A THIRTEENTH DOCTORATE

Series Eleven reviewed

Minor or major corrections, or referral?

Virgin New Adventures • Meanings of the Mara

The Time of the Doctor • Big Chief Studios • and more
The Wheel of Fortune

We're back again for a new issue of *Tides*! After all this time anticipating her arrival true, Jodie Whittaker's first series as the Doctor has been and gone, so we're dedicating a lot of coverage this issue to it. We've got everything from reviews of the series by new president Victoria Walker, to predictions from society stalwart Ian Bayley, ratings from Francis Stojsavljevic, and even some poetry from Will Shaw. But we're not just looking at Series Eleven. We're looking back too, with debates on the merits of the Capaldi era, a spirited defence of *The Time of the Doctor*, and drifting back through the years, even a look at the Virgin New Adventures!

Behind the scenes, there's plenty of “change, my dear, and not a moment too soon!” We bid adieu to valued comrades like Peter, Francis and Alfred as new faces are welcomed onto the committee, with Victoria now helming the good ship WhoSoc, supported by new members Rory, Dahria and Ben, while familiar faces look on wistfully from the port bow. It's also the Society's Thirtieth Anniversary this year, which will be marked by a party in Mansfield College followed by a slap-up dinner; an event which promises to make even the most pampered Time Lord balk at its extravagance!

On a personal note, it's my last year before I graduate Oxford, at least for now, so when the next issue is out, I'll be writing from an entirely new place. WhoSoc has helped me come out of my shell at university, and develop into the person I am now, while giving me a bunch of friends who I know I'll keep in touch with. Thanks to everyone who's been there along the way, and I'll try stopping in from time to time. *James*

The Dimensions of Time

We've hurried to publish this issue for the aforementioned Thirtieth Anniversary and yet there's nothing directly addressing the anniversary in it. We'll probably make up for that next time.

James and I have both been busy these last few months—James with the approach of finals, me with a much-delayed work project among other matters—but we have managed to get this issue out for the anniversary. We are back to eighty pages and have articles left over. There just might be a *Tides of Time* Special before the next edition proper to stop material from dating and where we've already laid the articles in, so we don't want to waste the effort!

That being said, I'm glad we've had so many original blog posts recently. There's a backlog! But for now... *Matthew*
The Thirteenth Doctor’s first series has broadcast around the world to impressive ratings. Critical response has been mixed—Jodie Whittaker has been widely praised but commentators had varied views on the markedly different series of Doctor Who presented by new showrunner Chris Chibnall when compared to those produced under the auspices of Russell T Davies and Steven Moffat. On the following pages Tides of Time writers present the view from and around Oxford WhoSoc real and virtual.

Ian Bayley looks at the predictions made about the series (page 4), Victoria Walker recaps her reviews from the Tides of Time blog and then looks back on the series as a whole (5), Georgia Harper considers fan and media reactions to the representation of diversity in the series (16), Francis Stojsavljevic looks at the society’s online reactions (19), Georgia examines her liveblogs and the responses they received (24), and Matthew Kilburn reviews the New Year special Resolution with some thoughts on Doctor Who’s current direction. William Shaw provides poetic reactions (24, 33 and 40). Several fan artists have graciously allowed their work to adorn our words. For the contents of the rest of the issue, see page 41.
A new series of Doctor Who is always a good excuse for the members of Oxford WhoSoc to start speculating. Series Ten had much for us to contemplate. What was in the vault? What would cause the Twelfth Doctor to regenerate? What would happen to Nardole and Bill? What could we expect from the Master and the Mondasian Cybermen? Series Eleven, in contrast, had no returning monsters to look forward to, and no series arcs; we knew this from the repeated statements of Chris Chibnall himself. The trailer was mostly just clips of Team TARDIS walking together in many different locations. Even the episode titles and synopses arrived only gradually by a process of drip-feeding, typically just a few weeks in advance. Eventually, I came to realise that, with so little information available, musing about the meanings of these titles, was the closest we could come to speculation this time round.

For me, despite the novel yet cheesy Sex Pistols pun, the title Arachnids in the UK suggested an uninteresting Hollywood B-movie, the prospect of which made my heart sink. More hopefully, the prospect of giant spiders recalled the giant maggots in The Green Death, and so I wondered if they too would be the by-product of pollution. Aliens and nefarious science experiments were also possibilities. I wanted to see what others would predict though, so I went to An Unearthly Chat (the in-society Facebook Messenger chat group - Eds.) to find out by making a poll “Arachnids are...” and adding some options. After the episode aired, we noticed that only I had vote for the most accurate “pollution” option so I was declared the “winner”.

The next poll was created three episodes later for The Witchfinders. Witches are a common feature in sci-fi and fantasy franchises. Like giant spiders, they had already occurred in Doctor Who, in this case as recently as Series Three’s The Shakespeare Code. Would they be evil aliens, as in that episode; misunderstood aliens, as in The Ambassadors of Death; or even humans with psychic powers, as in The Fires of Pompeii? If Rosa and Demons of the Punjab were a signal that historicals in this series would be gritty portraits of the worst of mankind’s past, perhaps all we’d see would be pointless cruelty of stronger humans towards weaker humans. For this reason, I included and selected a poll option that said that witches were “non-existent,” but Bethan Hughes added her own option “clever would-be scientists and healers persecuted by the fearful.” In the end, this was the closest match to the truth. Of course, in retrospect, this fitted well with the prevalent theme of Series Eleven that humans are the real monsters.

Perhaps the most unexpected moment of speculation came the day before It Takes You Away, when the Instagram account of BBC America shared a photo with the remarkable instruction “Do not wait until Monday,” implying that the episode must be watched live. We wondered why this must be. The most popular option was that there would be “a massive cliffhanger” to introduce the finale; the subsequent excitement on social media would then spoil the event for those catching up later. In the end, Chibnall was true to his word about the episodes being self-contained. The second place option proved to be the most accurate: “an important development in the Doctor/Yaz/Graham/Ryan relationship,” This matched the moment when Ryan finally addressed Graham as Grandad. However, nobody foresaw that Grace would reappear. Perhaps more inventively, a couple of us had suggested the episode might have multiple endings, or an interactive element, like the...
Black Mirror episode *Bandersnatch* which was released by Netflix three weeks later.

Although *Resolution* was the episode that really closed the series, we still regarded *The Battle of Ranskoor Av Kolos* as the season finale. For this episode, we voted on whether there would be a returning villain. I, and a few others, were inclined to think there wouldn’t be, as there hadn’t been a series arc leading up to it. The majority disagreed, however, and Victoria Walker in particular, applying her experience as Series Eleven episode reviewer for the *Tides* blog, correctly predicted that it would be the Stenza.

For *Resolution*, the real series finale, the single word title was a noun so abstract that my poll options were exhaustive in order to catch every possibility. It could be a spaceship, a weapon, an alien species or “another object of some description”. The initial two letters ‘Re’ seemed to be a sly confirmation that, as some had suggested, the story had Daleks. Most people thought the title meant that the plot arc of the four friends travelling together would be resolved, either with a death or, more likely, an amicable parting. In the end, it was Ryan’s feud with his Dad that was resolved, and none of us saw that coming.

Although the predictions were mostly just for fun, they also give us the opportunity to judge how imaginative Chibnall and his writers were. Evidently, as we can plainly see, the return of the Stenza and the nature of the arachnids were predictable, but the second reappearance of Grace, and the eventual forgiveness of Ryan’s Dad, were not. Although I didn’t expect that our speculation would be in the form of five polls until it happened, it was fun to take part in them and I look forward to more polls for Series Twelve.

---

The Victoria line (Hope Valley route)

Victoria Walker’s take on Series Eleven

*Well-judged fall, varied impact*

*The Woman Who Fell to Earth* was a really strong series opener. Chris Chibnall did a good job in creating a fast-paced introduction to our new Doctor, the new cast, and a new villain.

It is impossible to properly evaluate this episode without comparing it to the introductions of previous Doctors. I’ve found all these episodes tend to be quite slow. This is a symptom of post-regeneration fatigue and has been seen as unavoidable. This episode was quite different. Jodie was up and about, animated as she is throughout the rest of the series. Consistency is not sacrificed, as she does face difficulty remembering certain things, and we do have the brief obligatory sleep scene. This is a step in the right direction for series openers. Sure, I do enjoy stories like *Spearhead from Space* and *Deep Breath*, but they can be frustrating in their way.

We certainly start our new run of monsters with an interesting one. I do like the idea of the Stenza, and Tzim-Sha (or Tim Shaw as the Doctor chooses to call him) is an interesting offshoot of that race. Whenever discussions are held about the Stenza, people seem to take Tzim-Sha’s conduct as indicative of the entire race. With the

![Tzim-Sha, by reshipkmn](reshipkmn.tumblr.com)
Daleks, Cybermen, Sontarans or any other typical warrior race, it is natural to talk about one as though they embody the whole. Tzim-Sha stands slightly apart from the Stenza, as he has cheated his own race through the use of technology. Presumably, the Doctor would take issue with the hunt no matter whether he was cheating or not. That leads me to question why the cheating is brought up in the first place. I could be ever so cynical and claim that it is to explain why the Stenza don’t come after the Doctor themselves later on, and so that whole idea is little more than a plot hole plugger. I’ll leave that as food for thought.

Unfortunately, there is an issue with narrative pacing, as ends up evident for the rest of the series. This is most evident with the tonal whiplash of Grace’s death. I love Grace’s character, but why kill her off like that only to force a grief plot for Graham the rest of the series? The build-up and denouement of the episode are not set up to ensure that this event has the impact it should have. It makes me sad that this is the case because the episode, while it has some minor picking points, is otherwise fine. It is a good introduction to every member of the cast.

Ryan’s introduction through his dyspraxia is an interesting one. The sequences with the bicycle are, in my mind, genuinely quite heartwarming. The one thing I do question is just how he managed to throw a bike that far. Seriously. While I appreciate the effort in how this setup is achieved, it just doesn’t really work when you think about it. Yaz knowing Ryan from school is a good way of connecting the two, as in New Who a mixed gender pairing like this tends to imply some sort of romantic relationship. I like how platonic these two are. All in all, I did enjoy this series opener. Small issues aside, it was a very reasonable introduction to Jodie Whittaker and the rest of the cast.

There’s another room next door

The Ghost Monument opened with the incredibly convenient rescue of the TARDIS crew from space, but the rest of the episode was well put together and the general concept was strong.

The new title sequence is very, very good. It reminds me very much of very early Old Who openers and those were great. While I quite liked the opening put together for Capaldi, I am and always have been a sucker for the classics.

The setting and camerawork on this episode are particularly good, as they’ve made the planet really look and feel hostile. While Chris Chibnall has a tendency to tell, rather than show, the planet Desolation was shot really well. A good job was done making the planet seem of considerable scale.

The episode itself was not perfect, especially script-wise. There were many moments that felt clunky or awkward. I can sum them all up with the line “there’s another room next door,” from Yaz during the exploration of the underground laboratory. It pulls you out of the action, as it isn’t something anyone would ever say. There was a good intention behind this line. It could be rewritten well as “there’s another room through here,” or even “there’s another room through this next door.” It’s the small things that just pull you away from an episode.

The lack of a distinct antagonist is a potential weakness. I suppose Ilin could be considered as such, however spineless he may be. It’s most curious that he just relents when Epzo and Angstrom argue over there being a joint winner of the race. It is a startlingly short argument. How are they going to get off the planet if he doesn’t agree, and just leaves them there? He doesn’t know about the Doctor’s ship, in fact, she very distinctly does not give away the fact that the ghost monument is her ship. Presumably the result doesn’t really matter to Ilin. Perhaps he is just a bureaucrat, running the race because he has to.

Angstrom and Epzo formed a pretty great supporting cast. Epzo is brooding without being overdone. His character plays very well off of the Doctor, especially as she takes charge before they leave on the boat. She can handle him quite well. Angstrom has a
well-considered motivation for taking part in the race. The two have both a shared and individual history which is not fully explained. The mystery there is a good thing. There is always a danger of over-explanation, but it is well avoided in this episode.

Making people uncomfortable

*Rosa* was an episode of contrasts. Not only the contrast of its setting with our modern day, but also that of the quality of various elements of the episode. I admire and am grateful for the respect with which the subject was handled. Malorie Blackman and Chris Chibnall maintained truth to their source throughout and do not resort to hyperbole or exaggeration. They were not afraid to address the tough issues surrounding race, not only in the past but also in the present. Making people uncomfortable is an important thing to do when you are exploring tough issues, and it's to the episode's credit that it made me stir slightly in my seat and consider my own interactions.

Accuracy brings me to Krasko. What a trainwreck of an idea. He could have been executed so well, but I was continually left disappointed by the refusal for development. Joshua Bowman was admirable in what he did with the character, and it is not him I take issue with. The slapdashedness of his greaser costume was disappointing, as was his lack of characterisation. We saw very little of Krasko, and thus he was not memorable. His intentions were never developed past bigotry, which, considering the lengths he was going to, is disheartening. This was done to remove any justification for bigotry, as there is none, but it made for a flat and bland character. To some extent, Krasko would have been better off as a Master-esque mischief-maker, who does not care for humans, as not all racism is as explicit as that in Montgomery, Alabama in the 1950s.

The core cast had by this point developed nicely: Yaz remained my favourite of the three, and I had most definitely warmed to Ryan, especially over the course of this episode. We also saw a warm development of the bond between Graham and Ryan. The chemistry between the members of this cast is very genuine, and it was clear by *Rosa* that Whittaker's Doctor was almost taking a side seat to her companions. Whilst she retained the vast majority of the limelight with her astute observations and wit, we could see the companions as individuals with great self-determination.

The conversation between Yaz and Ryan is a good intersection for this episode. It exposes writing issues while also being terribly important to the message of the episode. It functions very similarly to the Historical Notes chapter of *The Handmaid's Tale* or any aspect of sci-fi/dystopian fiction that is meant to allow the reader to identify their world in the world of the novel or show. This conversation brings it all home and says the necessary: just because they’re in the past doesn't mean these issues are not still present. Structurally, it is a long dialogue section for this point in the episode and demonstrates the recurrent issues with pacing this series. Ryan's comments throughout about his treatment were a better example of how this sort of thing can be done well.

Taking this episode from a historical and political point of view, *Rosa* exceeded what I had ever hoped for it; but as an episode of *Doctor Who*, it wasn't anything special. Other episodes have struggled with issues with pacing and writing, and this one was no exception.

Suspense rationing

I was thrilled that *Arachnids in the UK* returned to the suspense and fear which characterises New Who, but which had been notably absent thus far this series. The trailer certainly suggested a tense hide-behind-the-sofa episode. This expectation turned out to be somewhat misplaced, as at no point was I genuinely spooked. That said, it was fine in general.

Every week I love Ryan more and more. He has become consistent and appropriate
comic relief, and shots like him in the lab making shadow puppets lighten a scene right up. The relationship between him and Graham continued to develop predictably, which was not a bad thing, while retaining the possibility that tension between them might be reintroduced. The exploration of Graham’s grief added much-needed depth and realism to his character. Jack Robertson was a well-written generic evil corporate tycoon with dreams of the United States presidency, reminiscent of Metcalfe from Jonathan Morris’s Fourth Doctor novel *Festival of Death*. Characterisation was a great strength of this episode, only not quite. The exception was Jade McIntyre. I don’t think she had a single line of dialogue that was not entirely exposition. Every time she said anything I was taken out of the episode, and physically cringed at the lack of effort in writing her. There have been much better scientists in *Doctor Who*. Jade has no traits at all other than being able to provide a lot of knowledge. There was never any mysticism to the spiders and their origin from the very start which only served to the detriment of the episode.

This episode’s pacing was no better than *Rosa’s*. It pretty much failed to create any suspense, as everything just moved way too fast. There was an incredibly short space of time from the introduction of the concept of the huge spiders (with Graham finding the carcass) to us finally seeing one of them. The wardrobe opening was an attempt at creating some sort of suspense, but this fell flat as not enough establishing time was given. What I suppose was meant to be the scariest moment was the large spider dragging Kevin away into the mines. This lacked the essential buildup to give the scene the impact it deserved. The sight of our first live spider is similarly damp and ineffectual due to the fact we’d literally just seen one of their carcasses, ruining any shock at the size of them.

I genuinely question how suspenseful Chibnall wanted the episode to be. Nothing about the pacing and very little about the actual devices used actually suggest a horror-based episode. It is entirely possible the production team were intending to simply rely on arachnophobia, but I don’t wish to disparage the writing that much. All episodes thus far have had similar pacing, humour, and moral slant. One of the greater strengths of *Doctor Who* is the ability to show a range of stories without stepping outside of the programme’s remit. It will be sad if this is lost. All that said, however, I can’t say I felt bored at any point. Some of the camera work was particularly nicely done, notably the static shots and establishing ones. I do question the continued use of the shaky camera, but it is only slightly obtrusive. The spiders were well-realised, but perhaps almost too cute for my liking. And Jodie Whittaker? Well, I like her Doctor more and every week.

**Space pace and kooky worldbuilding**

If I had to describe *The Tsuranga Conundrum* with a single phrase, I would definitely call it a warm blanket, comforting and familiar. The frustration of my wish for a more traditional episode had biased me against *Arachnids in the UK*. With *The Tsuranga Conundrum*, I expected a traditional story, and that is what we got. The cuteness of the monster was maintained, but everything else just worked.

Pacing has been a constant gripe of mine this series, but it worked for this episode. Chris Chibnall did an excellent job setting out high stakes, and the pace brilliantly met the level of urgency. That said, the pace is consistent with
previous episodes and does suggest a lack of flexibility in that department. The plot setup was cohesive if very much front-loaded, and absolutely watertight. There is a tendency to provide exposition in blocks. This made sense from an in-universe perspective as, of course, the computer would act as an encyclopedia, and there is no reason why there would be any lack of information there. I’m always wary of information dumps, however, as they can (not always) come across as entirely forced. Durkas telling Graham literally everything when he is caught trying to access General Cicero’s medical records is a mild example of this. There is no reason why he would tell Graham everything, especially considering they’ve literally just met. That is but a small flaw, and I think explicable when Durkas’s character is considered.

There was a great balance struck between serious plot and the slightly entertaining side plot of Yoss’s pregnancy. The idea of male pregnancy is not new, as any fan of Red Dwarf can tell you. What I do question, however, is how did the Giffitan develop such a reproductive cycle? As always it seems that these sorts of things are greatly aided by technology, but one supposes they have to have evolved from somewhere. I’m sure there is a good discussion to be had there, and it is outside the scope of this review to make any sort of assertion. This side plot was a slightly kooky bit of worldbuilding, and it went very smoothly. We also, again, got to see great development from Ryan, but it lacks subtlety. Every time he realises something or grows emotionally, we get a miniature soliloquy about how it has given him insight into himself or his father. The conversation with Yaz would be much better if it was either further spread or cut back like an overbearing rosebush.

Lois Chimimba did such an excellent job with Mabli and was able to put such a powerful range of emotion into her character. Of all the episodic supporting cast seen so far, she produced the single best character, of whom I would love to see more. Eve Cicero was another strong, compelling character whose only flaw is also that we did not get to see more of her. She is reminiscent of Jyl Stoker in Trevor Baxendale’s Fifth Doctor novel Fear of the Dark (2003), and Suzanne Packer was the perfect person for the role. The dynamic with her brother was simply heartwarming.

I actually really like the more educational aspect to this series. It has been mostly unobtrusive, which was why the section on the anti-matter engine was somewhat jarring. Not for the fact it was badly placed or awkward, quite the opposite! It was science fiction presented as scientific fact. Sure, the mention of CERN and positrons was not out of place, but the idea that it was so simple to create propulsion from something like this? Well, that’s a peculiar assertion. All considered however, I like how this series has been moving Doctor Who away from science opera and towards science fiction.

Just a final note on the contemporary references in this series, such as Stormzy, Hamilton or Call the Midwife. One of the reasons Old Who is so watchable is that it is somewhat timeless. Sure it draws upon the technology of the time (“Bubble Memory” in Logopolis springs to mind), and the costuming is dated but, on the whole, you do not need to have much (if any) knowledge of the context of each piece of dialogue. There is the concern that such contemporary references will badly date this series, and while they are fun for our audience, they may not hold up over time.

Questions of scale (and turtles)

So, we’ve reached the first episode this series that Chibnall had no hand in writing (or at least, no credited hand). Demons of the Punjab was my favourite episode so far. Vinay Patel pulled off a moving, thought-provoking episode that tackles the issues of family and religion, whilst also presenting a compelling and poignant tale.

One of my main concerns heading into this episode was that we were in danger of another Rosa: an episode that relies very heavily on the events it is based around, and thus becomes a slightly lazy morality tale.
There was also the worry this would end up as another interference plot. Those are generally low stakes, and largely uninteresting. I am over the moon to announce that that fear was never even close to realised. Historical episodes of *Doctor Who* are always best when they do not focus on the event in question but use it as a backdrop and factor in a wider story. The Partition of India informed most aspects of the supporting characters, but it was not the focus of the episode. The combination of opinions amongst the supporting characters might be thought slightly strange and simply to provide a cross-section of opinion, but it was not unbelievable.

I’ve noticed multiple mentions of other, off-screen adventures the Doctor and the current companions have been having. That sort of thing is in danger of becoming a double-edged sword. These mentions are important. They give the universe and the lives of our cast scale. Mentions of off-screen adventures are nothing new and are an important factor of any expansive universe like the *Doctor Who* one. You can’t show every little thing that happens to the characters, and sometimes these small pieces wouldn’t fill an episode anyway. However, there is always the danger that mentioning so many of these will lead to some questioning. Why were we shown *Arachnids in the UK* when we could have seen the Death Eye Turtle Army? A writer should really strive to show the most important and interesting parts of their subjects’ lives, and those turtles sound far more inventive and interesting than larger than average spiders.

You can’t talk about an episode of *Doctor Who* without talking about the aliens, and the Thijarians were a contrary lot. To a certain extent, they felt like they were there simply to fill the alien quota. On the other hand, Patel chose to take an intriguing path with them. I quite like the fact that they were simply observers, and humanity was the issue. The jury is still out on whether I like their design. If they had turned out to be cosmic assassins, as they were introduced, the design would be overwrought, even for *Doctor Who*. As mourners, however, the all-black was not bad, necessarily. The spiky shoulder pads were threatening, insofar as the idea of death itself is threatening. It is fairly refreshing to have a main alien who is not belligerent, and it doesn’t subtract from the atrocity of the event we are witnessing.

