



# QUEERS DIG TIME LORDS

Introduction by John & Carole E. Barrowman



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Michael Damian Thomas

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*This book is dedicated to Russell T. Davies  
and all of the LGBTQ creators who worked on Doctor Who  
in all of its forms.*

*Thank you for making the greatest show in the galaxy.*

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## Introduction: As Time Goes By

by John Barrowman and Carole E. Barrowman

Within the canon of the new *Doctor Who* and its spin-off, *Torchwood*, audiences have been wooed with soft kisses, hard kisses, smooches, snogs, shags, kisses on the lips, on the neck, in the present, the past and the future, kisses between friends, among lovers, and in one or two cases with aliens.<sup>1</sup> So when we were asked to write an introduction for this collection of essays exploring the queer sensibilities of the *Doctor Who* universe, there was no debate between us.<sup>2</sup> We knew we wanted to reflect on *the kiss*.<sup>3</sup>

Think of this introduction as foreplay for all the good things in the pages to come.<sup>4</sup>

The kiss we're referring to, of course, is the one that shook the Whovian world and rocked ours - the first time Captain Jack kissed the Doctor, played at the time by Christopher Eccleston.<sup>5</sup> And it was the first time in the history of *Doctor Who* (old and new) that a full on same-sex male kiss was broadcast.

Given the context for *the kiss* - Captain Jack, Rose Tyler (played by Billie Piper), and the Doctor's parting of ways - it was a kiss that needed to accomplish a great deal. First of all, *the kiss* needed to set up the complex nature of Jack's future relationship with the Doctor. In read-throughs, Russell T. Davies - the new show's creator, writer, and executive producer - made it clear to the cast that Jack's relationship would always be suggestively sexual toward the Doctor and overtly so with Rose. The sexual dynamics among the three characters did, we think, go

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1. JB: The first alien I kissed tasted like rubber cement and chips. Don't ask.

2. JB: Well, maybe a little debate.

3. CB: We did agree *the kiss* was suggestive of the progressive thinking about sexuality that Russell imagined for the new *Doctor Who* universe.

JB: Plus a little titillation sells books. CB: Better believe it, brother.

4. CB: I refuse to take responsibility for that line.

5. JB: Excuse me, but we should add the historical importance of *the kiss* too. CB: Are you going to keep interrupting? JB: Probably.

on to be one of the hallmarks of the new series, especially during David Tennant's regeneration as the tenth Doctor.<sup>6</sup>

Secondly, *the kiss* had to establish Jack as a man, albeit a fifty-first century one, but one worthy of the Doctor's compassion. This attribute was crucial for the tension and dynamics between them to be believable moving forward in their adventures together, particularly in Series Three. After all, in trying to keep the Daleks at bay in *The Parting of the Ways*, Jack was sacrificing himself for the greater good, a character trait that continues to be a defining element in Jack's nature.<sup>7</sup> Although at the end of the two-episode season finale arc, the Doctor and Rose abandon Jack at Satellite Five, we think the Doctor does so with a change of hearts about Jack's character. From this time forward, the Doctor never doubts Jack's capacity for good despite abhorring his nature as a "fixed point in time."

Thirdly, the kiss can be seen as an evolution in the Doctor's own character in the new imagining of the Whovian universe. In the past, the Doctor's history suggested he was asexual<sup>8</sup>, but in the seasons following *the kiss*, the Doctor kisses or is kissed by Rose (many times), Donna, Madame de Pompadour, Jackie, Jack, and many others, which is why we've always thought "chaste" or "pure" were truer descriptors of the Doctor's nature. The Doctor has a sexual self, but he chooses to contain it.<sup>9</sup>

And as if all of the above weren't enough burdens for a kiss to carry, *the kiss* was also a grand goodbye gesture within the canon and outside the context of it. When the filming had begun for *The Parting of the Ways*, Eccleston had already decided to part ways with the show after playing the Doctor for only one season. The main cast members had been informed of his impending departure and the changes it would mean for Series Two. All of this makes the Doctor's final line to Rose as he's regenerating, "You were fantastic... so was I", even more bitter-sweet.

"Wish I'd never met you Doctor," says Jack before cupping the Doctor's face in his hands and kissing him. "I was much better off as a coward."

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6. JB: Let me add that in real life, David is a great kisser.

7. CB: And one of the more intriguing traits of Jack we explore in *Torchwood: Exodus Code*.

8. JB: Hard to believe he never peeked under Jamie's kilt.

9. CB: He has two hearts and a pretty big brain, so we know he feels something.

*Introduction: As Time Goes By*

After the “cut” was called and the kiss had been sealed, the rest of the cast and crew erupted in whistles and cheers. When the episode aired, the audience did too.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, thinking about this iconic TV moment reminded us that no matter what the Doctor or Jack’s futures bring, never let it be said that, “a kiss is just a kiss.”

**John Barrowman** plays Captain Jack in *Doctor Who* and *Torchwood*. He’s a Sony recording artist and has performed in numerous TV shows in the United States and the United Kingdom. **Carole E. Barrowman** is a writer and professor of English at Alverno College in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The siblings have collaborated on many projects, including John’s autobiographies *Anything Goes* and *I Am What I Am* (Michael O’Mara Books Inc., 2008, 2009); a comic, “Captain Jack and the Selkie” (Titan, 2009); a fantasy novel, *Hollow Earth* (Simon & Schuster, 2012); and a *Torchwood* novel, *Exodus Code* (BBC Books, 2012).

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10. JB: I heard them. Not kidding. My family and I are huge fans.

## **Editors' Foreword: The Gay Agenda**

Welcome to the *real Doctor Who* Gay Agenda.

### **Michael**

When I became active in *Doctor Who* fandom in the mid-90s, I could hardly have heard a less surprising statement than, "Queers dig Time Lords." A contender would be "The Myrka is a bit crap" (for new series fans, that's the equivalent of, "The Doctor lighting the Olympic flame of *love* is a bit cheesy"), but that's about it. People who identified as LGBTQ were *everywhere*. They'd worked on the show, wrote fanzines, ran conventions, and made unofficial tie-in products. So many of the Virgin New Adventures authors identified as gay that a decent chunk ended up writing for Virgin's gay erotica line under pseudonyms. (No, I'm not naming names. Okay, maybe if you buy me a drink in the convention bar.) Many joked at the time that gayness was a prerequisite for becoming a prominent fan.

Then the queerest thing happened. *Doctor Who* came back. Russell T. Davies, creator of *Queer as Folk* and very prominent out gay writer, went from a very successful television drama career (along with writing a New Adventures novel, *Damaged Goods*) to showrunning our favorite show. And it was brilliant and popular - more popular, in fact, than even the Dalekmania of the 60s or Pertwee's and Baker's Golden 70s. Even as the press searched for RTD's "Gay Agenda" in every scene and quip, millions of people around the world fell in love with *Doctor Who*. Suddenly, LGBTQ fans found themselves surrounded by a massive number of straight fans. This wasn't a *bad* thing, but LGBTQ stories were no longer the centerpiece of the fannish narrative.

Podcaster Erik Stadnik suggested this book and title to Mad Norwegian Press publisher Lars Pearson and *Whedonistas* co-editor Deborah Stanish after he fell in love with *Chicks Dig Time Lords* (co-edited by Lynne M. Thomas and Tara O'Shea). Since Erik wasn't interested in editing the book, Lars asked Sigrid and me to make Erik's vision come true. We looked around and realized with some shock that such a book didn't already exist. In fact, it didn't exist for *any* SF TV show.

*Editors' Foreword: The Gay Agenda*

When we saw that, we couldn't say no. We couldn't let LGBTQ *Doctor Who* fans become invisible to history.

**Sigrid**

There are moments in culture and history when the only thing that will suffice is to state the incontrovertibly obvious over and over again until one's voice is heard. My life as a geek has seen a surge in such statements, until it seems one can't turn one's head in popular Western culture without seeing a fantasy or science fiction element. My life as a queer also seems to be comprised of such moments. From the Queer Nation rallies on my college campus in the 90s to the book you are holding in your hands.

The incontrovertibly obvious is that Queers like *Doctor Who*.

What may not be quite as evident before you read this collection of essays is how diverse, articulate, and thoughtful a group these Doctor-liking-queers are. I am delighted, therefore, to present them to you.

**Michael and Sigrid**

This wonderful volume is filled with the stories of a diverse spectrum of fans from around the world. There are tales of coming out, discovering your heroes, how a show can inspire careers, transformations, odd friendships, romance, loss, cosplay, and following *Doctor Who* actors around a car park. We hope you enjoy it.

## The Monster Queer is Camp

**Paul Magrs** lives and writes in Manchester in the North of England. He has published many novels, including the six-volume Spooky Mystery series about Brenda and Effie, and two about the adventures of that time-traveling adventuress, Iris Wildthyme. He published his first novel in 1996 - the same year he gained his PhD, which was written about the novelist Angela Carter. His first *Doctor Who* novel was *The Scarlet Empress* in 1998. In recent years, he has also written, for AudioGo, 17 *Doctor Who* audio dramas starring Tom Baker as the Doctor and Susan Jameson as his companion, Mrs Wibbsey.

### Episode One

When I was a gay teenager, *Doctor Who* wasn't cool, and neither was being gay. My teenage years happened at exactly the same time that the John Nathan-Turner years were happening to *Doctor Who*. Glitzy, over-lit, garish, ridiculous, and with occasional appearances by Kate O'Mara. It was the Nineteen Eighties. Childhood started to end with Tom Baker's gloomy final season, and my teen years began with Peter Davison being in charge of a TARDISful of young people.

