing everything within a four varg (about

twenty metres) radius, with the important exception of Sir Gegrogoth.

Seizing his ventriloquistic abilities, the warrior knight let out a howl of apparent pain and projected it at a particularly blackened bush nearby. As the roar of his enemy's flame thrower began to subside, he cut the motor on his sword. The flywheel would only keep it running for a few seconds, but he needed stealth.

Bavelard let out an arrogant roar of triumph and swaggered carelessly over to the charred bush where he thought lay the remains of his enemy. As he bent over to examine the 'remnants', Sir Gegrogoth crept out from hiding, raised his mighty chain sword and lopped off his opponents gun arm, the obligatory roar coming only as the weapon struck.

The evil Lord's flame-thrower clattered to the ground while its owner clutched his newly formed stump with his single remaining arm. A scowl of hatred was flashed firmly in the direction of his vanquisher.

Sir Gegrogoth let out a glorious roar of triumph and struck a heroic pose. "I hereby claim the Ministry of Pensions and Domain Insurance!" he declared.

Bavelard was in no position to argue.

As the medical drones attended to his predecessor, the now Lord Gegrogoth mounted his mighty steed, switched on the powerful engine and soared into the dusk sky.

That evening, still dressed in his red aluminium tunic and chain-mail battle trousers, Lord Gegrogoth relaxed at his usual table in the Gamesman's Bar, sipping his on the house beer.

The bar accomplished the feat of evoking an atmosphere of both class and seediness. The former was due to the smart black and silver decor and the latter due mainly to the clientele, or perhaps it was the other way round. It had been getting progressively quieter as the Games had progressed, due to the fact that losers were barred, though in many cases, the rule was academic.

A cheery warrior with a ginger beard large enough to hide a small menagerie approached the table and slapped Gegrogoth across the back, spilling his pint in the process. "Congratulations, my good man!" he boomed in mock surprise.

"Thank you, Vagros," the new Lord responded, trying to hide his boredom. He'd already received over a hundred compliments that evening, mainly from people who'd never spoken

to him before.

Vagros moved on to spread his hearty congratulations further afield and Gegrogroth returned his attention to the news-screen. They were discussing the exploits of Lady Azaroth, the highest placed woman in the games. He couldn't help noticing how her costume utilised her physical assets to great effect in distracting her mainly male opponents.

He groaned as another news crew entered the bar. After briefly looking around, they moved unrelentingly in his direction. Gegrogroth squared his shoulders and prepared himself for the irritating onslaught of the parasitic busybodies.

A hefty microphone was shoved in his face. "Mariella Aggravator, Eyewitness News," droned the over smart woman as she took an uninvited seat.

"Actually, we're Action News now," pointed out the contrastingly scruffy cameraman.

"So, *Lord Gegrogroth*," the reporter continued unabashed, "How do you feel about becoming the new Secretary of State for Pensions and Domain Insurance?"

"I'm very pleased," responded Gegrogroth blandly. "This will be my first time as a Cabinet Minister and I look forward to making a few changes at the Ministry."

"What are your policies?" probed Aggravator, oozing with faked seriousness.

"Well, I consider myself very much a warrior of the people and I intend to expand the Ministry's activities quite considerably."



"Another bleeding heart liberal," muttered the cameraman in disgust.

The reporter leant forward, her perfume assaulting his nostrils. "Does this mean you won't be fighting for a higher position this year?"

You must be joking, thought Gegrogroth. He'd been lucky enough to beat Baveltard; he'd have to be insane to gamble everything on becoming one of the first rankers. Still, politics was politics. "I haven't decided yet," he responded cryptically.

"Thank you," she responded, snatching back the microphone and spinning to face the camera. She raised an eyebrow. "That was Lord Gegrogroth, the controversial new left wing Cabinet Minister." She chuckled. "And I'm sure we'll be hearing a lot more about *him* over the coming months."

Very little of which would be true, Gegrogroth thought. As the news crew moved on, he glimpsed the familiar purple cloak of Volparth Heironymous, glittering in the light of the disco ball as he entered the bar. The Wizard joined him at his table and ordered a steaming lime green cocktail. He was really a lager man, but one had to keep up appearances.

"Where the hell were you this afternoon?" Gegrogroth demanded. "I needed you for a spell during the Game, but all I got was your flaming answering machine!"

Heironymous frowned in puzzlement and scratched his chin, which of course, bore the long straggly beard virtually obligatory amongst his profession. "I was in the lab as usual; I don't know why you couldn't get through." He removed his purple pointy hat and placed it on the table.

Gegrogroth made a grumbling noise. "Perhaps you forgot to switch off the machine when you got in," he suggested. His sorcerer had been getting more and more absent minded over the last few months.

The wizard continued to frown, before suddenly raising a finger of inspiration. "Of course," he beamed, "Baveltard's sorcerer must have stuck my phone back on the answering machine. A highly irregular, but nonetheless legal, use of his spell allocation."

"Hmm, maybe," responded Gegrogroth non-committally.

At that moment, they were joined by an obese man in a dark hat and conspiratorial cloak. This was Roger X, General Secretary of the Federation of Socialist Warriors and a man whose appearance was as far from warrior-like as could possibly be imagined. As he progressed through the Games, Lord Gegrogroth had seen more and more of the mysterious man.

The General Secretary glanced unwelcom-

ingly at the wizard.

"This is Volporth Heironymous, my sorcerer," explained the warrior, "and this is Roger X."

Heironymous furnished the General Secretary with a theatrical inclination of his head, but received no reciprocation.

"If I could have a private word," the General Secretary hissed.

"I keep no secrets from my sorcerer," Lord Gegrogroth roared a little too loudly, stopping the conversations at the neighbouring tables.

"Very well," Roger X reluctantly conceded, motioning the warrior and the wizard into a conspiratorial huddle. "Were you thinking of challenging one of the first rankers?" he whispered.

Gegrogroth reddened. "No, I wasn't," he snapped. "There's a lot I want to do at Pensions and Social Security. I'm not gambling it away."

"I urge you to reconsider," the General Secretary insisted. "We need someone to do battle with Lord Horvarth."

"The most extreme right wing Home Secretary in history," expanded Heironymous. The other two flashed him a 'shut up' expression.

"What about Lord Evick?" Gegrogroth suggested. "He hasn't fought at all this year."

"He hasn't been well. We made a deal with the Right; you may have noticed that Carcross hasn't been challenged either."

"That leaves Lord Helviticus."

"No way. We can't risk gambling the Department of Education."

Gegrogroth shrugged. "Sorry; maybe next year."

The General Secretary leant forward. "If you defeat Horvarth, you'll be the Left's candidate for Prime Minister next year."

Gegrogroth smiled. "Nice try, but I'm young. I can afford to wait a while."

Roger X sighed. "In the name of socialism, I beg you."

"Sorry."

The General Secretary looked as if he was about to attack the warrior Lord, which would have been a very unwise move. Instead, he leapt to his feet and waved an angry finger. "One way or another, you'll change your mind." He stormed off.

Gegrogroth exchanged a harassed glance with his sorcerer. "Perhaps I should become an independent."

Lord Gegrogroth's peaceful slumber was interrupted by a loud thumping on the door of his plush new hotel suite. With an angry roar, he thrust back the bed covers and leapt to his feet,

swaying woozily as the beginnings of a hangover asserted itself. He picked up a nearby dagger and stomped off to teach a lesson to whoever it was that had the gall to interrupt him at this un-earthly hour.

He snatched open the door and stuck his head out into the surprisingly empty corridor. "Get back here and face the music, coward," he bellowed, showing no consideration for his sleeping neighbours.

Then he noticed the video cassette at his feet. Muttering angrily, he snatched it up, slammed the door shut, stormed over to the video and forced in the tape. He let out an irate head of steam as the machine whined and groaned in protestation, but sat back when the screen eventually flickered to life.

Gegrogroth's eyes narrowed as they were treated to the sight of Volporth Heironymous sitting dejectedly in a shiny metal cell. Without preamble, a husky voice stated its business. "As you can see, we are holding your sorcerer in a magic-proof room. If you do not sign up against Horvarth in the next round of the Games, he will be eliminated." The screen blanked.

With a mighty bellow, the warrior Lord grabbed his sledgehammer and swung it into the hotel's television, producing a satisfying shower of sparks. No-one blackmailed him. He was a warrior; he would fight for Heironymous's freedom. The only problem was that he didn't know where to find him. Never mind, his sorcerer would know.

"Shit!" he screamed, soliciting an angry thump from the suite next door. Heironymous was a good man and had served him well. However, no-one told Lord Gegrogroth what to do and sorcerers were replaceable.

With a philosophical shrug, the mighty warrior returned to his bed, pausing only to take a couple of aspirins to ease his hangover.

Gegrogroth decided to attend the afternoon's Signing anyway. Still suffering the after effects of the previous night's drinking, he left his winged chariot back at the hotel and sampled the delights of his ministerial limo instead.

Roger X hopped in on him almost as soon as he emerged from the sleek black car. "Decided to reconsider?" he beamed smugly.

"Not at all," responded the mighty warrior from behind a pair of dark sunglasses. "I thought I'd just watch."

"You are aware of the consequences," the General Secretary hissed with more than a hint of caution.

"So it was you," bellowed the Lord. He grabbed the obese official by his collar and lifted. "If this wasn't a Signing, I'd put you to the sword right now, you slimy little toad."

The General Secretary attempted a shrug.

Gegrogoth threw him to the ground and strode purposefully over to the challenge board. Being the penultimate round, the four first rank positions had just come into play. These attracted most of the attention, although only the Chancellor had been challenged so far. The rules of the Games dictated that winners could not be challenged and losers could not challenge, so Gegrogoth's new job was safe provided he didn't challenge anyone else. He was amused to see that no less than four warriors had challenged Bavelard for his old job.

As the warrior Lord made his way to the bar, he passed none other than Lord Horvarth himself. Gegrogoth gave the Home Secretary a curt nod.

However, Horvarth stopped and placed a hand on his shoulder, a gross insult to a warrior. "I hear you're refusing to challenge me," he boomed with callous laughter.

Silence broke out across the entire Signing Hall.

With slow deliberation, Lord Gegrogoth reached out and removed the offending hand. Then, he removed his sunglasses and met his opponent's scornful gaze. "What of it?" he demanded.

"I'd say that makes you nothing more than a coward and a loser," the evil Cabinet Minister roared arrogantly.

Gegrogoth felt the slow but insistent rise of anger within him. He raised a defiant eyebrow. "I don't think so, arsehole."

A wave of gasps swept through the gathering crowd.

Horvarth grinned from ear to ear. "I do believe you've just challenged me," he declared icily.

"I do believe I have," responded Gegrogoth. Blackmail was one thing, but nobody called him a coward and got away with it.

He turned and strode confidently over to the challenge board.

As the seconds to the Challenge counted down, Lord Gegrogoth stood heroically on the Games platform, awaiting his opponent. His freshly laundered battle costume gleamed in the dawn sunlight and his chain sword, flamethrower and other weapons were at the ready, stashed carefully into his mighty rucksack.

At precisely the appointed time, he was joined by Horvarth. Dressed entirely in black, the evil warrior Lord strode arrogantly up to the



platform and scowled at his opponent.

Behind him, a smaller man in a spangly red suit and frilly shirt sprinted up the stairs to join the two warriors. Ignoring them both, he made straight for the microphone and beamed at the cameras with an obsequious clasp of his hands. "Good Morning, Ladies and Gentlemen," he oozed, "and welcome to the first Challenge in the penultimate round of the Games."

A precariously erected stand of drunken spectators whooped and cheered.

The compere continued. "Fighting today for the office of Home Secretary, we have the holder, Lord Horvarth and the challenger, Lord Gegrogoth." He held out an arm to each warrior in turn, eliciting a round of applause from the audience. Gegrogoth noticed that his opponent's applause had been boosted by the deft use of a tape recorder.

"This year, it has been decided to hold the first rank Challenges in the Labyrinth!"

The spectators whooped even louder than before.

A conspiratorial frown joined the compere's vacuous grin. "We thought we'd make a few changes to the battleground, but I'm sure the contestants will find them out for themselves. I'll just say, watch out for the dragon." He turned to face the warriors and, with a theatrical flourish of his arms, roared, "To the pods!"

Lord Gegrogoth strode purposefully over to the nearer of the two shining egg-shaped capsules and settled himself into its only seat. Following a second expansive gesture from the compere, the capsule sealed him in pitch blackness and, with a lurch, began to take him to his destination.

Although the capsule had stopped moving some time ago, the door was still shut. Gegrogoth was beginning to wonder if something was wrong. He felt around the inside of the pod, but there was nothing but smooth metal. Perhaps he was supposed to blast his way out.

As if to answer, the door finally whined open and the warrior Lord scrambled out, blinking in the sudden light.

He was at a cross-roads in what could only be described as an archetypal labyrinth. Damp grey stones lined the walls, interrupted only by the odd moss patch or cobweb and the dank stone floor was graced only by the occasional pool of dried blood. The Labyrinth's only unusual feature was the strange flickering illumination, courtesy of a series of dodgy strip lights.