Speaking of which, I would be a liar if I said Prem’s death did not make me cry a little bit. That was how you make a death in *Doctor Who* impactful. Other deaths this series have been invariably throwaway, or out of nowhere. The buildup was beautiful. The tension between Prem and Manish built throughout the episode and came to an explosive finish. Umbreen and Prem’s wedding was a gorgeous moment, compounded by Manish rejecting the union. Manish came across as immature without being childish. I could ramble for ages about how well thought out the plot of this episode was done, and I would never do it justice. Whilst the first third of the episode felt slightly contrived, and slightly rushed, it was more than worth it for the sheer punch to the gut that the final third provided. To put the end in perspective, the Mansfield College auditorium was usually pretty abuzz with discussion as soon as the credits started to roll. This episode, everyone sat in silent contemplation for a little while.

**A handle above a chute**

All series I was waiting for the episode that really took me back and reminded me of older episodes of *Doctor Who*. *Kerblam!* was that episode. From the slightly ominous TeamMates to the well-timed and placed
comedic lines, Pete McTighe did an excellent job in capturing the essence of a slightly less serious *Doctor Who* story, especially considering it was his first episode.

I’ll start by praising the set designers, as every set in this episode seemed large, and like it actually could have been in an intergalactic parcel fulfillment company. I find myself, then, picking only small faults. Obviously, this is a small bit of pedantry, but if no one was meant to go down the chutes to the conveyors, why would there be a precisely placed handle above the hole? Putting my nitpicking aside, I was equally as impressed by the design of the Kerblam! Man and associated TeamMates. They really managed to create a cold corporate idol, who seemed like he was the result of a committee attempting to create a warm and friendly mascot, but just falling short of the mark. He rather reminds me of some of Russell T Davies’s monsters, and that fills me with a warm nostalgia.

The episode setup reminds me of real-world happenings where people have found messages and cries for help inside goods. There were key moments of tension, such as when Dan Cooper and Yaz were down in the triple nines, balanced very well with moments of comedy. A few episodes this series have tried to create this balance, but this is the first time it has really worked. Using Graham as comedic relief this episode was a good choice, and it took our focus off Charlie, who really was our villain. I think you’d be lying if you said you saw that twist coming.

Considering the moral forwardness of the rest of this series, it surprised me to see the complete 180 this episode took. I thought *Kerblam!* was going to be a fairly straightforward episode on the evils of consumerism, but the change when it was revealed Charlie was essentially a terrorist was exciting. Judy Maddox’s pride over Kerblam! being a ‘ten per cent people-powered company’, meeting the legal minimum of organic staff, is perhaps a statement on the tendency of companies to do the absolute bare minimum when it comes to social prerogatives.

That said, the end of the episode wasn’t exactly the best, and not quite what the episode deserved. I’m still unsure as to why the Doctor decided she must blow up all the packages. Surely she could have just had them delivered to the warehouse as a safe space and then the bubble wrap could have been disarmed? That final plan seemed like it was more of an excuse to kill off Charlie. Considering the Doctor’s sympathy to his cause, it seems terribly odd she’d let him die like that. It probably saved a lot of time in wrapping up the episode, one supposes. Similarly, I have difficulty understanding why, from a corporate point of view, Kerblam! would want to bring more people into their business, as the fault was a human one, not a system one. You’d think that would lead to further lobbying against Kandokan laws surrounding this sort of thing. I find it hard to believe Charlie was not a part of some network. This network would have known about his plan and would be able to guess what had transpired given Kerblam! is closed for a while, coupled with the fact Charlie is dead. That would make the fact that Kerblam! fundamentally bowed to Charlie’s demands obvious.

The handle above the chute bothers me far more than the conclusion. It was a thoroughly enjoyable episode, and I think I will place it up there amongst my favourites.

**Absolute Joy**

While I can’t claim I found the plot of *The Witchfinders* to be entirely surprising, it overtook *Demons of the Punjab* as my favourite instalment of the series. Joy Wilkinson put together a marvellously creepy and grounded episode.

One of the first things I noticed about the episode was the costuming and aesthetic. I have a passing interest in fashion history, and while I can’t speak too generally about the historical accuracy of the costumes, I can say that they definitely expressed who the characters were. I found myself with a big grin on my face whenever Mistress Savage was on screen, just simply for her costuming.
That and the various shots of bare trees with the decidedly muted colour palette definitely created the dour aesthetic the episode required. However, I do have one point, which it is not necessarily criticism. When the Doctor attempts to connect with Mistress Savage, before being put on the ducking stool, she makes a comment about women not having pockets. I’ve been telling this to everyone that will listen, but women of that period would have had pockets, and rather large ones at that. They were tied around the waist under the petticoats and skirt and could be accessed through slits in the sides of the skirt. This particular piece of feminist dialogue strikes me as odd, especially when such pains were taken over the costuming generally. I am sure someone could probably come up with some satisfactory explanation for the line.

As King James I, Alan Cumming was a sheer delight, just an absolute joy to have on screen. I had a brief look into how accurate this portrayal of him likely is and, putting aside the fact that King James probably didn’t stalk around the Lancashire countryside in a mask, on a base level he seemed pretty faithful. I thought it good that they did decide to overplay his character somewhat, as he made a generally commanding presence on screen. While James obviously didn’t seem like a particularly pleasant person, with all the sexism and being a king and whatever, he was fun to watch. I did think at one point that perhaps he might have been the alien, but I much prefer the way this turned out.

Considering we’ve had two other historicals this series, it’s remarkable that this is the first time the Doctor has had any issues regarding her gender. A criticism I’ve had of the writing for Whittaker’s Doctor is that she has no uniquely defining feature. Whittaker has played the Doctor very well, but I feel as though she has not been written her own part, more an extension of all the Doctors before her. This episode was the first time she has been forced to react entirely different to how a male-presenting counterpart would, and I think it was handled well. The large TARDIS crew has meant a detraction from the Doctor. I did hope this episode would cure the sonic screwdriver overuse that we’ve been seeing this series and was disappointed. Its use made me feel uneasy, as there was the ever-present fear that everyone would turn on her. I liked that they didn’t until Mistress Savage needed to protect her own interests, as this reflects how witch hunts tend to go.

A lot of people have complained about the rush to introduce and solve the Morax problem. Personally, I think that as a point of resolution for the episode, it functioned fine. This didn’t feel like the Thijarians, who could probably have just not been there. If I had found the rest of the episode to be padded, I might have liked the Morax to have been introduced earlier, but as it stands, I’ve no quarrel with how they exist in this episode. I might take issue with the sheer volume of exposition within the final quarter of the episode, but it is unclear why this doesn’t bother me, especially given my earlier criticism of Chibnall for the same thing. Perhaps it is a result of better dialogue writing, or the exposition as an explanation, rather than a setup.

**Antizonal unanswered questions**

I am still not entirely sure how well Ed Hime delivered on *It Takes You Away*. It feels lacking. While I enjoyed it well enough, I can’t help but feel that it was slightly disjointed, and that none of the ideas fully married up.

To start out with a positive, Graham had such an excellent role in this episode. He remains appropriate light relief, with his sandwich and comments to Ribbons. It was remarked to me after *Arachnids in the UK* that it was good to see some grief from Graham, as there had been little since *The Woman Who Fell To Earth*. To see the wound torn open again here was compelling, and fairly realistic. The wonder in Graham’s voice as he is explaining the TARDIS and such to Solitact Grace is simply heartwarming. This also serves to give sympathy for Erik, even though Erik is a bit of a terrible person. Erik shows a very unhealthy sort of grief, and I enjoy the
I like the idea of the Solitract plane and Solitract energy, however, I’m not sure if I liked its execution. The Doctor’s analogy of chicken pox, while perfectly apt, is not particularly enlightening when it comes to the matter of what the Solitract actually is. What is most interesting is the fact the tales the Doctor was told as a child proved perfectly true. There were no inconsistencies between what Granny Five said and what was revealed in the episode. One also wonders how the Solitract would interact with other planes we’ve seen before. One might bring up E-Space, but I was thinking of wherever *The Mind Robber* is set: outside the universe. Does the Solitract interact with this plane? Is it contained within this space?

Onto the alien life of this episode, and we take a big step into the Anti-Zone. Ribbons of the Seven Stomachs was an absolutely creepy delight, especially with his use of ‘umbilical’ and repeated use of ‘delicious.’ It seems everything in this Anti-Zone likes to eat flesh, and that makes me question the zone’s validity. Why do these creatures exist in this zone? What is their purpose? If they are there to prevent crossover, then they aren’t particularly effective guards. I think we can assume space in the Anti-Zone is limited, as they only exist when they are required to prevent space-time from falling apart, meaning Ribbons and his friends are transient. Again, I like the idea, but I’m not entirely convinced by its execution.

That seems to be a recurring theme with my reception of this episode. It has some really great ideas that on a surface level string together quite nicely. As we all know by now, however, I think far too hard about things, and just can’t believe Erik would leave that pricey a sound system out in the elements, completely unprotected. Those speakers have to be somewhat expensive, given the quality and volume of the sound they create. I also question the setup more generally. Presumably, Erik must have been through the mirror a few times before he put together this incredibly elaborate ruse to keep Hanne in the house. Hanne is a smart and determined girl, after all. Can the Solitract only replicate the dead? Why? Why wouldn’t it replicate Hanne and Trine both, and fool Erik into thinking it was his universe, sans the fact Trine isn’t dead? Don’t mistake me, I very much enjoyed this episode. There was less sonic in it than in previous weeks, and the story was decently well constructed, putting aside the small holes here and there. I enjoyed the ‘reverse the polarity’ reference, as I have enjoyed all Old *Who* references this series. It is just this question has left me with more questions than I perhaps wanted, and I am sure they’ll never be answered.

**Very little mystery, but Ux love**

As a *Doctor Who* series closer, I can’t say I expected much more than was delivered by Chris Chibnall with *The Battle of Ranskoor Av Kolos*. It did not blow me away, not by any considerable measure, and I can’t say it held my attention particularly well. Despite this, I would never say it was a bad episode, and there were a lot of good elements there.

I was disproportionately happy to see the crew start in the TARDIS this week, and was just as happy to see the TARDIS actually used to help put planets back where they belong. To steal a complaint, this series the TARDIS has felt like little more than a mode of transport to get between mysteries. The TARDIS is a valuable character in the show,
and to ignore this as we have this series is a shame. Jodie Whittaker’s Doctor has not had the close relationship with her TARDIS that previous Doctors have had, but this episode reinforces its presence in the show and I hope that the next series continues the trend this and Resolution set.

Graham was a focal character this episode, and I’m not sure if I liked what it did with him. His wish for vengeance seemed uncharacteristic, as he is usually the light relief, even when the episode centers around serious development for him. Graham blames Tzim-Sha for Grace’s death, but with some reconsideration I’m not sure if that is fully correct. The fact Graham didn’t return to his role of light relief until after he shoots Tzim-Sha in the foot leads to this episode feeling like it takes itself far too seriously.

I still refuse to see how Tzim-Sha can be taken as seriously as the show demands we take him. I wonder if the Stenza only hunt species with human-like teeth? (Although that isn’t difficult when you consider that most alien species tend to be very humanoid.) His insistence that he is now effectively a god is almost slightly pathetic. At no point did I feel like he’d win, and without the fear from us, he can’t command respect.

I can’t say I was surprised when I saw Tzim-Sha was back. He appears to be somewhat of a renegade. I’d like to see more of the Stenza, excluding him. The Ghost Monument gave us a glimpse into what the rest of the Stenza may be like, or at least have been like in the past, however, I suspect that was only put there to set up the Sniper Bots and awesome tech in this episode. The reuse of a villain for this episode did have a curious consequence for the pacing, as I felt it was slow (shock-horror).

After complaining after every Chibnall episode that the pacing was too fast, we’ve got one where the opposite is true. I have a feeling this is a result of having very little mystery to the episode. The only real question was what the things in the minerals were. This was restated over and over, and we could have done with reaching the climax a bit earlier. Most of the parts with Paltrakí and Yaz felt useless, as they were not really plot driving in the slightest.

On a higher note, I like the Ux, as I tend to like all Doctor Who aliens who have a more naturalistic approach. Sure, the chrome and plastic of things like Kerblam! are fun, but I’ll always be a sucker for those like the Ux. I do question how there are only ever two, but they exist on three planets. Presumably, there is actually a maximum of six? I’d love to have a fact-file on them, they’re the most interesting aliens we’ve had this series.

Conclusion: The Unbearable Lightness of Thirteen?

The end of the first series of a new Doctor finally presents a full picture of how a showrunner wishes their Doctor to be received. I should now finally feel confident in making a full judgment on Chris Chibnall’s effort.

The problem is, there is so little to say. Whittaker’s Doctor has been quite uninspired and uninteresting, especially when compared with other Doctors. That’s not to say the Thirteenth Doctor isn’t played well. Whittaker is charismatic, witty, intelligent, and very solution-oriented. She makes a fine Doctor,
especially for the new audience who have been following just as a result of her casting. However, she still doesn’t feel that unique. It isn’t Whittaker’s fault, as much like Peter Capaldi, she is doing the best she can with the scripts and stories she is given. Instead, blame must be lain at Chibnall’s door, for creating the kind of Doctor you would expect to find if you’d asked someone to write a series based on the information on the Doctor Who wiki alone. It’s almost as if no one informed him that you actually have to rebuild the Doctor’s character every time they regenerate! Every other Doctor has some quirk that sets them aside from the rest, that you can point to, and say “this is why they are my favourite.” I am, as of yet, unable to do this for Thirteen.

The source of this issue lies within the large TARDIS crew. This shouldn’t be a bad idea, as it can help the series balance a variety of personalities, meaning a viewer isn’t forced to put up with a companion they don’t like for very long. In longer stories, the writer can also facilitate a large amount of very engaging interaction. However, there are some caveats to this method, and the execution of the three companions have left this series rather lacklustre. Many have complained that both the Doctor and Yasmin have been thrown somewhat to the wayside when it comes to episode focus and character development. This is very much true, given I can’t really name a single way in which either the Doctor or Yasmin have changed. It’s especially stark when pitted against the huge strides Graham and Ryan have taken, individually and together. A large crew can be done well, even in smaller formats, but you must introduce each person separately. For example, the ensemble with which Peter Davison’s Doctor travelled in his first season (comprising Adric, Tegan, and Nyssa) worked well because each character had their introduction at a separate time, allowing viewers to get to know each one on an equal footing.

But the characters aren’t the kernel of the issue with this series. The biggest, and most glaring, problem that has been a distinct lack of focus on anything. I’ve already shown how this has lead to an absence of development for the Doctor and Yaz, but it has also cheapened everything within the series. It was noble of Chibnall to attempt an entirely fresh series, refusing to fall back upon the monsters of old, but no time is spent building up these new monsters. There simply are no stakes to get worked up about, and Tzim-Sha is the prime example of this. The insistence on the Tim Shaw joke meant that it was clear neither the Doctor, nor any of her friends, were at all fazed or scared by him. If the characters can’t take a monster seriously, then neither can I! There was never any feeling, nor question, that Tzim-Sha would do anything but lose. Compare this to the reintroduction of the eponymous creatures in Dalek. Here, Rob Shearman provides an excellent example of how to provide an origin story yet make the episode feel worthwhile. This is emphasised by the performances, with Christopher Eccleston putting out so much fear when he meets the Dalek, and the genuine feeling that this creature could, and would, kill. Even if you’d never seen Old Who, you still understood the gravity of the situation. Comparing that to the laissez-faire way that the Thirteenth Doctor treats her adversaries, and it becomes obvious why every story fails to inspire the same suspense as any previous series.

I don’t want to give the impression that I found no enjoyment in Series Eleven, as that couldn’t be further from the truth. There have been some really outstanding episodes this series, such as Demons of the Punjab, and even when they’re not of that standard, Jodie Whittaker does her best with what she has been given. While I feel it a shame that I’ve not found this series to be particularly stellar, I’ve enjoyed the episodes as I’ve watched them, and it is only a result of re-examination that I have found particular fault with many of the episodes. Series Eleven has certainly been different, but it has captured a new audience and hopefully provides a launchpad for greater developments to come.
“If I was still a bloke, I could just get on with the job and not have to waste time defending myself.”

Georgia Harper finds resistance to Jodie Whittaker’s Doctor emerging from predictable but disappointing quarters

After eight months of hype, the reality of Series Eleven finally arrived in October. As with any new series, it wasn’t going to be to everyone’s taste. For some, the new flaws overshadowed the new strengths, while others talked for months on end about how it wasn’t as good as whichever era they coincidentally grew up with – but I wouldn’t have it any other way.

That said, I found it much harder to enjoy the discourse this time round. Particularly towards the second half of Series Eleven, I often found myself more nervous about the reaction to the episodes than excited about them. Make of that what you will, but it’s little wonder when you consider that this was the debut of the first female Doctor, and the not insignificant number of people who were against her from the very beginning.

Let’s start with the outright sexists, who take precious time out of their day to angrily react every Facebook post, and push online review scores down for episodes yet to air. They tend to declare themselves as “not sexist but,” before coming out with “ditch the bitch.” They might paste Jodie Whittaker’s face on a cartoon dog, or even attack the nine-year-old cystic fibrosis sufferer on Children in Need who said she preferred Whittaker to the “boy Doctors”. It need not even be as obvious as that. As any woman in any fandom will know, you need to demonstrate proof of having consumed and memorised every morsel of relevant media before you’re allowed an opinion. So imagine my amusement when I saw all those who would usually mock women referring to the character as “Doctor Who” suddenly understanding all the nuances around that name as soon as Whittaker alluded to knowing it’s not usually “Doctor Who” in an interview. The gender of a lead actor in a TV show is hardly the most pressing feminist issue in the world, but if these people are so angered by a programme where only thirteen of the fourteen leads have been male, I dread to think what they’d make of an actual human woman in a position of power.

And while the online trolls can (and should) be muted and blocked, this doesn’t stop other, more influential, media outlets capitalising on their narrative. This is most apparent in the narrative around Doctor Who’s ratings, which, like a diablo, seem to have discovered how to fall upwards. Whilst ratings did drop over the course of the series to a low of 6.42 million for It Takes You Away, this is still higher than nearly all of Series Nine and Ten. Don’t believe me? Aside from the Christmas specials, which always have high ratings, only the series openers (The Magician’s Apprentice/The Pilot), and the star power of Maisie Williams (The Girl Who Died) were sufficient to overtake this figure. Despite this, the articles about ratings worries were going viral before even the halfway point; from the outset, there’s always something more to prove. Many of these used as their benchmark The Woman Who Fell To Earth, which almost reached 11 million viewers, in an oddly literal case of women being held to a higher standard! You know, that episode where many of those who aren’t regular viewers tuned in out of curiosity and hype around the first female Doctor. Of course, as Series Ten’s diminished audience
demonstrates, ratings don't equal quality; but to point that out only after bemoaning the ratings is more than a little insincere.

Likewise, commentary detailing a “backlash” over “forced diversity” and “political correctness” seemed in some cases to have been virtually pre-written. Because apparently it’s so unbelievable that anyone other than white men would be there on their own merits? A memorable example of this was Twitter’s Moment for the #DoctorWho hashtag following Demons of the Punjab, which was captioned “Doctor Who’s historical approach divides viewer opinion”. This was particularly odd when, at least at first glance, it was far more well-received than The Tsuranga Conundrum the previous week. Indeed, closer inspection revealed the compilation of top tweets to be entirely positive. Seven days later, Kerblam! turned out to be one of the most divisive episodes of the series, yet mysteriously escaped the same treatment. It’s almost as if stirring up racism and anti-diversity narratives makes people click…

Thankfully, with most of the fandom now having progressed from “The Doctor is a woman?!” to actually discussing the substance of episodes, it’s easy to forget about the misogynists, or at least, that’s what I’ve heard from those outside the target range. On the other hand, this means it’s also easy to forget how big a step it was for Chris Chibnall to cast Jodie Whittaker in the first place—though that doesn’t let him off the hook for the more questionable decisions around representation later on. Would Whittaker’s Doctor have been better written under Steven Moffat, as some have suggested? Maybe so, but when Moffat could have chosen to make that scenario a reality, he instead chose to joke about how the Queen should be played by a man. Not that I’d wish away the Capaldi era (or indeed the wider Moffat era) for a second, but throwaway lines like that really highlight how far we’ve come in the space of a few years.

Unfortunately, the sexism is still visible enough that some equate it with criticism, setting up a divide not between hardcore fans and completely disingenuous trolls. At best, this does a massive disservice to the critics. At worst, it legitimises misogyny and hatred as “part of a debate”—the above set-up of a divide tends to be followed by “both sides are as bad as each other,” as if one side wasn’t a reflection and amplification of structural inequality and oppression. It also means that every mention of the misogyny has to be followed up with endless repetition that “yes, it’s okay to criticise the series”; “yes, I know not all criticism is sexist.” Suddenly, the focus has shifted towards criticism itself and away from the topic at hand.
That said, it doesn’t help matters that a vocal minority of genuine critics persist to the point of resorting to regular reminders they disliked this series, devoid of context or indeed, content. Coupled with a wider Twitter culture in which arguments are encouraged, and it’s cool to dislike popular media, this ends up being carried with such a glee—however unconscious, however unintentional—that it becomes almost indistinguishable from the wider misogynists.

There is, of course, a lot to criticise about Series Eleven, even leaving aside subjective matters of taste. The promised LGBT characters “from across the spectrum” were rapidly killed off with unnerving consistency, with Richard in Resolution having just 28 seconds between appearing, mentioning his boyfriend, and then being murdered. Yaz, meanwhile, was often sidelined in favour of Graham and Ryan, and Grace didn’t even last a full episode before dying to further the development of her male relatives (fridging). Particularly held up as problematic, and understandably so, is Kerblam!, which set up a robust takedown of an Amazon stand-in only to instead attack, er, one of its exploited workers instead. This prompted a social media revival of some of the more anti-capitalist—and brilliant—lines from Peter Capaldi’s time in the role. As enjoyable as this is, it’s frustrating to see the Twelfth Doctor framed as entirely unproblematic in comparison to his apparently irredeemable successor. I’d rather focus on the many things I enjoyed about the previous era too, but when you’re using the previous era to attack the current one it’s disingenuous to gloss over the frequent insults aimed at Clara’s appearance (see Into the Dalek and Listen), the episode that garnered attention from Oxford Students For Life for its anti-abortion parallels (Kill The Moon) and the literal sexual assault going unnoticed (Dark Water). This isn’t a zero-sum game. When it comes to treating people with respect, the higher standard to which Whittaker’s Doctor is being held can only be a good thing. It’s interesting, though, to see what is considered unforgivable and what is explained away or forgotten altogether – the latter category often ending up full of issues which predominantly affect women.