The way everyone at school said the name of The Show somehow demeaned it. In the local dialect, it came out, "Doctoroo." In my head and elsewhere, I only ever called it "The Show."

I wore a blue and green striped blazer and a straw hat to school. Baggy beige trousers and a billowing white shirt with open collars. I was beaten up.

Doctoroo in itself was a puffy thing to like.

Science Fiction in those years meant something quite different. The Eighties were a very butch time, it seemed. Heroes were like Rambo or Arnold Schwarzenegger. They were very muscle-bound and they wore scratches and grazes like badges of honor. They wore sweaty singlets to show off vast, pumped-up pectorals and biceps.

My hero wore ruffled shirts and bow ties. Cravats and floppy scarves. Regency frock coats. He called younger men, "My boy," and he was charming and avuncular towards young ladies.

## *The Monster Queer is Camp*

And his adventure stories were never very violent. Only on a very cosmic scale. Close to, they were rather genteel. Sometimes people got thumped, but mostly it was all about being tied up and chased around.

### **Episode Two**

As a gay *Doctor Who* fan, the question you get asked quite a lot is - why are so many *Who* fans gay?

Back when relatively no one liked *The Show*, it was like being in a secret gang. Even if the gang consisted of you alone. You could imagine other gay boys existed. But to you - with your *Doctor Who Monthly* back issues and your home-recorded audio books - they seemed just as fantastic as people in other times and places.

Everything about Doctoroo seemed to be in jeopardy in those days. Where I lived, in the North East of England, it was actually quite hard to get hold of the stuff. Doctoroo addiction necessitated trips to outlying towns on buses, to scope out WH Smiths for the new Target books. (Only one or two copies of each new title would be stocked there, so it was always a race against time! "Christ - what if someone's already nobbled *The Keeper of Traken*?!" I'd panic, running up the stairs of WH Smiths.) Our news agent and his delivery boys were notoriously unreliable. Sometimes the *Monthly* wasn't delivered at all, sometimes it was ripped or muddy from being dropped in a puddle. (Deliberately, I would think, darkly.) Sometimes it was - infuriatingly - several days late. And, as we got into the middle of the 1980s, *The Show* itself was under threat of cancellation. After the wounding blow of the 1985 enforced "rest," the fact that it ever again made it to air always seemed miraculous.

The announcement on the national news during Season Twenty-Two that Doctoroo was going to get a mandatory sabbatical still seems like the most hideously calamitous, impossible news bulletin ever. (Which is terrible, isn't it? In troubled times on a fragile planet? But there you go. Young, gay Doctoroo fans have no sense of proportion.) *The Show* was deemed to be tired/silly/ridiculous/out-dated, and so it was being taken off the air so that it could be somehow re-tooled. Which seemed to me then (and still does!) utterly ridiculous.

Season Twenty-Two was a deliriously wonderful season. One of the most consistent and entertainingly colorful and outrageous suites of outer-space adventures Doctoroo had ever engaged in. What was the BBC thinking of? What were the folks who were agreeing with the BBC bosses' diagnosis thinking of...? Had they even watched the same show

as me? Why hadn't they seen the same brilliance in it? Davros opening a funeral parlour and selling dead bodies to the third world for food? (This in the year of Live Aid! How's that for relevance?) HG Wells's influences laid bare in the astonishing *Timelash*. Then there was that Spanish interlude, in which an old Doctor and companion met the current models, as well as lascivious cannibals and some skinny Sontarans for a kind of polymorphously perverse runaround somewhere near Seville.

Yes, the stories were bordering on nonsensical and the dialogue was suffused with endless bickering, technobabble, and arch one-liners, but it was wonderful! Like the Rani opening a bathhouse for smutty miners back in nineteenth-century County Durham. (Hey, it was set near us! Doctoroo never came to our neck of the woods!) And something about how she needs to open a bathhouse because she's growing dinosaurs in her TARDIS. And then there was the one that parodied TV violence and those episodes themselves got criticized for being gratuitously nasty! What delicious irony Doctoroo was deliberately dicing with. And, at the season's start, we had returned to the Cybermen ice tombs on Telos - and met the Cyber-Ladies, one of whom seemed to fancy the Doctor. All in all, it had been tremendous fun. Every single minute of it. Even the padding and the exposition and the squabbles.

But no one else had liked it at all. So it was coming off the air.

That moment seemed to crystallize in my mind forever the idea that the things I like might not necessarily reflect wider, popular taste.

A very big moment for a young gay man.

I was gutted.

I still am, really. Even though they brought it back, and 18 months later we still had *Trial*, with Bonnie Langford and the Vervoids, and then Sylvester McCoy and Ace, and then the Virgin novels, and then Paul McGann, and then the BBC novels, then *Big Finish*, and then RTD and Eccleston, Tennant, and Smith. Even for all of that. I still don't feel like the breach made that afternoon in 1985, when the 15-year-old I was back then learned that the season he had just adored on TV had been deemed "not good enough" and the programme was to be taken off the air. That sense of, "Oh my god... Maybe I've got no taste at all? Maybe my taste in things is completely fucked up?" has never really gone away.

### Episode Three

Thinking it over, through the years, I've drawn up a sort-of list of things that a young gay man might enjoy about *The Show*. The list is not

## *The Monster Queer is Camp*

complete or comprehensive. But it might contain some shreds of truth, here and there.

- **Color.** When color TV came in (1969 - when I was born), *Doctor Who* was very, very colorful. Many shows were very drab in comparison.

- **Over-the-top acting.** Especially from military men, dolly bird assistants, and villains revealing their master plans. Not being very realistic or authentic is very important to the gay sensibility.

- **Bad special effects.** Straight men love special effects that look real. Queers love stuff that looks as if it's been made out of washing up liquid bottles and sticky-backed plastic and egg boxes. It's not that we're more tolerant and imaginative, though we are. It's just that we love being bonded by our shared sense of the ridiculous. We love the idea of a universe held together by a bit of tinsel and glitter.

Doctoroo's special effects always seemed to have a touch of drag queen aesthetic about them. As though the world of *The Show* was something you could "run up" at home out of odds and ends.

- **An asexual hero.** If we don't see the hero bedding and flirting with sexy young women, then there is room for other possibilities. Or simply the idea of sex not being a primary concern. When you grow up gay and are terrified or in denial about your own burgeoning sexuality, this is very liberating. It allows you to identify or root for a hero who won't confuse you by having desires of his own. He isn't straight by default. If he was gay, he would be just as terrifying to the confused kid - or at least, he would have been to me, I think. But the Doctor seemed apart from all of those considerations. (The current show is quite different in that regard, of course.)

- **Fabulous outfits.** Especially when the wonderful June Hudson was involved. Lots of velvet and flowing lines. This kind of thing always separated *The Show* from other science fiction on telly. Even when it was set on another planet, its costuming had more to do with the look of lavish BBC historical dramas than anything else. As Tom Baker said to me during the recording of one of our *Nest Cottage* adventures: "The thing about other science-fiction programs is that they are all about fuckers wearing their pajamas in space."

- **Cleverness and language play.** This was a huge factor for me in my love of *The Show*. All of the Doctors loved language and wit. And so, clearly, did the writers. You could always tell a fellow - perhaps closeted - *Doctor Who* fan because of their use of words such as "voluminous" and "capacious." They would drop them into conversation and they'd work, I imagine, rather like Polari - the underground Queer argot - once

did in the distant homosexual past. As a young gay kid, words were often your first and only weapon for defending yourself.

All of that, yes. All of those things screamed out to the gay boys in the audience.

- **And the gay villains.** *Doctor Who* is full of outrageous old queens intent on revenging themselves upon the universe. I'm thinking especially of Harrison Chase in *The Seeds of Doom*. What's he like...?!

- **Fabulous older women in full Bette Davis villainous mode.** The sausage sandwich-eating lesbians in *The Stones of Blood* are probably the campest women in *The Show*. Oh, and the Rani, of course. "*Leave the girl. It's the man I want!*"

- **The sexism is camp too.** Some over-earnest souls bemoaned the role of the female companion. Twisted ankles and banal questions and all. But I like to think that the reduction of the assistant to bleating, screaming cipher was camp. Everyone knew what they were doing there. It was a parodic sexism. We knew, really, that these women had psychological depth and sophistication. Of course we knew that. But isn't it simply preferable to skitter about on heels in quarries and scream at monsters?

But there's something else. Another factor.

Oh dear. I feel like I'm owning up to this. It's like a confession.

You see, we made it up. We invented it.

It wasn't that the show was really gay or gay-friendly. We just looked at it that way. We made it camper than it ever really was. We watched it through our rose-tinted spectacles.

As a queer, you read *into* texts. You hope that *something* is gay. Like you hope *someone* is. Scrutinizing for signs and signals. You read too much into things. And so, you take something you love and you read gay romance and subtext into it. And if it's not there enough - you simply read some more in. Rewrite it.

Doctoroo is famously open to rewriting. To spurring on its fans to write or draw or design or act. Or to create elaborate theories or to construct canons and continuities to explain inconsistencies or to create further ones...

And I think gay Doctoroo fans read gayness into Doctoroo. The man who travels in a closet with a gaggle of faghags.

Having nice girl friends - who weren't in any way girlfriends - was such a relief.