The mighty Gegrogoth looked around and

scratched his chin in puzzlement. There was only one thing for it. He reached for his mobile phone. "Hello, Heironymous? I'd like a map of this place, complete with the locations of all the hazards and the whereabouts of Horvarth."

"No problem," responded the Wizard of the Fifth Gadang and, with a glittering puff of low budget magic, the map duly appeared in front of the brave warrior.

Lord Gegrogoth spun the aforementioned item around a couple of times to try and find the right orientation, before finding the bright red 'you are here' arrow his sorcerer had thoughtfully supplied. Horvarth was only a few metres away down the passageway to his left. Unfortunately, there was a bottomless pit in the way, so he would have to go the long way round.

With a smile of satisfaction, the mighty warrior strode purposefully down the sloping stone corridor to his right. He would have let out a great roar, but he had no wish to alert his opponent. The fact that the clank of his metal boots on the stone floor was just as noisy had so far escaped his attention.

As the adrenaline of battle began to pump through his veins, Gegrogoth noticed that his left foot had yet to find the floor. He stepped back and looked down at the unmistakably cavernous form of the bottomless pit. He'd read the blasted map wrong. With a mighty bellow of frustration, the warrior Lord turned around and set off back the way he'd come, stopping only to vaporise a nearby video drone with his flame-thrower.

After a couple more wrong turns and a sharp detour to avoid the piranha infested pond, Lord Gegrogoth finally reached the point where his opponent was supposedly waiting. However, all he found was a great mirror blocking the expansive passageway.

Just in time, he glimpsed Lord Horvarth's reflection and the evil bastard had a laser cannon.

Gegrogoth dived into a nearby alcove, the beam missing him by millimetres. Horvarth was clever. The only way Gegrogoth could attack him with the mirror there was with another laser, but he'd used up his spell on the map. Still, there was one thing to his advantage; Horvarth may have been able to lift the laser cannon itself, but the power supply was over a metre square and weighed half a tonne. It was stalemate.

Suddenly, there was a loud roar.

Gegrogoth spun round. He was greeted by the sight of flames in the corridor behind him. He frowned in puzzlement for a few moments, then worked it out. The dragon was coming and he was trapped.

"Concede!" boomed the smug tones of Horvarth.

"Never!" responded the brave warrior.

There was no time left; he had to act. He could try attacking the dragon, but that might mean coming into the range of Horvarth's laser. Only one possibility remained - the legal option.

The mighty warrior dialled his lawyer. "I want a court injunction against Horvarth using that laser," he demanded.

"Certainly, sir," slithered the voice at the other end.

A few moments later, Horvarth let out an angry shout as the injunction came through. "Buggery and damnation!" he bellowed.

Gegrogoth leapt out of hiding just as the dragon rounded the corner and aimed his flame-thrower at Horvarth. "Prepare to meet thy doom!"

The evil Home Secretary was left holding the now useless laser cannon with no time to draw another weapon. "I-I concede," he blabbered in shock.

"Coward!" boomed the victorious Gegrogoth. He'd wanted to vaporise the bastard anyway, but rules were rules. Still, he was Home Secretary now and, with only one round to go, he could safely challenge the Prime Minister.

With a mighty flourish of his flame-thrower, he let out a great roar of celebration.



We'll Always Have Paris

the What, Where, How and Sort of Getting the Hang of *Who A Girlfriend Writes!*

Anna Bowles

"There was this man running along in this cave, and he got his brolly and hooked it over the rail of this walkway thing, and jumped up."

Thus runs the entirety of my childhood memories of *Doctor Who*. I think this profound moment must have occurred during a Sylvester McCoy episode, but I wouldn't've been able to tell you then, and certainly wouldn't now if it were not for my having been gradually transformed into that much-studied but nevertheless elusive being, the Who Girlfriend.

From my supervised forays into this zone of fandom, I gather that the Who girlfriend (or sometimes boyfriend) is a subject of much interest and debate. How to Induct Her Without Scaring Her Off? you all wonder, and pen warning stories about how subjecting her to the entire Colin Baker sequence during the first week has been shown to imperil a girlfriend's tolerance levels. Too much too soon is a bad thing. But of course then there's the importance of remembering Not to Hide What You Are, and the possibility of The Relationship Deepening Through Sharing Your Enthusiasms With Her.

The first episode to which I was introduced after having annexed Matthew was the CITY OF DEATH. The rationale behind this was that it had Romana in it, and Romana is not wet. The strategy worked quite well as I found myself fascinated with the degree and intensity of bulge displayed by Tom Baker's eyes. The not-wetness of Romana was unfortunately set off by the profound dimness of Mr Tentacly-Face's wife, but I told myself this was the 1970s and they didn't know any better then (nothing like finding someone or something to patronise for making yourself feel more charitable).

First round successfully completed. A whole two [?] - parter, and I still hadn't yelled "NERD!", torn up Matthew's anorak and

headed off round me mates'. As a Who Girlfriend, I would say that CITY OF DEATH is a canny choice for first contact, as it is high on Earth and low on rubber aliens, at least until the end. That is, if it's the right episode I'm remembering here. Don't ask me, I'm just along for the ride and the occasional episode like that one on the planet where they have a matriarchy and what I have forgotten the name of (Matthew won't tell me the names, he says he wants this au naturel). Now, don't say "THE HAPPINESS PATROL" or I will have to exterminate you.

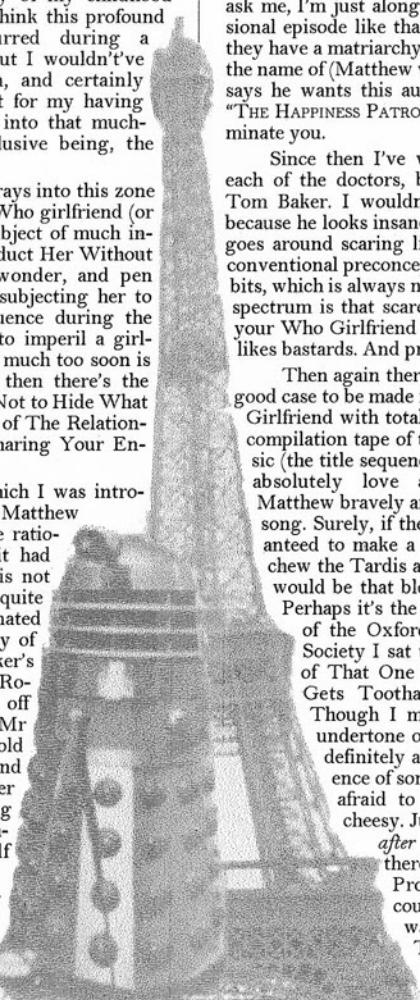
Since then I've watched episodes starring each of the doctors, but my favourite remains Tom Baker. I wouldn't quite say he was *sexy*, because he looks insane, but he also looks as if he goes around scaring little children and hacking conventional preconceptions into little quivering bits, which is always nice. At the other end of the spectrum is that scarecrow. Do not overexpose your Who Girlfriend to Jon Pertwee unless she likes bastards. And predictable bastards at that.

Then again there is actually a surprisingly good case to be made for bombarding your Who Girlfriend with total crud. When I asked for a compilation tape of the *Doctor Who* theme music (the title sequence music is the one thing I absolutely love about the programme), Matthew bravely and cruelly included the K9 song. Surely, if there is any one thing guaranteed to make a right-thinking person eschew the Tardis and all who drivel in her, it would be that bloody thing. Yet I survive.

Perhaps it's the kook factor. At a meeting of the Oxford University *Doctor Who* Society I sat through all eight episodes of That One Where William Hartnell Gets Toothache in the Wild West. Though I must admit to a continual undertone of when-will-it-end?, I was definitely aware of being in the presence of something unique. Do not be afraid to be weird, or downright cheesy. Just not too often, and only after you've convinced her there are other sides to Who.

Probably the only thing I couldn't be doing with at all was the multicolour daleks TV film. Or that and Worzel, anyway.

Not that I have any-



thing against daleks. I like them very much. To Matthew's discomfiture, I concentrate on daleks to the unfair exclusion of other subtler and more poignant Who reference points. But daleks are cool soundbites. They are easily apprehended by the novice mind. Plus they are a brilliant, if unintended, metaphor for the New Lad – aggressive and one-track minded on the outside, evil-smelling and squishy on the inside. They are also kind of cute. If out of reach of its plunger, one could quite happily pat a dalek on the head and say "aw!". The dalek would of course rage about extermination and wave its plunger about, but that would only enhance the diddiness factor. Perhaps after all the hidden secret of reconciling your girlfriend to *Who* really does lie in finding her something to be hormonal over (though I'm not quite sure how many women would get sentimental about daleks).

The *really* good thing about daleks though is that, unlike New Lads, they consistently fail to conquer the universe. Therein lies a potential for charming a girl with the cosiness of Who as escapism – but also a risk of wrinkling up her unknowing and judgmental nose. My biggest problem with *Doctor Who* is its investment in the idea of a single charismatic central figure who basically sorts everything out in the end (and I know the Doctor's not a simple goodie, but he leans that way). This is why I simultaneously love *Babylon 5* and wish that someone would shoot its hero. I do think there is a case for arguing that the Doctor, as a variant of the traditional explorer-maverick-whitebloke-hero, is a late offshoot of a tired and limp tradition. Give me an ambiguous political mess any day. Still, the Doctor is an improvement on Johnny bloody Sheridan.

Eighteen months on from *CITY OF DEATH* I have christened one of my Cabbage Patch Kids Adric. I have been *Who*'ed into a condition where I think of the Tardis whenever I see a portaloo, regularly make puns on "Exterminate!" and can recite the names of the eight doctors with only minor pauses for thought. This is about as good as it's going to get, and is probably a healthy balance. You can't coercively befall someone even if they want to be coerced: it has to grow naturally, and my soul is too deeply infested with other dubious enthusiasms to admit of more than a passing affection for daleks and bulging eyes. I suspect the most important trick to handling your *Who* Girlfriend is to successfully manage your own belief. Matthew has never thrust *Doctor Who* upon me, merely gone a bit starry eyed when encouraged to talk about it. Anything which he regards so highly, reasoning suggests, must be worth investigation.

Come to think of it, if anything, Matthew has been *too* careful lately. In fact he hasn't showed me any *Who* in months, and I'm inclined to start missing it. Now how long is that situation going to last once he's read this article?



Vengeance on Varos

VENGEANCE ON VAROS opens well. *Ja-son Connery* is reasonably convincing, establishing him as the story's 'hero-in-training', helping to compensate from the stylised and 'unreal' sets. Unfortunately the viewer is then plunged into an appalling Doctor-Peri scene – I was hardly surprised that on my UK Gold recording the station's transmission gave up shortly after Nicola Bryant delivers the line "you burned the dinner last night". I'm not against insights into TARDIS domestic arrangements if they can be carried off but the presentation of the Doctor and Peri totally negates the atmosphere established in the Varos scenes without encouraging tension. As is often pointed out, the Doctor and Peri spend most of the first episode in the TARDIS, out of the action, leaving this viewer at least with the impression that the author or the production team aren't very interested in *Doctor Who*. The purposes of the Doctor and his companion are to be gateways into the story, interpreting the action. VAROS actually contains a good, simple example of this sort of scene, as the Doctor takes Peri and the viewer through the Purple Zone.

The Doctor and Peri have to endure the dramatically pointless elongated dialogues about the mineral Zeiton 7 before they arrive on Varos round about the 25-minute mark. Once on the planet, VENGEANCE ON VAROS shows its true colours as a thrilling traditional tale with a few twists of presentation that in its own way honours some of *Doctor Who*'s original concerns by using a futuristic setting to comment on our own day. It is this success that might have been out of touch with the *zeitgeist* at BBC Drama. Many of Arak's and Etta's lines feel somehow very *Play for Today*, a strand that the new-look BBC 1 of Michael Grade and the atomised remnants of the Newman-Sutton era Drama Group had little interest in.

Philip Martin wrote a cynical script, probably encouraged by Eric Saward. Varos is a sexist world – there are hints that women are regarded as the property of men – and one of stunted emotional awareness. Martin Jarvis compellingly takes the Governor to the brink of suicide. A pity the Doctor is affected too, displaying uncharacteristic callousness throughout, to Colin Baker's embarrassment.

WHAT IS AND WHAT SHOULD NEVER BE

James Brough and Mary Brady

The Doctor Who TV movie is almost three years old, yet it is still being dissected in the absence of any new televised Who. The Trogolyte joins in...

This article was started the week after the *Doctor Who* TV film was transmitted on BBC 1 in May 1996. It was finished on 17 May 1998 - around two years later. In justification of the delay, we would offer that it has allowed a certain amount of distance from the original euphoria of seeing *Who* back on TV. Alas, it seems somehow appropriate, given how long the film took to appear, and how long we are having to wait for a second...

It may seem unkind to call the finished film one of the biggest anti-climaxes in years, but there is no denying that it could - perhaps should - have been better. In trying to cater for different audiences, the film lost its way. Matters could have been greatly improved by an intelligent script to match some excellent acting from McGann, Roberts and Yee Jee Tso. Sadly, both target audiences, general and fan, were let down by a flawed final screenplay.