It has also been rather striking to see how much discussion has focused on whether the Doctor “really feels like the Doctor”, even beyond The Woman Who Fell To Earth. Does she have the gravitas? Is she too generic? Too different? Too jokey? Too serious? Some have highlighted that the first female Doctor being more passive serves to reinforce gender stereotypes. I’d add that the first female Doctor being a flawless heroine would also have served to reinforce gender stereotypes, but that’s what happens when you only have one incarnation representing women in 55 years. The Doctor has encompassed a huge range of personalities over the years, but this one is expected—again—to prove something more first. These days, my three least favourite words on Twitter aren’t “Not My Doctor” but “for some reason”; as in “I just can’t see her as the Doctor, for some reason… she’s not there yet, for some reason…”. Perhaps we should all reflect a little more on what those mysterious reasons we just can’t quite put our finger on might be...

We relentlessly scrutinise Doctor Who because we love it and we want the show to be the best it can be, even if we can’t agree on what that means. It’s a shame to see that big conversation tainted, both consciously or not, by the biases and assumptions that would inevitably surround the first female Doctor. Nevertheless, it’s important to maintain a sense of perspective, to discuss and debate away as we always would, to ensure that the misogynists don’t take over the conversation entirely.

Oh, and remember to keep in mind that the young girls finally getting to see themselves in the hero really don’t care one jot what we boring old grown-ups think.
Team, gang, fam?

Distracting ourselves with eleven new Doctor Who episodes, Oxford WhoSoc reviews en masse. Commentary and compilation from Francis Stojsavljevic

After each episode of Series Eleven aired, WhoSoc’s faithful 2018/19 publicity officer (your humble author) ran a poll through the society’s email newsletter to find out what this body of Oxford Doctor Who fans thought. Opinions varied wildly on every episode, with marks out of ten and one-line reviews pointing me to the beautiful and life-affirming conclusion that everyone is entitled to experience Doctor Who differently.

But I’m here to change all that. I’m of the opinion that there is one objective audience view of each episode, and I’ve made it my mission to find out what it is. I have pieced together every one-line review I received from our dedicated poll-users and have strung them together into one truly objective review for each episode. I’ve contributed very little to each review, just a connecting word here and a bit of rearranging there. It’s worth bearing in mind that people tend to feel more moved to write a one-line review (it was optional) if they have a bone to pick with the episode.

The experience of reading these reconstituted reviews can be best described as like scrolling through Twitter really fast straight after each episode airs. There’s a mish-mash of positives and negatives, and most criticism centres on one specific scene or image (I’m all for the talking frog, just so you know). With that in mind, here’s what the Oxford Doctor Who Society thought of Series Eleven…

The Woman Who Fell to Earth
Written by Chris Chibnall
Directed by Jamie Childs
The best series opening episode since The Eleventh Hour and the best new Doctor introduction of New Who. The speeches get to be a little much, there are some duff lines, and it’s slow to start but it’s what Doctor Who has been waiting for! Jodie Whittaker as the Doctor was worth the wait, and there are many moments in which she gets the character of the Doctor just right. Love the falling into the train and the big jump at the end. Note to self: Don’t throw salad at aliens. Tim Shaw!

The Ghost Monument
Written by Chris Chibnall
Directed by Mark Tonderai
It had an interesting plot. Poorly paced, full of exposition, nonsensical plot points, and not too dissimilar to the Hartnell era. There wasn’t a mystery to be solved nor any kind of plot twist, and they could have waited another episode before re-implicating the first villain. Destined to be remembered only for the opening titles and the TARDIS at the end. Great performance from Art Malik.

Rosa
Written by Malorie Blackman and Chris Chibnall
Directed by Mark Tonderai
A proper historical again at long last—successfully observing (and not changing) a rather relevant bit of modern history. It was an outstanding triumph: I got teary at the climax even on the third time of watching. While clunky, Rosa is incredibly powerful – no episode of Doctor Who has made me feel like that. The bus scene was spine-tingling. They thankfully pulled no punches on the reality of the time and made good use of all members of the ensemble cast. A surprisingly un-pantomime, uncompromising exploration of one of the most shameful periods of recent history, with plenty of tense and uncomfortable moments, resulting in one of the most powerful and important episodes of
Doctor Who ever. It felt like a blend of classic and New Who: you could truly feel where the show comes from, but it didn’t feel outdated in the least. An instant classic. But while stories about historical figures are valid, that isn’t what I want from Doctor Who.

Arachnids in the UK
Written by Chris Chibnall
Directed by Sallie Aprahamian
Arachnids in the UK is an entertaining B-movie-style romp which essentially updates The Green Death for the modern day while satirising capitalists. It maintains the themes of co-operation and discovery in this series with a very promising set-up. The story is, however, marred by a heavy-handed Trump analogy and an unsatisfying, tonally jarring ending that frays like an old scarf. A few too many frankly concerning loose ends weren’t tied up. Much like The Ghost Monument, it is more concerned with us liking the characters rather than the story, with relatively few scares despite the spiders. It was at least entertaining to watch with amusing dialogue and developments on Graham’s grief. I should be binging these episodes in December instead of attempting to savour them one at a time!

The Tsuranga Conundrum
Written by Chris Chibnall
Directed by Jennifer Perrott
Really quite poor: no laughs, no tension, no emotional climax, no twists, no depth, disjointed themes, excruciatingly bad monster, dull guest cast, all over the place, overwritten, and an absence of an actual conundrum. The cute monster and gorgeously futuristic sets can’t save it. Chibnall likes ensemble casts, but this attempt at an ensemble episode didn’t really work, with lots of bits that didn’t fit together thematically or emotionally. Rarely have I considered switching off an episode of Doctor Who. What happened here? Why did the alien have to look like a gremlin? There have been too many mediocre episodes for me to tolerate another one. Disappointing when we only get ten episodes a year plus a special, and depressing if 2019 is going to be (like 2016) a blank year. Very cute Pting.

Demons of the Punjab
Written by Vijay Patel
Directed by Jamie Childs
That’s more like it! Demons of the Punjab is a powerful human drama about remembrance
and division, set during a hugely significant period of recent history which is forgotten all too often. The ending was incredibly sad, undoubtedly heightened by the wonderfully haunting end theme. The episode gives Yaz some much needed character development: it’s a great personal story, with the best performances from the Doctor and Yaz. It touchingly explores an issue that still has weight today and was thematically fitting for Remembrance Sunday. It only very narrowly misses out for me on recapturing the heights of Rosa. There were no clunky scenes for once, but perhaps too many companions. Give the Doctor an episode on her own show, please!

Kerblam!
Written by Pete McTighe
Directed by Jennifer Perrott

Kerblam! delivers a great mystery, an unexpected twist, and an enjoyable satire for the majority. The critique of Amazon’s poor working conditions and labour exploitation was good but was completely undermined by a muddled twist ending in which the corporation turned out to be the victim instead. The ending felt a bit off—I was expecting more criticism of the system. It was an enjoyable episode nonetheless, with so much positive energy that its mixed messages and other flaws didn’t bother me. I liked the conveyer scene, and it was a decent portrayal of people (and an AI) trying to make a difference where they are not supposed to. The nonsensical twist is what drags it down from being one of the greats. Now we know where the Smilers (from The Beast Below, 2010) ended up!

The Witchfinders
Written by Joy Wilkinson
Directed by Sallie Aprahamian

The Witchfinders is an enjoyable seventeenth-century romp with a standout performance by Alan Cumming along with the rest of the TARDIS team, but it has no visual appeal whatsoever. There was a threatening atmosphere, light relief with King James, and profound Jodie vs James scenes. The Thirteenth Doctor’s gender has a significant impact on the story, finally acknowledging that this Doctor is different, yet still the same. I still think it would have been fun to have the Doctor be the first witch. Atmospheric, impactful, and sublimely realised.

It Takes You Away
Written by Ed Hime
Directed by Jamie Childs

What starts out as a Cabin in the Woods-style horror slowly evolves into a powerful episode about grief, loneliness, and acceptance. It was going okay until the random CGI frog. A universe as a talking frog! Totally bought it and no other episode could make me do that, but they could at least have made it realistic. It Takes You Away has a novel concept but the
worst ending ever, packed with unnecessary elements like the overburdened exposition of the Solitract and the pointless ‘Anti-Zone’. I like how it was so easy to get through the Anti-Zone after that first time. It was almost perfect save for a few missteps, and the best non-historical of the series. The Solitract is the kind of bizarre that Doctor Who should thrive on.

**The Battle of Ranskoor Av Kolos**  
**Written by Chris Chibnall**  
**Directed by Jamie Childs**  
Underwhelming, incoherent, poorly-paced, mediocre and not entirely original, but a solid finale nonetheless. A few scenes that can be described as aesthetic, but nothing more. It felt like a mid-season space-filling episode. Tim Shaw could have done with more development—he was an insignificant villain to start with, made more important this time, but at least this episode wraps up the loose ends of The Woman Who Fell to Earth. A fun end to the Stenza trilogy with some good performances, and great as a one-off adventure.

**Resolution**  
**Written by Chris Chibnall**  
**Directed by Wayne Yip**  
The actual finale of the series! A solid single-Dalek episode that functioned as a better finale than The Battle of Ranskoor Av Kolos, and one that finally makes the Daleks scary again! Still not really sure what the title was supposed to mean, but that might just be me. It’s our most fun Thirteenth Doctor episode to date and genuinely creepy. Resolution is highly competent with a sharper, brighter colour scheme and the return of body horror. On the other hand, the ‘junkyard’ Dalek design was a bit too perfect to be actually cool, there were some awful attempts at gags, and the episode was let down by a ridiculous ending. Haven’t done my rewatch yet, though.

**Impressions of...**  
**The new TARDIS interior**  
- I love the roundels and the new paint, but I thought the area around the console looked a little clumsy.  
- Not my favourite, but I am a minimalist when it comes to TARDIS interiors.  
- You’ve redecorated - I don’t like it.  
- I quite like it. The steampunk/crystal/hexagon themes are unique and it looks especially good with the lights dimmed. The custard cream dispenser and the miniature TARDIS which spins on the dashboard are nice, quirky touches.  
- Going for nostalgia for the late 2000s—the set feels smaller, suggesting less of each episode will be set in the TARDIS than we have been used to.  
- Like the entrance foyer consisting of the three-sides of the police box but I think the lattice-work pattern is too far from the ideal of the roundels. Unfortunately, I don’t like the console itself. The arches are too similar to the time rotor (but different enough that it doesn’t look carefully coordinated) and the time rotor looks silly juddering up and down unevenly at the end of Rosa.

**The new opening titles**  
- The opening titles are too short, but look amazing! And I’m so happy that the Middle Eight is back!  
- Title sequence is beautiful, but the theme tune is missing a beat and it’s killing me.  
- It’s purple. I like purple.  
- M I D D L E 8  
- Very good, reminiscent of the classic era (psychedelic colours rather than the time tunnel or outer space).  
- Not as pleased with them as other people seem to be, but they complement the stripped-down nature of the new show.  
- Hated the drum-heavy version played out over the closing titles in The Woman Who Fell to Earth, but happy with the version they are using now. A much needed return to mystery. Expands and
contracts like a bubble with an amazing succession of textures before it suddenly changes to the title card. I regret that the TARDIS is not there but it’s a return to abstraction. Rather cross that Jodie Whittaker’s face is not visible.

**The new Doctor**

- Love her brilliant, positive interpretation of the character. Jodie is excellent.
- As much a Doctor as any of the previous twelve. I look forward to seeing Whittaker develop her incarnation of the Doctor but she’s doing a good job so far!
- Energetic, manic, but still dedicated to justice, Jodie Whittaker plays a delightfully likeable new incarnation of the ancient Time Lord.
- While I think Jodie and her performance are great, I’m not convinced the material is always there for her. Some of the characterisation this series has been quite simplistic, and I’d like Thirteen to be a bit more assertive in the future. I think this series has definitely been a learning curve for everyone involved, so I hope that now they’re settled in it’ll keep getting better!
- I think that Whittaker does a great job, but the writers frequently don’t do enough to really let her be a strong character. Only in the New Year special did she really start to get some bite, whereas she spent a lot of time just sort of flowing along as things happened during the series itself.
- A bit too light hearted and playful like Matt Smith was, and needs to be on her own more in order to shine.
- Good, but we’ve not yet seen her full potential.

**Chris Chibnall**

- I like the direction in which he’s taking the series. The lack of a complex overarching plot was a good decision. He should write fewer episodes, and some dialogue is a bit clunky. But overall positive.
- His greatest strength was to allow new writers to try their hand at *Who*.
- Davies brought wonder, Moffat brought narrative intrigue. So far, I think Chibnall has focused on character (except Yaz ☹).
- There was an overall lack of strong and interesting alien villains particularly in the Chibnall-written episodes - ideally his role in the next series would be less episode-writing and more show-guiding.
- Hit and miss as a writer, though more hit than miss lately. Thought until recently the solution was just to get him to stop writing and get loads more guest writers, but now I’m not so sure.
- Thirteen suffers from the same problem as Twelve and Eleven: questionable writing. Dialogue is forced and strangely delivered, and Jodie is yet to have her ‘Doctor moment’. Something needs to change—and it’s not the Doctor.
- Chibnall’s character-focused vision for *Doctor Who* has reinvigorated the show and brought in a new wave of popularity and cultural relevance.
- A brave attempt to reinvent *Doctor Who* as a procedural drama, but it hasn’t yet worked through.

**Comparison with the rest of New *Who***

We also ran a poll to find out how Series Eleven ranks alongside the other ten series in New *Who*. Answers ranged from ‘third best’ to ‘worst.’ Based on these results, Series Eleven averages out as WhoSoc’s **seventh favourite series** of New *Who*.

There is another way to measure the strength of the series, however. WhoSoc members voted for each episode on a scale of 1 to 10 relative to the rest of New *Who*, where a score of 1 ranks an episode as being in the worst 10 per cent of New *Who* and a score of 10 ranks it as being in the best 10% of New *Who*. With Series Eleven getting a mean episode score of 7.56, that would rank it approximately as WhoSoc’s **fourth favourite series** of New *Who*. Collectively, we seem to have deemed Series Eleven weaker than the sum of its parts...
The Woman Who Fell to Earth

This city of steel
Marks the death-and-rebirthplace
Of mercury’s light.

William Shaw

“I’ve lost track of what’s actually happening.”

Georgia Harper relates the view of Series Eleven from “loosely Oxford-based Facebook group Time and Relative Dimensions in Shitposting”

The Woman Who Fell to Earth
broadcast 7 October 2018
liveblogged 8 October 2018

The Thirteenth Doctor’s full debut was praised for the show’s new look visually and musically (the latter of which would become a running theme) as well as for Jodie Whittaker’s performance, with her introduction described as “surely the best entrance for a post-regeneration story ever.” For me, this rewatch was more focused on the emotional pull than critique, and “Jodie Whittaker is the Doctor and the world is a wonderful place” crops up in my comments several times. There was also much enthusiasm for the portrayal of Ryan’s dyspraxia (and relief that he wasn’t magically able to ride a bike at the end of the episode). Graham’s disparaging remarks led one commenter to describe him as “a bit of a dick”, resulting in a few correct predictions that Graham and Ryan’s relationship would develop as a series theme.
The Ghost Monument
broadcast 14 October 2018
liveblogged 17 October 2018

While there was generally less enthusiasm for The Ghost Monument than The Woman Who Fell to Earth, we particularly enjoyed the TARDIS reveal and visual aspects more widely. “This episode struck me as an ‘excuse to show off the new look’ episode, and it does that brilliantly.” Praise was also given for the Doctor using Venusian Aikido in “a clear reference to the past that also doesn’t matter very much for new viewers” and being a rare example of “female characters bragging about how smart they are.”

However, many agreed that the episode was let down by the apparent threats. “Oh no, it’s… some fabric!” “SniperBots! How imaginative!” Some argued that this was exacerbated further by following another underwhelming villain: “Evil Clothes. And ummm… a guy with teeth on his face. Daleks smaleks, amirite?” Other criticisms focused on a plot which “seems to wrap up very suddenly” and the use of Ryan’s viewpoint for the second time running: “it might also be nice for the others to get a turn.”

There was also some discussion around the potentially foreshadowing mentions of the Stenza (“STORY ARC, DUN-DUN-DUUUUUN”) and the mysterious Timeless Child (“STORY ARC TWO, DUN-DUN-DUUUUUN”). Of course, we’re still no closer to finding out who or what the Timeless Child is, and while it could be argued that Tim Shaw’s return in the series finale qualifies the Stenza as a series arc, there was no mention made of them in the intervening seven episodes.

Rosa
broadcast 21 October 2018
liveblogged 24 October 2018

There wasn’t so much discussion around the Rosa liveblog, primarily because its sensitive and powerful depiction of racism in 1950s America was so universally well-received. Details such as the diner scene highlighted the dangers of even “simple things like sitting down with friends and discussing what just happened and next plans”, which many of us take for granted. There was also praise for “how the episode handles the complex question of where Yaz ‘fits’ in a two-recognised-segregated-races society” and acknowledgement through the conversation between Yaz and Ryan that racism is still embedded in today’s culture. The TARDIS-based epilogue was an opportunity to show “not just how Rosa Parks is recognised, but the sacrifices she had to make and how life was still a struggle after her protest.”

Criticalisms of Rosa were minor, from historical accuracy (Rosa Parks’ bus protest was planned rather than spontaneous) to the lack of reaction to the TARDIS reaching ‘1955, Montgomery, Alabama’, though this could be explained as “the first time (the new companions) have left the TARDIS” and being “yet to develop the mentality that’s required” for adventures in space and time. While we had seen criticism elsewhere that Krasko was underdeveloped, it was agreed that “that’s kind of how it should be” because “further development might lead some to try and excuse his white supremacism” and “the real villain in this story is ‘racism’.” Elsewhere, there was speculation over the “Did you just accidentally pay me a compliment?” line which was read by some as setting up romantic tension between Yaz and Ryan; ultimately, this did not materialise. In fact, it was the discussion about the first female Doctor being “put in a position where she is still very much within the privileged/oppressor group” which turned out to be more relevant later…
Again, there wasn’t so much discussion around this one—perhaps everyone was saving themselves for *The Great The Tsuranga Conundrum* Discourse? Praise for this episode was largely within the “Jodie Whittaker is the Doctor and the world is a wonderful place” category, as well as the introduction to Yaz’s family, the “BEAUTIFUL” new time vortex, and Ryan’s unexpected shadow-puppet skills.

On the other hand, *Arachnids in the UK* was widely criticised for its hasty ending, in which Jack Robertson—who we referred to as “Not-Trump” throughout—faced no consequences for his actions. It was argued that this “could be a deliberate attempt to offer a satirical critique by showing how villains aren’t always held accountable,” but “in practice, it just feels like a really abrupt ending where they forgot to show any closure” and “makes the Doctor look like a terrible apathetic person who can’t be bothered even to try bringing Robertson to justice.” Also, what about the spider left in that Sheffield flat, held back only by a line of vinegar? Probably, “As long as it pays the rent at the end of every month, I’m sure nobody will mind.”

A few of the comments I made while liveblogging *Arachnids* are more interesting to look back on in hindsight. As well as the first use of “big fan of the music,” which I’d make a point of repeating in every Series Eleven liveblog from this point, I also remarked on lines potentially setting up both Yaz and Ryan and Yaz and the Doctor, neither of which came to fruition. With Yaz telling her family she was only going to the shops, I hoped to see her “return home several episodes later, but a few minutes later in real time, in different clothes, without bread.” I’m still a little annoyed this didn’t happen!

**The Tsuranga Conundrum**  
*broadcast 4 November 2018*  
*liveblogged 7 November 2018*

This was… an interesting one. While I enjoyed *The Tsuranga Conundrum,* most of the group emphatically did not, and had spent the three days between broadcast and liveblog elaborating on this in the WhoSoc-affiliated An Unearthly Chat. Criticism focused on an array of plot jumps and inconsistencies which soon built up, from the mine opening which is “never given any context at all”, to Astos’s unnecessary death (“WHY DOES HE GO IN THE POD”), to the sonic miraculously recovering as soon as it’s needed.” And what was the conundrum supposed to be again? The Pting’s development was also considered erratic; as it was “shown to be generally destructive and kind of vicious… destroying an entire space fleet”, it was argued, “the twist that it’s misunderstood and only wants to feed on energy specifically comes out of nowhere.” Nevertheless, “after several days of the Pting is very absent”, I was “very much surprised by how much Pting I’m seeing.” It was also noted that the episode was “better paced than a few other episodes this series, allowing time for an actual ending where they get rid of the threat properly.” Primarily, though, my main defence of *Tsuranga* was repeated variants of “Don’t Hate On This Wholesome Content,” having particularly enjoyed the Doctor’s explanation of anti-matter and the generous sprinkling of remarks about hope and “light in dark times,” particularly “as someone who bloody loves Doctor-as-hope and also jumps to worst conclusions always and low-key can’t stop
thinking about the world ending.”

Again, discussion noted that Yaz remained underused, “being reduced to asking the questions so one of the other characters can have even more development.” I reacted to the mention of her police uniform camera with “well, that’s Yaz’s development for the episode,” and in hindsight I’m wondering if that was a little unfair. In general, reading back, we as a group seemed to use lines developing Yaz as a springboard to laugh at her underdevelopment. Yaz’s mimicking of Siobhan Chamberlain was also noted as “another attempt to develop Yaz… as a Sporty Person” or, as one commenter put it, “how to develop characters without actually giving them dialogue.”

So why did the episode initially get such a severe slating? One commenter replied that the negative reaction is “partly because we’re now halfway through the series, and people are getting tired of episodes that are OK but still flawed”, while another argued that fans are more critical “since it’s following in the footsteps of a strong series opener, a scenic journey which culminates in the new TARDIS interior, the hugely important Rosa, and an enjoyable B-movie-style romp.” Very different opinions, same ultimate outcome.

**Demons of the Punjab**

*broadcast 11 November 2018*  
*liveblogged 17 November 2018*

Back to a much more positive reception as *Demons of the Punjab* shone a spotlight on an often overlooked area of history: “For a lot of people, this will be the first they’ve really heard about the Partition, because Eurocentric history lessons etc.” It was noted that the episode’s Remembrance Sunday broadcast meant it was “particularly powerful for wars and unnecessary losses that are often forgotten to be represented” and the episode was praised for the “bold” decision to “criticise the British Empire during the one month of the year where criticising Britain’s past is considered particularly taboo.” While the usual circles online were bemoaning an approach they deemed too “politically correct,” we “really [didn’t] see how this more educational side of *Doctor Who* is being seen as a bad thing.” Commenters noted that “the fact the show is being more educational is a huge draw” and “Moffat already used up all the ideas for timey-wimey stuff, a change in focus was desperately needed.”