#### **Episode Four**

I wanted to use the book by Harry M. Benshoff as a way to talk about *Doctor Who*. He wrote a critical book in the late 90s called *Monsters in the Closet*, which focused on oblique representations of homosexuality in horror films down the ages. The book had a huge impact on me at the time. Benshoff's revelation of the figure he called "The Monster Queer" resonated with my own ideas of what was going on in the horror films that I loved. He talked about these monstrous specters erupting into the horror text as a revolutionary, subversive act - the monster breaks into the heterosexual romance and plunges all the characters into Queer chaos. Chasing them around, trying to kill them and/ or fuck them.

But... that doesn't work for *Doctor Who*, in quite the same way. In the classic series, the Doctor was never involved in the heterosexual romance plot. Sometimes his companions were - just only in a gentle, rather mild way. (Leela and Andred hold hands; Barbara and Ian grow close through adversity - she brushes his hair for him in *The Romans*, rather tenderly, teasingly.) But the Doctor is oblivious to the whole business, it seems. He seems baffled by it all - choking on his cocoa when Aztec ladies fling themselves at him, etc... His famous line to Catherine Schell in *City of Death*, "You're a very beautiful lady... probably." He just can't see sex when it's under his famously aquiline nose.

The monster in *Doctor Who* could be seen to have quite the opposite function...

Is it perhaps the force for homogenization...?

The Daleks, Cybermen, Sontarans all want to make everyone exactly like themselves. Clones and drones. The more organic creatures - lizard people and shape-changers - all are rather sexless or polymorphously perverse, it seems. Decrepit or disembodied people want to take over and possess fit young human forms. It's all about messing about with human bodies. The monsters remind the hero that he is made of flesh.

Everyone - friends and foes - all seem more sexually sophisticated than the Doctor. He lives in a busy universe, heaving with temptation, tumult, and all kinds of nefarious desire. He doesn't seem to see it going on around him. He's very English like that. And strong emotion and plainly stated desire are things that embarrass him.

This hesitation at the brink of adult behavior is something else that gay boys can identify with. The Doctor is too charming and perplexed by the curious way that both straight and gay adults carry on.

### Episode Five

Then, even after the 1986 reprieve, it seemed that *The Show* was still about to be axed. The last of the show coincided with my growing up, finally. I went to university in 1988 and I couldn't watch the twenty-fifth season there. The only place was the college TV room, where everyone assembled en masse for the wedding of Kylie and Jason in *Neighbours*, but during Doctoroo I'm sure it was a desolate place. Or the TV was tuned to the other side. But, besides, I would never have chanced watching *The Show* in public. Not if there was a chance of being among people who were deriding it or talking through it or just somehow not *getting* it. (But I do look back and wonder why I never imagined happy possible outcomes. Maybe there had been lovely fans gathering down there in that institutional lounge in order to watch *Remembrance of the Daleks* together? I might have had a nice gang. I might have met a new friend. But that thought didn't even occur to me. All I thought about was the frustration of not having Doctoroo to myself.)

Then, in my second year, for the final season of Doctoroo: The Classic Series, there was the shame of watching it with my housemates in our student house. In a basement room full of dopey smog and a red light bulb, I was glued to a black and white telly with lousy reception. My housemates were skeptical and bored and I found myself saying things like, "No, it's good, this! It's turned Gothic and Hinchcliffian again! Look, the Doctor's wearing a dark duffel coat! It's much more serious and less... less silly and camp in tone..." But then I was like, "Oh, why even bother anymore?" Even I wasn't quite following the stories by then. Those last episodes seemed like edited highlights of full-length stories that seemed to be playing elsewhere. They were cryptic. With mythical underpinnings. Yes, *The Show* was indeed taking a more serious turn. But then they axed it. It was the end for Doctoroo.

But I was busy, anyway. I was doing English Literature. All of it.

My heroes became Angela Carter, Joe Orton, Mary Shelley, Oscar Wilde, and Susan Sontag. And I was learning to write, too.

And then, at 20, I was coming out.

I was way past the need for *The Show* by then.

Or so I thought.

Here I was in bed with my first boyfriend. He was very sophisticated. A Manhattanite who was a Literature Major, and one who had been born on the very same day as me, all that distance away. Our conjunction was fated, though only for the month he had remaining in his Junior Year Abroad.

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He had never even heard of Doctoroo.

This was staggering to me. It was like he had come from another planet.

So, one night, in bed, in the attic bedroom of my student house, we were talking all the way through the night, as we seemed to, every night of the month we were together.

"What's the story of that show again? The one you love so much. We've never heard of it in the US... I've never heard of it at home in New York... what makes it so great? Tell me."

And so I had to explain it all from the start.

I was telling the story again. About the cross old man in the junkyard. About the granddaughter and the teachers following her home to see she's okay. And about all the crazy stories that span out from that basic beginning.

It took hours, but I told the story of the whole thing. Right up until the then-present day.

My poor first boyfriend was hearing rather more than I think he wanted.

But I was on fire, like Scheherazade, telling him the longest story in the world. And, like Scheherazade in the *Arabian Nights*, who spun tales to win herself a stay of execution, it was as if, by telling every single Doctoroo story to my lovely first boyfriend, I could make that night last forever. We could stay there and remain 20 for the rest of our lives.

### **Episode Six**

When I was a kid - 17, say - the idea of being gay in the future meant something special. Something unspeakable. The love that dare not speak its name... out of sheer, delirious excitement.

I came from a small town in the North East. It was very conventional and provincial. We were told on our first day of high school that, if we were lucky, we could get a job in one of the factories on the industrial estate.

I knew none of that was for me. Being bright and ambitious saved me from that, but so did being gay. I didn't feel that you could live in that town and have the kind of life I imagined I was going to have. The kind of life I dimly, fondly imagined.

Doctoroo saved me too, of course. The Doctor lived free and easily, moving blithely through time and space. No family ties, nothing to hold him back. They could put him on trial, they could exile him to Earth. They could even make him feel obliged to return to Gallifrey, but he was

having none of it. He was always happiest when he was, “racketing about in an old police box,” flying through, “that mysterious region where time and space are one.” Even if all those girls made doe-eyes at him, nothing would ever tie him down. He couldn’t even be locked into a single continuity. Nothing in his story ever added up. Nothing could ever make him belong. He was a mass of contradictions in a frilly shirt and a frock coat. He was remorseless in his quest for new times and places. Avid for new adventures and new friends.

What was Doctoroo after? What was it that he wanted? He never seemed to tell us. We never really knew. Just a hunger for adventure. A yen for justice. But always moving onwards. And never settling for things that just everyone wanted. He didn’t want houses and babies and cars and ladies and a career or beer. He wanted, if anything, a robot dog. And not even that for very long.

That’s a powerful - if celestial and vague - set of aspirations to set before a young, gay boy. But what we got - what I got - was a role model who said it was okay to hanker for something that wasn’t obvious. It was quite all right to want something mysterious and beyond the pale. It was essential, in fact, not to be pinned down and defined. He never even had a proper name, let alone anything else.

### Episode Seven

Another useful point of reference for looking at Doctoroo might be Susan Sontag’s “Notes on Camp” essay from 1964. When I first read this piece - many years ago, in the context of researching my PhD thesis on the magical realist novelist, Angela Carter - I was dumbfounded. Sontag seemed to be defining a genre of artifacts and art works that belonged to my very favorite things on the planet. She talks about the art of excess and extravagance; of art works that are so bad they’re good; of objects that place themselves determinedly between inverted commas and flag up their own materiality, falsity, ludicrousness. For me, it was a perfect way of looking at Doctoroo. Kitsch that was more than a bit gay.

The reason I loved Doctoroo from being five to 24 was that I was in the company of a show that was unconsciously, bravely, wonderfully camp. Sometimes, it became cleverly, self-consciously camp, and this fits in with Sontag’s definition too. She talks about camp being, “completely naïve or else wholly conscious.” Sometimes, Doctoroo was outrageous when it wasn’t even trying to be (the Thals hiding red handbags in the jungle in *Planet of the Daleks*) and then when it was (everyone camping it up like mad in *City of Death*). Science-fiction stories best suit

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Sontag's definition when she calls camp the "seriousness that fails."

Camp taste - Sontag tells us - isn't exactly homosexual taste. But it's close enough. They have a "peculiar affinity and overlap," though in 1964 she didn't go on to tell us exactly what that was, or why. I would hazard my own guess about that, and it's about appropriation. Queers like to look at old films and painting, texts and whatever - and claim them for themselves. To see hidden meanings and hidden - well, not depths, exactly. Hidden shallows, say. Queers revel in the "failed seriousness" of camp objects. We take what the mainstream won't have and won't take seriously. We love the underdog and we love the ludicrous and the despised.

I find myself loving bits of *Doctor Who* that no one else ever seems to. I love *Dimensions in Time* - the multi-Doctor, multi-companion telethon "Special" from 1993 that was shot in 3D and reviled by most everyone on the planet. It was a crossover with popular TV soap *EastEnders*, and featured a plethora of cast members from both shows milling about helplessly as time ticked down to a denouement about goodness knows what. It was filled with glorious moments of nonsense. Every line is a camp classic.

In 1993, when it was broadcast - it was my final night of being a Doctoroo fan, phase one. I was 24 and living in a shared house, and I had persuaded a household of friends and weekend guests to tune in to this teatime extravaganza. No one else loved *The Show*. No one else cared. But they were prepared to indulge me for ten minutes while the mini-episode aired. I bigged it up like crazy. Tom Baker's and Jon Pertwee's Doctors were actually going to meet! Colin Baker's Doctor was going to share screen time with the Brigadier! The excitement was almost too great to withstand.