The opening scene does not augur well. The 'continuity' - Skaro, Time Lords, Daleks, Master, Gallifrey - drawn on in the first few minutes originally evolved over a period of thirteen years. This (as has been pointed out already many times) alienates people new to the programme; it also condescends to established fans by seeming to assume that they would switch off without immediate reassurance that they are watching the same programme as before. The narrative itself is poorly written. Consider the following. A first time viewer would wonder what the significance is of the planet Skaro, who the Master is, and may spend much of the film waiting for the strange electric Smurfs to turn up again and justify their mention at the start. They are mentioned by McGann during the 'babble in the park' scene. However, this is forty minutes later and is lost among the mass of plot exposition the Doctor is delivering at the same time and is meaningless to anyone not already familiar with the Daleks. All it is likely to achieve is to

raise more expectation that they will appear within what was after all commissioned and broadcast as a one-off self-contained TV movie - why else mention them?

Despite the fact that over ninety per cent of the story was set on earth, the all-important opening, designed to grab the viewer, is set on a planet no-one has heard of, where somebody's greatest enemy whom no-one has heard of, is killed for unspecified 'evil crimes' (as opposed to lovely crimes) by some squeaky aliens no-one has heard of, who then drop out of the film.

Do you feel gripped?

The confusion continues. Post-credits, the narration refers in the first person to someone who clearly is not the narrator. It is always possible that some people started to give up at this stage, reasoning that any programme which can't bring back the same actor to do a voice-over can't be up to much. Looking at these scenes through virgin eyes, things do not look good.

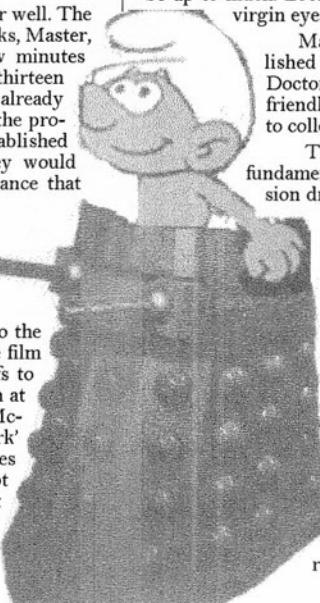
Matters are no better for established fans, wondering why the Doctor and the Daleks are on such friendly terms that he can turn up to collect the Master's corpse.

The opening breaks two of the fundamental rules of film and television drama, cited by Orson Welles.

Primarily, one does not tell, one shows. Secondly, when dealing with the fantastic, it is always easier to involve the audience if the action starts in an atmosphere of normality, which it then proceeds to undermine.

For instance:

Grace Holloway, heart surgeon, is called to hospital. On arrival, we hear her briefing: a John Doe, no visible injuries, fibrillating badly and in some kind of coma; wild rumours circulating that he



was shot by what looked like a death ray. X-rays have been taken but they failed to develop. In the theatre, the operation proceeds calmly until the patient comes to and tries to fight off the doctors. He is drugged again but, before they can continue, dies. Grace studies the X-rays in her office realising that they show two hearts. A man in a morgue shroud bursts into her room.

'Help me.'

'Who are you?'

'I'm the man you just killed.'

Titles.

On the subject of the titles... we think that the best of the title sequences are the original, the Troughton, and the Tom Baker slit-scan time tunnel. Each of these was like nothing the viewer had seen and this is why the other sequences were lacking. The original Pertwee looked like a kaleidoscope; the starfield and McCoy sequences were made up of stars and other recognisable images. The successful sequences left more to the imagination - the viewer had no real idea what he was looking at. Was it ever officially stated that the 'Tommel' showed the time vortex, or was that just what we all decided at the time? Between the ages of 3-10 years, the Tommel had a profound impact on our burgeoning psyches. It's hard to imagine children lying, eyes shut, seeing the McGann titles rolling away as we once did. One of the recent BBC 75th anniversary trailers showed Damien Hirst describing the Tommel as the most visually striking image he'd ever seen on TV.

Another problem with the McGann titles is, of course, the credits. Any sense of atmosphere and mystery is rather undermined by the interpolation of production staff's names, bringing us face to face with the fiction of it all. Belief has never been so unsuspended. Try to imagine titles from episode one of *GENESIS OF THE DALEKS* with the words "starring Tom Baker" added. The face at the end of the tunnel is no longer some unknown alien, but rather that of an actor.

Meanwhile, the rerecorded theme music could have been far better. Originally the theme was like the visuals - unlike anything else on television. It was a cold, empty, lonely sound, full of space. It was quite alien. The closest nowadays is the theme from *The X-Files* - not that it has the same impact. The theme from *The X-Files* sounds played. The *Who* theme sounds grown - not organic, but crystalline. Indeed, the original version was spliced together, not played: it is this element of composition which removes any human feel from it.

On to the story itself. It is interesting to compare the structure of the original series pilot, 'An Unearthly Child'. Throughout this episode, a sense of gradually less everyday situations are set up and then demolished. In the opening scene, the policeman on his beat - very *Dixon of Dock*

Green - is backed by the theme music, giving an air that can only be described as 'odd'. Another odd point - why is the police box in the junk yard? - is lost now. Where else would we expect to find a police box? But, why is our attention drawn to it by the camera? Obviously, we think, it will play some part in the story. Then the school. Again ordinary, but we have the strange schoolgirl. And then there's the absence of her home - a gap between two buildings. Some of us may guess at this point that it will turn out to be the junkyard that we saw at the start - and we are right.

So we progress to the junkyard. The earlier emphasis on the police box, now reinforced, Ian's suspicions and the contemporary codings which identify him as young, active, male and therefore hero - lead us to believe that, while this is something out of the ordinary, it is something we have seen before. The old man may be an imposter who has kidnaped Susan or somehow have her locked in the police box. His uncooperative demeanour shows him, within the world of TV drama, to be up to no good. Given all this, the shock from the revelation of the TARDIS interior is increased - we have been led to expect something quite different.

In the TV movie, the element of surprise is lost. We surmise the extra-terrestrial nature of the Doctor from the start. Indeed, the makers developed cold feet, pulling back to a position where the Doctor is half-human. The shock from revealing the TARDIS interior is quite wasted - Segal et al apparently assume the audience already knows what is inside the police box. Surely, though, people unaware of this will never deduce it from a cut between a cathedral-style interior and a police box - it seems too great a leap.

In 'An Unearthly Child', we can identify with the two teachers. We, like them, are baffled. Their deductions and reactions match ours. In *ENEMY WITHIN*, there is no room for this. We always know more than Grace or Chang Lee, so their discoveries mean nothing to us. Presenting viewers with an enigma and clues to its solution will gain more interest than giving the answer at once and then showing characters faced with the enigma. Chang Lee's reaction to the TARDIS is a nice moment, but is denied resonance. Every viewer already knows what is in there.

Aside from this puzzle, there is little in Chang Lee and Grace with which we can empathise. Hence, we are severed from their involvement with the story. We're not interested in the plot or characters: what does this leave? That McGann is charming does not entirely make up for the paucity of his written part. As written, and attired, the Doctor is a clichéd eccentric Brit, circa 1896, as imagined by a Mills and Boon writer. He is dressed as a castrati Heathcliff, with floppy hair, floppy cravat, floppy brained, lives in

what looks like the Castle of Otranto, and drinks tea from a china cup in a saucer. Were he not as well played, he would come across as an idiot.

As matters turned out, it was McGann who held the film together, despite any faults. Sadly, it seems improbable that he'll resume the role, although his performance had enough meat for us to imagine how it would have developed given half a chance - and also to spot when the BBC Books version goes wandering off course. (Hello, John Peel.) He certainly made the pointless romance with Grace less painful than might have been the case.

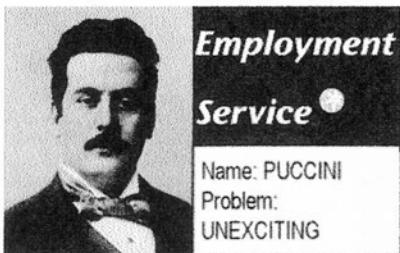
And on this subject, it seems clear the romance was added not for reasons of plot or character development, but to make the Doctor more accessible. He may be 'the guy with two hearts' but hey, he has a human mother, a Gillian Anderson wig and a yen for blondes in surgical gowns. Making him half-human does nothing other than annoy fans and make him seem a rip-off of Mr Spock.

Some have argued that the half-human nature of the Doctor was significant in plot terms, explaining why the Master cannot use the Doctor's TARDIS. In response, we wonder - why has this never phased him before? Secondly, the Master is in a human body. Why can't he use the Eye himself? Yes, yes, his eyes have changed - but does this not seem a little strained? Would it not seem more logical for the Doctor to be a full Time Lord and the Master's pilfered humanity to be the problem?

This kind of sloppy thinking leads the narrative to fail both audiences. There is no reason why the Doctor should not have a romance if handled well. The possibility was there in the early years of the programme with Cameca in THE AZTECS, and subsequently with the second Romana. The seventh Doctor's references to the illogicality of unrequited love was finally taken up with Paul Cornell's memorable novel HUMAN NATURE. Even the Doctor's acquisition of humanity could be explored without reference to cliché. Previously each of the Doctor's regenerations has taken place in or near the TARDIS, or (presumably) on Gallifrey. In this case, we are told the Doctor was 'dead too long'. He was away from the TARDIS. Perhaps his body was forced to use biodata from the nearest sentient species as a model? Perhaps this is what he meant by 'I'm half-human on my mother's side'? Grace is the last person he was in contact with prior to 'death'. She imagines his kiss to be romantic in nature: could it be simply a newborn child's affection for its mother?

Similarly sloppy thinking can be seen in the overdose of incidental music. The film lasts 85 minutes, about 68 of which are wallpapered with homogenised aural chewing gum. The worst example is in the opening scene. Puccini is playing, but someone saw fit to paste musak over the top

of it. Well, clearly Puccini wasn't up to the task. Viewers need a sign saying 'Be excited'. This might not seem so insulting were it an original piece, rather than the one used earlier during the TARDIS breakdown as well as the later bike chase. At least the Doctor's blues had the sense to admit defeat and switch off. The scriptwriter cannot be blamed here - any music specified in the script does add to the production.



A problem for which the 'author' is to blame - the author at any given point not necessarily being Matthew Jacobs but whoever seconded by Universal, Fox or BBC Worldwide at any given time to make sure that their aims were catered for - is that as the film does not start in the 'real world', nor does the climax take place there. Because of this, audiences find it hard to care what happens in this never-never land. That the Doctor can travel back in time and bring his friends back to life is not magical - it's silly. What was anyone fussed about if he can just go back and rub out any mistakes? Remember the complaints about late TV McCoy and early Virgin NAs that future Doctors left 'notes in the margin' for previous selves to find and act on. Imagine the outcry with such behaviour as this. Where would it stop? Would the eighth Doctor set up a trampoline under the Pharos project? Or leave a radiation suit in the third Doctor's TARDIS? Whatever happened to the Blinovitch Limitation Effect of fond memory?

We did find the show entertaining and well-directed, despite the music. The script was occasionally atmospheric, but showed the worst combination of ignorance of the ethics of the programme and overenthusiasm for continuity. (One rumour suggests that an earlier version of the script featured a different plot, where the Master wanted to use a passing comet to destroy Earth.) If positions had been reversed - a fan writing the script with a sympathetic newcomer producing - then the indulgence in ancient history might have been tempered.

However, the most important things missing were not in the details. An initial premise which lacks credible characters and an involving plot is bound to fail. It is to McGann's credit that despite all problems, for ninety minutes, he was the Doctor.

Missing Believed Wiped 1998

Matthew Kilburn

'MISSING EPISODES' ARE PART OF the culture of several television fandoms, particularly *Doctor Who*, but also *Steptoe and Son* and others. In the case of *Who*, it was long rumoured that someone, somewhere, owned all or nearly all the episodes that had been 'lost' - actually, destroyed, through (to put it kindly) misco-ordination of the BBC Engineering and Enterprises archives. With the non-appearance of more than one new *Doctor Who* adventure in the 1990s *Doctor Who* culture has become less prone to excitement and since the recovery and video release of *THE TOMB OF THE CYBERMEN* in 1992 there have been no major discoveries apart from the footage rescued recently from the Australian censors. *STEPTOE AND SON* has fared better and its 'lost episodes', existing as black-and-white copies on low-band videotape, have been part of the Missing Believed Wiped festivals since they started in 1993.

There hadn't been a Missing Believed Wiped since 1995, as little material has been discovered in recent years. Steve Bryant, Keeper of Television at the National Film and Television Archive, explained that he hoped that the 1998 event would start film cans reeling his way once again. He was particularly pleased at the BBC's on-air appeal for the return of missing *Dad's Army* episodes, which he said was unprecedented in the Corporation's history. Steve Bryant also confessed that one or two of the items in the afternoon programme had apparently been at the BFI for some time but they had mislaid them; an example was 'Men of Property', the last episode of *Steptoe's* fifth season which received its first public screening since the 1970s at the event.