The few minor criticisms of this episode again revolved around Yaz’s characterisation; even in her “inner thoughts exposition scene… Graham does all the talking for some reason.” It was also noted that “Ryan might be a bit annoyed that Yaz gets to see HER nan” and that “it’s weird how Grace didn’t seem to get a mention this week, considering the subject matter,” although “maybe shoehorning in continuity might have slowed down the episode’s pace.” This discussion led to some predictions around “a scene where the Doctor takes Graham back to meet Grace one last time,” being “the most likely way this series is going to end,” with others pointing out that “Graham is in remission from cancer… I do wonder if it could come back” and “this is the second episode running where he’s defended someone keeping a sad secret from their family.”

There was also speculation over whether
Umbreen “ever realised that her granddaughter travelled back in time to see her during her youth,” with the final scene in which Yaz shows off her henna tattoo from the wedding taken as an unspoken confirmation. One commenter would “like to think she secretly does know, but will never tell anyone,” although “the ambiguous ending feels better, with this left unsaid between the two.” Perhaps it’s something to follow up in Series Twelve…

**Kerblam!**

*broadcast 18 November 2018*

*liveblogged 22 November 2018*

Two hundred and three comments.

Fasten your seatbelts…

Let’s start with the positives. There was praise for the killer bubble wrap (“VERY Doctor Who,” the fez-based introduction (“I love this system of brief references to the past which don’t actually relate to the main plot so don’t interfere with new viewers’ understanding”) and in particular the conveyor belt chase scene (“RYAN REMEMBERS HE’S DYSPRAXIC!”). There was acknowledgement of previous criticisms being addressed, with Yaz “actually getting to use her police training for once” and “the TARDIS interior getting a little bit more use.” I particularly enjoyed the line “In the meantime, why not consider a personal mindful moment?” in the closing scenes: “a nice critique of the ‘WE CARE ABOUT YOUR MENTAL HEALTH!’ initiatives that do nothing about the conditions that lead to the mental health problems in the first place.” That concludes the purely positive comments for this liveblog.

Watching Kerblam! a second time made it a very different episode: “even if you leave the political yikes aside, it’s building up to something”—a satirical Amazon critique—“that it doesn’t deliver on.” As one commenter noted, details such as Yaz being rebuked for talking on the job “make the whole thing really weird… Kerblam! is clearly a terrible place to work, but in the end, the solution is to get *more* humans doing these unpleasant and dehumanising jobs?” Similarly, while Slade’s mistreatment of the workers “helps to set up a red herring… this also makes it harder to believe that Slade can help make Kerblam! better.” My main criticism was that the episode “pushes the whole ‘technology can do repetitive jobs’ vs ‘we currently need jobs to survive’ thing, and yet they never quite get to ‘maybe think about why we need jobs to survive even though we don’t need people to do those jobs anymore’”—for me, the issue “isn’t that it’s pro-capitalist so much as it doesn’t even consider that options other than
capitalism exist.” The end result of a sentient corporation fighting back is, well, “pretty yikes.” Perhaps, as one person suggested, it would have been “much improved if Judy was the mastermind behind the whole operation, driven to these measures by Slade looking down on her as merely ‘head of people’”?

Elsewhere, what on broadcast could be considered an “adorable awkward cringeworthy meet-cute scene” between Charlie and Kira was pointed out to be “less adorable the second time as Charlie is plotting the mass murder of innocents… I was pretty uncomfortable with the ‘woman’s love could or should have redeemed male mass murderer’ trope.” Kira was then, of course, “fridged to further the villain’s manpain”, culminating in a final confrontation where “the undervalued worker is somehow the bad guy… how can this possibly look bad?” Indeed, with a “theme this series of villains getting away” it’s rather unfortunate “that Charlie is the one that dies.” As one commenter put it, “the episode tries to criticise both Amazon/corporations AND extremists/terrorists, and ends up not really succeeding in either.”

All of which leads to the main thing I remember about this liveblog: while others were complaining about Doctor Who fandom shutting down debate (read: sexism), we were busy squabbling over a plural. The much-quoted line “The systems aren’t the problem” being repeatedly misquoted as “The system isn’t the problem” had become a particular source of irritation for me: “This is the closest the episode comes to getting it right… the ‘systems’ refer to technology, and technology alone isn’t the problem—people exploiting technology is the problem, and a society where people need jobs despite technology is the problem.” As one commenter highlighted, though, this is really a moot point anyway; the Kerblam! system had just murdered Kira, and “it’s a bit of a dick move to suggest there’s nothing wrong with the system which literally killed an innocent woman to try and make a point.” Moving swiftly on…

**The Witchfinders**

*broadcast 25 November 2018*  
*liveblogged 29 November 2018*

As well as being mercifully lighter on the comments section than Kerblam!, this episode was also much better received. The liveblog itself was something of a quote-along, with praise also for “everything you ever wanted from Alan-Cumming-as-King-James”. This was also “the first episode to make the Doctor’s gender plot-relevant… a risky move but done well”, with this theme being played out not just through the Doctor being tried as a witch but through subtleties such as Willa’s aspiration to become a doctor.

One of the main criticisms was, as ever, “Graham hogging a lot of the companion time”; by this point, I was “starting to think three companions just doesn’t work in the shorter New Who format.” There was also reference to some earlier An Unearthly Chat discussion about the Doctor comparing the Old Testament used by King James to justify witch hunts to the “twist in the sequel, love
thy neighbour”: “Old Testament violent, New Testament forgiving’ is a pretty common anti-Semitic trope, and as was pointed out earlier, ‘love thy neighbour’ is from Leviticus anyway…” Later, the reveal of the Morax was considered rushed: “I genuinely looked at my watch, and at one point worried the blackout was a Sleep No More-style bad ending.”

The Morax themselves caused some debate; while some found them to be “reduced to generic snarl-a-lot-and-try-to-take-over-the-world monsters” following the reveal, others appreciated this given that “this season was lacking the traditional campy fun of generic monsters.” It was noted that the Doctor's disdain at James killing the Morax queen “would have worked quite well if it hadn't already been done multiple times this series.” One commenter pointed out that “James is using what happened to justify his prior actions of persecuting innocent humans,” whereas “the outrage about kicking Tim Shaw and shooting the spider is just clumsy writing,” while another argued this was “another challenge to the Doctor's authority and her personal way of resolving crises.” Indeed, the non-interference principle behind much of the Series Eleven discourse is finally addressed in this episode, which according to one commenter “marks a crucial character moment in which Thirteen takes direct action against injustice, instead of being a traveller who occasionally helps others out.”

Above all, though, the main talking point in this liveblog was my complete inability to register flirting—by James towards Ryan, for example—until it’s pointed out to me. Re-watching with the benefit of having seen social media reactions, though, I had “no earthly idea how I missed it.” Cue lots of shouting at myself, jokes about how anyone wishing to date me should use a neon sign, and lots of over-analysis of that pricker James kept bringing out. Somewhere amongst all that, though, was a serious point: in a series where “LGBT representation across the spectrum” (executive producer Matt Strevens) turned out to be “two dead wives, a pregnant man who doesn't really count because that's how his species works, and James,” James was the first gay character in the series to survive his episode. Although praising Alan Cumming's performance, one commenter noted that “James I's homosexuality being played for laughs maybe isn't great in the wider context of Series Eleven's representation”, with a need for “more positive diversity in representation there to balance it.” This isn't the first time the issue will crop up…

It Takes You Away
broadcast 2 December 2018
liveblogged 8 December 2018

Another largely positive reaction for this episode, and again with particular praise for aspects of the Doctor's characterisation; one commenter described the scene in which she casually tasted soil as “eccentric and alien without being uncomfortable to be around unlike previous efforts at being eccentric and alien.” The surprise return of Grace was “handled well… as far as bringing back a dead character goes” and came with a few early clues to her true identity: “Grace not immediately prioritising Ryan means she's not Grace.” There was also lots of enthusiasm for the Solitract's frog form, which we described as “less weird than a lot of things in Who,” and “as much as it's funny and memeable, it also contains genuine feels.”

One of the main criticisms of this episode focused on the Doctor's “inelegant info dump” in explaining the Solitract, with Yaz's response that she’s “literally never heard the word before” cited as an example of “pretty
much how this series introduces its aliens. It was argued that throughout this series “we rarely see the Doctor learning or discovering things… either they know something already, or the information is delivered in an inelegant dump of exposition.”

Another talking point was the direction, which often made following the story more difficult. I missed the Solitract mirroring entirely the first time round while others “thought it was unusual lighting” and following earlier discussion on Twitter, it was pointed out that Hanne’s Arctic Monkeys T-shirt “isn’t visible at all in the immediate scene before Yaz notes it,” and before that is “dark enough that I doubt most people would have seen it.” As one commenter explains, this is “the first in an episode-wide pattern where we rely on dialogue to tell us about things we really ought to be shown before they become immediately relevant to the plot – see also the rats, the balloon, and arguably the two plates.”

It Takes You Away also included a blind character, Hanne, played by blind actress Ellie Wallwork. While Wallwork and Hanne were overwhelmingly praised, there was also some discussion of the merits of the producers “talking about how important it is… when meanwhile the regular disabled character in this series is played by an abled actor.” It should be said that those commenters who mentioned their own dyspraxia really didn’t mind either way, with an eventual consensus that “non-disabled actors playing disabilities is most offensive in the case where the disability is obvious all the time.” Relatedly, there was some discussion over whether Hanne’s immediate rejection of the Solitract’s projection of Trine is a reflection of the “problematic disability-as-superpower” trope, with commenters alternatively interpreting this as “Hanne being a critical thinker” and “because Mirror Trine is based on her Dad’s memory, rather than the real deal.”

Finally, I was “genuinely surprised they resolved The Grandad Arc” in this episode, because it “otherwise would have been the one certainty we have about the finale.” One commenter predicted that this “100% means one of them dies (probably Graham because if it’s Ryan then Graham’s arc is just grief),” with another noting rumours that “as well as continuing The Chase, Bradley Walsh will be presenting a chat show for ITV next year, and I think it’s impossible that he could do a full season of Doctor Who as well.” [That was me, wrong—Ed.-Matthew] I mean, technically, they were right about Bradley Walsh not being in a series of Doctor Who this year...

**The Battle of Ranskoor Av Kolos**

*broadcast 9 December 2018*

*liveblogged 15 December 2018*

Safe to say, the official Series Eleven finale did not go down so well. To start on a positive note, there was a fair amount of quoting along, with Graham’s rebuke to Ryan that Grace “would want to be alive” described as “a rare Chibnall line worth quoting.” I appreciated the episode’s attempts to “acknowledge the inconsistency” of the Doctor’s morality around weapons: “It’s worth noting that previous Doctors have been inconsistent too and perhaps haven’t been criticised so much for it.” Even the return of Tim Shaw garnered some praise, with “the final confrontation between Graham and T’zim Sha… done really well” and one commenter arguing that they “can’t see ‘it’s ONLY Tim Shaw’ being such a problem ten years from now… we’ve had so many finales that depended on the Daleks, Cybermen or Master.”

In general, though, reaction to Battle was largely negative. After the trailer highlighted nine distress signals, I expected “a lot more frantic running around and saving everyone, rather than just Mark Addy being confused on a spaceship,” and there was particular disappointment that “they really build up the psychotropic waves and then do nothing with them.” Tim Shaw returned “to the shock and surprise of no-one” and (save for the Ux), he was again alone: “Given how big a deal the Stenza apparently are, it would have been nice to see more of them.”

Again, there was criticism of Yaz being
underutilised, with “her main contribution [being] to have a second neural blocker for the Doctor to use”, and the Doctor once again describing her TARDIS as a “ghost monument” felt jarring to some: “Honestly, that just felt like ‘whoops, it’s the finale, better shove in a ton of continuity references so this feels epic’.” Towards the second half of the episode, “the Doctor notes that all life on the stolen planets would have been destroyed, then there’s a big deal made about the planets being saved” and “a big deal is made about the risk of taking off the neural balancers, until absolutely nothing happened with it.” The end result? “I have to say I’ve lost track of what’s actually happening.”

Elsewhere, Graham’s sudden desire for revenge against Tim Shaw became a talking point. I “liked the plot overall” but found “the set-up… really clunky—he takes the person most likely to angrily disagree with him to one side and is completely honest without being remorseful.” As one commenter noted, “this goes nowhere… Graham and the Doctor are separated for most of the episode, so we don’t see her trying to stop him or change his mind.”

There was also discussion about how this episode fits into “the general theme of the Doctor letting the villains get away” this series, with Tim Shaw thanking the Doctor. One commenter pointed out that “the Doctor being called out for not taking responsibility for the consequences of their actions is something which comes up often in series finales, such as The Parting of the Ways and Journey’s End,” while another criticised “how the Doctor responds to Tim Shaw’s rhetoric… it felt like she was trying to dodge responsibility.” In short, we were generally relieved that Battle wouldn’t really be the last episode after all.

Resolution
broadcast 1 January 2019
liveblogged 6 January 2019

Last but not least, the New Year’s Day special (which I’m counting here because it was broadcast within weeks of the main series ending) received a rather mixed reception. The use of Daleks beyond their usual casing was a particular highlight; although there was criticism of the CGI (“I think we had better Kaled mutants in Genesis and Resurrection”), the reveal of the Dalek on Lin’s back was described as “brilliant… at the time I was worried this would be *instead of* a full encased Dalek, but now I can appreciate it a bit more.” One commenter pointed out this scene “reminded me a lot of the recent Venom film” but “the Dalek in this episode is almost more intimidating out of its shell than in one.” Later, there was praise for “the Dalek forging its own casing in parallel with the Doctor forging her new sonic in The Woman Who Fell to Earth”, with the final confrontation “really showing what we’ve been missing with no recurring monsters in Series Eleven.” Elsewhere, Nicholas Briggs’s voice acting was “on fire” and the café scene with Ryan confronting his long-absent father Aaron was “the most underrated scene of the episode.”

On the other hand, Resolution was criticised for its “crammed in” ending (“it felt like they were trying to force a resolution to the Ryan’s Dad arc… it seemed quite unearned”) and lack of opening titles (“not having Jodie Whittaker’s name in the time vortex opening of her first festive story AND Dalek story seems wrong”). This was exacerbated by the idea that the time was instead filled by “the scariest monster in Series Eleven: the conversation joke,” in which a random family despaired at
the loss of their internet connection, because they might have to talk to each other. As one commenter put it: “Just think, we didn’t have a title sequence so we could make time for… that.” It was also pointed out that security guard Richard “comes out as gay then immediately dies—an unfortunate pattern throughout the series,” and there were further unfortunate implications in Mitch texting Lin straight after saying goodbye: “Immediately texting ‘still thinking about you’ seconds after seeing someone with whom he’s not even in a relationship is bad enough, but she already communicated that she wanted space.”

I took the call centre scene “to be a joke about call centres and bureaucracy, and had to have the Brexit connections explained to me later.” It was argued that “it’s also just not a very funny joke, based on tiresome and somewhat sexist stereotypes about useless call centre workers.” The wider panic about UNIT being “killed off” was downplayed: “This is an easily undone development, and I was pleasantly surprised they were mentioned at all in this not-focusing-on-old-things era.” There was also some debate about the comedic elements, in particular the Doctor having apparently grown an extra head at a party; while some “really wish that for Resolution they’d stop with all the jokey-ness, to emphasise the threat levels”, others highlighted that “this Doctor’s got a habit of being even jokier when she’s threatened.”

Lastly, this final liveblog of the series provided an opportunity to wrap up some of the ongoing discussions about how the three companions are used or, as the case may be, under-used. After some confusion about “why Graham suddenly lives in Sheffield after getting a train home FROM there in The Woman Who Fell to Earth,” “He lives there in Woman too - Ed-Matthew” one commenter highlighted this as an example of “one of the broader issues with this series: the companions’ home lives aren’t explored fully, and this leaves me uncertain as to whether they’re travelling with the Doctor full-time, or if it’s just a part-time deal.” Elsewhere, it was noted that the fallout from Lin’s criminal actions while under Dalek control “would have been a nice opportunity for more Yaz,” with several people noting that “not tying Yaz into the police stuff feels like a massive missed opportunity here.”

As you might expect, it seems that if there’s one thing that Time and Relative Dimensions in Shitposting agrees on, it’s that Yasmin Khan deserves more attention!

---

The Witchfinders

How else do we travel
But through the earth, the flames
The wind and the rain?

William Shaw

The Tides of Time • Trinity Term 2019 • 33
Say you want a Resolution

Is everything going to be all right? Matthew Kilburn isn’t sure, but Chris Chibnall is just doing what he can

Resolution felt a brighter and more energetic episode than many of its recent predecessors. In its immediate wake, several episodes of Series Eleven proper seem most memorable for their technical competence, whether the symmetrical settings of It Takes You Away, the CGI-heavy fantasy factory-warehouse of Kerblam! or the evocation of historical period, whether in the quasi-documentary attention to detail in Rosa and Demons of the Punjab or the more expressively freeform metahistorical commentary of The Witchfinders. In contrast, Resolution appeared more self-assured from the beginning, framing its world-threatening narrative as a bump in the start of a love affair in a straightforward way which would surely have appealed to Russell T Davies or Steven Moffat.

We all want to change the world

Visually, Resolution returned to the sharper contrast last seen in The Woman Who Fell to Earth with less of the dreamlike dawn-twilighet palette which while often successful (as in the warm haze of memory which shone balefully across Demons of the Punjab) sometimes seemed at odds with the prosaic storytelling of much of the past series. Indeed, it went further, the cold blues inherited from Woman (and succeeding stories including The Tsuranga Conundrum and The Battle of Ranskoor Av Kolos) now being offset by more reds, a concrete present which reminded me of Frontier in Space’s brutalist future, and of course the green of the reconceived Dalek mutant. It’s tempting to attribute this to the arrival of Wayne Yip, the first director with Doctor Who experience from before the Chibnall-Strevens era to return to the series. Television is a collaborative medium integrated vertically, horizontally and at all conceivable diagonals and so the answer is probably more complicated than that, but there seemed for almost the first time this Doctorate a strong sense of the TARDIS interior as a space in fictional and performance contexts. It was lit more brightly, becoming more clearly a place in itself, where too often in 2018 the TARDIS interior seemed to be made up of islands in a no-place but failed to achieve the sense of dislocation it might have sought.

Arguably, this was part of the deliberate mirroring spotted elsewhere. The Dalek pushes its new self—whether as its reassembled and regenerated form or previously when working through its parasitized host Lin—to its limits when building its new casing, just as the Doctor defined her construction of the sonic screwdriver within her discovery of her new identity in The Woman Who Fell to Earth. Perhaps, then, the expulsion of the Dalek from the TARDIS at the climax deliberately recalled the apparent rejection of the new Doctor by the Michael Pickwoad TARDIS control room at the end of Twice Upon a Time. The whole series has been one of transition, with the Thirteenth Doctor now presented as the most at one with her ship she has been so far. I don’t think there were any complaints about ‘new systems’ here, with TARDIS glitches instead being the consequence of the Dalek scout’s jamming abilities. If Twice Upon a Time saw a TARDIS traumatised by a journey from one showrunner’s universe to the next expel something of the new while it could work out how it accommodated this new cosmos, Resolution shows people who have been made new cast out something which is determinedly old and seeking to revive an 1130-year-old mission.
When you talk about destruction

One critic of the current era of Doctor Who said that the series seemed to them to have forgotten how to blend comedy and horror. The cutaway to the screen-addicted family seemed an odd target for a series so much part of the connected world. The use of Impact for the early captions made many of the shots in the cold open suggest meme-spreading GIFs from internet social media, and while this might have been a wry comment about the transmission of the legend of the Custodians, if so it suffered from this legend receiving insufficient development and being sidelined by the time of the climax.

Comedy remains ill-handled and vulnerably dependent on performance alone rather than canny scripting. Horror, though, picked up, with the Dalek possession of first Lin and then Aaron being invasively grisly. Dalek-Lin and Dalek-Aaron were distinct kinds of horror performance, with Charlotte Ritchie’s phases of possession shifting from the confused to the terrified to the submerged to her final surfacing. The audience gets to know and like Lin as she struggles with her kidnapper and abuser. The point where she impassively fails to react to the Dalek’s praise that she is a “useful soldier,” soon after killing two police officers, chills because we fear we won’t see again the Lin we first met and whom Mitch loves. The Dalek has taken and redirected her vitality, though this vampiric element in Lin’s possession seems ultimately self-defeating as piloting Lin for so long causes the Dalek to weaken.

In contrast Daniel Adegboyega portrays the hijacked Aaron as a shuffling puppet on the verge of being a living corpse; the Dalek has seized upon the depression and isolation on which Aaron’s sense of agency depends and physically caricatured it.

If the Dalek possession is horror, why are neither Lin nor Aaron despatched in a ghastly fashion like the possessed and transformed humans of mid-1970s Who or indeed 2000s episodes which paid tribute to that era such as The Unquiet Dead or The Satan Pit? Taking such a route with this story would have been dramatically wasteful and unjustly fatalist. We have no eugenist Noahs, condescending Scarmans or fraudster Keelers here, nor a tragic abused Thea Ransome. Unlike Babylon 5’s Keepers, which they slightly resemble, there is no sign that a new Dalek will grow from remains left inside its host. Instead the violated characters survive and are restored.

so they can resolve their destinies and not succumb to fatalism—Aaron by dealing with the shadow of not being able to live up to his mother’s expectations, Lin by not running from a new romantic attachment. There’s a deliberate echo, no doubt, of 1974 story *Planet of the Spiders*—spiders, on the back or otherwise, take many forms. Here, release from physical possession by another leads to greater self-possession. It might be thought an elementary allusion, but part of *Doctor Who’s* remit is and has been to introduce audiences to the basics.