Everyone donned their 3D glasses, as given away by the *Radio Times* that week for this very purpose, and prepared to have their socks blown off.

And then it started. Kate O'Mara and Sam West were fussing about in the Rani's TARDIS. Tom Baker was speaking into a microphone wearing his old hat and scarf and pretending to be Oscar Wilde. Then everyone was running about in Albert Square, barking at each other and uttering lines of such outrageous nonsense that my friends in our living room were exchanging glances with each other.

It was a Three-Dimensional piece of crap.

And I sat there, my face scalding over with shame.

It was horrible.

And I never went anywhere near *Doctor Who* again until 1996 when Paul McGann first appeared, and that's a whole other story about falling in love.

But now... I love *Dimensions in Time*. I love it like I love puppet dinosaurs from 1974, or the Skarasen on the Scottish moors. Or Adric in the Master's Castrovalvan web. Or Tom Baker making the policeman corpse in *Weng-Chiang* with the way he utters the name, "Nelly Gusset." Or Davros's hissy fit in *Resurrection of the Daleks*, or the curious hermaphroditic red herring Juno Baker in *K9 and Company*. Or the Bandrils or the Yeti or the innovation of saving the Moonbase by popping a tea tray over the hole in the plastic of the lunar dome. Or the Thals in purple fur coats, hiding handbags in the jungle. Giant rats nibbling Leela. Zoe in spangly lycra on top of the TARDIS console.

I love the embarrassing bits. The overacted and nonsensical bits. I love the bits that are, by anyone's definition, monstrously bad. They are my favorite moments in Doctoroo.

There are many of them. Mostly they are concentrated in the 1980s.

Sontag's unconscious camp? Or self-conscious and strategic camping about? Or just plain so-bad-it's-marvelous?

Everyone will have their own favorites.

The Sontaran who trips on a sun bed during *The Invasion of Time*.

"Who was that terrible woman?" from a clearly doo-lally Victoria in *Dimensions in Time*.

Solon in *The Brain of Morbius*: "You've been looking for that arm again, haven't you?"

The Kandy Man getting, "One of his heads again."

### Episode Eight

I said before that the Monster Queer doesn't really exist in Doctoroo, in the way that it does in classic horror movies, because there is little or no "heterosexual romance plot" for the Monster Queer to disrupt. So even if the monsters look like Dracula, Frankenstein, the Mummy, and Mr Hyde sometimes, the affinity is not quite correct, because they aren't there, necessarily, in order to break up human couples.

But maybe I was wrong about some of that. I think that the great romance in Doctoroo is between the fans and The Show itself. They want to love it. They want to love all of it, unreservedly. They want it to be a *good* science-fiction TV show. And they know some of it is embarrassing. They know some of it is badly written and acted, and the sets and monsters are ghastly and the special effects can be rotten. They

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think sometimes The Show is sending itself up. And the great romantics want the show to be better than that. To be serious and good and worthy of their devotion.

They want to love it, warts and all. But they can't. They are haunted by camp. So they try to improve it. They make the continuity work by creating all kinds of theories. They are on the alert for fanwank and satire and want to stamp it out. They love the new CGI effects added in the DVD releases - in which their old, tawdry love is restored, cleaned up, modernized - and better than it ever was before.

I think that the Monster Queer in Doctoroo - the specter that threatens the fans and makes them hide behind the settee - isn't the vengeful figure of repressed homoerotic desire. It is, rather, simple embarrassment. The Monster Queer is made of the left over bits that the mass of fans despise. The silly bits. It's because they want it to survive - this shambling monster made of shred and patches - that they want to hide away the Kandy Man, Kamelion, Kate O'Mara, and all the bits that don't seem "real." And so fans seek to expunge the show of camp.

But that's just not possible. The Monster Queer is Camp. And camp old monsters will always come back to life.

## Time, Space, Love

**Emily Asher-Perrin** is a graduate of Sarah Lawrence College, studied at the University of Bristol, and comes from a family of entertainers and musicians - which means that she'll sing at the drop of a hat. She spends her days as an editorial assistant and staff writer for the SF/fantasy website Tor.com. There, she has done her fair share of coverage on all things *Doctor Who* and ruminated on every aspect of the program - including the changes in its fan base, the logic behind the regeneration cycle, and the Doctor's affect on his companions. Her coverage elsewhere on the site runs the gamut from *Star Wars* to feminism in genre fiction to Neverland, and she has no intention of stopping there. She lives with partner Kelsey Ann Barrett in Brooklyn, where she doesn't ride a bike because she doesn't know how.

"Lots of planets have a north!"

So said the ninth Doctor in *Rose*, the first episode of the revived *Doctor Who* series in 2005. Though not a native of the United Kingdom, I had enough Anglophilia in my background to fully comprehend the joke, while my parents tilted their heads in puzzlement over my sudden fit of giggles. It was perhaps the dozenth time during the episode that I recall thinking to myself, "Where has *this* show been all my life?"

But that doesn't make my experience unique by any account. There are plenty of people who had nearly the exact same reaction upon discovering this show for the first time. Many first stumbled upon it in the same way. It has all the hallmarks needed to draw people into an imaginary universe and hold them hard, all the humor and pain necessary for real human drama - with time and space travel thrown into the pot for unforgettable flavor. But when does a media work of any kind transcend the realm of fannish dedication and become integral to your own personal experience? In that way, I suppose that my involvement with *Doctor Who* is a different sort of story. It's a story about costumes and growing up and things that come in pairs. It's the oldest kind of story I can think of.

It's a story about falling in love.

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If you groaned and rolled your eyes at that, I wouldn't blame you. In my defense, I've never been a Happily Ever After believer myself. I certainly don't want to pare my life down to a list of clichés, if only out of sheer vanity; it's no fun being the romantic ingénue, and no one ever cast me in those roles anyway. Comic relief is more my comfort zone. But in the interest of comedy, I can say with a grave certainty that the ridiculous is more often true than not. And it was in this weird case. So you can leave the groaning and eye rolling to me, and I'll tell it to you straight, no violins attached.

*Doctor Who* was on the edges of my perception for some time before I had any idea what all the fuss was about. My childhood was mired in strange, geeky pursuits, but I didn't come to understand my love for genre until I was about ten years old. From that point on, if I wasn't reading a book chock full of robots, aliens, or magic, I felt oddly displaced. I ate up everything put in front of me, and the word "dated" did not exist when I was so eager for more; original 1960s *Star Trek* still affords my lasting reverence, Styrofoam boulders and all. But I never watched much PBS, so the TARDIS eluded me. I knew the name of the show, knew it was adored in Britain, knew it had been going for quite some time and was remembered for some spectacular rubber aliens, but I never came across the opportunity to watch it.

When the show returned and the new first season began airing in the United States, I was instantly enchanted. But it wasn't really the premise that did it, or the endearing and mysterious main character. It wasn't the shop window dummies or the anti-plastic. It wasn't even the killer opening theme or that beautiful blue box of a ship that happened to be bigger on the inside.

It was Rose Tyler.

Rose Tyler was 19, and I was 19. Rose Tyler had no idea where her life was going and neither did I. Rose Tyler was still caught in that in-between place of not-a-child, yet still-not-an-adult. Rose Tyler wore T-shirts with funny things on them and too much makeup, and dyed her hair blonde. Rose Tyler had a mother who could nag the ear off a saint, but would do absolutely anything for her only child. Rose Tyler wanted something wondrous to happen to her, and jumped at the chance for adventure with only the briefest hesitation.

Rose Tyler was *me*.

It's common knowledge that the companion role on *Doctor Who* is meant to be a sort of audience avatar, that your journey with the Doctor is filtered through their eyes. But I hadn't expected such a solid lifeline

to the experience, and the effect was jarring for me. I didn't just feel welcomed to the fold, I was absorbed by it. Everyone had to hear about my coolest of cool new obsessions, to understand what set it apart from just any science fiction or fantasy yarn. Luckily, I've long been blessed with friends and family who know how to handle my fanaticism, and they bore out this new phase with (mostly) good humor. I sought out *Doctor Who* communities online for a sense of camaraderie, and to start boning up on my classic era knowledge. (Like I said, "dated" doesn't really enter my thought process where fandom things are involved. The desire to master aggravating canon minutiae does, however. Bring it on, matte background paintings and hokey special effects....)

*That's great, you're saying. But I still don't see how this has anything to do with that whole "groan and eye rolling" thing that you threatened.*

I promise, it's coming up. Think of that first part as the Cardiff pit-stop to refuel.

The second series was quickly in my grasp, and Rose's love for the Doctor bubbled to the surface as he traded in his jumper and black leather jacket for pinstripes and a brown coat that looked more like the cape of a superhero. What struck me most about that first TARDIS romance was how the tenth Doctor and Rose interacted - for the most part - like two best pals rather than googly eyed kids drunk on their first taste of infatuation. Rose could handle her side of the adventure on her own, and the Doctor was more than happy to let her explore. There was trust there, but also a firm belief in what the other could accomplish. This wasn't just the Doctor and a "human flavor of the month": this was a Dynamic Duo (yes, the Ds should be capitalized in this case) in every sense of the word.