The first session's star attraction seemed to be the only surviving instalment of *Cool for Cats*, an Associated-Rediffusion pop music magazine fronted by Kent Walton. I hadn't heard of Walton but apparently he is famous as ITV's 'voice of wrestling'. He was singled out from the stage by Brian Taylor, second producer of *Cool for Cats*, who spoke about the programme's influence on television dance and the acclaim it helped win for its deviser - Peter Moffat's wife, *Who* fans note! - Joan Kemp Welch, not present due to ill health. *Cool for Cats* itself, recorded as part of an attempt to sell it overseas, was only of curiosity as an anachronism, as much for its unashamed banality as for its attitude towards its teenage audience. Whereas today's presenters seem anxious to convince the viewers that they represent all that is hip (or however the fashionable zeitgeist is expressed), Walton (or his scriptwriter, Ker

Robertson of the *Daily Sketch*) believed that he dictated what was 'cool for cats', as demonstrated by the rant against the state of the charts following the first number, Kenny Baker's *Bakerloo Non-Stop*, which Walton/Robertson described as the only true jazz number in the charts at the time. The confidence in the statement that other forms of popular music in 1958 were just degenerate forms of jazz was amazing in light of the revolutions that have taken place since then; the second item was a *Tommy Steele* comedy record described as a 'piece of nonsense'.

Before *Cool for Cats* we were primed with a BBC News bulletin from 26 May 1958. The presenter was Robert Dougall, surprisingly dark-haired, and the main film report (the only one in the bulletin from BBC cameras, as the others seemed to be telerecordings from the US about Eisenhower's health) concerned blocked roads in the Pennines 'from Michael Hancock of our Manchester studios'. To Dougall's left was a map of Britain on which Manchester and a flooded river in East Anglia were picked out. The format of television news hasn't really changed in forty years; newreaders nowadays adopt a more dramatic tone and a lot of technology has been overlaid allowing greater intercutting between studio, location and recorded reports, but the news remains the news.

Anyone unsettled by the 'product placement' in *The Truman Show* would have been worried by *Ideal Home*, a special edition of the 'admag' *Jim's Inn* from 1961. This programme, a string of adverts based on products on display at the Ideal Home exhibition, was remarkable for the degree of complicity expected of the audience (most, but not all, of the characters knew they were in an admag, allowing jokes at the 'innocents' expense) and the professionalism of Jimmy Hanley compared with the apparent embarrassment of guest star Kenneth Horne, 'a man who likes his comforts' according to Hanley's script, who was advertising oil-fired central heating alongside Shell-Mex and BP's official representative 'Mrs 1970'. This may have been because Kenneth Horne had his own advert series, made by Tyne Tees, and didn't take kindly to being a supporting player in a Rediffusion show. Alternatively, Horne's gentleman-out-of-water act has just dated badly.

Other items in the first half included episode one of *Object Z* from 1965, a dismal Rediffusion SF series about a meteor on a collision course for Earth, with future *Neighbour* Terence Donovan as

the representative of British security. Its plodding pace helped show why *Doctor Who* was the success it was; *Robert*, also from Rediffusion, an excellent 1967 dramatisation sensitively directed by Ridley Scott starring Angela Baddeley as a teacher nearing retirement coping with her mother's death, a schoolboy obsessed with poisons (Robert Langley) and a modernising headmaster (Frank Windsor) who sees her complaints as signs of mental collapse, in ignorance of the tragedy at the boy's home; and finally 'Men of Property', last of the lost *Steptoes*. It's nothing new to say that *Steptoe and Son*'s strength was in its manipulation of social embarrassment leaving results that were more tragic than comic; the comedy comes from the *Steptoes*' unfamiliarity with banking leading to their dining their bank manager and his wife at a Mayfair club, complete with gambling tables too tempting for Albert.

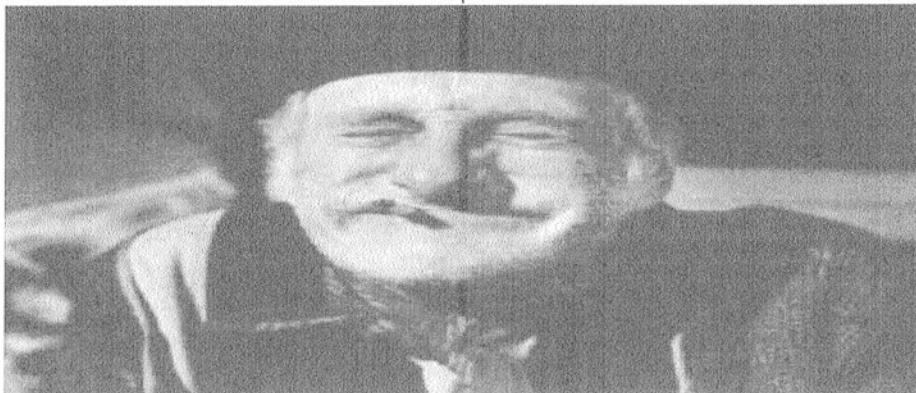
The second half of the programme had more coherence. Introduced by a Frank Windsor still fanatical with enthusiasm for his work of more than a quarter-century ago, we watched examples from eight years of police drama. This began with a 1955 episode of *Fabian of Scotland Yard*, 'Robbery in the Museum'. All possible stereotypes were on show in Doreen Montgomery's script: the desperate poet and his virtuous wife suffering in poverty; the incorrigible villains with their impenetrable foreign accents; the petty thieves who run out of the pub when Fabian enters; the youthful, enthusiastic sergeant; and of course Fabian himself, played by Bruce Seton as a well-spoken moral exemplar. The contrast with the real Robert Fabian, into whom Bruce Seton dissolved in the final scene, was striking; Fabian was a cockney whose demeanour suggested an antecedent of *The Sweeney's* Regan rather than a lineal descendant of Sherlock Holmes.

The next episode was listed as coming from *Murder Bag*, starring Raymond Francis as Detective Superintendent Lockhart; however, once the *Murder Bag* titles had run, they were followed by another set, showing a different actor at a police

desk, and the credit *Mystery Bag*. A caption then explained that owing to the indisposition of Raymond Francis this week's episode would star Gerald Case as Chief Superintendent Carr! 'The Superintendent Finds the Angels' told of Carr's investigation of an illegal gambling ring, and featured a strangely familiar actress as the girlfriend of one of the villains - who turned out to be *Play School's* Miranda Connell, whom I'd last seen on the screen about 24 years ago. *Mystery Bag's* attitude towards the police was far less reverent than *Fabian*, although the police were still depicted as homely figures to whom nonetheless the criminals eventually deferred.

Fabian of Scotland Yard, although shown on the BBC, had been made on film by independent producers with the intention of selling it abroad. According to the NFT's programme notes *Mark Saber* began in the US and then was picked up by British-based producers the Danzigers with the international market in mind. The episode seemed to be a print for export, with the American series title *The Vise*. The instalment, 'The Sucker Game', was a routine runaround with the all-wise, one-armed Saber (Donald Gray) and his American assistant Stevie (Diana Decker) facing an Egyptian antiquities fraud. Michael Caine was involved as a gangster whose accent was inevitably mid-Atlantic.

After *Mark Saber's* hardly challenging adventures, removed from the real world, *Z Cars* was a revelation. 'Contraband', by Allan Prior, came from the first series and featured the story of how Fancy Smith (Brian Blessed) tried to break a watch-smuggling racket almost single-handedly in the hope of receiving a reward. To place *Z Cars* alongside the other crime dramas seemed almost an insult as *Z Cars* was the only one which dealt credibly with human interaction. Where in the other series the characters were investigative ciphers, albeit with a few individual flourishes, in *Z Cars* the dramatic tension arose from the relationships between the young constables, not as worldly-wise as they think, and their



more cynical superiors. Frank Windsor said that he and his actor colleagues were workhorses interpreting excellent dialogue and characters, but with lesser performers *Z Cars* could not have been the success that it was. The police are still depicted as playing fair, but each individual has his own idea of justice, concepts which have to be reconciled with each other and the law and order the police are employed to uphold and enforce. At the beginning of the episode, Jock Weir (Joseph Brady) and Fancy intervene to stop a factory employee being prosecuted for stealing nylons a few days before her wedding; but they eventually have to arrest her merchant sailor father as the vital link in the watch racket. Life is ultimately fair but involves a lot of hardships and injustices along the way - an attitude expressed throughout Stratford Johns's portrayal of Barlow. Whatever the future of *Missing Believed Wiped*, a *Z Cars* day at the NFT must be a viable proposition, particularly if Frank Windsor is still as energised by the memory of his time on the series.

roduced with subtlety and as integral parts of the drama, George Stephenson is anticipated in such a way that his appearance can only be an anti-climax.

The problem is that Pip and Jane Baker display an irrational worship of 'genius', which they place in the mouths of the Doctor and other characters. The 'great man' theory of history was already anachronistic by the time *Doctor Who* started in 1963 and it is alarming to find it taken so seriously in 1985. Also, it's surprising for the veteran Labour campaigners to present such simplistic working-class characters. While it wouldn't have been too improbable for there to have been a Luddite revival in c.1821, it would be to find Luddite sympathies among miners, who generally welcomed mechanisation as at this time it created further work opportunities, extending seams and allowing new pits to be sunk. Not even Stephenson's engines could replace the underground labourer.

However, the historical elements of the story turn out to be red herrings. We are really watching a piece of variety act casting analogous to the star-heavy plot-light films churned out to little profit by Lew Grade in the late 1970s. The programme seeks to entertain us by treating the Rani as the latest addition to the Doctor-Master comedy rivalry; the examples of her villainy can hardly be taken seriously as they are so clunkily naive or plain silly. Spend time with the Rani, and you too can be a tree. The Bakers' attitude to science is confused; on the one hand they hero-worship Stephenson and the off-camera giants of the Industrial Revolution, but on the other the Rani is condemned as being amoral 'like many scientists'. The script is uncertain as to whether it is painting with a broad or a narrow brush, and so ruins its arguments.

The larger the share of attention given to the antics of the three Time Lords, the less relevant the 1821 setting seems to be. It is perhaps just as well that, apart from showing off the open air museum location, the production seems rather unconcerned with maintaining period detail. While the supporting cast of miners and their wives are generally unkempt and suitably filthy, other denizens of Killingworth West Moor Colliery are somewhat well-scrubbed and in the case of Gary Cady, too much the mid-1980s TV juvenile lead.

This story was co-written and directed by women, but they show no particular sensitivity towards the plight of Peri. The most obvious is her attempt to rescue the Doctor from the brain-drained miners by throwing a few lumps of coal at them. She is then ritually humiliated when the Rani and Master escape from under the muzzle of the Tissue Compression Eliminator. Not that she should have been handling it anyway - but there have been enough articles on the morality of season 22 of *Doctor Who* already.



The Mark of the Rani

WITH THE PREVIOUS two stories having been rooted in first the programme's past, and then a nightmarish fantasy cum social allegory, the task that *THE MARK OF THE RANI* has to perform is establish a credible nineteenth-century industrial Northumberland. The location of the Ironbridge Gorge Museum goes as far as possible without going to the unfeasible expense of building a large set. Unfortunately the sub-Dvorak music lowers the production to the status of a Hovis advert. This juxtaposition of good intentions and ill-conceived execution hallmarks *THE MARK OF THE RANI*.

That having been said, as *ATTACK OF THE CYBERMEN* brooded upon a fannish conception of programme mythology, and *VENGEANCE ON VAROS* applied the social concern of the *Wednesday Plays* beloved of Sydney Newman, *THE MARK OF THE RANI* appears to hark back to the programme's original aim of acquainting children with history, or in this case with historical personalities the programme adjudges of lasting significance. However, where characters such as Napoleon, Richard Coeur de Lion and even Nero were in-

The Deconstruction of a Falling Star

Anke Büttner

wonders if J. Michael Straczynski has betrayed his series and its fans

About three and a half years ago I was staying at a friend's house, whose considerable video-collection contains many a volume of *Deep Space Nine* – and in a small neglected pile beside the television there were also a few tapes of *Babylon 5*, season 1 recorded off the television.

"Oh, those", my friend said when I asked her about them, "my husband recorded them. It's supposed to be quite good, but I really prefer *DS9*." I thought, I would, too. But then I sat down anyway as I was house-sitting, because – what the heck – watching some of this "Space station rip off" couldn't hurt, could it? It didn't hurt, but the first episode I watched was 'Parliament of Dreams', with that amazing, if in hindsight somewhat predictable, final scene portraying "Earth's dominant belief system". And because there were three other episodes on the tape, and I had nothing better to do, I continued to watch. Three hours later I found that it was perfectly possible to take people with that hairstyle seriously; I wanted to find out what exactly had happened to Sinclair when the Minbari took him, where the animosity between the Narn and the Centauri came from, and, to cut a long story short: I'd become a fan.

However, there was a minor problem. I had no television. So I put liking the show on a backburner – in fact I almost forgot about it. But then, at a meeting of the Oxford Tolkien Society, of all places, someone mentioned that they had bought the newest video and suggested we all went back to their room to watch it. And then about a week later Channel 4 started showing season 3, and so I remembered that I was a fan, and watched it every Sunday evening at some friends' house.