**People with minds that hate**

While Lin, Aaron and also Graham and Ryan all go some way towards resolving their relationship issues, the Doctor is the only person to specifically make a resolution in this story: “I’m coming for you, Dalek.” There’s another parallel here. Christopher Eccleston’s Doctor in 2005 was criticized in much the same way as Jodie Whittaker’s was in 2018, as a Doctor who stood at the side of the action and failed to take leads. This never rang true to me, as the Ninth Doctor was clearly not just an influencer, but an interventionist and very capable of giving orders and having them taken seriously. (The roots of Danny Pink’s berating of the Twelfth Doctor as ‘officer class’ in Series Eight can be justified in the manner in which the Ninth Doctor takes command of soldiers in *Aliens of London*.) The Thirteenth Doctor too has been criticized for observing too much and acting too little, “sidelined within her own stories” [Max Farrow, *Screen Rant*, 8 December 2018] and less known to her audience at the end of her first season than any of her predecessors. She’s even been described as “kind of wet,” arguably the result of the Chibnall-led writing team having “overshot” a justifiable decision to cut back “that ‘lonely god’ stuff” [Jonn Elledge, *New Statesman*, 7 January 2019].

These criticisms emphasise what the Thirteenth Doctor isn’t rather than what she is. She has a certain priestliness, which qualifies the awkwardness in which she fits into the absent space in the Ryan-Grace-Graeme triangle. Grace O’Brien embraced and lived through her roles of mother and wife and nurse, taking things as they came and managing the lives of those around her, not necessarily to their benefit. It is questionable whether forcing the dyspraxic Ryan through the ritual of learning to ride a bike does Ryan very much good. Grace’s determination and belief that she will win through with indifference to the risks is fatal. This contrasts with the Thirteenth Doctor’s ‘radical helplessness’. An article at *The Atlantic* by Kelly Connolly [10 December 2018] which used this term in its headline finds that this version of the Doctor is frequently unable to overcome the severe social problems which she encounters.

Having exhausted being a Doctor of War, this Doctor expresses herself as a Doctor of Hope; but the Doctor is now open to the charge that she prioritises piety over effectiveness. I’d argue that this Doctor instead places herself among the pebbles and arranges them so that they may better cause the avalanche. The revolutions are not always obvious or even inevitable. Few observers seem to have been encouraged for the future of Kandokan society by the promises made by Judy and Jarva at the close of *Kerblam!* although this still left their employer and their world open to incremental changes in attitudes and social policy. The Doctor’s declaration of faith in love—“because love is a form of hope and, like hope, love abides in the face of everything”—in *Demons of the Punjab* seems to stand in the face of the story which is about to unfold, as Prem goes to his inevitable death. However, love succeeds in Umbreen’s second marriage, in her family, her life in Sheffield and Yáz’s life there and with the Doctor and with us, the viewers. The revolution is perpetual and capable of surprise; but this model is not far from the revolution of the wheel turned by anger and ignorance, as that fundamental text of literary-minded 1980s fandom, *Kinda*, told *Doctor Who’s* viewers in 1982. There is a potential challenge here to *Doctor Who’s*
viability.

Returning to an earlier *Doctor Who* story influenced by Buddhism, *Planet of the Spiders* had its Time Lord projection-priest Cho-Je remark that when everything is new (or following an inevitable path of change) how can anything be a surprise? Dramatically, one might think *Doctor Who* thrives on surprise, of an endless stream of horrors perpetrated upon and sometimes by its lead character, whose benign activity has for much of the programme’s history been contrasted with unspoken—potentially unspeakable—darkness within. How, then, does a *Doctor Who* work where the lead character is not a mysteriously powerful being dealing with unprecedented trauma by ‘being kind’, but has been reincarnated as the high priest of hope? Perhaps *Resolution* tries to provide an answer, as Ryan’s experience of travel with the Doctor and his resulting acceptance of Graham’s grandfatherly love had lend to and inculcated in Aaron the strength to face his anger, accept his weakness and those of others, and strive for a path without resentment and without the literal Dalek-demon on his back. It’s Aaron who narrates this episode, after all.

**We’d all love to see the plan**

When anticipating this series of *Doctor Who*, I’d remark that I was looking forward to finding out what Chris Chibnall’s authorial voice was, as I didn’t feel I’d heard it in his earlier *Doctor Who* contributions. I’m not sure that I’m any closer to finding out. Several critics, including some early reviewers in the commercial media, thought Chris Chibnall’s *Doctor Who* is a police procedural drama echoing his greatest hit, *Broadchurch*, but also acknowledging his earlier work on *Law and Order: UK* and of course *Torchwood*. I’ve discussed this with those more familiar with the procedural genre than me; one friend described (I think, from memory) the current TARDIS team as consisting of the Doctor as the youthful, optimistic new broom inspector, Graham as the old sergeant who has seen all the angles and doesn’t think he can learn anything else, and Yaz and Ryan as the new constables, one an enthusiastic team player who looks up to the new boss and the other more of a loner, still dealing with personal issues which affect their work.

Series Eleven has been bookended by direct references to the police, first Yaz’s job, foregrounded in *The Woman Who Fell to Earth* and then (to the surprise and disappointment of several fan commentators) seemingly forgotten about; and the Dalek-possessed Lin in *Resolution* assaulting two police officers and then taking one of their uniforms. Both Yaz and Lin are presented as women younger then the Doctor, both in terms of physical appearance and experience; they are both
in their way her acolytes, under what Steven Moffat's Doctors might have called their duty of care, and in the Thirteenth Doctor's case spontaneously adopted into her 'fam'. There's something about learning, accepting and having faith in the social cohesiveness which makes Chris Chibnall's Doctor Who tick, and that means promoting an understanding of the police as conciliatory rather than coercive, Yaz's way of doing things over Dalek-Lin's deceptions and murders. The Doctor in the shape of Jodie Whittaker is more pacifier than manipulator, moving with systems and events, navigating the flow of a lethal river like in The Ghost Monument.

The Doctor as teacher of peace might relate to another comparison made, that in consciously reshaping Doctor Who for Sunday night, Chris Chibnall has looked to BBC One's most enduring successful drama series on Sunday evenings this decade, Call the Midwife. Call the Midwife blends a gentle and superficially undemanding tone with assertive treatment of historical developments in health care and wider society. It chooses when to land its punches and when to pull them. In the 2019 series, the formation of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets in 1964 was presented through the election of Violet Buckle (Annabelle Apsion) as a councillor, but without any sense of the political disputes in 1960s Poplar or indeed of which party, if any, Violet was a candidate. In contrast the plight of an elderly woman (Clarice Millgrove, played by Annette Crosbie) in poor physical health and suffering in consequence from a mental health condition was treated more seriously, as were the limitations of the 1960s health service's attitude to the vulnerable elderly. Scripting the attending midwife (Lucille Anderson, here acting in more general nursing capacities, played by Leonie Elliott) walked a tightrope between 1960s attitudes and those of the present day, assisted by the decision to make the elderly woman a veteran suffragette and a survivor of forced feeding.

Call the Midwife is in a sense a time travel series, its inexperienced younger midwives being educated not only in midwifery but in the history, especially women's history, if the first six decades of the twentieth century. There are certainly correlations with Rosa, as the Doctor and her friends learn about white privilege and oppression against the black population, try to ameliorate the situation, but are imprisoned by circumstances.

You tell me it's the institution

Dipping into academic work on Call the Midwife turns up articles examining how the series portrays women's conversation across generations. The young National Health Service midwives receive instruction from older midwives from a religious order, care and learning passed on across the changing symbolism of turning ages. Doctor Who's Grace O'Brien was not a midwife but a cancer nurse, but she represented a tradition of female action which she could pass on to the newly female Doctor. It's tempting to argue that Grace's death isn't a surrender to a sexist comic book trope, but instead her adoption of a gung-ho confrontational attitude which might be characterized as masculine, inspired by the Doctor, leading to her death. She is not a victim, just another flawed person in a series of flawed people facing difficult choices. Through the lens of this model, in succeeding episodes it's not just the two men, Graham and Ryan, who are inspired to become heroes, but the Doctor is enabled to move from hero to heroine. She becomes the older woman educating Yaz, but this is backgrounded partly because Yaz's hero-worship of the Doctor (manifested in Mandip Gill's performance rather than in dialogue, but probably intended) is based on how Yaz interprets the Doctor's self-presentation. Widely, the Doctor takes time to understand herself in terms of the woman others see, only accepting this role as late as The Witchfinders.

How might this apply to Resolution? The Doctor becomes not just Yaz's mentor, but Lin's, protecting her as far as she can and urging her to keep up her spirit and resist the Dalek. The Doctor heals Lin not unlike a nurse
in *Call the Midwife’s* Poplar, administering medicine with a sometime hard-partying northern lass’s advice on hangovers and how to deal with them. Lin is played of course by a former *Call the Midwife* regular, Charlotte Ritchie.

*Call the Midwife* has a narrator, its episodes topped and tailed by Vanessa Redgrave as the mature Jenny, the (by 2019) long-disappeared original lead of *Call the Midwife* played by Jessica Raine. In *Resolution*, this role is assumed by Aaron. His reference to “unlikely friends” in the closing narration grates, as two of the Doctor’s extended fam are colleagues who have fallen in love and the core team all know each other well and have been shown to have complementary character traits. Nevertheless the speech recalls *Call the Midwife’s* emphasis on the bonds forged between women of very different backgrounds and life experiences.

We are perhaps supposed to take away that it’s Aaron who has learned the most from the episode, and become a better person and father, with Lin and Mitch holding hands as a pledge to his future as much as theirs. The dematerialisation of the TARDIS acts here as much as a parting of the veil between worlds as the Doctor’s blessing of the marriage of Prem and Umbreen did in *Demons of the Punjab*, and with a comparable effect.

**A real solution?**

I suspect there’s a lot to be said about the Thirteenth Doctor standing at the crossroads of feminism, between an essentialist view which sees feminism as defending the worth of those roles seen by late twentieth-century western culture at least as historically female, those of caregiver, peacemaker and consensus-builder, and that which rejects the confines of gender expectations. (Chris Chibnall has form here: see the replacement of Russell T Davies’s excessively militaristic and compassionless UNIT with the calmer civilian-led version introduced by Chibnall in 2012’s *The Power of Three*, the civilian leader being a woman, Kate Stewart.) The Thirteenth Doctor might stride across worlds in a long coat and trousers like Tom Baker and David Tennant, but she’s much more concerned that the community confirm her as the instrument of moral consensus, asking her friends to witness that she gave the Dalek a chance for a negotiated settlement before attempting to kill it at GCHQ. If the Doctor’s attempts not to play god end in her accepting from *The Witchfinders* onwards that
she can’t be a bystander even when the norms of the society she is visiting demand it, she will at least do so having asked others to restrain her if they think it right.

Returning via Kinda to another Doctor accused by critics of being ‘wet’, Peter Davison’s Fifth, the Doctor has tried here to mend their ways after acknowledging there is a problem. Viewed in the context of the continuous narrative of the programme, whereas (as Frank Collins wrote at Cathode Ray Tube [2 January 2010] of the change from the Tenth to the Eleventh Doctors) the price for previous Doctors’ achievement of self-knowledge was to regenerate and return to adolescence, here the Twelfth Doctor’s recognition that the core of what he did was being kind has led to a Doctor who more than any other most obviously loves her enemies and is not outwardly troubled by the consequences, but whose maturity robs the character of much of the inner conflict which has engaged viewers in the previous ten series.

Problems with Doctor Who in 2018 have been as much about intention as execution; the relationships between the Doctor and her friends need to have been written with more wit and energy to carry them through the changing situations with sufficient continuity. Unlike in Call the Midwife there’s no fixed setting against which the audience can measure the slow evolution of the characters. Resolution was a step towards re-energising Doctor Who. The concentration on Graham and Ryan’s story this year, together with hints (in The Ghost Monument) of Doctor-centric arc material to come, suggest that Chris Chibnall is playing his game long, refusing to burden his series with questionably satisfactory linking high concepts such as Series Nine’s Hybrid. At the same time, he’s yet to convince that he’s found an adequate replacement, or that he understands the senses of terror and the absurd which have underpinned the best Doctor Who. He is evidently highly conscious of the programme’s role as social observer in a manner which recalls the first Russell T Davies series. Hindsight may be more confident of Chris Chibnall’s handling of the programme than many feel now. Resolution was more exhilarating than most episodes in Series Eleven, which had other priorities, but there remain issues which suggest the production team need to engage further and more deeply with the Zeitgeist.
There’s more to this issue than Series Eleven reviews. Andrew O’Day discusses literary influences on the Mara serials written by Christopher Bailey for Peter Davison’s Doctor (page 42). After he vanished from television the Seventh Doctor’s escapades continued in Virgin Publishing’s New Adventures books, and James Ashworth reviews the first four, the Timewyrm series (51), before Stephen Brennan looks at Bookwyrm, the recent guide to the New Adventures by Robert Smith? and Anthony Wilson (55). Oli Jones vindicates Matt Smith’s swansong (58) while Ian and James debate the merits of the Twelfth Doctor’s title sequence (61). Rory Salt explores the miniatures of Big Chief Studios (66), and Ian meets latterday First Doctor David Bradley at the Oxford Union (69). Fiction this issue takes the shape of the first part of Philip Holdridge’s Thirteenth Doctor story Equilibrium (71), while Georgia reviews Steve Cole’s Thirteenth Doctor and Attila the Hun novel Combat Magicks (77). Some photos and admin follow (79).
Wise Men Say

Of Entertainers, Seers and Fools in Christopher Bailey’s televised Doctor Who, by Andrew O’Day

Like Stephen Gallagher’s Warriors’ Gate (1981) and Christopher H. Bidmead’s Logopolis (1981) and Castrovalva (1982) before them (O’Day a b c), and Marc Platt’s Ghost Light (1989) after them (see O’Day 2018d), reading Christopher Bailey’s Kinda (1982) and Snakedance (1983) is fraught with difficulty. In the first academic study of the programme, Doctor Who: The Unfolding Text, scholars John Tulloch and Manuel Alvarado recognized Kinda’s complexity by providing an in-depth analysis of it in a book written before Snakedance was even broadcast. They concentrated largely on the Buddhist/Christian allegorical meanings in Kinda, but there are different ways that the narratives, starring Peter Davison as the Doctor, can be read applying a close reading approach, just as those other serials invited close readings. This article will develop Tulloch and Alvarado’s investigation of entertainers, seers and foolishness and look at how these connect Kinda and Snakedance and reflect on the programme as a whole.

Entertainers in Kinda and Snakedance

In Kinda oppositions are set up between the Dome and the outside forest and between the colonists and the simple Kinda, as well as among the colonists themselves. We are told that Deva Loka is like Paradise:

TODD: There are no predatory animals on Deva Loka. No diseases, no adverse environmental factors. The climate is constant within a five degree range and the trees fruit in sequence all the year round.
— Kinda, Part One (see also Bryther 2014: 66)

The outside only seems threatening through Tegan’s eyes as indicated through sound effects and camera angles. Moreover, as Todd remarks, in the forest the clown/jester is a common figure who diffuses potential conflict through mockery and ridicule. At the beginning of Part One, Sanders puts the Kinda mask to his face to scare Hindle and remarks that it is “just a joke.” In Part Three, the Trickster’s jumping out from behind a bush using the mask echoes Sanders’s action. He then reveals his painted face underneath showing that he is self-consciously playing the clown for amusement. Here the clown is different from the sinister circus clowns of the later serial The Greatest Show in the Galaxy (1988). The Trickster’s play is amusing, but there are instances in Kinda where others’ play is not. Sanders waking Hindle up saying “Boo” to him and indicating that he is having “bad dreams” is echoed by the deranged Hindle saying “Boo” in Part Four as he jumps out of a box to an unsurprised Doctor and Todd, and by Tegan, possessed by the Mara, saying the same to Aris as she drops apples on his head. The Trickster’s jumping from behind a bush is also echoed by the appearance of the attendant demon in Part Four of Snakedance.

Bailey intended that the Trickster was conceptually based on Jung, performing the
The Trickster does not preach or lead but ridicules (1983: 273). Tulloch and Alvarado explore the Trickster’s role in more detail than made it to the screen in Kinda, arguing that the Winnebago’s Trickster ridiculed peace (the equivalent of Panna) as well as war (the equivalent of Aris), that he was a heroic benefactor yet also, distinguished from gods, represented human weaknesses, and was a figure of disorder (1983: 275-76). By comparison with Kinda, the Trickster in The Sarah Jane Adventures (2006-2011) is a more mischievous figure.

The Trickster of Kinda derives from other figures in addition to Hare. As pointed out in the DVD Production Notes for the serial, the Trickster’s carrying a doll is reminiscent of the medieval court jester figure who held such an object, even though in Kinda the doll is a Little Green Man which brings with it connotations of rebirth. This links with Todd’s comment that the clown/jester diffuses potential conflict.

Whether Bailey was thinking about it or not for his Christian Buddhist allegory, other traditions present rustic entertainment in an idyllic outer countryside. This is important since the Trickster not only diffuses conflict outside but stands in opposition to the society inside, in addition to being a figure of disorder. The most notable tradition is that of the pastoral genre which began with the classical poets Theocritus and Virgil but which flourished in the English Renaissance. In Sir Philip Sidney’s Arcadia shepherds sing, and following The Shepheardes Calender, there is a pastoral interlude in Book VI of Edmund Spenser’s The Faerie Queene. In the Book of Courtesy, Sir Calidore “loathd leasing, and base flattery/And loued simple truth and stedfast honesty” (I 3) and embarks on a quest for the Blatant Beast. In the pastoral interlude, based on Christ as the good shepherd there are “shepheards singing to their flockes” (IX 4), “Playing on pypes and carolling apace” (IX 5) who “fell to daunce” (IX 41). Soon afterwards, Sir Calidore views the Graces who dance and sing (X 10-18). This society is invaded by Evil (the Brigants) just as is that on Deva Loka invaded by the Mara. In Shakespearean drama, meanwhile, the countryside is not always idyllic. For example, while the forest can be enchanting (A Midsummer Night’s Dream), it can also be a dangerous place hiding rapists (Titus Andronicus) or nature itself can be hostile (King Lear, The Tempest). But it is The Winter’s Tale that evidences the pastoral genre with a move from Leontes’ court to a countryside where shepherds and
shepherdesses dance (IV. 4).

Unlike in Kinda where there is an opposition between inside and outside, in Snakedance the contrast revolves around social class. Interestingly, the word clown originally denoted someone of lower rustic origin. Snakedance juxtaposes the aristocratic hierarchy of the Federator (unseen), his wife Lady Tanha and their son Lon, with the common folk in the market. These include the showman Dugdale, who runs a booth of mirrors which distort identity, just as the Mara does. Social roles are to a degree collapsed as Lon, possessed by the Mara, escapes from boredom by finding amusement in his distorted reflection. However, it is still the commoner Dugdale who is sent by a possessed Tegan to summon Lon to the booth and it is Dugdale who is ultimately “no longer necessary.” Dugdale is rendered mindless by looking at the possessed pair and upon Ambril’s arrival in the cavern behind the snake mouth makes his pitch like a fairground automation.

Snakedance also contrasts the supposed frivolity of children’s entertainment with adult seriousness. Dugdale responds to a possessed Lon that the relics in the cavern are not toys for children but genuine antiques and worth money, while later there are shots of children watching a Punch and Judy show. Instead of the traditional crocodile appearing, a snake takes Punch into its mouth, but this anticipates the seriousness of the Mara consuming Tegan at the end of the serial (see DVD Production Notes).

From fool to wise man: the figure of the Doctor

In the vein of clowns and entertainers is the “artificial” or “wise fool” found frequently in Shakespearean drama. These fools have a festive license and simulate ‘natural fools’, who are those with limited mental faculties who remained detached from ordinary and corruptive social life and manners. Robert H. Bell writes that Elizabethans often distinguished between a natural fool, meaning a simpleton or lunatic, and an artificial fool, who “professionally counterfeits folly for the entertainment of others …is conscious of the role he plays” (2011: 1), and is therefore “deliberately” (2011: 4) a “self-reflexive performer” (2011: 5), “self-identified or self-evident”(2011: 3). The different meanings of ‘fool’ are also “extravagantly displayed in Erasmus’s Praise of Folly, written in 1511 and immediately translated and widely read throughout
Europe" (Bell 2011: 1). Robert Hornback groups fools and clowns together, looking at their ideological significance such as the way representations of blackness were emblematic of the “natural fool” who was seen as mentally deficient and the way puritans were viewed as arrogant and stupid. The artificial fool who mimics natural fools is not to be found in Bailey’s televised *Doctor Who*, but Bailey plays with the idea of foolishness. The boundaries between natural and artificial foolishness were explored in the *Blake’s 7* episode ‘The Keeper’ (1979).

In classic *Doctor Who*, the Doctor is anything but an idiot, as a number of examples show. Echoing the Doctor (William Hartnell) deducing his way out of a cell in *The Dalek Invasion of Earth* (1964), in *The Dominators* (1968) the Doctor (Patrick Troughton) and Jamie are tested for cleverness. Here, however, they feign stupidity so that the evil alien Dominators will not perceive them as a threat. In *The Krotons* (1968-69) the Doctor (again Patrick Troughton) and his companion Zoe are selected as “High Brains,” while the Krotons seek to eliminate the most intelligent of Gond society who are anything but fools. In *Inferno* (1970), both the Doctor (Jon Pertwee) and his antagonist Professor Stahlman dismiss their opponents as fools. Tom Baker’s Doctor could also define his authority by others’ foolishness—most famously his declaration that “Harry Sullivan is an imbecile!” (*Revenge of the Cybermen*, 1975), but could also criticise his own mistakes in this way, for example his failure to recognise a couch as a short-range matter transmitter in *The Ark in Space* (1975).

The Doctor is regularly characterised as foolish when played by Peter Davison. In *Time-Flight* (1982) the Master, shedding his disguise as Kalid, says of the Doctor that “you never do understand.” A year later in *The King’s Demons* (1983), as the Master abandons his disguise as Sir Gilles, he accuses the Doctor (Peter Davison) of naivety, but the Doctor responds that the Master may be able to disguise his features but never his intent. In *Enlightenment* (1983) the Doctor (Peter Davison) remarks that he is a fool. He has hacked up the jewel which is going to explode Striker’s ship, but realises that the power of the stone has therefore multiplied. Yet he perceptively proceeds to collect the little pieces and throw them overboard. There is mirroring in that two serials earlier, in *Mawdryn Undead* (1983), the Black Guardian rebukes his assassin Turlough as an “imbecile,” and in the next serial *Terminus* (1983) as a “fool,” but at the climax of *Enlightenment*, Turlough (who is prone to assume an air of intellectual superiority) at the last recognises his own foolishness and rejects the eponymous prize. In this he acknowledges the Doctor, not the Black Guardian, as his mentor.