And duos have always been key for me. I was the sort of kid who needed one friend who was closer than all the others to share every little detail of life with. I loved heroes, but always understood that the power of two was something mighty to behold. Holmes and Watson, Frodo and Sam, Thelma and Louise, Mulder and Scully, the list goes on and on, doubling back through history. Being part of a duo gave you real power, the kind that could not be obtained by going all lonely cowboy on the world. Hell, even the *Lone Ranger* had a partner.

So I brought the show to my best friend, my college roommate, knowing that if anyone would share my newfound crush, she would. Sure enough, we found ourselves frequently marathoning spates of episodes long after her first viewing, determined to get every line of dialogue committed to collective memory. We shared love for plenty of

things, but *Doctor Who* united us in a common pursuit that we could experience at the same time. It was different from our usual banter; she could teach me about the finer points of Middle-Earth history, and I could explain the Jedi Code to her, but now we had something special between us. A common element. And perhaps the most interesting thing about that element, was while I had come to identify so heavily with Rose, my friend found herself identifying with the tenth incarnation of the Doctor.

It might have been how he had the ability to swagger with his hands planted in his pockets, or maybe his madcap sense of humor. It might have been that untarnishable air of confidence that she wanted to emulate so badly. It probably had something to do with feeling misunderstood for all the wrong reasons, a city-minded girl from a small country town - Gallifrey had certainly never been big enough for our favorite Time Lord. Whatever it was, we had suddenly both tied our changing senses of self into the show's mythology, a powerful connection at an uncertain time in life.

The only logical progression was to dress up as Rose and the Doctor that year for Halloween.

It wasn't the first time we had dressed the part of a couple on that holiday; our freshmen year, she dusted off an old Robin Hood costume from high school and I pulled a Ren Faire getup out of my closet, and we went as the archer and his Maid Marion. But this time, we felt possessed by a gleeful sort of madness, ran down the walkways of campus holding hands and grinning from ear to ear. I had the toy Flight Control TARDIS, which I insisted the Doctor had shrunk. She gamely got out her sonic screwdriver and tried to fix it. Dramatic photographs were taken.

Rose was gone after Series Two (and what a cry that led to), but that heralded a funny little pocket era in all this. Series Three brought back the Master, who might actually be my favorite character in the series outside of the Doctor himself - let's just say I have an incurable soft spot for hyper-intelligent villains, particularly the kind who mirrors the elected hero. It's easy to count that among another type of duo, I think, so my fondness was not surprising in the slightest. My friend and I were hypnotized by the heartbreaking codependency infused in that lifelong relationship (as we all know, despite trying to kill him numerous times, the Master said outright in *The Five Doctors* that a universe without the Doctor would "scarcely bear thinking about"). It got to the point where we had to work out their problems ourselves in a written RPG on LiveJournal. We would go to class, discuss theater and art history and

creative writing, then come back to our room, turn to our respective laptops and have at it. O, the history, the old wounds gouged open!

Am I strange for saying that it was one of my favorite parts of college? Perhaps, but I'd never deny it. It's what fandom is there for, after all.

Of course, a large part of the fight between the Doctor and the Master seemed to be couched in age-old misunderstandings. So how's this for misunderstanding: my friend and I were talking one day about how it was high time we both found boyfriends. We were dead tired of being single in college, but neither of us was really the fling-a-week type. I don't recall who said what in this conversation, but this is how it shook down:

"I need a boyfriend."

"Me too."

"There's just one problem."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. If I get a boyfriend, I'll be all involved with that. I won't get to spend as much time with you."

"... Yeah. I know what you mean."

And as so often happens in the real world, lightning did not strike, no light bulbs lit our cavernous mindscapes, and we went about our humdrum day like any other two boring 20-somethings might. It's likely obvious to you, the reader, just as obvious as those three little words that the Doctor never got the chance to utter when he first said goodbye to Rose at Bad Wolf Bay. I can only claim partial cluelessness and more than my fair share of naïveté. That and a profound certainty that, no matter how many romantic comedies my mother had dragged me to in my youth, love could never be such an easy thing.

I was so certain on that count that a new development occurred when I discussed *Doctor Who* with other fans: I stayed mute while more and more of them came to condemn Rose as the show evolved and moved on from her. No ruckus from me, even though the new popular critique in fandom was to call out a character *I* loved for allowing herself to be so shaped by someone *she* loved. Because, academically, I understood the argument against Rose's devotion; her tendency to believe that the Doctor's way was always the right way, to never question the long-term consequences of their adventures, to care more about him than any of the people in her life who cared about her. Logically, all of these points made sense... so love remained a difficult, elusive subject.

Then my friend kissed me for the first time, just a couple of months

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before Series Four began, and she was very, very drunk. Naturally, I was worried that this was all the alcohol's doing, and determined that I should not to get too attached. We watched those new episodes unfold as college came to an end, which was frightening in its own right; the world was about to get 100% closer in a matter of months, so watching Davros attempt to destroy reality with a bomb seemed like an apt metaphor. And while I observed Rose crossing universes - essentially doing *The Impossible* (yes, the *I* is capitalized in this case) - in order to find the Doctor again, I came to a firm conclusion:

Not getting too attached was a very hard thing indeed.

It was another moment where Rose and I grew at the same time. I was getting nervier, my resolve was coalescing, and I was getting older. Neither Rose nor I had any idea where our lives were going, still, after all this time. But we did know one thing, and that was who we wanted to face all that uncertainty with.

I would be so happy to claim that I was eloquent when explaining this to my friend. Mostly I just blubbered incoherently, my face buried in the arches of my feet. (I have a tendency to sit on my bed in yoga poses, and Diamond Pose seemed like a good place to make my declaration from at the time.) What I would have given for Rose's empty beach, with the wind knocking my hair about at every angle while mascara tracked dramatically down my face. I aimed for direct and came off confusing, but by the next day, my friend had the architecture of things. I think I held my breath waiting to find out what she thought of my solution.

And I can honestly say that after experiencing it for several years now... love is a remarkably easy thing.

So I can't help myself whenever I hear fans give poor Rose a hard time these days. We all have people who influence us more than others, who help shape us into who we become. Certainly, we all struggle with how to maintain individuality in relationships, but that's something for the individual to decide how they feel about. So if Rose wants to fire herself through a dimension cannon to get back to the alien who showed her all of time and space, then everyone should leave her be and let her do it. She's still young and has plenty of room to grow. We won't get to see how she develops with the Doctor's hand-clone for a boyfriend, but I bet she will be every bit as spectacular as the Doctor hoped.

As for me, my girlfriend and I graduated from Halloween dress up to full on cosplaying at conventions. She gets to swagger with her hands in

her pockets and I get to wander off in search of barrage balloons to hang from. Her coat really does look like a superhero's cape, and her love of the tenth Doctor has given her all sorts of courage to tackle everyday life. In the company of each other, we become the best versions of ourselves. And if we hold hands a bit more often than your average couple (especially when we run), well, you know exactly who's to blame for that.

Some people will never understand it. Some take one look at her in the tenth Doctor's garb and make all sorts of disappointing assumptions about gender, sexuality, and the roles we play in our relationship. Some think they can pare us down to the societal stereotypes they adhere to without bothering to consider what role these characters might have played for us. Some will never recognize the significance in taking up the mantle of a beloved fictional figure, because they themselves have never felt so welcome in being outcast, curious, or clever.

But some will understand it. A couple years back, walking the streets around San Diego Comic-Con in our gear, a woman charged between us, and we let our clasped hands fall as we parted to make way for her. As we continued, we could hear her boyfriend behind us:

"Honey, you just broke up the Doctor and Rose."

"I did?"

At the last convention we went to, a man stopped us on the dealer floor. Usually cosplayers are stopped for pictures, but this fellow had no camera on him. He looked sheepish for having made us pause. "I just wanted to let you know," he said, "that you are my favorite couple of the convention. Both of you, the costumes, everything. You really are great."

And in those sincere moments, the times when people get it, get us without having to be told, I find myself giddy. I don't have to do any explaining, don't have to gage anyone's approval to protect us, don't have to slap on the "two bisexual women in a monogamous relationship" label to make everyone less confused about what they're looking at. Because in those moments, we get to be exactly who we really are.

We are our own Dynamic Duo.

So you can see, I owe *Doctor Who* quite a bit. For helping me grow into adulthood. For making me laugh. For being something special that I share with the people closest to me. For making the ridiculous true. Or, as the tenth Doctor would have it, for giving me the most important thing of all when you're traveling the universe: someone to see it with.

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And I take what I said back earlier, being apologetic about the romanticism of all this. Because, if we're being fair here, *Doctor Who* is about as romantic as you can get. It has high adventure. Heroes and danger. Deep thoughts and cosmic humor. Questing and noble deeds and daring rescues and tearful reunions. An endless parade of humanity in the best and worst of times. Specific preferences aside, we all tune in each season for largely the same reasons.

So there you go. You're just as bad as the two of us, my forever college roommate and me.

Let's all be romantics together.

## Seven Ways of Looking at Captain Jack

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### **We Meet Jack and Fall in Love (Mary Anne)**

When we first meet Jack in *The Empty Child*, he is marked first and foremost as a sexual being, chided for thinking about sex when he should have his mind on the job.

**Jack** [watching Rose through binoculars]: Excellent bottom.

**Algy** [facing the other direction, thinking Jack's talking about him]: I say, old man. There's a time and a place.

**Jack**: Sorry, old man. [He laughs.] I've got to go and meet a girl. But you've got an excellent bottom too. [He slaps Algy's bottom on the way out; Algy looks neutral for a moment, then smiles.]