The show had changed tremendously since I had last seen any. What had happened to Sinclair? Why

had Delenn suddenly developed hair? Who was this Sheridan guy anyway? And those "Shadows" ... I realised that there was only one thing I could do: watch it all... And I loved it. And I bought all the videotapes. Oh, yes, there was the occasional episode I liked better or worse than the others, but I loved the show, and when Sheridan jumped I didn't know how I was going to survive the long wait until the next season. Another delicious season full of plot and arc, character development, and unexpected turns and twist in the tale... It was such a good and intelligent sci-fi program and even my *DS9*-loving friend had utterly been won over to *Babylon 5* as she admitted to me in a semi-embarrassed way.

But the wheel turns, does it not? With all the anxiety about whether the show would be renewed for a fifth year, J. Michael Straczynski had made a decision, and with that decision made also the one mistake he said he would never make: he compromised. Suddenly the show became rushed and incomplete seeming with

much of that wonderful character interaction missing. More often than not I found myself second guessing all the twists with a "Well, what JMS thinks we are least likely to guess would be..." And what about Lorien! I mean seriously, and if you want a real anticlimax that even large amounts of CGI fail to spice up, watch the end of the Shadow War!

Oh yes, one of the show's unique selling propositions had always been that the characters would change and develop, but with season 4 I often felt that the changes forced on the characters were almost artificial (with the "torture victim of the week"), driven not so much by a powerful plot as a race against time; frantic, frantic: we might not get a fifth season.

There still were the occasional high-points in season 4, which fitted well with the earlier spirit of the show, but mainly it felt like a



hectic run of episodes that failed to stand on their own for the most part. And I, who had prided myself on knowing every episode title in order, lost track, unable to distinguish between this week's predicaments and next week's continuation.

Some episodes stood out: 'Intersections in Real Time' for example, because of Boxleitner's outstanding performance, and 'Rising Star', because it was so ... twee. Had we not known that TNT had agreed to take on *Babylon 5* and season 5 was secured, we might well have despaired. Was that supposed to have been it? How I wished that JMS had stuck to his guns and filmed season 4 as he had originally intended, even if I would never see the end of the show...

But season 5 had the go-ahead and ... and it couldn't possibly get any worse, could it? The pace could relax again, the characters would have time to grow and breathe... The linking episode between the last two seasons look fairly promising: it was intriguing if somewhat far-fetched.

That was when the blow fell, though: appended to the last episode was a little note from JMS which in plain text translated to something like: "Well, I said I would do 5 years, like no one before me has, and I haven't compromised." Jibe, jibe. And on top of that season 5's first episode was called 'No Compromises'. Told-you-sos have always made me uncomfortable, as they are utterly lacking in any form of grace, but suddenly my favourite TV show had sunk to the level of a told-you-so. I sat back, gritted my teeth and decided to give season 5 a fair chance, anyway.

What I couldn't have second guessed, however, was the fact that somehow JMS, whom a long time ago I had admired very much, would suddenly take to riding high on his success: I am so good, I can just do things the way I like, and I don't need to listen to any ideas or suggestion, because I am the Creator of this success: I can make you weep. I can drop you hard and raise you high, you're at my mercy. Or at least that it's what it felt like to me, reading the Lurker's Guide



"Look, John - a new franchise opportunity!"

on the web and watching the show. But previous success is not a guide to future improvement. I mean, what for example was Byron supposed to be all about? And where did the subtlety from earlier seasons vanish to? And the dialogue had also "devolved"...

T h a n k

goodness that at least the actors were still as good as ever, breathing as much life into their characters as the script permitted. I am so glad that most of them were happy to bow to the control-freak, and did not leave like Claudia Christian, whose wonderful Ivanova was woefully under-used.

But all personal regrets and disappointments aside, there is something else about *Babylon 5* fandom that struck me recently: there appears to be a sub-culture of *Babylon 5* fans, who accept and admire the genius of JMS in an unquestioning manner. They do not express disappointment at the way the show had to deviate from what it might have been; it would never occur to them that the blame for Ivanova or Talia leaving might at least partially lie with JMS's inability to trust his actors to know their characters: no, no, it was all due to Claudia misbehaving, wanting too much money or Andrea wanting her character to see more action... But unless you were there how can you know what exactly happened? I try not to judge when I don't know, but the JMS fans feel that of course the Creator must be the wronged party. Me, I don't know. All I can go on is interviews and such like.

There are other aspects of *B5* fandom I find intriguing and worrying at the same time: for example, the existence of a whole vocabulary of devotion: lurkers, the very fact that JMS is called Jay-em-ess, spoilers (I had never come across that word before in the context of a TV show, cars yes, but not TV!) and so on. There are behaviours such as the screaming down of someone who might inadvertently give away something that you haven't seen yet, there is that reverent section on the Lurker's Guide (which is a very good web-resource by the way!) called "JMS speaks".

For a while I enjoyed being a *Babylon 5* fan, part of the sub-group of sci-fi fandom who understood the vocab, who admired JMS, but when it got to the stage where being critical of the Master would have the Fans look at you askance, where disappointment with a development in the *Babylon 5* universe was considered heresy, I realised that I had to take a step back.

I began to notice that a lot of the things that JMS claimed previously, such as his desire for *B5* not to become a franchise, had not been upheld as promised. There are toys galore, there are the novels (some of which are okay and some of which a truly dire), there are the comics, the T-shirts... Once, or so I have heard, JMS said that the fans were welcome to do with his show as they pleased as long as it was not profit-making, but he is also supposed to view fan-fiction very dimly... (There is a fanfic archive on the web, safe from JMS's eyes - M/ed.)

I am also not sure whether to believe JMS's statement that he would rather be just a writer and not involved quite so deeply with the show, if only he could be guaranteed that the scripts he wrote were not rewritten. Or his claim that he was only at the head of the show as a means of self-defence against such rewriting (which may be a fairly valid point, but surely not the only reason to become executive producer!) I reckon, JMS has sold out despite his self-professed ideals. And in his attempt to do things better than *Star Trek* he has succeeded only in so far that *Star Trek* also had to pull its socks up and get better yet in turn: I hear *DS9* has gone in for arc, too, these days...

Of course, I will watch the rest of the show, but I am not quite so keen to see the last five episodes as I was to see the end of season 3. Not because it will all be over then, but because I don't trust JMS to leave any room for dreams about those characters I have come to hold dear. I am afraid that his impulse to control everything will tie up any loose threads that might have spun off into whole new adventures in the minds of the fans of the show. The thing about fiction is this: if you cannot bear to see your fans love your work and take it on flights of fancy, if you are so precious about your creation that you cannot tolerate criticisms or suggestions (yes, I am aware that there can be legal implications and all that, but that is not what I am on about), then maybe it is better if you do not give your works to the public. Because the moment you do you share custody of the characters and their world with the fans, not legally maybe, but emotionally.

Having written all that I feel it is time for a disclaimer: the above was written because I very much loved and still love *B5*. I still think that it has been ground-breaking in its achievements and I look forward to its legacy in future TV science-fiction.



Sixth Sense

The Two Doctors

ROBERT HOLMES was never above recycling his own ideas. As outlined in an article in *Circus 2*, the storyline for the first Jon Pertwee story, SPEARHEAD FROM SPACE, drew heavily on a Holmes storyline for a film eventually made as *Invasion*, and written by Roger Marshall. **THE TWO DOCTORS** looks back, thematically at least, to one of Holmes's earlier, unproduced *Doctor Who* storylines - 'The Aliens in the Blood'. 'The Aliens in the Blood' concerned a new species who had evolved from humanity and were antipathetic towards humans. They could only be identified by minor details - four fingers on one hand, for example. Understandably, with its racist message - that some groups of people are the enemy because they are born that way - Terrance Dicks rejected it as unsuitable. However, by 1984 Eric Saward was in charge, happy to let anything through so long as it was technically feasible to produce it. Thus the Androgums and their insatiable appetites and the story's implicit approval of eugenics. It's the races themselves who are intrinsically at fault, not the theory itself.

As for the meeting of the sixth and second Doctors, the production team might have believed that they were entertaining the audience with a compare and contrast exercise. This didn't work. First of all, Patrick Troughton remained an assertive, authoritative screen presence, of the sort that John Nathan-Turner wouldn't have employed in his underdeveloped bid to make *Doctor Who* more of an ensemble piece. Secondly, Troughton and Hines had visibly aged and *Doctor Who* was older as well. The Doctor-Jamie relationship had a different dynamic because the series' format had changed. The second Doctor and his companions were at their best when playing the inquisitive children to the pompous grown-ups who had got themselves into a crisis. This couldn't work in **THE TWO DOCTORS** because the Doctor inhabited a universe that was both more cynical and more crude. The Doctor had become one more garish figure among many, and the guests from the past were assimilated into the new arrangement. Hence the plotless diversion where the second Doctor is turned into an Androgum and goes eating in Seville with Shockey; the Doctor, past and present, is just another figure of fun in a cruelly mocking universe.

Identification Parade

Changing audience attitudes in the 1980s and *Doctor Who*, as seen in 1990 and 1998

Matthew Kilburn

The inclusion of this article stems right back to my original plans for this zine at the beginning of the year. I had originally thought of it as including a large number of reprinted articles from my contributions to *The Tides of Time*, *Skaro* and *Celestial Toyroom* of the last few years, together with my comments on them from a present-day standpoint, but soon discarded this idea, firstly because really, I don't think there's an audience for it, and secondly because most of my articles seemed to raise the same issues. It was also an old trick; I'd done it before for *Tides of Time* in 1994 when I took a review of *Doctor Who* in the 1980s and updated it from the point of view of my older and wiser self. However, I thought there was mileage in it for just one more piece, and it's this one, originally published as 'No-One Identifies' in 'CT', December 1990. Soon: my reflections on it in 1998, which in a departure for the main text of this magazine will be in Arial like this paragraph rather than Bell MT, but first, the original article:

1990

Much ink has already been expended on assessing the declining ratings of *Doctor Who* in the 1980's. This article, however, will place less emphasis on the failings of John Nathan-Turner as a Producer, than on *Doctor Who*'s increasing conspicuousness within the wider context of the changing tastes of the British television viewer and the differing pressures placed on the BBC during the last decade.

In the 1970's there would appear to have been more room for diversity in popular British television. The soap operas did not dominate the top placings as they do today. A balance appears to have been maintained between popular series based in the past, such as *Upstairs, Downstairs*, *Edward VII*, *Jennie* or *The Duchess of Duke Street*, the half hour contemporary soaps, night-time examples being *Crossroads* and *Coronation Street*, crime/action series, and the futuristic models such as America's *Star Trek*, our own *Blake's 7* and, of course, *Doctor Who*. Overseas sales were not a priority in days when no-one questioned the BBC's right to a high licence fee, or when ITV's advertising monopoly was not assailed by satellite channels or a free market government.

The import of the American nighttime soap operas, such as *Dallas* or *Dynasty*, reflected a

change in the attitude of the British Public. Tired of looking back to a prosperity they were unable to emulate, or forward to a technological utopia promised for tomorrow, the tastes of the public for television drama demanded a shift to the here-and-now. Wealth creation moved out of *Sale of the Century* and *The Generation Game* - the Light Entertainment giants of the 1970's- and on to *Howard's Way*. Attempts to revive the old period genre, such as *The Brides*, were doomed to failure. The public now seemed to want identifiable characters coping with day-to-day human relationships.

Doctor Who was at first a beneficiary of this change. John Nathan-Turner and Christopher H. Bidmead were genuinely ahead of the pack in moving towards 'glossier' production and attempting to include more believable characters in *Doctor Who* within the limits of the twenty-five minute VTR format. Although following the onslaught of the revamped ITV Saturday evening schedules at the turn of the decade and the confidence-deterring performance given by Tom Baker in Season Seventeen ratings for the first Nathan-Turner stories were low, the first Peter Davison season gained successful positions, probably helped by the restored family unit aboard the TARDIS. However these were not matched the following year.

1982 was a year of revolution. The dominance of the Conservative Party in British politics was assured by the victory over Argentina; the home computer took off, the appeal of high technology in the home combining with a new medium of home entertainment; video rental began to make feature films available to the general public years before they could ordinarily have seen the on television. In addition, the arrival of Channel 4 increased the polarisation of the television networks into two populist channels anxious to gain large audience shares, with two subsidiary outlets to broadcast 'cultural' or 'minority' programmes. This may have deterred experimentation with the variety of programmes made, but, with an increasing awareness of the importance of selling to markets outside Britain, encouraging diversity of production formats.

Overseas sales, coupled with BBC Enterprises' increasing re-orientation towards exploiting the core audience of Who enthusiasts as opposed to its traditional child target audience,

coloured the BBC's attitude to the series as the decade progressed. Nostalgia came to hold sway with Season Twenty and Twenty-One, and with it an increasing unintelligibility to the general viewer. While the lowest ratings for these two seasons may have owed more to the presence of Channel 4 and the rise of the computer and video, there does seem to be evidence that the BBC's criteria for producing *Doctor Who* were becoming strikingly different from those operated in previous times.

To be fair to the Corporation, there were alterations to the programme during this period designed primarily to attract the British viewer. The weekday evening timeslot indicated that the programme was to be regarded more seriously; stories like EARTHSHOCK and TERMINUS relied on tension and horror far more than the shock tactics of the Hinchcliffe era. One innovation BBC1 Controller Alan Hart deserves credit for is the introduction of the forty-five minute episode, which gave the series the opportunity to develop more away from the restrictive cliffhanger serial format which could easily invite derision.