There are also examples of the Doctor being seen as a clown-like figure as opposed to being intellectually foolish or clever. Tulloch and Alvarado, for instance, point to the way Patrick Troughton’s Second Doctor visually echoed Charlie Chaplin from silent cinema (1983: 61). In *Robot* (1974-75) the Doctor (Tom Baker) engages in post-regenerative foolishness, common to all the Doctors, trying on a variety of ridiculous costumes, including that of a clown. In *Earthshock* (1982) the Doctor (Peter Davison) is accused by Scott with the words “Too many people have died for you to play the fool.” Characters other than the Doctor are described as fools, like Bigon by Monarch in *Four to Doomsday* (1982), the mutants by the Doctor in *Mawdryn Undead* (1983),
and indeed Nyssa by Tegan in Snakedance. Bailey, however, highlights the Doctor’s wisdom more strongly.

In Kinda there is an opposition between wisdom and foolishness. Panna is labelled the “wise woman.” Like Tiresias from Greek mythology, she is physically blind but has insight, in contrast to the Fortune Teller in Snakedance who looks into her crystal ball and makes things up. Panna is an allegorical Buddhist figure who gives birth to Karuna standing for the way wisdom leads to compassion. Panna and Karuna and Wisdom and Compassion are one, since later when Panna seemingly dies, she continues to live through Karuna. Both wear similarly coloured costumes, highlighting the identification of the two as doubles. Panna points out that for the Not We voice is not a mark of wisdom. She describes the Kinda Aris, who has gained the power of speech when possessed by the Mara, as a “blind male fool” rather than truly wise. Panna dismisses the Doctor, who is “babbling,” as an “idiot,” telling him to “keep quiet”, stating that no male can open the Box of Jhana without going out of his mind. This was illustrated on-screen by the expedition leader Sanders and presumably off-screen before him by Roberts and the other colonists who disappeared in the forest long before the serial began. Later when the Doctor tells Karuna that Panna is dead, Karuna continues Panna’s perception of the Doctor by remarking “Idiot. Don’t you know anything. Of course I’m not dead.” Far from being an idiot, the Doctor is assuming a stance where rational enquiry provides the answers. The Doctor and Todd are both scientists and each says of the other that they are asking “so many questions” such as earlier when the Doctor interrogates Karuna on the way to Panna in the cave. Todd had earlier said that “guesses are not science.” The Doctor and Todd are in this respect like Sanders, who told Adric before leaving for the forest that what is needed is “good down the line practical thought.” The Doctor had said to Hindle that opening the box would not be “very wise” but it actually leads the Doctor and Todd to the forest and answers about the Deva Loka world.

Tulloch and Alvarado explain that Kinda was originally written for Tom Baker’s Doctor and that writer Bailey was attracted to Baker’s Doctor’s “all knowing’ wisdom” (1983: 273). Bailey told Tulloch and Alvarado: “I did consider the Doctor to be more of a sage than he is now, and so I had him helping the Kinda, but helping them in
full knowledge that something was just being postponed” (1983: 273). Bailey’s vision of the Doctor as “wise old man…was as a reaction to the action-drama formula he disliked” but that as director Peter Grimwade said “In contrast to the interiorised drama of Hindle and the exteriorised one of the Kinda, the Doctor would have sunk from view” (1983: 278). However, even with the departure of Baker, the arrival of Peter Davison, and the removal of lines emphasising the Doctor’s wisdom, in the final televised version the contrast between foolishness and wisdom and the Doctor’s rational approach to things is far more pronounced than Tulloch and Alvarado allow for.

The Doctor can be seen as a fool, however, in precipitating the events of Kinda. As Tulloch and Alvarado note, it is “the Doctor who destroys a culture through his wanderlust.” They quote director Peter Grimwade: “The whole trouble is caused by the Doctor. If Tegan hadn’t landed with the Doctor, nothing would have ever happened. It would all have worked out quite happily. So in fact it’s the Doctor’s intervention that caused the problem…” (1983: 279). Therefore, as Tulloch and Alvarado explain, the Trickster is a reflection of the Doctor himself with the dual functions of hero and buffoon (1983: 279) and indeed the Doctor plays his coin trick, based on Adric’s in the Dome, on the Trickster. This is where the Doctor puts his clenched fists out and tells the Trickster to choose only to reveal that both his hands are empty and taking a coin from behind the Trickster’s ear.

The colonist Hindle, meanwhile, is a madman. He says at the end of Part One to the Doctor, “you don’t fool me, I’m afraid.” Later in Part Two he tells the Doctor to “be sensible.” But Hindle has lost all sanity and sees the outside forest as threatening and the Kinda as the servants of the trees and plants. It is rather the Doctor, not trying to fool anyone, who applies reason to the situation on Deva Loka.

In Snakedance much is made of the supposed foolishness of those who believe in ‘the Legend of the Return’ of the Mara. Right from near the beginning of Part One, in the exchange between Lady Tanha and her son Lon, there is the idea that the Legend is “nonsense” and that the previous Director Dojjen’s beliefs were “the ramblings of a madman.” In a play on Queen Victoria’s alleged catchphrase, Tanha remarks that Lon’s father, the Federator, “was not amused” at going in disguise into the wilderness to see the snakedancers. Ambril, the current Director, continues this theme saying that the Legend of the Return is “pure nonsense” and sees the Doctor (who insists that the Legend is not a made-up story) as “clearly deranged” and
one of a series of fools following Dojjen’s views which were “the meanderings of another crank.” Ambril describes such theories as “colourful improbabilities”, as “wishy-mystical mumbo jumbo” and as “woolly-minded nonsense.” He sees the Doctor as a fool, noting in Part Three to his assistant Chela’s assessment, that “of course the fool’s harmless.”

However, as is usual in the programme, the Doctor is revealed to be anything but a fool and credibility is given to his theories. Arriving on Manussa, he tells his companion Nyssa that the answers they seek are outside on the Mara’s homeworld rather than in the TARDIS data bank. He says that the cave in Tegan’s dream is a real place and likely nearby and there is an immediate cross-cut to the snake-mouth entrance of the cave. This interestingly echoes the Doctor’s wisdom in Kinda, where he told Todd that the cave in the vision from the Box of Jhana was undoubtedly a real place. Much later in Snakedance, Lon tells Tanha that the Doctor is “a complete fool,” but we know that the Doctor is not and that Lon is possessed by the Mara. The Doctor follows Dojjen’s beliefs and as Chela earlier reads from Dojjen’s writings about the presence of the Mara, something dismissed out-of-hand by Ambril, Lon appears in the doorway, possessed by the Mara (see Gillatt) giving weight to Dojjen and the Doctor’s conclusions.

The Doctor is indeed presented as an astute reader. On the cave walls are pictorial representations of how the Mara reoccurs just as there are similar drawings detailing the emergence of Gastropods in The Twin Dilemma (1984) (see DVD Production Notes, Snakedance). In Snakedance, the Doctor declares that everything has meaning if one knows how to read the drawings and later comes to the conclusion that the lines flow from the figures to the spot of the Great Crystal, with this energy allowing the Mara to reoccur. This reading is shown to be correct towards the serial’s end.

The theme of seeing is important to the narrative and while many Manussans are blinded to the truth, with Ambril even wearing a blindfold, the Doctor perceives correctly. The Mara gains its power through people looking at it whether that be the Fortune Teller at the end of Part One, the Showman at the end of Part Two or the Manussans at the ceremony towards the end of Part Four. Earlier, Lady Tanha looks at her son Lon in his ceremonial costume and says “let me look at you. I am going to be so proud.” But it is the Doctor who realises that the glove on Lon covers up the mark of the snake to which Lon says “they’ll never believe you” until he dramatically unveils the design at the ceremony later on. The Doctor says that evil will never succeed and...
Lon plays on his identity as Lady Tanha’s son replying to inquiry about who is evil that her son is evil and when he says “Don’t you see” (my italic) she replies “I most certainly do.” The Doctor’s wisdom is contrasted with the foolishness of those around him.

The Doctor has already turned Ambril into a figure of mockery, exposing him as the real fool. Ambril shows the Doctor a headpiece of the Six Faces of Delusion. On the headpiece there are five faces, and Ambril says that he finds it very difficult to take seriously a legend which cannot count properly. However, the Doctor persuades Ambril to try the headpiece on, and after Chela counts the five faces the Doctor points to Ambril’s own face revealing that the sixth face of delusion is the wearer’s own. Ambril’s reaction becomes one of fury at having been made a buffoon, shouting at the Doctor to get out. Ambril is one of many deluded in not believing in the Legend. This scene is based on a ‘joke’ picture common in the Renaissance where two people are dressed as fools and significantly is commonly called ‘We Three Fools’ or ‘We Three Asses’ (see DVD Production Notes) highlighting that Ambril is revealing himself as a fool.

The theme of ceremony and reality reaches its conclusion at the end of Part Four. Possessed, Lon is uninterested in the ceremony marking the Federation’s vanquishing the Mara 500 years previously. Lon takes the ‘fake’ Great Crystal from the rubber snake’s mouth and treads upon it, echoing Aris, possessed by the Mara in *Kinda*, stamping on the Trickster’s doll. Lon is only concerned with placing the real Great Crystal in its socket to enable the Mara to return. Lon’s stamping on the fake Great Crystal connects with his earlier destruction of relics that Ambril is so interested in, prefigured by Lon throwing an ornament of a snake towards Ambril, which the Director anxiously catches, near the start of the narrative. Lon is not interested in Ambril’s love of relics apart from as a tool to make Ambril provide the real Great Crystal. In putting the lie to Ambril’s view of the Legend as “nonsense,” he confirms the truth in the Doctor’s theories.

**Conclusion**

A close reading of *Kinda* and *Snakedance* supports the idea that entertainment, foolishness and wisdom are central concerns, and that they can be placed in the
context of other texts and traditions, whether intended by writer Christopher Bailey or not. Rational enquiry means putting aside preconceptions and accepting that there are different planes and paradigms. However, this is not the final word on Bailey’s televised *Who*. For example, the Buddhist/Christian allegory can be investigated further. The Mara is personified in ancient Buddhist texts as a great tempter. In Bailey’s serials it appears in the guise of a snake, tempting figures to agree to its terms just as Satan tempts Eve to eat from the Forbidden Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden and just as Satan tries to tempt Christ in John Milton’s *Paradise Regained*. Also, as mentioned elsewhere (O’Day 2018d), the snake mouth cave in *Snakedance* reminds one of Hell Mouth in the Christian tradition.

*I’d like to thank Tim Harris for providing archival material and Dr Matthew Kilburn for offering suggestions on drafts of this article. I am also indebted to Professor Ken Borris (English Department, McGill University) for his undergraduate course on pastoral.*

**Bibliography**


When *Survival* saw the end of the television series for a good twenty-six years, *Doctor Who* entered what became known as the wilderness years. Two years in, Virgin Publishing stepped up to the plate, promising a range of novels, the New Adventures, which would provide stories that were “stories too broad and too deep for the small screen.” Beginning this range was a four-part arc, the Timewyrm saga, featuring the Doctor and Ace battling the eponymous villain across time and space. With the release of *Bookwyrm*, and the thirtieth anniversary of *Doctor Who* going off the air, I thought it was time to take a look back at these novels. Here’s what I thought...

**Timewyrm–Genesys**
The first of the New Adventures, John Peel’s *Timewyrm–Genesys* kicks off the series by being… solidly fine. There’s nothing to this story that’s particularly inspirational, and the whole thing comes off as a bit derivative. Inspired by the epic of Gilgamesh, which is already quite heavy going to start with, the Doctor’s first major villain was not the titular Timewyrm, but the dastardly Tabloids! The *News of the World* declared that “Dr Who’s Too Blue”, and that the Timelord is “cowering under his scarf in shame.” This manages to skip over the fact that ancient Babylon, and mentions of teenage prostitutes, while a bit off-putting and certainly overused, are by no means something that can be used to attack the novel. What can be used, however, is the sheer amount of references, and associated continuity, that the novel contains. Indeed, it features one of the most blatant pieces of exposition in any medium, with the Doctor ‘accidentally’ wiping Ace’s memory so he can spoon feed a brief history of the show to you in great detail. Presumably, someone at Virgin assumed that they’d be getting readers who’d never watched the series, which was always going to be a tad optimistic. All the same, there are better ways of introducing the Doctor than this. Perhaps this playing around...
with their memories (the Doctor regresses to a former incarnation at one point, for the most dubious of reasons) explains why their characters are somewhat generic, with not quite all the fire of the characters who walked off into the sunset in *Survival*. It’s by no means the most exciting *Doctor Who* novel, but it’s a solid base to begin with.

**Timewyrm–Exodus**

If you’ve seen the front cover, you’ll already know in which direction *Exodus* is heading. To say *The Man in the High Castle* is an inspiration is an understatement, with the novel putting a British spin on the events of Philip K. Dick’s novel. Of course, this being a *Doctor Who* novel, Ace and the Doctor need to get involved, which is where opinions are going to diverge. Indeed, some reviewers on the *Doctor Who Reviews Guide* give it plaudits such as “100/100,” and “undeniably superb,” while others criticise it as “badly misguided,” and “total rubbish.” Really, it all depends on whether you can accept the concept of aliens being behind the Nazis’ rise to power, or if you feel that this obscures the fact that human beings are more than capable of committing atrocities. In addition, the Doctor, as part of his deception, spends a lot of time with the Nazi elite. Indeed, I myself am still somewhat conflicted over this, but for the purposes of the review, I’ll be going along with it. Terrance Dicks has certainly got novel writing experience, and it shows; the world he creates is terrifyingly palpable. Characterisation of the Doctor and Ace also picks up a bit here, with the cunning of the former and the righteous fury of the latter on show, even if Ace does get a bit more damsel in distress work to do than normal. Perhaps this unnecessary character trait results from the overstuffed nature of the novel as a whole, which spans multiple eras, locations and villains; all while essentially missing out half the title—the Timewyrm doesn’t really feature.

In all, whether you should read this novel is best left to your own judgement. If you want a *Pulp Fiction* look at World War Two, look no further. If you want something more nuanced, then you should probably look elsewhere.

**Timewyrm–Apocalypse**

*Apocalypse* also has a reputation that precedes it, with one friend describing it as “the most boring *Doctor Who* novel ever.” Having read it, I would indeed describe it as *The Krotons*, crossed with *The Lie of the Land*, with an added dash of *Time and the Rani*. Not the most promising, then. Despite that dubious lineage, it somehow manages to be perfectly readable. You won’t be blown away by it, and the Timewyrm again does a great job of not featuring, but it’s another perfectly
entertaining adventure for the TARDIS crew. Being bland in places and not very original, I would’ve suspected this was the direct sequel to Genesys had I not known otherwise. It even shares the quirk of putting in a lot of unnecessary references, with the Second Doctor, much as I love him, cameoing for no particular reason. Logopolis also gets shoehorned into the novel in an unsubtle cameo, and given my experience of later VNA's, I’m glad they eventually stopped with this kind of thing, as it becomes oddly tiresome, rather than thrilling. Apocalypse won’t set your hearts racing, and while there are worse options out there in the Whoniverse, it’s definitely near the bottom of the pile.

Timewyrm–Revelation

The finale of the Timewyrm arc, Revelation defies description. Like The Mind Robber on steroids, the majority of the action takes place either inside the Doctor’s head, or perhaps more strangely, within a sentient church on the moon. If this already sounds odd, don’t worry, it gets weirder! The ethereal nature of the situation leads to the return of old Doctors, cameos of former companions, and a lot of timey-wimeyness. In the wrong hands, this could’ve been a tedious mess. But instead, it’s beautiful. Musing on the nature of the Doctor, on a relatively literal trip to Hell and back again, it is full of wonderful ideas, spectacular imagery, and a ton of symbolism. In a story that features...
literal Nazis (there's a theme here), its telling that
the most terrifying character is Ace's childhood
bully, given extraordinary power over life and
death. Unlike the other stories, it performs a deft
balancing act between homage and fanwank, tying
up the many plot threads that the other authors
left so inconsiderately hanging. I doff my figurative
hat to Paul Cornell, and recommend anyone to
seek out this gem of a novel.

In all, the Timewyrm arc can best be described
as like a bag of Revels. It’s full of the ones that
you don’t like (looking at you, coffee), but is
interspersed by all kinds of chocolatey delights.
Replace coffee with excessive continuity, and
chocolatey delights with some excellent ideas;
you’ll probably get the general idea! As for a
recommendation, I’d personally suggest reading
just Exodus and Revelation—they recap the story
so far, and then you get all the good bits with none
of the baggage. Unfortunately, these also happen
to be the expensive ones, so a library is probably the best bet. While these novels, as
a group, are not what you’d have picked to build a literary empire on, they provide
tantalising hints of the stories that are to follow—and you can’t ask for more than that.

Tale of Future Past by Matthew Kilburn
Back in the early 1990s, I greeted the dawn of the New Adventures with conflicting
expectations. I'd hoped for original print adventures for the Doctor and his friends ever
since I was a young reader of the Target novelizations, but had been socialised by my
discovery of fan culture to accept that these had to wait until all the television stories were
novelised—or at least those without unsurmountable obstacles to their novelisation such
as being written by Douglas Adams or being Dalek stories written by David Whitaker or
Eric Saward (though Whitaker’s stories fell early). The announcement that original novels
featuring the Seventh Doctor and Ace were on their way was welcome. I bought all the
New Adventures for the first two or three years.

Of the Timewyrm series, I remember Genesys as enthralling, but rambling, with an
author who didn’t seem as attuned to the Seventh Doctor and Ace as they ought. Exodus
demonstrated Terrance Dicks's skill as a thriller writer, his mastery of the Nazi alternative
universe subgenre and his thoroughly professional treatment of the regulars. Apocalypse
was a disappointment which lacked its predecessors' competence or thematic depth.
Revelation was transformative—a love letter to Doctor Who and its fandom and commentary
on what Doctor Who meant to the generations who grew up with it, and its possible futures,
from a leading fan writer whose enthusiasm for both science and humanities was profound,
whose youth was itself an encouragement. The future lay this way.
The diary of Prof. Stephen Brennan

Before we begin the review, I have a confession to make. I am a New Adventures Fan. I love these books so much, including all of their characters, their history, their fanwank: I love every bit of it. Being a fan of the New Adventures can be tough in this day and age. They’re often seen as an embarrassment: the teenage puberty years of Doctor Who, that people would rather quietly push under the rug. And, due to their relative unavailability, fewer and fewer people can actually claim to have owned, let alone read, these tenacious tomes. And those who haven’t tend to pour on the most scorn of all.

Now, why am I telling you this? Well, dear reader, all this is crucial context for just how important, and just how damn magical this book is. Bookwyrm covers the entire 61 book run of the New Adventures (with a brief interlude discussing Steven Moffat’s Short Story Continuity Errors, published concurrently in Decalog 3), and whether you’ve read none or all of them, this is a book for everyone.

To any Wilderness Years fan, the names Antony Wilson and Robert Smith? are well-known.

The Editors

For any concerned readers, the ? is meant to be there - Tides doesn’t make mistakes!

If Stephen can rip off Bernice Summerfield’s Diary, then so can we!

Smith? is the Webmaster and Editor-in-Chief of the Doctor Who Ratings Guide, a fantastic website where anyone can contribute a review of anything in the vast pantheon of Doctor Who Stories, in all mediums, where the motto is “By Fans, For Fans.” And together, Wilson and Smith? run the website Cloister Library, a website which chronicles every continuity reference in every Doctor Who book ever, as well as a mini-review of each one. Well come back to these websites later, but for the moment, if you haven’t already checked out these websites, and you’re interested in Bookwyrm, you should do so at once! I’ve been a regular visitor to both sites for several years.

The Editors

For any concerned readers, the ? is meant to be there - Tides doesn’t make mistakes!

If Stephen can rip off Bernice Summerfield’s Diary, then so can we!

Smith? is the Webmaster and Editor-in-Chief of the Doctor Who Ratings Guide, a fantastic website where anyone can contribute a review of anything in the vast pantheon of Doctor Who Stories, in all mediums, where the motto is “By Fans, For Fans.” And together, Wilson and Smith? run the website Cloister Library, a website which chronicles every continuity reference in every Doctor Who book ever, as well as a mini-review of each one. Well come back to these websites later, but for the moment, if you haven’t already checked out these websites, and you’re interested in Bookwyrm, you should do so at once! I’ve been a regular visitor to both sites for several years.
The diary of Prof. Stephen Brennan

From the moment I was told about Bookwyrm, I was sold. The idea of a guide that covered the New Adventures in depth, by two people who knew their stuff, sounded like a dream come true! And I’m glad to say, Bookwyrm far exceeded my expectations! Wilson and Smith? clearly have such a love for this era of Doctor Who, and every paragraph has humour and warmth pumped into it. Reading Bookwyrm is more like sitting in on a conversation between two fans than reading a 400 page book, in the best way possible. And, considering just how much the New Adventures themselves very heavily draw on influences of fan-culture at the time, this only serves to make Bookwyrm feel even more like a love letter to the New Adventures. However, it’s not just NA Nuts who’ll appreciate Bookwyrm, everything is written accessibly enough so that even someone with no knowledge of the New Adventures can enjoy it, and maybe even consider picking one or two up! Whether you can name every character in Transit, or can’t name the books in the Timewyrm saga, this is a book for everyone. Beginning this review, I had only intended to read up to Nightshade, but I ended up finishing the entire thing in one sitting! It’s THAT well-written.

As with all things, Bookwyrm is not perfect. As mentioned earlier, both authors are responsible for the wonderful Cloister Library. However, as someone already intimately familiar with the site, certain parts of Bookwyrm feel a little... too familiar. In the review sections in particular, a lot of the same wording is used both on The Cloister Library, and in Bookwyrm. As both authors give their thoughts on the books in Bookwyrm, and only one does so on Cloister Library, the “Main” review in Bookwyrm is always by whichever author didn’t write the one for Cloister Library. It isn’t a huge issue, and certainly not one that most people would even be aware of, but it is worth noting. Also, although the book stays factually accurate throughout, there is one glaring error, that I feel obligated to point out. In the section where they discuss Lungbarrow, Wilson and Smith? state categorically that “Since Lungbarrow, precisely no Doctor Who, in any form, has mentioned the Looms, the Doctor’s family.” No matter what way you slice it, this is blatantly incorrect information.