That introduction captures so much of who Captain Jack Harkness is, initially at least. Stunningly handsome - everyone Jack meets responds to his flirting, even the Doctor. He's sexual to a fault - a cheerful, charming playboy who puts pleasure before work. Clearly bisexual, and

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openly so - which was shockingly satisfying to me, since I identify as bisexual and as far as I can remember, have *never* seen a bisexual character on TV<sup>11</sup> (and only in a very few movies).

To make it even better, Jack possesses a broad and open sexuality that can encompass appreciation of multiple people at once; he may not call himself poly, but he certainly reads that way. He's very far from the polygamous Mormon characters in *Big Love* - the only poly characters I've ever seen on TV. And as that first episode continues, these bi/ poly/ joyfully sexual impressions are reinforced - Jack flirts wildly with Rose, insists on drinking champagne when discussing business, and finally reveals that he's a con man, that he's been trying to con Rose and the Doctor into buying what Jack believes is a piece of junk.

Jack holds within himself a contradiction - outrageously open, in ways that our modern world isn't used to seeing represented, but at the same time a deceiver, a cheat, a fake.<sup>12</sup> In that first episode, he's a tease, offering us a glimpse of paradise, and then yanking it away again.

When asked to write this essay, my first thought was that all I wanted to do was go "Squeee!" about Captain Jack. Because that's how I feel about Jack; I love him quite madly. I was recently on a comics-convention panel about Geek Girls and Artists, and while the discussion ranged far and wide, we kept coming back to Captain Jack as a common denominator. No matter where you fell on the geeky or girly scale, there was a place for you to love Captain Jack. As one of us said that night, "Captain Jack is the great equalizer."

I don't know why everyone loves Jack. For me, it's because he reflects a part of me that I rarely see represented in the world. Jack loves everyone, Jack would like to have sex with everyone, and even though practicalities tend to intervene making that impossible (for Jack as well as for myself), that's a reflection of my own reality.

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11. Jed: There've been a few - Wikipedia has a list - but not many. [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_media\\_portrayals\\_of\\_bisexuality#Television](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_media_portrayals_of_bisexuality#Television)

Mary Anne: After looking at the Wikipedia list, I do remember seeing a few of the bisexual women mentioned (mostly on mainstream shows, not SF/ F). And in most of those examples, the women seem to be bi primarily to demonstrate their so-liberal credentials - rather than appearing realistically portrayed, with actual ongoing relationships, such as Jack's and Ianto's on *Torchwood*.

12. Mary Anne: To be fair, throughout *The Empty Child/ The Doctor Dances*, we learn that Jack believed that Rose and the Doctor were part of an organization that had stolen two years of his life, so if he's a con man, it is, in some sense, in the service of a twisted sense of justice. Jack is always more than he seems; his slight, charming presentation is a mask for greater (and darker) depths.

I'm poly, and bi, and have had sex with a lot of people - not as many as Jack, but then, I'm not immortal. And for the most part, I've succeeded in resisting the world's attempts to make me ashamed of any of that, although being unabashed gets harder as I get older. When I was in college, it wasn't easy juggling four partners at once, but the difficulties were mostly logistical; I was very clear on what I wanted, at least, even if it was sometimes hard to put into practice. Now that I'm in my 40s and have small children, now that I live with a male long-term partner and easily pass for a married soccer mom, it's sometimes hard to remember how transgressive and scandalous my desires really are. Jack reminds me.

Jack speaks to that inner slut that really would like to have sex with everyone, if only because it would be so interesting. Jack would have sex with them joyfully. The joy is key - and something that he has a hard time hanging on to, as the series goes on. But at least in that initial moment of meeting him, Jack reminds me, reminds all of us, that sex can be delightful.

What's sad is how shocking it was to see that on television.

### **From Asexuality to Avid Sexuality (Jed)**

When I was in high school, watching Tom Baker and company on KTEH San José every Saturday night until 2:30 in the morning, one of the things I loved about *Doctor Who* was the lack of sexuality.

At the time, I didn't really get what the big deal was about sex in real life. Friendship, yes; loyalty, sure; and I wasn't *opposed* to sex, just didn't see it as terribly important, and kind of resented that so many grownups seemed to be so totally obsessed with it. And although I doubt I would've articulated it this way, I think that seeing these characters on *Doctor Who* who were friends and companions, but who never dealt with any of that sex stuff, was comfortable and comforting to me.

But during college, I started getting more interested in sex. After college, I gradually figured out I was bi, and started learning about what happened to queer characters in movies and TV (on the rare occasions when they existed at all), and started wanting to see more of them.

When *Doctor Who* came back, after a long sad Doctorless hiatus, I started watching it again, and loved it. And that first scene with Captain Jack, the exchange with Algy about bottoms, was delightful.

The names would have been a clue (being the names of characters from *The Importance of Being Earnest*), but the name "Algy" wasn't spo-

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ken until later.<sup>13</sup> But the “you’ve got an excellent bottom too” line was another clue, a big one that made me laugh out loud with delight - could they really be going there?

And they were, and they did. And I loved every moment of Captain Jack’s screen time in those first two episodes.<sup>14</sup> I had already been really liking the new series, but Jack was what sealed the deal for me. I loved the new Doctor (with his deep sadness overlaid on the old Doctor)<sup>15</sup>, I loved Rose (with her penchant for befriending the lower classes wherever she went), but I totally adored Captain Jack. Funny, charming, bi, and totally hot - what’s not to like?

The exchange at the end of *The Doctor Dances* may have been my favorite bit of Series One:

**Rose:** I thought Jack might like this dance.

**The Doctor:** I’m sure he would, Rose. I’m absolutely certain. But who with?<sup>16</sup>

I didn’t love the foreground plot of that two-part episode, but Jack’s presence made it among my favorite *Doctor Who* episodes ever.

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13. Jed: I also liked the handling (as it were) of Algy throughout the episode. Perhaps especially the bit where Rose gears up to distract Algy with her feminine wiles, and Jack says she’s not his type; I loved that as a subversion of the “female agents use sex as a tool” trope.

14. Jed: And not just the bi/ poly stuff. “Who looks at a screwdriver and thinks, ‘Ooo, this could be a little more sonic?’”

15. Jed: There’s a whole other discussion to be had about the Doctor’s sexuality in the new series, but that’s out of scope for this essay, and I imagine other pieces in this book will talk about that anyway. But the short version of my feeling about the revived-series Doctor’s sexuality is that (a) he’s basically personsexual, only interested in a few people, most of whom happen to be female; (b) he continues to most of the time be more interested in having fun, saving the world, and running than in sex or romance; and (c) it depends a lot on the writer - I don’t feel that his characterization has been consistent in this regard.

16. Mary Anne: In my fuzzy memory of that episode, Jack then waltzes off with the Doctor. Which isn’t what actually happens - the Doctor dances away with Rose. But how delightful that Jack and the Doctor was even a possibility! Jed: Funny that we both misremembered that ending; I had remembered it as ending with the open question, with Jack looking at both of them, and I was a bit disappointed when I rewatched it and saw that the scene ends with the Doctor and Rose dancing. But yes, agreed about the excellence of the possibility.

**Is It Jack, or is It the Coat? (Or Can You Separate the Two?)  
(Jed and Mary Anne)**

**Mary Anne:** Part of what we love about Jack, of course, is how everybody loves him back. Part of the fantasy of Captain Jack Harkness is that not only would he sleep with anything that moves, but anything that moves (human or alien) would also sleep with him. If you identify with Jack, then you get to stand with him in that place of utter desirability. He's tremendously sexy, and part of that is the actor's sheer physical beauty and appeal. But part of it, I have to believe, is actually the coat.

**Jed:** The coat is awesome. Standing on a rooftop, looking out over the city, he'd be pretty hot regardless, but the addition of the coat makes him hot *and* heroic.

I think *Doctor Who* has always featured interesting clothing choices; for example, the Doctor's wardrobe has always said a lot about him.<sup>17</sup> In various incarnations, he's worn frilled shirts and velvet smoking jackets; a scarf; a leather jacket; and, of course, the ultimate in cool: a bowtie and a fez. He's been a dandy; he's been a tough guy; he's been, well, odd. (Celery on his lapel?) Or at least eclectic. His clothing choices have sometimes been class signifiers as well as personality markers. But I feel like in most of his incarnations, he hasn't been particularly masculine (whatever that means).

Whereas Jack is. It seems to me to be a sort of Errol Flynn masculinity; a bit light on his feet, as they say. A form of masculinity that's more about grace and agility and wit than about pure brute strength. Not to say Jack doesn't have muscles, but he doesn't read terribly butch to me. And the coat is, to me, part of that not-strongly-butch masculinity. But maybe that's just me?

And speaking of butchness and clothing: is relying on impeccable clothing to add to one's appeal a femme thing?

**Mary Anne:** I think Jack's style is in line with Beau Brummel, who "established the mode of dress for men that rejected overly ornate fashions for one of understated, but perfectly fitted and tailored clothing."<sup>18</sup> Jack isn't a Byronic sickly languishing poet - he's a strong, manly man of action. But beautifully dressed, and in perfect taste.

**Jed:** And maybe the masculinity of it is helped by it being a military coat, or at least adapted from one. Which parallels the real-life adapta-

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17. Jed: As does the fact that he travels through time and space with a vast closet full of outfits from all of history.