Unfortunately three factors let this down. The first was the styling of the new sixth Doctor, who seemed geared much more to the 'camp' style the American and other overseas audiences supposedly loved. While Peter Davison's orthodox English gentleman easily gained acceptance at home and abroad (despite being written off by the telly-pundits) the outrageous costume and manner adopted by Colin Baker, combined with a poor launch story which established the new Doctor as next door to a maniacal psychopath, did little for a series whose potential audience was not disposed to accommodate the innovation. The second was the writing of the twenty-second season, which was largely entrusted to writers new to Who, unfamiliar with the need for fast, active scenes in the programme, resulting in drawn-out episodes and plots in which little seemed to occur. Thirdly, BBC management were content to allow the above to continue, as *Doctor Who* was proving cheap to make, still reasonably popular although outdated in style, and financially lucrative to a BBC realizing the necessity of making prestigious all-film dramas for an international audience but needing the financial base to prevent foreign co-producer from interfering with the BBC's creative role. The 'cancellation' affair, apparently motivated by the Corporation's need to maximize its foreign sales surplus under pressure from the Government, cemented the disastrous consequences these circumstances brought about.

The pressure for the elusive 'quality' programming at home, combined with international market forces, encouraged a growth in the TV/film sector in Britain, including both 'Film on Four' and series such as *Inspector Morse*. Few drama series expecting high ratings came to be

made on video, except 1970's hangovers such as *All Creatures Great and Small*, the soap operas, or semi-soaps such as *The Bill*.

Against a background of high budget film series and mass-media promotions according to fantasy and horror films, *Doctor Who* has become more of an anachronism, pumped out at the lowest possible cost, using as little studio time as it can, in order to help fund other BBC projects. Higher viewing figures may have come its way had it not been placed against such established programmes as *The A-Team* and *Coronation Street*, but the programme no longer speaks in a language that is readily understood by the viewer. The statements that Andrew Cartmel and his writing team have tried to make in the past three years would have been more forceful, less out of place, had the programme had the budget to allow it to communicate as it could before its environment changed; although there again, mistakes and misunderstandings displayed by Cartmel, such as the caricature that was the original Ace in *DRAGONFIRE*, and the buffoon who claimed to be the Doctor in Season Twenty-Four, may simply have been all the more blatant.

Doctor Who has not been allowed to adapt to its changed circumstances in the past decade. What *Radio Times* could refer to in August 1980 as a programme with "high fantasy, labyrinthine plot, wit and élan" can now be acceptably referred to, to quote from a recent *Listener*, as "pantomime and derivative kitsch". If the programme is to survive in the new decade, it seems clear that there must be a major re-examination of the format. Fans should brace themselves for the melting of many sacred cows.

1998

When I wrote the above article I thought that we were in the middle of a comparatively brief hiatus, longer than that between seasons 22 and 23, but not one that would last beyond autumn 1992 at the very latest. I don't think I was alone in my naivety. I had faith that BBC management had realised how resilient a concept *Doctor Who* was, and bring it back after a short interlude in which they could agree new terms for its production and then continue the programme in a revised and hopefully more lavishly-funded form. Lavishly-funded, not because I wanted more special effects, expensive model work or overseas filming, but just to buy a little more time for the programme to be thought over, to be a little more considered. Many of the Cartmel era stories were good, but they often felt like the work of people just learning their trade. I watched them again when preparing his article and thought that too many of them are of the social issues school of popular drama, human relationships being explored within a framework that only understands them in crude, agitprop terms. Curiously

ously, I thought the best stories of the last two seasons by far were *Survival*, with *REMEMBRANCE OF THE DALEKS* following close behind - perhaps because simplistic social observation was to be the stuff of series drama in the 1990s, in the wake of *Casualty* and *EastEnders*.

I was recently looking through old copies of *Radio Times* and was struck by how many new drama

series there were in the 1970s. There would usually be at least one or two new starts a week on BBC 1 or BBC 2, often more. Most were adaptations of one sort or another, and would often run for many more weeks than their successors today. There would be little location filming, judging by the studio sets displayed in the photographs besides the listings. Yes, there was indeed diversity, at least more so than today when one reads in the media pages of channel controllers, or often their superiors, ordering large batches of costume dramas, or 'docu-soaps', which run all at once. The tyranny of the soap operas widens yearly. About a year ago there were stories that Lorraine Heggessey, head of Children's BBC, wants to make *Grange Hill* into a weekly soap to counterbalance the reliance on youth characters by *Neighbours*, *Emmerdale* and even the latterday *Coronation Street*. Timidity now rules where once there was creativity and a willingness to introduce audiences to new ideas.

If it sounds as if I deplore the shape of modern television. This isn't true. As a critic I regret the manner in which it has increasingly become a distribution medium whereas once it claimed to be a form in its own right, drawing on some of the qualities of theatre, radio and cinema but with its own immediacy, intimacy and unrivalled audience reach. However, in these multichannel days the amount of new dramatic product has drastically reduced and so much of it seems uniform; the same characterisations, camera technique, dialogue and hand-me-down morality, from *Out of Hours* to *Berkeley Square*. Nonetheless, as someone who would like to solve the problem of what to do with *Doctor Who*, should it by some ever remoter chance return to production, I want to work with it, find a space. There is still a lot of good stuff out there - I wasn't impressed by *This Life* but I have enjoyed Tony Garnett's team's work on *Ultra-violet*, and I've heard that *The Bill*, in the manner of its predecessor *Z-Cars*, has adapted well to a return to a one-hour slot - but there just isn't enough of it.

In the light of developments in popular television drama in the late 1980s and afterwards, it



could be argued that the instincts of the 'Cartmel gang', as I called them, were leading in a fruitful direction if they really were moving *Doctor Who* towards *Casualty*-style social commentary. The reinvention of television light entertainment in the late 1980s was spearheaded by *Blind Date*, whose crudity exceeded anything ever seen on *The Generation Game* or *Blankety Blank*.

In these series the hapless members of the public were largely there as feeds to the celebrity hosts or panellists. Most of them knew what they were there for. *Blind Date* encourages the contestants to become caricatures of themselves, become the parts that are made from them, blunt themselves so that they become simplified wood carvings of people. Occasionally the real people re-emerge in the follow-ups, particularly among the couples who actually develop relationships and get married. Even so, they have gone through a rite of passage and are created anew for television, remaining characters of whom the audience is encouraged to consider themselves the authors. Human society had become fatally confused with human interest drama, a development not altogether unconnected with the proliferation of the latter form in the late 1970s/early 1980s, and its incorporation of tabloid journalistic values in the new social pseudo-realism of the new soaps.

By 'human interest' drama I am thinking of *All Creatures Great and Small* as well as the American imports. As almost everybody knows, John Nathan-Turner had worked on *All Creatures* and he wanted to emulate the qualities of *Dallas* and its imitators on British television, as shown by his long-running plans for *Impact*, a series which was often mentioned in BBC press statements but never actually seemed to near launching. In the meantime JNT sought the expansion of the TARDIS crew, thereby making the programme more of an ensemble show. Whereas historically he had some justification for trying to restructure the cast structure so the narrative was less reliant on the presence of the Doctor, the programme was called *Doctor Who*, and any possibility that the character would not be the overriding central reference point for the series had been put aside as soon as Ian conceded that the seemingly frail Doctor was his 'leader' - see Andrew Smith's article earlier on.

The reception given to the expanded cast aboard the TARDIS by fandom probably vindicates the Nathan-Turner/Bidmead agenda, as I identified it in 1990, to some degree. The fuller companion characters included in the Virgin and latterly the BBC ranges can trace their lineage back to the fifth

Doctor fan fiction of the early 1980s and an emerging generation of writers' expansion and (if this is the right word) personification of the characters who on screen did little more than argue and complain at each other most of the time.

The problem is that the 'Nathan-Turner/Bidmead' agenda I identified in 1990 - a commonplace for many years of those critical of the development of the programme under the script-editorship of Eric Saward - didn't really exist - at least, not in the way that a lot of us thought it did. The 'JN-T Memoirs' in *Doctor Who Magazine*, followed by Peter Griffiths's interviews with Christopher H. Bidmead, reveal two distinct agendas. Bidmead was interested in bringing a realistic, credible *Doctor Who* to the screen that could return to its 'old' values of familiarising children, and others watching, with the scientific method. Bidmead's thoughts were probably more advanced than anything Sydney Newman had ever dreamed up on the matter, and David Whitaker was more concerned, after simply getting workable scripts on the table for the first read-through, with different forms of knowledge, from twentieth-century science, through mediaeval religion and eastern mysticism to the hermeticism that Tat Wood identifies in his 'Whizz for Atoms' article included in *Licence Denied*. But that's a matter for my Bidmead-as-true-heir-of-Newman-and-Whitaker piece, which I've been meaning to write for two years and never got round to.

Returning to 1980, John Nathan-Turner was primarily interested in getting through the season in such a way that the programme could survive for another year, delivered under budget with adequate audience numbers and appreciation, thus rewarding him with permanent staff producer status and, hopefully, a move on to the kind of series with which he felt more comfortable. Thus the 'restored family unit aboard the TARDIS', which enabled TARDIS scenes which could include more dialogue, character interaction and even plot development and so hopefully reduce the number of actors and new sets necessary for each new story. The larger cast was also a device with which Nathan-Turner, anticipating the marketing zeitgeist of the latter

part of the 1980s, hoped to ensnare different sectors of the audience. Nathan-Turner was a producer perhaps slightly ahead of his time; whereas traditionally the BBC seems to have regarded its audience as a spectrum, Nathan-Turner only saw brightly coloured blocks.

In 1990 I put forward the argument that Alan Hart as controller of BBC 1 treated *Doctor Who* as a programme of weight, deserving its midweek timeslot. Having read the occasional issue of *In-Vision* dealing with the Davison era, I'm familiar with their line that the reason for *Doctor Who's* rescheduling in a succession of midweek timeslots was not that the BBC were taking it more 'seriously' at all in the sense that I meant in 1990, but instead using it, *Angels* and *The District Nurse* to experiment with audience figures and viewing patterns in anticipation for *EastEnders*. The case is a credible one, and complements the ambition that John Nathan-Turner repeated frequently around this time, that he wanted to produce a twice-weekly popular drama series to rival *Coronation Street*.

I'm more favourable towards the cliffhanger serial form than I was in 1990. The problem was less with the serial format itself but in that Nathan-Turner played to all its clichés, noticeable by 1984 as every episode finished with a close-up on the Doctor's face or with a scream dissolving into the theme music. The series seemed to be aiming at a less sophisticated audience than it had encouraged five, seven or even ten years before, contributing to the impression that it was travelling backwards. The 1980s were also the age of the microcomputer. We might laugh now at the primitiveness of the Spectrum or Commodore, but it was crushing for

the young viewer anxious to see genuinely futuristic technology in *Doctor Who* (and the old console was so basic that it didn't need to be seen to keep up with the times, something understood when the season 14 console room was designed in 1976) to see that the Doctor had 'upgraded' his ship to use the BBC B.

I've discussed aspects of some of Colin Baker's stories seasons in my 'Sixth Sense' articles scattered through this magazine and think that the style of the twenty-second season resulted from more complex factors than



purely the inexperience of the writers - most of whom had worked on other series, apart from Paula Moore/Wolseley whose work on *ATTACK OF THE CYBERMEN* was in any case more closely shadowed by Eric Saward than that of other writers to say the least, and the poorly served Glen McCoy. As for BBC management's plans towards *Doctor Who*, the more information we have, the less clear their intentions seem to have been. I think that *Doctor Who* was kept on after Tom Baker left because it was being used to 'road-test' the twice-weekly serial format as described above, and also because the Drama department was without clear leadership for several years. I don't know anything of the politics that followed the departure of Shaun Sutton in 1981 but for many years BBC Drama seemed to be gently treading water, with no real leadership, as if Jonathan Powell disliked the Newman-Sutton inheritance but knew that he couldn't turn the department back into what it had been until 1982 because television had moved on. *Doctor Who* survived for want of something better to spend money on and fill screen time with, and with BBC Enterprises willing to co-produce the series from season twenty-two onwards, it could actually be argued that it freed resources that could be spent on other programmes while the studio production system continued.

Inspector Morse was something of a cause célèbre for *Doctor Who* fans in the early 1990s. I think that to many people it represented something of what they felt *Doctor Who* should be, though whether everybody could agree on the particular something is less certain. Largely, though, people were drawn to its filmed appearance and the fact it told an entire story in ninety minutes. I'm sure that a case can be put forward that argues of the McCoy-Cartmel stories would have benefited from being screened in this way, particularly *BATTLEFIELD* which, as a serial, is structured atrociously but redeems itself in some respects if watched in one go. *Morse* was also a programme that was respected, whereas by 1989 *Doctor Who* was marginalised and mocked.