As with all things Bookwyrm is not perfect. As mentioned earlier, both authors are responsible for the wonderful Cloister Library. However, as someone already intimately familiar with the site, certain parts of Bookwyrm feel a little... too familiar. In the review sections in particular, a lot of the same wording is used both on The Cloister Library, and in Bookwyrm. As both authors give their thoughts on the books in Bookwyrm, and only one does so on Cloister Library, the “Main” review in Bookwyrm is always by whichever author didn’t write the one for Cloister Library. It isn’t a huge issue, and certainly not one that most people would even be aware of, but it is worth noting. Also, although the book stays factually accurate throughout, there is one glaring error, that I feel obligated to point out. In the section where they discuss Lungbarrow, Wilson and Smith? state categorically that “Since Lungbarrow, precisely no Doctor Who, in any form, has mentioned the Looms, the Doctor’s family.” No matter what way you slice it, this is blatantly incorrect information.

I won’t go into detail on them here, as I already wrote an essay for Tides about this very topic. The Editors

See ‘Looming Large’ in #41
- Available to order in limited amounts!
I love Bookwyrm. Yes, I have one or two nitpicks with it, but that’s all they are: nitpicks. I enjoyed every moment of reading it, even if I didn’t always share the same opinions as the authors (I mean come on, All-Consuming Fire is easily one of the best NAs!)...

The Reader,
C/O Tides #43

If my deduction is correct, as it always is, then this letter will reach you just in time for me to relate that I, Sherlock Holmes, and my assistant Watson, appeared in The Case of the All Consuming Fire, to lend The Doctor a hand. After his hopeless imitation of me (Though to this day, some still mistake me for him near the Palace Theatre), it was only right that I lent the poor fellow a hand. My associate Stephen is correct in the assertion that it was one of Conan Doyle’s more entertaining summaries of my work, even if the truth is far too shocking to relate.

Yours,
Sh

P.S - Look behind you

...but that’s part of the fun of Bookwyrm. Best of all, it reminded me of exactly why I love the New Adventures so much. In a time when Doctor Who was off TV, they took The Doctor to places they’d never been before, and while there were a few bumps in the road, it worked out in the end. I heartily recommend that every Doctor Who fan should pick up Bookwyrm, as an insight into one of the most often-overlooked and neglected eras of the franchise. I shall look forward to the next Volume in the series, covering the BBC Books Eighth Doctor range. Bookwyrm is the perfect book for any book worm!

Fake Lawyers Co.

From our client:

Dear all,
I’ll see you in court.
Regards,
Paul Cornell
Controversially, I adore The Time of the Doctor. It celebrates Matt Smith’s era, from the playful comedy to the whimsical fairy tale, with lots of specific callbacks as well. But it doesn’t just focus on the past (which would be an easy mistake to make, given how arc-heavy the Smith years were) and instead gives some nice forward development for the Eleventh Doctor. It’s a brilliant character piece and the essential final note in the arc of my favourite Doctor.

Silliness and fairytale

We open with the Doctor flying around Trenzalore, calling on Daleks and Cybermen alike in trying to work out what the message from the planet’s surface means. Meanwhile, this is interspersed with the Doctor bickering with Handles, and trying to deal with Clara’s Christmas crisis. It’s a fun sequence, and I appreciate the frontloading of comedy. This sort of silliness is a staple of Smith, particularly his early years, and it would have felt wrong not to have it somewhere in his swansong. With the drama to come, it’s good that we get it in early, allowing the rest of the episode to take on a more thoughtful tone as this Doctor draws to an end.

The silliness carries on for the next ten minutes, but unfortunately, it gradually gets much less funny. The Doctor and Clara running around naked, first with Clara’s family and then the Papal Mainframe, is frankly too odd a concept. We also get the introduction of Tasha Lem, and, while I don’t intend to get into a long discussion of how well Steven Moffat can write female characters, Tasha Lem is a solid point against him. In my opinion, this is easily the weakest part of the story, and serves to turn people off the story.

Once we’re through that, and a visually appealing but rather pointless encounter with the Weeping Angels, the quality picks back up again. The Doctor and Clara find themselves in a lovely, snow-covered village called Christmas, which like a lot of the episode, and the era as a whole, has a very fairytale feel to it. This gives Smith, who’s on top form throughout the episode, the opportunity to lean further in to the nature of the story, and nowhere more so than the scene in the base of the tower. When the
omnipresent crack is revealed, and the question introduced, Smith does an excellent job of being scared, setting an appropriately ominous air for the rest of the episode.

His response, sending Clara home, is typical of Eleven, who cares a lot about his companions but rarely gives them much say when he thinks he knows what's best for them. The following sequence dials the fairy tale feeling up to the next level, with Tasha narrating the Doctor’s three-hundred-year defence of Trenzalore. I love the idea of the Doctor growing old in Christmas, fixing toys and fighting monsters. While, due to time constraints, we only see snapshots of his time there, I enjoy what we get to see, even the wooden Cyberman! Yes, it is a slightly silly idea, but Eleven’s answer is undeniably witty, and a very satisfying use of the sonic to solve a problem.

**A trickster and a strategist**

I want to highlight how important this part is for Eleven’s character. Smith’s Doctor is a trickster and a strategist. He took over Demon’s Run in five minutes flat; he utilised the entire human race to defeat the Silence; he is willed back into existence in Series Five using nothing but Amy’s subconscious, and the entirety of *The Wedding of River Song* is about him cheating his own death. He has no patience for sitting around either, as shown in *The Power of Three*—another episode I get funny looks for liking. But in *Time*, there’s no clever way out, no cocky monologue and master plan, just a little town which will suffer if he doesn’t stay. If he simply left with Clara then, while the Daleks might burn the planet, there would be no wider impact on the universe. The Time Lords would remain trapped, and everything would proceed as normal.

The Doctor is the Doctor, and so he stays. He settles for a simple life as the town’s guardian and toymaker, even though it’s completely against this incarnation’s character. Indeed, dying to save a handful of people is something of a theme in regeneration stories; *The Caves of Androzani*, *The Doctor Falls* and even the original idea for Ten’s regeneration (discussed in *A Writer’s Tale* by Russell T Davies and Benjamin Cook) all feature the Doctor sacrificing himself for a few ‘normal’ people. It’s a clever way to end Eleven’s arc, showing him growing up and adding to the story’s theme of acceptance.

Though it’s moments for us, Clara’s back three hundred years later after pulling a Captain Jack, providing the impetus for further insight into the Doctor. Smith always played the weary old man very well in my opinion and here he really makes use of that, demonstrating the Doctor’s acceptance of his fate. Unfortunately, the arrival of Clara means that it’s time for Handles to move aside, which in this case is his rather sad death. I have to say, at this point, that I think Handles is a great companion. He’s memorable, despite only featuring in a smattering of scenes, and his death is quite touching. Again, through a companion we see Eleven grow. Previously, he’s been very bad at dealing with loss, going so far as to isolate himself above the clouds in *The Snowmen*. But here, he is sad yet composed: “Thank you, Handles. And well done mate.”

Shortly afterwards, we go back to the Papal Mainframe, now the Church of the Silence, in the name of advancing the plot and getting some hurried exposition on
where the Kovarian Chapter came from. While I often hear people complain about *The Time of the Doctor*’s rushed solutions to longstanding arcs, I personally think it’s a strength. Of course, it’s no secret that some of the arcs in Smith’s tenure became a bit of a mess and it’s not that I mind them—I appreciate the attempt to try a more serialised format—but the landing wasn’t perfect. Some things were just too convoluted to tie up neatly in an hour, and so the episode doesn’t try to do the impossible. It’s telling that we get two lines to justify a two-series arc immediately after five minutes of quiet reflection on top of a tower. Rather than trying to tie up every dangling thread from the last three years, the episode decides to be the best ending for Smith’s Doctor.

**Thoughts on a Clock**

Eleven then shows another slither of his ice-cold brand of love, again sending Clara home, and we go back to fairy tale mode for another time passage. At six hundred years, I think the episode overdoes it, and would prefer something closer to a hundred. All the same, it gives Clara’s Gran the opportunity to tell a story about her husband, which feeds nicely into the themes of inevitable change and loss that permeate the story.

This leads almost immediately into the very emotional conversation with the ancient Doctor in the base of the tower. It’s striking, to see the youngest, liveliest Doctor grow so old, both in appearance and spirit. The extract from ‘Thoughts on a Clock’, meanwhile, is perfect. It’s nice that at the end, there’s no bitterness to Eleven—he’s just an old man who, like the rest of us, has accepted that it’s his time. Despite his age, he is surrounded by the drawings of children, which are very reminiscent of Amelia’s. But while hers were just fantasies, born from the Doctor’s mishap which warped her entire childhood, these are the drawings he earned ‘the long way around’; depictions of real events. By the end of this episode, Eleven has finally earned the fairy tale persona that surrounded his run.

We now come to the major bone of contention—the ending. While the resolution may be a bit *deus ex machina*, it has to be said that Clara is right. The Time Lords owe the Doctor at this point, and as the episode is a character piece, rather than plot focussed, I’m prepared to let it off the hook. You could argue that the regeneration somewhat undermines the themes I’ve been preaching, but it doesn’t undo any of Smith’s character development. In fact, it allows his closing words a more hopeful tone as well as, you know, letting the show continue, which is a big plus.

As for the final moments, the Eleventh Doctor’s is the best final monologue I’ve seen. It’s both optimistic and reflective, which is only enhanced by the lovely Long Song. His arc completed, he welcomes the change, something that ties the episode’s themes up perfectly. We also finally see him drop some of the self-loathing that plagued his Doctor—“I will always remember when the Doctor was me.” It celebrates him, and is hopeful for the future: it says that change is inevitable but, more importantly, that change is good.
The Capaldi Conundrum

Welcome back to Top or Flop?, where two fans are pitched against each other on a point of contention. This time, James Ashworth and Ian Bayley debate the Capaldi titles…


Come the hour, come the man. In the case of The Time of the Doctor, this saw us introduced to a new, renally inclined Doctor, as played by Peter Capaldi. As the opening of Deep Breath rolled around, we waited with bated breath to see what the new Doctor would be like. He was certainly older than his predecessors, at least in New Who, and seemed to be a big fan of the series, if his writings and comments were anything to go by. We had six minutes of Who before the titles rolled around, and opinions were already diverging…

At first, the fog clears to reveal a series of cogs, which form into a ring before revealing a clock beyond. A clock forms, stretching out into the vortex through which the TARDIS flies. As it disappears, the clock stretches, revealing planets and the time vortex beyond, as well as the lead actors’ names. A certain pair of eyebrows make their appearance, the logo and title cards flash up, before the episode begins. It had taken just thirty-five seconds, and now a new division had been driven into Doctor Who fandom.

In an effort to heal this rift, two fans go head to head, arguing why their view of the Capaldi Titles is ultimately correct.

For the Defence: James Ashworth
You may have noticed that James, an aspiring journalist, happens to be one of the Editors. He would like to reiterate that there is no editorial bias in the presentation of this debate, and why he is overwhelmingly correct.

For the Prosecution: Ian Bayley
Ian is a lifelong fan. His favourite twentieth-century Doctor is Tom Baker. His favourite twenty-first Doctor is Peter Capaldi. He doesn’t like Capaldi’s title sequence, however.
The Argument for the Capaldi Titles  James Ashworth

Over the years, the Doctor has “had many faces, many lives.” He’s also had plenty of title sequences. Some of these toe a line, and others break out in a new direction, of which Peter Capaldi’s are certainly a part of the latter. My esteemed colleague argues why these titles should be consigned to the Doctor Who dustbin, but evidence is not on his side. Indeed, a show of hands on the issue at a screening of Oxygen failed to go in his favour. I will also provide further evidence to the grand jury of readers why these titles deserve reappraisal from the fan community.

Firstly, the titles show just what Doctor Who is best at: the abstract. Whether it’s a sentient universe in the shape of a frog, or a world composed of fictional creations, the show always excels when it pushes boundaries. Capaldi’s titles pick up on this, becoming a visual metaphor for the time vortex through the swirling, relentless cogs that give way to a helical clock face and planets beyond. Never before has the duality of the TARDIS’s ability to travel in both time and space been depicted so well in the title sequence, with hints of the nature of the vortex itself in the wisps beyond. If you were to go by the titles of the 1980s, for example, you’d probably think it could only travel in space, given the use of stars and galaxies. The clock metaphor also complements the soundtrack, the relentless ticking reinforcing the unstoppable nature of time, that even the Doctor, old as they may be, is powerless to resist.

The titles also offer references to both the series as a whole, and the character of the Doctor. The roman numerals on the clock faces count up to twelve, indicating the present Doctor’s era whilehonouring the past. The Circular Galifreyan on and around the clock faces provides hints of the Doctor’s non-terrestrial origin, and being pervasive throughout the sequence, the ever-present role of the Time Lords across the Universe. As for the Twelfth Doctor himself, we are reminded of his triumphant entrance into The Day of the Doctor eyebrows—first by their depiction before/after the logo, depending on the series you are watching. The eyebrows also hint at this Doctor’s more cynical nature, Peter Capaldi being one of the undisputed champions of the eyebrow raise. The high pitch of the theme, meanwhile, makes it somewhat abrasive, giving further hints of the Doctor’s character before the episode has even begun.

The tiles also lean in to the deconstructive nature of this era of Steven Moffat, who sought to understand the Doctor by breaking him down. Whatever your opinion of this, it is clear to see that the titles are at least a part of that, changing multiple times throughout Capaldi’s run. When Clara tells the Cybermen that she is the Doctor in Death in Heaven, whose eyebrows should appear but Jenna Coleman’s to drive the point home? Perhaps unwittingly, it also acted as something of a knowing nod towards
The Argument against the Capaldi Titles  Ian Bayley

The opening title sequence is the bridge from our own mundane time and place to the world of the Doctor. I believe it should evoke the mystery of the title character; after all, the very name of the show can be read as a question. The theme should evoke the wonder of an unpredictable time vessel that can literally materialise anywhere in the universe at any time. We hear this wonder in the Season One to Four titles when the opening low-pitched brooding builds to a dramatic crescendo just as the words “DOCTOR WHO” are formed.

The shapes we see are meant to represent the space-time vortex. We have known this since the very first televised flight of the TARDIS in An Unearthly Child where Bernard Lodge’s howl-around effect is superimposed on the faces of the Doctor and Susan. Later titles show the TARDIS travelling in the vortex. There is plenty of scope for artistic interpretation in the design of the vortex because we know so little about it from the dialogue in the show itself. Sid Sutton, when designing the titles used for seasons Eighteen to Twenty-Three, thought the space-time vortex would be a star field like the outer space we glimpse in our night sky. The Series Five to 7A titles show the TARDIS being buffeted by lightning strikes. Perhaps both of these are a little too close to our everyday terrestrial experiences and lacking the required sense of mystery. In my opinion, the best titles are the ones so abstract that you can’t recognise anything, like those of Series 7B and Eleven.

So what is the Series Eight to Ten vision of the time vortex, that magical place through which the TARDIS travels, making possible all the adventures we watch? The answer, abysmally, is that it’s the place where the clocks live, because clocks measure time. The clocks we see are inscribed with Circular Gallifreyan, and while that does suggest they are out of this world, I always see their outline first and I cannot explain why they would be in the time vortex.

What makes the arrival of the clock faces even more appalling for me is that it is preceded by eight seconds of cog wheels. It’s as if the title sequence is smug enough to present as a revelation the surprise that we were inside a clock all this time. It’s possible that the turquoise swirls at the end are what really represents the vortex since we see...
the ‘Clara Who’ section of online fandom at the time, who complained about how they saw a character other than the Doctor taking charge of the narrative. Later on, for Last Christmas and The Husbands of River Song, the titles become festive, especially in the case of the latter. Is it a coincidence, perhaps, that of Capaldi’s Christmas episodes, those that got into the spirit were much better than those whose titles chose to remain as usual? Last, and by no means least, The Doctor indicates how self-aware both he and the titles are by playing his own theme music in Before the Flood. The titles have always changed to reflect the nature of the show, and this time, they reflected its stories as well.

How best then, to sum up the Capaldi-era titles? I think the Moment had the right idea, when it described the noise of the TARDIS as a sound that “brings hope wherever it goes.” In a similar way, so do the Doctor Who titles, and none more so than Capaldi’s. These titles demonstrated that even in an increasingly corporate media landscape, there’s still the possibility that a fan at home can design their own titles, and eventually have them featured in the very show they enjoy. Our work can be appreciated by more than we may ever realise, and if that’s not a reason to support the Capaldi-era titles, I don’t know what is.

If you would like something debated in Top or Flop?, then please send your ideas to outidesoftime@gmail.com

Top or Flop? will return
it on the show, when the Doctor stares at something in the opening seconds on *Time Heist*, but if so why is the TARDIS travelling through a clock beforehand? Why do the circling planets look like grisaille sketches rather than the coloured spheres we’d see on the show itself? It’s as if the designer was being deliberately cartoonish. While this might suit the comic strip-homaging *The Return of Doctor Mysterio*, it feels out of place for any other episode.

As for the theme tune, I believe Murray Gold makes two mistakes in his final arrangement. Firstly, the opening bars are now accompanied by heavy percussion, like the sound you would get from a steel drum. While this complements the cogwheels, it also draws too much attention to them. Worse still, the loudest and highest pitched point, at which the TARDIS appears, sounds like the McCoy title music. Both versions are pitched so high that they sound as if they are being sung by someone who has inhaled helium. The Capaldi version is made even worse by a tremolo effect in the final few seconds, which I can only describe as an irritating mosquito flying past my ear.

There is a theoretically heartwarming back story to the Series Eight to Ten titles. After seeing the work of graphic artist Billy Hanshaw, Steven Moffat arranged for his concept to be produced professionally. This story even echoes the journey from life-long fan to starring role by Peter Capaldi himself. However, this parallel then reminds me of the eloquent words Capaldi used to describe the titles for seasons Twelve to Seventeen: “within seconds of starting, the title designer has drawn us into the world of Dr. Who and suspended our disbelief”. Unfortunately, I cannot believe the realm of the clock people that my eyes behold and, far from being drawn in, my ears want to leave the sonic landscape I hear as quickly as possible.

The author (right) with Murray Gold (second left). Image by Matthew Kilburn
Hail to the Chief!

Rory Salt on the *Doctor Who* miniatures from Big Chief Studios

In the 2007 episode *Utopia*, the Doctor compares Captain Jack’s method of time-travel to a ‘space-hopper’ and his own TARDIS to a ‘sportscar’. In the world of *Doctor Who* merchandise, Big Chief Studios’ 1/6th scale replica figures are the ‘sportscar’ of the hobby. In every sense of the word too; expensive with a limited production, yet once in hand prove their worth. Even beyond this purely aesthetic level, the history of the company forms an interesting examination of the trials and tribulations that accompany the production of *Doctor Who* merchandise. As such, I decided to take a look at Big Chief Studios’ past, and its potential future.

The release of the Eleventh Doctor and Amy Pond figures marked the humble beginnings of the range in 2012. Now, Big Chief Studios produces figures that include a plethora of Doctors and companions from across the classic and new series, with a weeping angel to boot. My personal history with the company began with their First Doctor figure, revealed in 2013 to coincide with the fiftieth anniversary. It offers a truly unique collectible; an uncanny likeness to Hartnell with a huge variety of accessories. From the pipe of *An Unearthly Child*, to the walking stick of *Marco Polo*, to the fur karakul hat and cloak of *The War Machines*, the accessories are extensive to say the least! Furthermore, the package came complete with the signatures of Carole Ann Ford and William Russell. This in itself is a unique feature of the range, as often there is the opportunity, at extra cost, to gain the signature of the actor the figure was based on, be it Jenna Coleman, Matt Smith, David Tennant or even Jodie Whittaker. Big Chief’s First Doctor figure remains a pride of my ever-growing collection, and displays what the range has to offer at its peak.

For a Birmingham-based small business having to liaise with Chinese manufacturers in
times of economic uncertainty, there are always bound to be difficulties. Often cited across Big Chief’s Facebook page and fan group are the long delays on the production of certain figures, especially Rose and Clara. Announced in March 2016, it took over two years, until April 2018, for the figures to finally be released. While the delay would be infuriating for those who thought they would get the figures sooner, it must be put in context of the 1/6th scale collecting market. Other companies, such as Hot Toys, have had similar delays with figures—it is par for the course when dealing with items that require detailed paint work and tailoring. Yet what separates Big Chief is their generally excellent communication; on Facebook, the company readily answers questions from fans, no matter how many times people repeat the same ‘when are you making my favourite doctor’ or ‘the face of this figure doesn’t look right’ comments.

On that note, the likeness of Big Chief figures’ faces is perhaps the most important part of the package. Unlike the 5” figures by Character Options, the 1/6th scale means the head is not only larger, but needs to be more detailed. The aforementioned First Doctor possesses an excellent likeness, as do the Series 7B Eleventh Doctor and War Doctor figures. In order to produce these detailed figures, an artist will sculpt the head, often independently of work on the body, to produce a likeness that shows the wrinkles, hairs and lifelike eyes that miniaturise the character perfectly. Afterwards, the actor’s likeness needs to be approved, a daunting and potentially lengthy process. Once it is, then there is essentially no going back, or else you waste more time, money and resources on a product that a percentage of the audience will dislike. Some figures demonstrate the drawback of that; with the Rose, Clara and Amy Pond figures drawing criticism for their lacklustre likenesses. Yet, as in the case of most of their figures, Big Chief provide excellent, uncanny likenesses that continue to impress.

The future of the range, like all current Doctor Who merchandise is uncertain. Gone are the days of 2008 when Toys “R” Us could stock a whole aisle with Doctor Who toys, or multiple pages of the Argos catalogue were filled with remote control daleks, plush adipose and Dalek Sec masks. The market has changed massively since then, not just for Doctor Who but even more generally. Times prove especially tough when Doctor Who is off the air for a year, as in 2016 and now. As interest dies down, sales across the broad church of merchandise are hit hard. For Big Chief, the range of fandoms they supply, such as Marvel, James Bond and Harry Potter, alleviate this somewhat, but it still leaves a funding hole, as the company relies on pre-orders to be able to fund production. Fortunately, new market trends have been able to provide greater stability and, hopefully, a brighter future for the company. In late 2018, Big Chief took advantage of crowdfunding by establishing ‘Launchpad’, where costs are kept down by fans guaranteeing payment, either in full or in instalments, as soon as a specified target is hit. The idea follows other companies doing the same for low quantity, high cost collectables, such as Hasbro’s ‘HasLab’ initiative which recently developed a 4ft long Jabba’s sail barge via crowdfunding to a resounding success.
The first ‘launch’ of the Doctor Who range is the Thirteenth Doctor figure, launched after over 350 people, including myself, pledged support earlier this year. This new way of selling products to consumers has several benefits; more can be offered to the consumer to incentivise quick and guaranteed payment in order to fund production. For the Thirteenth Doctor figure, Big Chief offered alternative costume colours, a second head in a different pose, a plaque signed by Jodie Whittaker, and even a Pting! The process itself further helps consumers, for there is more communication as the consumers directly influence whether a product gets made in the first place. Any problems arising from likeness or delays can be directly tackled due to this new direct-to-consumer method of sales. If Big Chief proves successful in this new frontier, then other Doctor Who merchandise producers might take note. While the future for the range looks hopeful, it is important to recognise the fabulous work the company has already done. Big Chief figures really are the sportscars of any collection, and deserve that recognition.