18. [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beau\\_Brummell](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beau_Brummell)

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tion of the WWI trench coat from military officer coat into fashion item. I'm not a costumer, but (speaking of Beau Brummell) I think there've been connections between military uniforms and fashion at least since the Regency.

**Mary Anne:** I'm not an expert in the history of fashion, but my understanding is that military history and fashion were deeply intertwined. "In 1804, Napoleon hoped that France would become a fashion leader. He halted the import of British textiles, revived French lace making, and forbade women to appear at court in the same dress more than twice. Napoleon's wife, the Empress Josephine, was a fashion icon, a trend setter of the day."<sup>19</sup> Although according to a lecture I attended recently, Josephine had a fondness for British muslin and insisted on wearing it, to Napoleon's deep irritation.

Napoleon and his coterie were a "recently elevated military social group seeking to express to the world in no uncertain terms both their new importance and their joy in its possession."<sup>20</sup> In other words, Jack's coat is never just a coat - it's a statement of power and manly grace.<sup>21</sup>

What's particularly interesting is *how* Jack wears the coat - he's tall and broad-shouldered, muscular and strong - he fills out the military coat really nicely, which then gives him leeway to be flirty and feminine and pretty.<sup>22</sup> The man and the coat work together, allowing Jack to present himself with both masculine and feminine aspects, combining to create a being who, for many, becomes immensely desirable. Which implies interesting things about the way we, Jack's fan club, are reading

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19. [doloresmonet.hubpages.com/hub/Fashion-History-Early-19th-Century-Regency-and-Romantic-Styles](http://doloresmonet.hubpages.com/hub/Fashion-History-Early-19th-Century-Regency-and-Romantic-Styles)

20. *The Psychology of Dress*, Frank Alvah Parsons

21. Jed: By the way, the coat that Jack wears in *The Empty Child/ The Doctor Dances* isn't the same coat he wears later. That first coat, which he only wears intermittently, is a thick winter coat, and it presumably gets blown up with his ship; he's not wearing it when he's rescued. I'm guessing that The Coat that he wears later, the lighter-weight swishier more flowing trenchcoat, comes from somewhere deep in the TARDIS's closets. (Although it didn't appear until *Torchwood*, so possibly it's something Jack picked up while living through the twentieth century.) Russell T. Davies had originally intended Jack to always wear period-specific clothing, but he changed his mind.

22. Jed: After writing this essay, we came across an academic piece by Sarah Gilligan, "Fashioning Masculinity and Desire," that discusses related issues, such as the way the coat "feminize[s] and eroticize[s]" Jack. We saw it too late to be able to respond to it here, but it's well worth a look, and it has lots of footnotes pointing to other related material. It's in the 2010 anthology *Illuminating Torchwood: Essays on Narrative, Character and Sexuality in the BBC Series*, edited by Andrew Ireland.

both gender and sexual orientation in the modern world.

**Jack Goes Dark**  
**(Mary Anne)**

For me, Jack gets really interesting when he makes the shift from charming con man to hero. When we first meet him, he's running a con, and he explains it to the Doctor:

**Jack:** Simple enough, really. Find some harmless piece of space-junk... let the nearest Time Agent track it back to Earth. Convince him it's valuable, name a price. When he's put 50% up front - oops! A German bomb falls on it, destroys it forever. He never gets to see what he's paid for. Never knows he's been had. I buy him a drink with his own money, and we discuss dumb luck. The perfect self-cleaning con.

**The Doctor:** Yeah. Perfect.

**Jack:** The London Blitz is great for self-cleaners - Pompeii's nice if you want to make a vacation of it, though, but you've got to get your alarm for Volcano Day.

[He laughs at his own joke. The Doctor just looks at him. Jack's laughter dies away.]

**Jack:** Getting a hint of disapproval.

Jack eventually realizes that his con has caused people a lot of pain, and is shamed into helping with the clean-up. He disappears, and at first, the Doctor thinks he's fled, but Rose trusts that Jack will come back. "I trust him 'cause he's like you. Except with dating and dancing." And Jack does indeed come back, teleporting them to his ship, with a punchline about his dress.

**The Doctor:** If ever he was a captain, he's been defrocked...

**Jack:** Actually, I quit. Nobody takes my frock.

Then when everything's falling apart later, he again seems to flee. The teleporter can only take one, and he goes, leaving the Doctor and Rose behind. But he comes back, to snatch away a bomb before it destroys them. The bomb needs to be removed, and Jack takes it away - only to discover that he can't get away from it. He resigns himself to his fate, and is rescued at the last minute. Charming - but not actually heroic. Never in this sequence does he choose to sacrifice himself. That comes later.

Later, in *The Parting of the Ways*, Jack dies and is resurrected - as a

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result of which, he comes back immortal. He can't die - or rather, he can be killed, and is, sometimes in excruciating ways, but he always abruptly comes back to life. It's a radical shift, taking him from a charming, beautiful, capable human to pretty much a superhero.<sup>23</sup>

If one of the primary characteristics of the hero is his ability and willingness to endure suffering for the sake of a greater good<sup>24</sup>, then Jack, in his capacity (and willingness) to endure that suffering, is perhaps the ultimate hero. Even though he isn't any smarter or stronger than a normal human otherwise, and he doesn't get any flashy destructo-rays either.<sup>25</sup>

In fact, that superpower functions much the same way the coat does - it makes Jack hyper-strong (in endurance) and hyper-masculine. The fact that he can't die is what *allows* him to be pretty. Before his superpower, Jack's a charming madcap sexy rogue (with some hints of mystery in his past); after becoming immortal, he gets darker and grimmer - but also hotter to some of us. Now there's a danger aspect, and he gets a lot darker over time.

I have to admit, I was the girl who would have picked Spock over Kirk, and Apollo over Starbuck, back in my teenage angst days. I've always had a thing for the strong, suffering types. *Brood for me, my darling, and whisper the secret sorrow in your soul, which I alone among all women will be able to heal.* That's a seductive fantasy.

### **Brooding is Overrated (Jed)**

Here's one of the places where Mary Anne and I disagree: I don't really think of Jack's immortality as being essential to his character or his

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23. Jed: And by the way, superheroes rely on clothing for effect too, and various commentators have noted that The Coat is somewhat cape-like.

24. Jed: A friend of mine has suggested that in many action movies, the hero's primary D&D attribute is Constitution; that is, the hero's main ability is to take lots of damage and keep moving. Immortality takes that one step further.

25. Mary Anne: He does compensate for that lack with access to a whole lot of cool alien toys in *Torchwood*. And, of course, having traveled in time and being friends with the Doctor don't hurt. Jed: It's interesting that when we first meet him, he does have a flashy destructo-ray: the sonic blaster. But it's conveniently low on batteries (which are irreplaceable because the factory has been destroyed, which the Doctor hints was something he did), and it probably gets destroyed along with Jack's ship at the end of *The Doctor Dances*; I don't think we ever see it again. (Unless River has it in *Silence in the Library/Forest of the Dead*.) And by the way, at one point in that episode, the Doctor takes away Jack's destructo-ray and slips him a banana. Take that, people who think the Doctor is straight!

appeal. My personal canonical Captain Jack is the first one we meet, rather than the darker and longer-lived character he became later.

Or perhaps what I really mean is that what I love about Jack is his portrayal in *Doctor Who*. I watched the first season of *Torchwood*, and a couple second-season episodes, and *Children of Earth*; but Jack as portrayed in *Torchwood* doesn't work nearly as well for me (with some exceptions). I still think it's great that he's bi, of course, but for me he loses a lot of his appeal.

I can go for dark brooding leaders. (I liked Cyclops in the X-Men comics, for example, even after friends started mocking his angstiness.) But I like charming rogues more, and charming rogues who become semi-reluctant heroes even more. (And yet Han Solo did nothing for me. Maybe partly because I didn't find him especially attractive, or even especially charming?)

For me, a central part of the appeal of Jack's sexuality was his cheerfulness about it. He's sex-positive, which is lovely; and he's also people-positive. I get the feeling from him that not only would he enjoy sex with everyone he encounters<sup>26</sup>, he would enjoy it partly because he likes them.<sup>27</sup> Sure, he flirts with people on first meeting them, before he even knows whether he might like them; but he isn't arrogant about his sex appeal, he doesn't behave like someone who knows he's irresistible. His expectation doesn't seem to be "I can have anyone I want, 'cause I'm hot," but rather, "You. You right there. You and I (and anyone else who wants to join in) would probably have a great time together, because we'd probably like each other and we'd probably enjoy sex together."

I think that adding the weight of the world to his shoulders could've been done in a way that I would've liked; the writers did that for the Doctor, after all. And I can imagine the story of the lone wolf learning to be a good team leader could've been a really appealing story to me. But instead, I felt that the writers of *Torchwood* constantly showed him being a *terrible* leader, but without anyone seeming to notice just how bad at it he was, and without his ever getting better at it.

And although I can totally go for wounded, if you take it a step further into tortured, the appeal lessens for me.

Of course, there are still lovely moments in *Torchwood*. Jack standing looking out over the city in that coat. Jack and his namesake having a

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26. Mary Anne: It's unclear what's on the table, but it could be anything, up to and including the table.

27. Mary Anne: Agreed! The liking is huge.

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brief moment together. Jack and Spike Captain John engaging in the best fan-service I've seen on TV.