In my *CT* article I called on *Doctor Who* fans to prepare for the melting of sacred cows. But is it possible to melt those sacred cows without simply recasting them in slightly redesigned moulds? In my more pessimistic moods, the experience of the 1996 TVM and the introverted nature of much published *Doctor Who* fiction leads me to doubt whether it can be done. Sometimes I feel that *Doctor Who* has lived off its own flesh for too long to be restored to full life. Even if a production team emerged with the will and the moral and financial support to make a new series, they would face a public which has been primed to sneer at 'old' television. However, I still have enough confidence in the versatility of the concept to believe that *Doctor Who* could return and be warmly received by a weekly television audience - after all, audience response to the TVM was generally positive and there's every reason to expect that a more focussed production team would produce a yet more entertaining film or series. For all the fashionable sneering, there is a great warmth for *Doctor Who* across both British and global media SF culture. I hope someone has the imagination to awake the sleeping giant.



Timelash

I OFTEN ARGUE that *TIMEFLASH* is where Season 22 turns a corner and starts improving. The people I am debating with almost inevitably turn as if animated by some uncanny force and recite all the reasons why this story is so bad, which I then (mostly) concede. However, part of the reason why I think the *Doctor Who* of 1985 started to get better, at this late stage, is that some of the underlying faults became glaring, and there were a few signs that members of the production team, recovering from the 1983 anniversary hangover, started to put right what had for some time been going wrong.

Firstly, and most obviously, Peri wears something approaching a tasteful outfit for the first time since *THE TWIN DILEMMA*. More subtly, Glen McCoy is the first 'young' writer to contribute to the season. Paula Moore was new but as her scripts had substantial input from Eric Saward she doesn't really count. The others were veteran writers, if unfamiliar with *Who*, whereas watching it one feels as if this script has something to prove. In a way, it tries too hard and the script overflows with undeveloped ideas. Despite the casting of Paul Darrow as Tekker, this doesn't come across as another variety bill story because other elements are stronger. Karfel's leaders may be a clichéd senate-in-togas but there is enough for the imaginative viewer to fill them out. The android design is innovative and it's a pity the incidental music sends it up. The Borad costume is well realised and though the benign-ruler-as-frontman-for-un-speakable-horror device is an old one (in *Who*, best represented by 1967's *THE MACRA TERROR*) *TIMEFLASH* deploys it to good effect. Unfortunately:

The characterisation of the Doctor and Peri remains poor - at the start of the story the Doctor is obsessed by a holiday which seems odd as if he didn't enjoy universe-saving (or more fittingly feel morally compelled) every week, he wouldn't do it. The TARDIS and the viewer are insulted by the multicoloured safety belts. The pained inclusion of Herbert (George Wells) does nothing for the memory of the speculative fiction pioneer. The Timelash itself is a laughable confection of tinsel and giant eggboxes rather than a threatening 'nowhere'. The inclusion of pictures of Jon Pertwee and Katy Manning was superfluous and served only to undermine the current cast. Again, it could have been better.

THEY EAT MUSHROOMS, DON'T THEY?

IAN COLLIER

Let's get this straight right from the start, I am a Tolkien fan; I have no life. Or so it is said.

This article might be expected to talk about Tolkien fandom, what we do etc., but actually it's going to begin by dealing with how others, specifically the media perceive us. Tolkien fandom is like many forms of fandom, in that the literary and media establishment both condemn it while at the same time knowing next to nothing about it. For some reason those media staff who look into fandom usually come to it with a set of preconceptions in their luggage which they never bother unpacking; no surprise then that skiffy fans (and by social association Tolkien fans) refer to them and non-fans as 'mundanes'. In fact most modern mediabozos would appear to draw their information not from talking to the subjects of their 'study' but from the programmes or articles of their predecessors. A classic example of this was the launch of a touring exhibition on Tolkien, where the local radio journalist asked "So how often do you dress up?" (based on the photo of one group dressed in costume for an article in the *Radio Times*, announcing the launch of the radio play), rather than any pertinent questions about the exhibition, Tolkien's books or what happened at society meetings. The answer was based on a quick mental calculation of membership and members who dress up at Oxomoot – the Tolkien Society's annual conference, held every year in Oxford – "roughly once every ten years." Certainly at the time none of us at the exhibition had ever dressed up, although that has since changed.

Tolkien and his fans are usually derided by the lit-crit crowd of Bloomsbury set wannabes. An example of this was the attempt by a reporter for the Times to find a Tolkien Society that they could accuse of rigging the result of Waterstones' Book of the Century poll; without trying very hard they found the Oxford University society; but there was no Waterstones in Oxford at the time.

It does not take a great mind to realise after trawling through the critical responses to Tolkien books, or events such as that poll, that reactions fall into two basic types. Tolkien's work is either liked or loathed, but generally derided. Amongst the fans there is a similar divide, between an academic and a fun approach.

If you like it, the golden rule is not to say so too loudly. With regard to the fans though, the media will treat them politely (but coolly) if they are academics, or mock them as weirdoes who dress up and play at hobbits. Even an allegedly sympathetic treatment in the series *An Awfully Big Adventure* had its hippies, not forgetting the counterpointed scene of Tolkien talking (negatively) about people studying elvish and some of the Tolkien Society talking about elvish; a discussion which happened at the request of the TV crew.

That aside the prevalent literary take on Tolkien and other fantasy authors is that such works are immature and for the feeble-minded, after all proper literature is all about real life. But isn't the point of Bridget Jones that she is a fantasy – or am I being immature in expecting the media in-crowd to do as they would be done by? What really is the difference between somebody who doesn't exist in an imaginary world and somebody who doesn't exist in London?

The great irony of the media concept of Tolkien fans is that The Tolkien Society was set up by Vera Chapman (author of several Arthurian romances) for the express purpose of lifting Tolkien appreciation and its public perception away from the 'Frodo Lives' hippie-campus crowd to a more scholarly level. This was in part a reaction against the excesses of fandom in the sixties. Unfortunately just because you are intelligent enough to present an academic paper on Tolkien's use of landscape imagery, that doesn't mean that you don't like to drink and natter, or even dress up now and then. This attempt to move Tolkien fandom away from the hobbit parties of students and others was always doomed to failure. There are and always will be two sides to Tolkien fandom: one is the academic and intellectual appreciation that can see and knows how the 'soup' of stories has been created from the glorious larder of myth and archetype within European literature; the other is the side that loves the stories at face value – great stories well told, and if the enjoyment of them can be enhanced by meeting fellow admirers, so much the better. And all academics like to ease the throat with a good drink, so the two will always meet up in the bar.

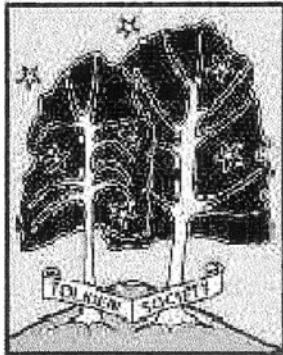
I tried to write the above as a serious look at the twins of Tolkien fandom, but they keep merging, shifting back and forth. Almost everyone I think of as an aspect of one camp can also be

pigeonholed in the other, if I think about them long enough. There are a few extreme examples (I won't say extremists: that has the wrong connotations) who help define these camps, but even Vera Chapman took on the pseudonym Beladonna Took, and dressed up now and then.

It's rather hard to define Tolkien fandom outside these terms. After all, there are around a million copies of *The Lord of the Rings* sold every year, so the readership is pretty huge. I don't know if that figure includes the translations, either (currently there are about 25 foreign language versions). So Tolkien fandom is a broad church, attracting people from all walks of life. I could write a list here but that would be pointless given that this is generally true of other fan bases. It's only the outsiders who try to make out that we are all 'baguette'-toting mediafascists with social skills that only extend to air-kisses and waves. I'm sorry, what was the difference between knowing passages from Hunter S. Thompson and knowing passages from Tolkien?

Having been a member of the Tolkien, *Hitch-Hiker's Guide*, and Fantasy & SF Humour societies, I know how wide fandom reaches across humanity, and that the biggest differences between fan groups are down to the *raison d'être* of the individual society.

This article was intended to be a study of Tolkien fandom, but its either going to be very long or a part-work. The Tolkien Society has been in existence for over twenty-five years, and the books were generating fans for sixteen years before that. So if we're lucky I can finish off talking about Tolkien fans in the next issue, but at least you know that rumours of our loopiness are greatly exaggerated.



The Tolkien Society can be contacted through its membership secretary, Trevor Reynolds, at: 16 Gibsons Green, Heelands, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire MK13 7HN. UK membership costs £15 per year; other rates available on request. WWW: www.tolkien-society.org

SOMEONE TO WHOM I should have devoted more space in *The Troglodyte* is

DAR WILLIAMS

the folk-rockish singer-songwriter mentioned by Paul Dumont in 'The Franchise Affair' earlier in the magazine. Her American label, Razor and Tie, have now set up their UK branch; consequently, Dar's third album for them, *End of the Summer*, has officially appeared over here a year after its American release. Dar made a few appearances in the UK at the start of October, playing the Queen Elizabeth Hall on the South Bank among other venues. Minus the backing musicians from the new album, her roots are as an inspired acoustic performer and she entertained the packed house with a generous selection from her first three albums and unreleased material, including the stunning 'What Do You Love More Than Love?' based on her visit to the Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan which led her to appreciate more fully the Buddhism she espoused when a student.



Dar's lyrics reflect experiences that will be familiar to many twenty-and-thirtysomethings, and they sound equally as heartfelt whether she is singing 'in character' or dramatising her own experiences. 'Iowa' (from her second album, *Mortal City*) - the wistful but strident number that Dar likes her audience to sing along to - Dar describes as being in the voice of an introverted woman suddenly awakened to sensuality by the discovery of a new landscape. 'What Do You Hear In These Sounds?' celebrates Dar's own experience of psychotherapy with a great deal of self-deprecating humour but optimism as well. 'Are You Out There?' records the teenage Dar living in middle-class comfort on the outskirts of Greater New York and listening with urgent passivity to the crackly inner city radical radio stations.

Dar Williams's talent is too great to describe within the confines of this box. Investigate, listen to and appreciate.

The Universal Observer

1ST DECEMBER, 1758

THE OBSERVATOR was privileged enough to be invited to the *London Film Festival's* surprise screening of

Pleasantville

at the *Odeon West End*, in *Leicester-fields*, opposite the site of the town residence of his late Royal Highness *Frederick, Prince of Wales*, now patriotically entitled the *Empire*.

Pleasantville relates the adventures of *David* and *Jennifer*, a teen-aged brother and sister transported into *David's* favourite television series, a gentle comedy from the late 1950s enjoying never-ceasing repeats through cable television. The world of *Pleasantville* is in monochrome, seemingly a symbol of social, political and sexual repression; as *Jennifer* introduces the youth of the town to sex, people and objects gradually become colourful. The message of *Pleasantville* is not as crude as some commentators have termed this device. The film condemns neither the conservative small-town ideal of 1950s *America* beloved of conservatives, nor the seemingly amoral 1990s. Instead, it encourages the watcher to consider their cultural assumptions in relation to those of other people and other periods, and realise that what are often thought to be objective and universal values are in fact parochial and subjective ones.

Mr *Kilburn*, the conductor of this periodical, advises me that there are many cautions to the members of what he is pleased to call fandom. *David* is such an admirer of *Pleasantville* that he is familiar even with the little-watched later seasons, clinging to their narrow depiction of a naive world that was no longer cherished by the public in general. *David* finds that in order to relate to the characters he has always watched and now finds himself living among, he has to use his imagination in a way that damages the fiction he has loved; it is a little like telling *Londo Mollari* not to listen to *Morden in Babylon 5's* 'The Coming of Shadows', or telling Mr *Davison's Doctor* not to touch the fatal bat guano on *Androzani* – what would they do then, separated from the intentions of their creators? The implication of the changes wrought by *Jennifer* and *David*, as the black-and-white world turns into a coloured one, is that the altered *Pleasantville* was broadcast for many further seasons,

surviving into the era of colour television. *David* himself loses his monochrome appearance when he decides to support those *Pleasantville* residents who appreciate the changes being wrought upon them – the 'coloureds' in an *American* town where no-one is of *African* descent, but where prejudice will out. *Jennifer* regains her colour when she becomes independent from the pressures placed upon teenage girls in 1990s *America* and discovers books. The new *Pleasantville* is a more worthwhile television experience because it has kept up with the attitudes of the watching nation; it is no accident that *Jennifer*, remaining in the television fifties as they become the sixties, takes a coach heading for *Springfield*. Congratulations to writer-producer-director Mr *Gary Ross*.

The *Observer* did not, on one of his anachronistic but enjoyable visits to the cinema, expect a history lesson from the makers of

ELIZABETH.

However, he did hope for more attention to be paid to historical detail than was actually the case.

Readers may question the *Observer's* fairness of judgement; after all, director Mr *Shekhar Kapur* professed himself in many interviews to be making entertainment, and screenwriter *Michael Hirst* apparently has a background in history. Unfortunately *Elizabeth I* is such a pivotal personality in the history of Western *Europe* and North *America* that too many people are likely to take what they see on screen as an interpretation of the truth, particularly when there are captions at the end purporting to describe 'what happened next'. *Robert Dudley* very probably continued to see *Elizabeth* in private, and *Walsingham* was but one of many ministers, the most prominent of whom was the very much active *William Cecil*, who didn't retire on becoming *Lord Burghley*, no matter what the film seemed to think. What history there is is of a traditional nature; Miss *Kathy Burke* played a *Mary I* ruthlessly presiding over mass burnings; it isn't mentioned that *Elizabeth* did the same and, as she reigned longer, approved the execution of far many more 'heretics'.