Which is the best likeness of the War Doctor?
Top: Funko Pop War Doctor. Not by Big Chief Studios.
Centre: The late Sir John Hurt. Not by Big Chief Studios.
Bottom: Big Chief Studios War Doctor. By Big Chief Studios.
Top image by James Seattle (CC BY 2.0) https://flic.kr/p/T5goPb
Centre image by Sam Hughes (CC BY 2.0) https://flic.kr/p/ani6x8
There is an exasperating contradiction between David Bradley’s two main contributions to the Doctor Who universe. In An Adventure in Space and Time, Mark Gatiss’s play about the show’s birth screened just two days before the fiftieth anniversary, he portrayed William Hartnell, and achieved the extraordinary feat of making the actor to whom we owe so much live again. He gained widespread praise for that performance but his later appearance as the First Doctor in Twice Upon a Time was greeted with indignation by many of the same people, myself included. With David Bradley coming to the Oxford Union on 18 February 2019, I set out to discover how he could, in my opinion, get it so right and then get it so wrong.

At the meet-and-greet reception in the bar beforehand, David Bradley confirmed my positive impression of his dedication to the role of Hartnell. He had found it important to portray the actor naturalistically, “warts and all.” To help with this, he had read closely the biography written by Jessica Carney, Hartnell’s granddaughter, and he also spoke at length to William Russell and Carole Ann Ford about their memories of the actor. It was important for him to do justice to the man for the sake of all the many people who had known him and worked with him. When recreating the TARDIS interior scenes in An Unearthly Child, he explained to me that he and his fellow cast members watched back the original footage to replicate the original performances as accurately as possible. They paid attention even to the smallest gestures, and reshot scenes where necessary. They did this because they knew that many fans would know the episode extremely well. His performance was so universally admired that he became the obvious person to portray the First Doctor in Twice Upon a Time. In fact, it appears that Capaldi spontaneously suggested Bradley to Moffat in response to a speculative question about future multi-Doctor stories at New York Comic Con.

This is where the contradiction expresses itself. He was now playing the Doctor but his dialogue was a confection of wince-inducing awful attitudes, such as the assertions that Polly and Bill should be required to clean the TARDIS. These may have been the thoughts of an elderly man from the 1960s, such as William Hartnell himself, but not the Doctor we know and love as fans. In An Unearthly Child, Susan begs her
The uncharacteristic attitudes displayed by the First Doctor in Twice Upon a Time are also strangely reminiscent of the last time a First Doctor appeared played by someone who was not William Hartnell, in The Five Doctors (1983). As written by Terrance Dicks and portrayed by Richard Hurndall, the First Doctor also treats a female companion of a later Doctor, in this case Tegan, as some kind of maid, much to the chagrin of the older incarnation. While this may have been the go-to point of reference, I can’t believe that a long-term fan such as Steven Moffat simply forgot Hartnell's performance, and as such responsibility for the representation of the First Doctor in Twice Upon a Time must lie with Moffat’s decisions as writer.

I should close, however, by noting that there was more to the generational humour than sexist attitudes. There were the jokes about the New Who Doctor’s overreliance on technology, like the sonic shades. There also was the dismay at the Twelfth Doctor’s grandstanding as “the Doctor of War,” when the First Doctor preferred to leave more quietly. Most importantly of all, his performance also included a beautifully-delivered speech about why he left Gallifrey which added to the Doctor’s origin story and which will be treasured by fans for decades to come. Perhaps one day I will be able to watch the episode and think of him as a sitcom character in the first half, where necessary and as intended, and as the First Doctor during the more poignant second half. Maybe the doublethink that this requires is the true meaning of Twice Upon a Time.
“Doctor!” Yaz exclaimed cheerfully as she opened the door, “you came!”

“Of course I did; I wouldn’t want to miss Ryan’s birthday!” The Doctor entered Graham’s house and followed Yaz into the living room. Ryan was already there, sat at the table holding spider-themed Top Trumps cards. The Doctor handed him a small present.

Ryan thanked her, and tore off the wrapping paper. “It’s Stormzy’s new album, I hope you’ve not got it already,” the Doctor explained.

“But he doesn’t have a new album,” Ryan turned over the CD case, “copyright 2025!”

“Well, it’s very new, ok,” said the Doctor.

“That’s incredible!” said Ryan.

“No, I mean it’s incredible that people still make CDs in 2025.”

“Oh...” said the Doctor, “well anyway, listen, you don’t mind if we have a slight change of plan, only...”

“Why do I suddenly get the feeling you’re about to suggest we all stop having fun and go and do something very dangerous?” said Graham, entering the room with a cake ready to go in the oven.

“It’s not that dangerous, probably. It’s just I’ve received this distress call through a crack in spacetime, and if we don’t go soon it might close up!”

“But what about my birthday!” Ryan protested.

“And what about the cake?” added Graham.

“We can still do all that; it’s just a change of venue! Besides, there’s a kitchen in the TARDIS. Come on, birthday cake on another planet! How often does that happen?”

The Doctor led the way into the TARDIS. Although it appears on the outside to just be a small blue police box, the inside of the TARDIS is much larger and generally more cool-looking. The entrance door opens into a large, circular control room, where crystalline pillars surround a central control panel covered in screens, buttons, levers and other gadgetry. This was where the Doctor stood, tinkering with the ship’s complicated controls.

“So, where’s this kitchen you were talking about?” Graham asked, the unbaked cake still in his hands.
“I don’t know, somewhere down that corridor, you’ll find it eventually. I’ve got a virtually infinite number of rooms in this place, you can’t expect me to know where everything is!”

Graham gave a sigh and headed off down the corridor. The Doctor was looking at one of the screens, out into the time vortex. Yaz pointed to what looked like a long gash in the swirling clouds of time. “Is that where we’re going?” she asked.

“Yes, and it could lead anywhere in the whole of time and space, or possibly even somewhere outside of it. All we know is that someone is in trouble, and they need our help.” The three watched the screen as the gash grew closer, until the screen was just a flash of light.

The TARDIS emitted its characteristic whooshing noise as it faded into existence in the middle of an alien woodland. “Ooh, I think we’re in another universe,” the Doctor commented as she looked at her monitor screens, “a miniature universe: just one solar system and that’s it.” She walked over to the door and opened it. “It looks safe out here,” she said.

The Doctor, Ryan, Yaz and Graham stood on the damp soil of the forest floor. They noticed the squirrel almost immediately. It may have had green fur and eight legs, but the Doctor and her friends were used to seeing aliens. What stood out to them was something else. Apparently oblivious to their presence, it’s frontmost paws dug into the earth and pulled up a nut. It then scampered around the trees before returning and burying the nut in the same place. Then it did the whole thing again, and again.

“It looks like that squirrel’s one acorn short of an oak tree!” said Graham.

“I think you’re right,” said the Doctor, “but let’s not get too close! We don’t know what it’s capable of. How about this way?” She gestured to her right. The path led them down a gentle slope through the trees. It appeared to be the height of Spring, and flowers grew all over the forest floor, insects buzzing around them in circles. Above, the oddly shaped leaves were interspersed with blossom. They could even hear the sweet chirping of birds. It seemed like the safest place in the universe: who could be sending out a distress call?

As they walked, the trees thinned out. The slope grew gradually steeper and below them they saw a lush valley. A stream ran down from a waterfall in the hills to their left and flowed off towards the horizon on their right. Right there, in the middle of the valley, lay the wreckage of a spaceship. At least there were survivors, that was immediately clear. They’d pitched a few tents on the flattest area of ground they could find, and a few people could be seen sitting outside them. The other eight survivors had loaded a makeshift sled with supplies salvaged from the wreck, and were dragging it up to the camp.

“Well, that was easier than I was expecting,” said Yaz. “It’s not often we go somewhere and don’t end up in some kind of life or death situation!”

“Don’t speak too soon,” said Ryan. Just as he said it, one of the survivors slipped, and the others lost their grip on the rope. The sled glided back down until it hit the spaceship with a metallic thud. A little dejectedly, the eight turned around, retracing their steps to pick up the rope and start again.

Meanwhile, Jacen was busily stirring his tea. He was sitting on a crate outside his tent with
a mug in his hand. Along with the other technician, Munith, he was conducting maintenance on the radio transmitter, which sat in the middle of the ring of tents. Munith emerged from her tent, “I couldn’t find the solar cells,” she said, “I don’t know what’s happened to them.”

Jacen kept stirring for a few seconds before he noticed he was being spoken to. “What did you say? I’m sorry I, um… it’s just I think there’s something wrong with this sugar.” He lifted his spoon out of the tea and gazed at it in bewilderment.

“I said I couldn’t find the solar cells, and never mind about your tea: this is more important. If that transmitter runs out of power, then how are we ever going to get help?”

“You’re right,” said Jacen, putting his mug down on the grass, “I’ll go and look for some.” He turned to go into his tent.

He came back out again a minute or two later. “Any luck?” asked Munith. Jacen shook his head. “I’ll have another look in my tent,” Munith said, “They must be around somewhere.” Jacen sat back down on his crate and picked up the mug of tea, stirring it busily once again.

“I couldn’t find the solar cells,” she said a little wearily, emerging from her tent next to Jacen’s, “I don’t know what’s happened to them.”

There was a pause. Jacen didn’t respond; he seemed preoccupied with his tea. She was used to Jacen being like this. Once, on their first flight together, he had been doing a sudoku on his bunk when a meteor struck the hull. He fell out of his bunk onto the floor, and only after filling out the third row from the bottom, did he remark, “Munith, did something just happen?”

She was about to ask him again when he finally responded, “What did you say? I’m sorry I, um… it’s just I think there’s something wrong with this sugar.”

“I said I couldn’t find the solar cells, and… oh.” Munith and Jacen looked up at the group of four strangers who had just arrived.
The first to speak was the one with the long, grey coat, who looked like she was in charge, “Hello, we got your distress signal. I’m the Doctor, and this is Graham,” she gestured to the old man on her left; “this is Ryan,” she gestured to the young man on her right; “and this is Yaz,” she gestured to the young woman who was also on her right.

Jacen and Munith just stared blankly for a few seconds. “Well... nice to meet you,” Munith eventually managed to say, as though she was trying to remember how, “and what brings you here?”

“The Doctor just said: we got your distress signal,” said Ryan, “we’ve come to save you!”

“Oh yes! I remember now!” Jacen exclaimed, “my name’s Jacen and this is Munith. We crash-landed here didn’t we? And we were just doing maintenance to this, um, radio transmitter here.” Ryan and Graham exchanged bemused glances.

They all heard a faint yelp as one of the salvage team lost his footing and a crash as the sled slipped back down to the ship. “In the exact same spot...” the Doctor muttered to herself. She turned to Jacen and Munith. “The salvage team seem to be having trouble with that sled, maybe they need a hand.”

“We were planning on it, just as soon as we’ve finished this maintenance,” said Munith.

“And once I’ve finished my tea,” added Jacen.

Munith scoffed, “You and your tea. You’ve been stirring that for ages; isn’t it cool enough to drink now?”

Jacen lifted the spoon out of the mug. “There’s something very weird about it, look.” Everybody crowded around, craning their necks to see Jacen’s teaspoon. It was full of sugar. “It just won’t dissolve!” he said.

“Just how long have you been sat here?” the Doctor asked.

Jacen strained his memory, “Oh, um, I can’t even remember. It must have been ages!”

“Neither can I,” added Munith.

The Doctor clapped her hands together, “Well, never mind about that. The important thing is that we get everyone back to my ship. Don’t bother bringing supplies with you; I really think we should get going right now.” She ran off to gather together the salvage team, who had just lost their grip on the sled again and were running off downhill.

Yaz turned to Ryan, “What’s got the Doctor so worried?”

“It’s like this planet’s stuck in some kind of time loop or something,” Ryan replied.

“But us being here seems to have disrupted that. Look at Jacen and Munith. They’re behaving pretty normally now.” Jacen and Munith were standing up now, talking to Graham. Jacen seemed to have given up on his tea and decided to water the grass with it.

“If the Doctor’s worried, then I’m worried. There must be something more to it than that.” Graham removed a sandwich from his pocket and offered it to the two technicians. “Are you two hungry? I can’t imagine how long you must have been sat there not eating anything.”

“Thanks, but actually, I’m not hungry at all,” said Munith.

“Neither am I,” Jacen added, “how strange.”
On the other side of the camp, Captain Dalz dug his heels into the trampled turf and heaved with all his strength. His crew on either side did the same, and the heavy sled jerked and began to move. It was a mixture of food, cooking equipment, as well as some boxes of power crystals: the ship’s cargo. Dalz knew that the food was essential if they wanted to survive on this planet. The crystals weren’t so important, but Dalz wasn’t prepared to leave behind something so precious. At the bottom lay what was left of the spaceship Sisyphus, a long and slender craft with its yellow paint singed from the heat of the crash. It had dug itself a deep trench through the bed of the stream which ran through the bottom of the valley, and the stream had created a pool of fresh water surrounding the wreck. All of this had made Dalz’s job harder, but he wasn’t going to give up when his crew’s lives depended on it. That was why it didn’t matter to Dalz that they had failed, who knows how many times, to drag this load up the hill. Nor that it was always just as they were about to reach the top that he would trip over and the whole lot would go tumbling away from him.

“Excuse me,” said a voice. It came from just next to him, but Dalz didn’t notice. He kept digging his heels in and pulling, step by step, up the hill. “Excuse me,” the voice said again, quite a bit more loudly. Still, Dalz did not respond. The Doctor waved her hands in front of his face, but he still did nothing. There was a blaring noise as the Doctor held aloft her sonic screwdriver. Dalz let go of the rope and covered his ears, collapsing to the ground.

The sound quickly died away, and Dalz, dazed, rose slowly to his feet. “What happened…” his voice was faint and confused, like somebody waking up from a dream. “Wh- hey! Who are you?” He jabbed a finger at the Doctor. The other crew members around them had also woken from their trance and gathered round.

“I’m the Doctor, and I picked up your distress signal. Now if you can all come this way, we can get out of here. My ship is already ready to leave.” The crew were overjoyed, and a couple even cheered, that is, with one exception: Dalz did not seem too happy at all.

“Just a minute, Doctor,” he said, “what’s the rush? We can’t leave just yet; I’ve got to get my cargo out of the ship.”

“Listen to me, every second we stay here, we’re in danger. Leave the cargo, your crew’s lives are more important,” said the Doctor.
“In danger? Look at this place! It’s Idyllic! We’ve been here who knows how long and nothing’s attacked us. Thanks for the advice, but Captain Dalz Tholp of the Spaceship Sisyphus doesn’t take orders from you.”

The Doctor looked at a rectangular device on Dalz’s hip. “Just how long have you been here? Look at the chronometer on your ship’s log.”

Dalz removed the device from his hip and tapped the screen. His eyes widened. “No, there must be a fault. That’s impossible; the battery should have worn down long before then, not to mention we should all be dead from old age.”

“Whatever it says, I’m afraid it’s most likely accurate,” said the Doctor. “I believe you’ve been stuck in a time loop, repeating the same sequences of actions over and over again.”

Dalz was stunned. He read the figure on the screen again. Eighteen trillion years: he just couldn’t believe it. He realised that the Doctor was right, they did need to get out of here now, or now might end up being never.

As has already been mentioned, the TARDIS is much bigger on the inside. As you might imagine, this usually produces cries of, “We’ll never all fit in there!” or, “How does all this fit inside that box?” or even just the classic, “It’s bigger on the inside!” The rescued crew said all of these, and more, as the Doctor and friends tried to persuade them inside. When asked, the Doctor only mumbled something about, “dimensionally transcendental,” and so, understandably, the crew were more than a little perplexed.

“It’s usually best if you just forget about it, and try to pretend everything’s normal,” Graham explained. They found this answer far more satisfying.

The Doctor fired up the controls and the whooshing sound started up. An outside observer would have seen the TARDIS slowly fade away... and then fade back again a few seconds later. “No, no, no!” said the Doctor frustratedly.

“What’s happened?” asked Dalz.

“Just a bit of difficulty dematerialising,” she said, “The gap in spacetime must be closing. Don’t worry though, if I can just give it another try, we should be able to break through.” She pulled a lever and the TARDIS shook. Graham stumbled back into Jacen, who nearly fell over.

The TARDIS began to whoosh and slowly faded away, only to fade back soon afterwards.

The Doctor fiddled frantically with the controls. “No, no, no!” she said.

“What’s happened?” asked Dalz.

“Just a bit of difficulty dematerialising,” she said, sparks flying off the TARDIS console, “The gap in spacetime must be closing. Don’t worry though, if I can just give it another try, we should be able to break through.” The TARDIS shook as she pulled a lever and Graham stumbled back into Jacen, nearly knocking him over. Jacen had the feeling he was going to be there for a long time...

How long will the crew be stuck for? Find out in the next issue of Tides!
You all right, Hun?

Georgia Harper reviews the great Attila’s encounter with the Thirteenth Doctor in the novel *Combat Magicks*...

One of the three BBC books novels released alongside Series Eleven, Steve Cole’s *Combat Magicks* takes Team TARDIS into fifth-century Gaul as the Romans and Huns prepare for battle—but why is the night sky glowing, and who are the mysterious Tenctrama aiding all sides?

With Attila the Hun’s world co-opted by alien “magicks”, it’s only a matter of time before the Doctor and Yasmin are recruited as his sorcerers. Of the three books, I chose *Combat Magicks* because the presence of Yaz on the front cover implied that she would be given a focus that was sadly lacking in Series Eleven, and in that respect the novel delivers! The story is told largely from the point of view of the companions in turn, finally giving us an insight into Yaz’s internal monologue, and some tidbits about her life. Furthermore, she is given the opportunity to shine as she accompanies the Doctor at the heart of the action.

As for the rest of the team/gang/fam, they find themselves separated for much of the novel, which I’m sure they’ll be used to by now! While the Doctor and Yaz are heralded as witches, Ryan encounters the anachronous Legion of Smoke, and Graham is taken for a healer by the Roman leaders. Throughout Series Eleven (and, indeed, the periods of classic *Doctor Who* with a larger main cast), I often find this separation to be simply a convenient way of removing a character or two so the rest can be fully included in a relatively short timeframe. Here, though, it has the opposite effect; giving each companion their own strands of the story means they all have adequate time to shine. On the other hand, this does mean there are a lot of new characters and plot lines to keep up with, so perhaps reading it in short sections on my daily commute wasn’t the best approach!

That said, once you’ve reminded yourself of what’s going on, each of

“Ryan’s dyspraxia is part of his character throughout.”
the novel’s threads are as engaging as each other. The constant presence of the Tenctrama—sometimes in the background, but always there—makes for genuinely creepy villains, going beyond the anticipated witchy tropes to wreak havoc across history. Cole takes full advantage of both the battlefield setting and the freedom from the financial and technological limitations of television to create threats on a massive scale…

Something I particularly appreciated about *Combat Magicks* is that Ryan’s dyspraxia is part of his character throughout—not clunkily inserted for the sake of it, not always even referred to by name, but the stumbles, loss of control and subsequent frustration is a theme running throughout the novel. There’s a point relatively early on in which Ryan falls while running to escape from the battling empires, changing the course of the entire plot. I found it powerful that his neurodivergence is incorporated seamlessly into this classic chase scenario by the novel, rather than being ignored when inconvenient (as I felt was sometimes the case in Series Eleven). His later adventures with the Legion of Smoke also provide some brilliant nods to the Doctor’s past meetings with the Romans, notably in *The Fires of Pompeii*, and the Doctor’s gender change since then, referenced in a way that may have made me laugh out loud on a packed Tube carriage.

In many ways, *Combat Magicks* fits some overarching themes in the episodes broadcast alongside it; it’s a historical, at least loosely speaking, and features the Doctor grappling with tragedies that she cannot undo. If, like me, you were a big fan of the recent series, this is definitely worth a read, and even those who were less keen might find the extra space of the novel format helps to make up for the series’ shortcomings. It’s certainly convinced me to pick up the next two!
The Fourth Doctor is always ready to protect presidents from assassination. After all, it worked so well last time.

Chris, bringing star quality to the Quiz of Rassilon, ensuring it's "Fantastic!"

Edited by James Ashworth and Matthew Kilburn

Front cover montage including details from an image of the Sheldonian Theatre and the Clarendon Building by David Pearson (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) https://flic.kr/p/nJsXGV and Jodie Whittaker at San Diego ComicCon International by Gage Skidmore(CC BY-SA 2.0) https://flic.kr/pMi6ej1

Back cover: Bumbag of Rassilon in Worcester College before it travelled to London to be competed for at the Quiz of Rassilon in February.

Thanks to Daniel Blythe, Lyndsey Pickup

Matthew’s font-obsessive’s paragraph

This issue was largely typeset in Minion Pro and Myriad Pro by Adobe; members of the Alegreya family, designed by Juan Pablo del Peral; members of the Saira family by Omnibus Type; with Bell MT, Gill Sans, Mr De Havilland, Nothing You Could Do, Just Another Hand, Libertinus Sans and Libertinus Serif.

THE TIDES OF TIME number 43 for Trinity Term 2019 was published in April 2019 by the Oxford Doctor Who Society, a registered student club of the University of Oxford. Printed by the Oxford Print Studio, Estates Services, University of Oxford. Distributed online at oxforddoctorwho-tidesoftime.blog.

Doctor Who is copyright © 1963-2019 BBC Studios and this publication does not seek to infringe this or other copyrights or licenses. Article texts remain the copyright of their contributors.

The Oxford Doctor Who Society committee is President VICTORIA WALKER Corpus Christi Secretary PHILIP HOLDRIDGE Mansfield Treasurer and Social Secretary RORY SALT St Benet’s Hall Magazine Editor JAMES ASHWORTH Worcester Membership Secretary ROGAN CLARK St Catherine’s Publicity Officer DAHRIA KUYSER Lady Margaret Hall IT Officer BEN HACK Balliol Vice-President IAN BAYLEY Historian and Magazine Editor MATTHEW KILBURN Librarian KATRIN THIER Web Officer ADAM KENDRICK

You have been reading The InDesign Experiment