And I'm probably buying into the stereotypes. Queer guys in TV and movies are supposed to be happy-go-lucky and fun and shallow, and constantly interested in sex (or else, to be non-threatening, entirely uninterested in sex); if they have anything serious in their lives, either it's because they're tragically dying of AIDS or it has nothing to do with romance and sex.<sup>28</sup> (Or they're the sidekick and it's the protagonist's serious problem they're helping deal with.) So, sure, it's good to have subjectivity for queer characters, to give them real and nuanced emotional lives and problems that aren't about, but don't ignore, their sexuality.

But still: to me, the breathtaking and liberating (and hot) things about Captain Jack are mostly to do with his combination of action heroism, roguishness, wit, and cheerful sexuality.

### **Is Jack Our Future? (Jed and Mary Anne)**

**Jed:** Another aspect of Jack's appeal may be the idea that he's not the only one of his kind.

In *The Doctor Dances*, there are suggestions that Jack's sexuality is typical of fifty-first-century humans:

**The Doctor:** Relax, he's a fifty-first-century guy. He's just a bit more flexible when it comes to dancing.

**Rose:** *How flexible?*

**The Doctor:** Well, by his time, you lot have spread out across half the galaxy.

**Rose:** *Meaning?*

**The Doctor** [grinning]: So many species, so little time....

**Rose:** What, that's what we do when we get out there? That's our mission? We seek new life, and... and...

**The Doctor:** Dance.<sup>29</sup>

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28. Jed: There are also some other tropes specific to bisexuality, of course. For example, the easiest way to show that a character is bi is to *show* them in a threesome with a man and a woman at the same time. It can be hard to make really clear that a character is bi without that. It's easy for me to slip into thinking of Ianto as gay, for example, even though it seems more likely to me that he's bi and monogamous.

29. Jed: Which reminds me of a line from Tiptree's "And I Awoke and Found Me Here on the Cold Hill's Side": "Man is exogamous - all our history is one long drive to find and impregnate the stranger. Or get impregnated by him; it works for women too. Anything different-colored, different nose, ass, anything, man *has* to fuck it or die try-

Which seems to suggest that bi(/ pan)sexuality is where we as a species are headed. I'm always both charmed and a little annoyed at that kind of thing.

I'm charmed because, sure, who wouldn't want their own desires to become universal? I like the idea of a world of happy bi poly people. But I also find the claim that that's our future a little annoying, because it seems to suggest that bisexual polyamory is (perhaps literally) more evolved than old-fashioned monosexual monogamy, and I think a lot of bi poly people are wary of that idea.

**Mary Anne:** Well, "evolved" is certainly a problematic way to put it, implying that one option is more advanced or better than the other. But that's not really how I read it. My sense was more that in the fifty-first century, humanity has shed some of the strictures that have limited our choices to date.<sup>30</sup>

For one, given that research seems to indicate that a significant percentage of the population is some variant of bisexual, in practice, it seems plausible to me that in the future, there might be less social pressure pushing people towards affirming a strictly gay or straight identity.

**Jed:** Sure; I agree that reduction of anti-homosexual bias is likely to lead to more people being willing to identify (to themselves and/or publicly) as bi.

**Mary Anne:** As for polyamory - well, I don't think most people are actually poly. I've seen too many people attempt poly, only to crash and burn on the realization that no, polyamory is not well suited to their own emotional needs and relationship desires. But given how high the incidence of cheating is in supposedly monogamous relationships, I wouldn't be surprised if the future brought us models of relationships that are, as the Doctor says, more "flexible" than our current, culturally constrained models.

**Jed:** I'll go along with that too. I certainly think that we are becoming, over time, more flexible about such things; modulo the occasional backlash, I imagine that trend will continue.

So I totally buy the idea that by the fifty-first century, there'll be a more diverse range of completely socially acceptable sexual orientations and identities and relationship models.

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ing." In the Tiptree story, that's a dangerous drive to pursue with aliens; in *The Doctor Dances*, it's presented as charming and fun.

30. Mary Anne: Much in the same way that the recent advent of mostly reliable birth control (when available and affordable) has revolutionized women's sexual practices and various societies' attitudes towards marriage, child-rearing, etc.

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But to me, the Doctor's remark suggests that in the future, everyone will be like Jack. Whereas in my experience, being bi and poly is not a non-stop orgy of friendly frolicking<sup>31</sup>; people have human desires and needs and reactions, and everyone's different. So, tempting as the thought is, I don't believe that my own approaches to life are the inevitable universal outcome of future change; I think the future will be more diverse than that.

Of course, the Doctor doesn't actually say that all fifty-first-century humans are like Jack, and we've seen so few people from his time portrayed on the shows that it's hard to generalize. So perhaps the Doctor really just meant that pansexuality is the norm rather than the exception in the future.

**Mary Anne:** And really, his point there was more about humans having sex with aliens, in specific. Apparently, in the future, much of humanity is less constrained by xenophobia than we might be now - at least where sex is concerned.

**Jed:** Good point about the alien-specificity. I may well have been reading too much into his comments, just 'cause I've seen other people say similar things about the likelihood of a glorious utopian future in which everyone just happens to match their beliefs and desires.

**Mary Anne:** Well, I do think he implied the bi and poly aspects as a stepping-off point to the wanton sex with aliens. So you're not completely off-base, I think.

**Jed:** It's also worth mentioning, as Shoshana Magnet and Robert Smith? noted in their essay in *Chicks Dig Time Lords*, that there are real-world people with Captain Jack's proclivities. "People exactly like him exist in the twenty-first century. [...] Queerness and polyamory aren't fantastical imaginings from the fifty-first century; they're something that happens every Friday night down at Club Babylon."<sup>32</sup>

**Mary Anne:** Yes, exactly!

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31. Mary Anne: If only.

32. Mary Anne: It's a shame that the show seems afraid to actually show us the future they evoke. If I have one complaint about Captain Jack, it's that as two series went on, the writers/director seemed to pull back on really making visible the range of his sexuality. You can walk down to Club Babylon today, as Magnet and Smith? say, and see plenty of male on male action. But on the show, all that hot sex is kept firmly off-screen. Jack does get to have a relationship with another man on *Torchwood*, but we see almost no on-screen male/male sexual interactions - especially in comparison to how much male/female, or even female/female sex is offered. I find that disappointing, and hope that as the series continues, they'll do a better job delivering the future that Jack so clearly promises.

**Jed:** Still: to me, the idea that he'll be the norm in the future rather than a rare exception is itself interesting.<sup>33</sup> And the idea of living in a world - a galaxy! - full of Captain Jacks is awfully appealing. At least, if you ignore the dangers of being too overwhelmed by choice to know where to begin.

**Mary Anne:** Dip me in honey and throw me to the aliens.

**A Concise Summary of the Foregoing Arguments!**

**(Mary Anne and Jed)**

In other words - SQUEEE!! CAPTAIN JACK!

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33. Jed: Then, too, the fifty-first century isn't the end of time; I wonder about fifty-second-century humans. Have they given up on all this? I feel like we've seen a fair number of humans from very far in the future on *Doctor Who*, and few of them other than Jack and John are much like Jack; is it just that not many of them are from the fifty-first century per se?

## Born Again Whovian

**David Llewellyn** was born in Pontypool, Wales, in 1978. Published in 2006, his debut novel *Eleven* was a black comedy set in Cardiff and London on September 11, 2001. It was followed in 2008 by *Everything is Sinister*, a dystopian satire about the British tabloid press. He is the author of the *Torchwood* novel *Trace Memory*, and the *Doctor Who* novels *The Taking of Chelsea 426* (featuring the tenth Doctor) and *Night of the Humans* (featuring the eleventh), and has contributed to both *Torchwood: The Official Magazine* and *The Brilliant Book of Doctor Who*. From 2007-2008, he wrote a regular blog for *The Daily Telegraph*, and since 2012 has written a number of scripts for Big Finish Productions, including *Bernice Summerfield: Paradise Frost*, *Dark Shadows: The Last Stop*, and *The Confessions of Dorian Gray: This World Our Hell*. His latest novel, *Ibrahim & Reenie*, will be published in October 2013. Llewellyn lives with his partner in Cardiff.

For 15 years, I didn't consider myself a fan of *Doctor Who*. *Fifteen whole years!* Days, even weeks went by when I wouldn't think about it. I didn't read *Doctor Who Magazine* (now, at 34 years old, the longest running magazine dedicated to a TV show); was unaware of the Virgin novels that filled the gap when the show was off the air; had never heard of Big Finish's audio plays featuring the Doctor; and I'd forgotten the names of almost every companion except K9 and Ace. When others, friends in school, laughed derisively at the memory of shoestring special effects and wobbly sets, I joined in. Indeed, there was nothing to distinguish me from someone indifferent - or indeed hostile - to the show.

Except that's not strictly true. For one night - May 27th, 1996, to be exact - I was a *Doctor Who* fan once more, and the worst kind of fan at that. I sat and analyzed, scrutinized, and dissected every second of a 90-minute television movie as if it were the Zapruder footage, and I didn't do this alone. Sitting next to me, on the sofa, was my Mum. Our conversation, in a very abridged form, ran as follows:

**Me:** What's that noise? Are they meant to be Daleks?

**Mum:** No. Can't be. They sound ridiculous.

**Me:** The theme music's okay. Better than the Sylvester McCoy version.

**Mum:** Yes. But it's all very... American.

**Me:** And? What's wrong with that? It's still *Doctor Who*.

**Mum:** Yes. But is it?

**Me:** Wow. I love the TARDIS. It looks amazing.

**Mum:** It's a bit over-the-top.

**Me:** What are you talking about? