



I'VE BEEN FASCINATED, entranced and frightened by insects since childhood. They are small compared to humans and many other creatures with which we interact, but they do so much that we can't. They can fly, of course – but most of all it's their ability to completely transform their physical state which bewitched me as a child and which I still read about today, absorbing exotic new vocabulary such as eclosure (the process of emerging from an abandoned exoskeleton) and exuvia (the abandoned, shrivelled 'skin'). Much more is known now about metamorphosis than it was a few decades ago, but there are still competing accounts of what exactly happens when a larva pupates and how far the resulting adult insect is the same individual as the larva it was.

Metamorphosis is a recurrent device in **Doctor Who**. Time Lord regeneration is an obvious example, but I was reminded of the Cybermen when I saw Sam's artwork and decided to put it on the cover of this issue. The picture (*above left*) is a homage to *Male Figure with Skin Removed* (*above right*) by Andreas Vesalius, a sixteenth-century Netherlandish anatomist, but rather than revealing bone and musculature, the skin is held at the arm of a *Tenth Planet* Cyberman, as if it has been newly cast off by the remade Mondasian whose new metallic organs harden in the night air.

There are plenty of precedents within the broadcast series. *The Wheel in Space* featured Cybermen being transported in eggs within which they seemed to grow before hatching. It's not going too far to conceive of the eggs having contained machine parts,

organic material analogous to the imaginal cells from which the adult organs of an insect grow, and nutrients to feed those cells as they become organs which complement the machine components. The emerged Cybermen then parasitize human beings, turning them into their proxies.

The Wheel in Space built on associations begun in *The Tomb of the Cybermen*. There, the Cybermen tombs are presented as a giant nest of insect cells, each sealed unit containing not a pupating wasp but a dormant Cyberman. Weakened Cybermen can be placed in a 'revitalizer', and while this device has a lot of the sarcophagus about it, it's arguably most immediately a cocoon. There, the Cyberman re-pupates and emerges restored to full vigour. It's a little like the 'sleeping compressor' within which *Tomb's* co-author, Gerry Davis, regenerates the Doctor in the closing pages of his novelization *Doctor Who and the Tenth Planet*.

The later twentieth-century Cybermen stories employ some of this imagery. The Cyberman bursting from its wrappings at the conclusion of *The Invasion* episode four is one of the well-remembered cliffhangers of the 1960s, though the otherworldly associations *Tomb* made, evoking not only insects but of course also ancient Egypt, are overwritten by the industrial. The freighter interior of *Earthshock* is even more mercantile, the Cybermen becoming not a swarm but bogus machine parts with attitude. While they do emerge from cylindrical cells the destruction wrought by their emergence owes little to the nest-like imagery of *Tomb*. In *Silver Nemesis* the tomb/cocoon imagery is displaced from the Cybermen to Lady Peinforte and the Nemesis statue, larva, pupa and adult existing simultaneously.

The **Doctor Who** of the twentieth century presented the conversion of human to Cyberman as a form of maturation. 'Our brains are just like yours, except that certain weaknesses have been removed,' Krail told Polly in *The Tenth Planet*. Cybermen think they have put away childish things, but they are repeatedly shown to be wrong – at least, in stories in which their creator Kit Pedler had a major hand. Their version of adulthood is one in which the ability to feel upset or happiness has been surgically removed. They can conceptualize and strategize, but have – or insist they have – no emotional connection with their plans and outcomes beyond appreciation of success.

In twenty-first century **Doctor Who** the emphasis is altered from finding perfection in a change made through necessity, to initiating change in the hope of unlocking potential. This isn't metamorphosis into an adult, but repression into perpetual childhood, something Russell T Davies's **Doctor Who** repeatedly warns against. Davies's Cybermen are often looking for parents, whether John Lumic or Mercy Hartigan. Even after the 'C' of Cybus Industries disappears from the Cyberman exoskeleton in the Steven Moffat era, the Cybermen are still looking for a father, in the shape of Craig in *Closing Time*. The Cybermen can't appreciate their need, nor escape it.

Dark Water and *Death in Heaven* again present the Cybermen as children, with Missy

as mother offering the Doctor the role of their father. However, there's much which recaptures the earlier idea of the Cybermen as insect creatures. Missy's Cybermen have been nesting at St Paul's like watery wasps and her first shockwave of Cyber-troops burst forth like explosive mayflies, living briefly only to reproduce. Once Missy's corpse-seeking rain is unleashed, Cybermen awake on top of indoor lakes, making the Danny Pink Cyberman a sort of giant mosquito, or underground like stag beetles or hawk moths. Given Steven Moffat's interest in the fragility of masculinity it's perhaps the stag beetle metaphor which plays out.

These Cybermen are armour-plated humans reborn to fight the Doctor's battles for him. If at all insectoid, they are individual, with variations in the shape of their metaphorical grappling jaws and differing awarenesses of how to use them. It's those who hold on to their identities above ground who know how to win and lead. Danny's sacrifice of his fear does not remove his personality or reduce him to uniformity. Neither Danny Pink nor Alistair Lethbridge-Stewart want to leave their grief behind. There are no Cyberwomen; in the end it is Clara who counts and is ushered towards a foster-motherhood (of which we see nothing again). Missy's quarrel with the Doctor is shown, at least in this instance, to be sterile. Cybermen here emerge from decay, owing something to a stag beetle's feeding habits. However, it's Danny and (briefly) the Brigadier who represent the self-knowledge which the Cybermen have often promised in the past. Maturity comes from facing and rejecting the deception that being a Cyberman offers any kind of growth. Danny switches off his fear and his love but not his memory of these things and does not dismiss them. They are not weaknesses.

In most **Doctor Who**, the transformation of a human into a Cyberman is only metamorphosis by metaphor. The change is imposed upon an individual by others through surgery. Even when a whole society converts itself, this is a technological and social shift which seeks to marginalize biology rather than change it. At the time of writing, *World Enough and Time* and *The Doctor Falls* have yet to be broadcast, but one has been led to anticipate a renewed emphasis on the origins of the Cybermen in limb and organ replacement run amok, as conceived in 1966. However, the process of conversion unleashed by Missy in *Dark Water/Death in Heaven* was quasi-biological: Cyberpollination, where 'every tiny particle of a Cyberman (contained) the plans to make another Cyberman'. We were left only one stage from the infection of living people, though the effects might be too horrific for **Doctor Who**.

Nevertheless, the thought of someone suddenly stopping at home, school, or workplace, their skin becoming dry and brittle and then breaking open to reveal something inhuman made of steel or silver or plastic is one to tantalize. The stuff of teatime nightmares only ends when the Cyberpollen comes for *you* and the Cyberman within needs to eclose, abandoning your humanity as pupa sheds its caterpillar skin. Humanity is left not exterminated, but exuviated.