Apart from this, Miss *Cate Blanchett* provided an interpretation of the Queen that has a claim on the over-used adjective, definitive. Miss *Glenda Jackson's* television portrayal, covering a much



longer period of *Elizabeth's* life, has not been eclipsed but *Blanchett* will be seen by many more people as early 1970s videotaped drama becomes an antique medium. Mr *Geoffrey Rush's Walsingham* was coldly effective, his homosexuality marking him in his own cosmology as born damned and so free from the possibility of redemption. *Dudley* was so weak a figure it was difficult to imagine *Elizabeth* becoming enamoured of him; it is difficult to decide whether this was because of the inability of Mr *Joseph Fiennes* (an excellent *Jesus* in the late Mr *Potter's Son of Man* at the Barbican Pit in 1995) or uncertainty towards *Dudley's* role within the film's narrative.

The film deserves credit for avoiding the hackneyed confrontations between *Elizabeth* and her cousin *Mary, Queen of Scots*; instead, we meet the Queen Dowager of *Scotland*, *Mary of Guise*, widow of King *James V*.

Elizabeth also provided a travelogue of the North of *England*; ironic considering that she never visited the North. The *Observator* cannot have been the only spectator expecting Mr *Christopher Eccleston* and Mr *Daniel Craig* to revert to their *Our Friends in the North* characters when they met on the Northumbrian coast.

Alas, the *Observator's* passing acquaintance with the period contributed to his dissatisfaction with this particular *moving picture entertainment*. Laying this aside, then *Elizabeth* may well have been a pleasing, if superficial, dramatic presentation.

THE *OBSERVATOR*, aware that Mr *Kilburn* has pretensions towards being a historian, has long encouraged him to read the novels of Sir *Walter Scott*. In his extreme youth Mr *Kilburn* had been sceptical about the merits of the historical novel, particularly the works of *Scott*, which he had been lead to believe unacceptably anachronistic. The *Observator*, writing from his residence in a time before the birth of the great *Scott*, cannot but allow a wry smile on hearing such opinions. Although still pleased to call himself young Mr *Kilburn* has now recanted and turned to

THE HEART OF MIDLOTHIAN

on the grounds that he wanted to know *Scott's* account of the *Porteous Riot* in *Edinburgh* in 1736. Captain *Porteous* of the City Guard, who had ordered his troops to fire on the crowds opposing the hanging of a popular smuggler, had been tried and found guilty of murder by a *Scots* court, but had been reprieved in distant *London* by Queen *Caroline*, governing for her husband King *George II* who was in his native *Hanover*. A mob broke into the *Tolbooth* prison in *Edinburgh* - the 'Heart of Midlothian' of the title - removed *Porteous*, and lynched him. *Scott* was of conservative tendencies and his work sought to rehabilitate the *Hanoverian*

monarchy. *Jeanie Deans* travels on foot to *London* to ask Queen *Caroline's* pardon for her sister *Effie*, who has been sentenced to death for concealed infanticide; *Jeanie* refuses to perjure herself by saying that *Effie* confided in her and told her of her pregnancy, which would have won her a reprieve.

Scott succeeds in conveying the hazards of a journey on foot down the Great North Road in the 1730s, although he sweetens it by allowing *Jeanie* to rely on a web of good-natured *Scots* which would have fed the paranoia of xenophobic *English* in that era. The last few chapters are devoted to the humorous and tragic adventures of the main characters on the Duke of *Argyll's* estate of *Inverary*, reflecting both on *English* ignorance of *Scots* ways and the cruelty of the criminal underworld.

The novel's scope makes it practically unfilmable; the *Observator* judges, nonetheless, that *The Heart of Midlothian* is worth rediscovering.

THE *OBSERVATOR* learns that Mr *Kilburn* wishes to recommend the following publications, which are themselves produced by *amateurs*; he would say, *gentlemen*, but at least two include *lady* editors among their conductors.

Brickbat Lingerie; issue 3 has been available since September; issue 4 is published in January 1999. 'The *Babylon 5* fems' fanzine' is still thriving. It is available for £1.50 and an A5 SAE from Anna Bowles, 8 Glastonbury Court, Farrow Lane, London SE14 5EA.

Pendragon is the magazine of the Pendragon Society, membership of which is recommended for Arthurian enthusiasts. A sample issue can be had for £2.50, three issues for £7.50 from John Ford, 41 Ridge Street, Watford, Herts. WD2 5BL. Cheques payable to 'Pendragon'.

FAZE, edited by John Connors of 8 Henry Road, Liverpool L18 2DW, expresses the wide interests of the editor and his contributors across popular culture. Issue 14 costs £1.50.

The Tides of Time, magazine of the Oxford University *Doctor Who* Society - issue 22 includes a discussion about *GHOST LIGHT*, a Gay/ Lesbian/ Bisexual guide to *Doctor Who*, articles on *LOGOPOLIS* and *Get Smart* as well as several intriguing short stories. It costs £1.75 from Matthew Peacock, Wadham College, Oxford OX1 3PN. Cheques payable to 'The Doctor Who Society'.

Circus 7 is still available - another excellent pan-media zine, like *Faze* rooted but grown from *Doctor Who* fan culture. From Colin Brockhurst, 73 Vann Road, Farnhurst, Haslemere, Surrey GU27 3NP, at £3. It includes an informative *Press Gang* pullout, frontier-transcending fiction, and an astounding cover depicting John Inman and some hermaphrodite hexapods...



THE DOCTOR AND PERI emerge from the TARDIS and in to a new adventure - for the first time since *THE CAVES OF ANDROZANI*, there is no scene on board the ship to postpone the travellers' involvement in events at their destination. This might indicate that Saward knew director Graeme Harper's antipathy towards scenes in the TARDIS (the opening TARDIS scene from *CAVES* was removed during production) or that Saward was insufficiently motivated to remove ineffective TARDIS scenes from earlier stories. A further alternative, and one suggested by some interviews with Saward, is that he thought the stories in season 22 were so thin that TARDIS scenes were necessary as padding.

Even though Saward solved the script problem by adapting a novel by Evelyn Waugh and adding Daleks, there is a freshness about *REVELATION OF THE DALEKS* that is very welcome. It is impossible to imagine anyone bringing more to the character of the DJ than Alexei Sayle. The DJ represents the ordinary person as hero in a world full of larger-than-life figures. The vertical scrolling effect, used occasionally in 1970s *Doctor Who* to expand the limitations of the studio sets, is adopted by Harper to express the scale of Davros's complex on Necros. The 'shorthand characterisation' touches, such as Grigory's grog-swilling, are carefully underplayed so they are not obtrusive; unlike the broad-brush approach common in later seasons. Similarly the sets suggest the saccharin atmosphere of *Tranquill Repose* without being too gaudy, evoking the 1930s and 40s Hollywood of Saward's source.

Odd points: Jenny Tomasin's Tasembeker has strong echoes of her Ruby in *Upstairs, Downstairs* but by 1985 she was really too old to be addressed as 'child'. In the exchanges between Colin Baker's Doctor and William Gaunt's Orcini the latter emerges as the stronger character. Perhaps Saward would have been happier if the Doctor was an Orcini figure, and played by someone with Gaunt's natural authority. In many ways Orcini is an extension of Lytton, continuing the theme of the mercenary as tragic figure; Orcini achieves redemption in killing his paymaster and then seeking to kill Davros for honour alone. Sadly, dishonourable behaviour in the BBC prevented the Doctor from finishing his last line and taking us and Peri to Blackpool.



An Austin Reed advertising image from 1935, as presented on a postcard from the Victoria and Albert Museum, and (as Paul Dumont points out on the right) an inspiration for Patrick Macnee's look in *The Avengers*, at least in the colour Macnee/Rigg title sequence...

PAUL also mentions the BBC's policy towards *Doctor Who*. Here, straight from the BBC's website, is their current statement:

DOCTOR WHO - the BBC's view

We are very well aware of the part that *Doctor Who* plays in the BBC's history and would have hoped that it could be a part of its future. We do not believe it is appropriate to continue with the programme as a low-budget enterprise as this would serve neither *Doctor Who* itself or the BBC's reputation for quality programming. Also, audience expectations for the effects produced in science fiction programmes are much higher than they once were - and as you know the new technology which is available is expensive.

Nothing is cut and dried as far as this series is concerned. We appreciate that the 1996 movie was a long time coming but it may well be that there will be more of the Doctor in the future. What we cannot do is make any promises about the programme at this particular moment in time.

In Turnaround

Paul Dumont

NOVEMBER 23rd, 1998. The BBC are marking the 35th anniversary of *Doctor Who* with a special episode, starring the Daleks and the ninth Doctor, who takes the shape of a schoolboy extolling the virtues of paying the licence fee. As he wanders through what appears to be the Mediaphere of *No Future* (I presume Paul Cornell wrote this story) bravura special effects see him change from black and white into colour. He braves the White Witch of Narnia and the *Blue Peter* elephant, before finally confronting that embodiment of immeasurable evil, Zoe Ball.

This new Doctor is playfully self-aware in a typically 90s po-mo way. His catchphrase is the scariest mantra since "Exterminate" — "Programmes for small people" (or .../smallpeople as the website address puts it.) The children's programme adults adore has become the children's programme adults used to pay for. Except that the Children's Department never produced *Doctor Who*. And let's just forget that the last original transmission of *Doctor Who* on BBC 1 actually finished after the 9pm watershed.

Whilst it's good to see the programme featured alongside the Teletubbies and Noddy, the other Global Brands beloved of BBC Worldwide, the positioning of the programme by the BBC in its portfolio is reminiscent of *The Hudsucker Proxy*. In this film Tim Robbins invents the hula hoop, trying to explain to a bewildered boardroom exactly what the hula hoop is for: "You know... for kids." After an intense wave of hulamania, the toy dies.

Earlier this issue (in 'The Franchise Affair', pages 5-6) I wondered if the (then) upcoming summer of TV-inspired movies would augur well for a theatrically released *Doctor Who* film. Sadly, the glorious summer of telefantasy cinema didn't happen. *Lost in Space* and *The X-Files* underperformed, given their respective cost-to-earnings ratios. Neither movie broke out beyond their target audiences in the way that, say, the most successful *Trek* films have. As for *The Avengers*... the most poignant experience I've had connected with that film was walking past Miss Selfridge, seeing window stickers proclaiming the shop to be the only place to buy *Avengers* fashions. I saw these stickers three weeks after the movie had closed... I suddenly had an image of an executive somewhere signing a contract because of his memories of Macnee's elegance and Diana Rigg's élan. (He has a point — just look

at the way Austin Reed used to advertise their wares, and contrast it with the Rigg/Macnee title sequence.)

And yet, as Thomas Disch pointed out recently, 30% of Hollywood's income comes from SF/Fantasy/Horror material. So a film would still seem to be a logical proposition. However, are the BBC the logical choice to make it?

As a regular attendee of the London Film Festival, I've lost count of the number of undernourished, underdeveloped BBC films showcased there. (This is by way of an apology to the editor for inflicting upon him *The Life of Stuff*, a film so bad that the BBC couldn't risk a limited theatrical release beyond the confines of the NFT.) The BBC's only unqualified success in this area, *Mrs Brown*, was handed over to Disney to release and publicise.

It's instructive to see how Polygram have been handling *Thunderbirds* since they picked up the rights. They have a script, a director (*The Borrowers*) and even actors (Pete Postlethwaite, Joanna Lumley). However, nothing will happen until \$50 million of production money has been raised, and given the ongoing uncertainty as to who is likely to own Polygram (Seagram-Universal at the time of writing), the Tracy brothers remain grounded for the time being.

\$50 million is small change compared to the revenues to be generated by merchandise. Even *Lost in Space* scored, to some degree, in this field — it was possible to buy figures of characters who didn't make it to the final cut of the movie. However, the phantom menace of the new *Star Wars* looms large. Early sightings of the trailer indicate a visual extravaganza that will increase audience expectations of FX in movies so much that competitors might as well concede now. It's been argued that *Star Trek: Insurrection* represents the last throw of the dice for this arm of the franchise: *Insurrection* has to come out before *Star Wars I* re-defines the standards for the genre. And, given the BBC's stated desire, in the past, that a new version of *Who* must compare (at least) in terms of visual FX as served up by *Trek*, then the portents are not good.

In short, the BBC lack the money, the co-production partners, and the will to put the Doctor into the multiplex. Instead, the potential remains there, unrealised, as the BBC firmly establishes the fact that *Doctor Who* was a black-and-white programme made for small people.

CONTRIBUTORS

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Next Issue is largely up to you. There will be the second part of Ian's look at Tolkien fandom, and the remaining parts of *Sixth Sense*. Otherwise, a few ideas: if anyone wants to write about the future of the television sitcom, or whether the single play can be revived in television drama, they are very welcome. I'd also like to run something on the progress of the BBC Books *Doctor Who* range, and comparisons with the *Star Trek* and other franchises. With the National Centre for the Children's Book going up on Tyneside, I'd like some articles on children's authors or the children's book in general. Otherwise: anything on fantasy, SF, in television, on film and in print, is welcome. Thank you for reading.

Matthew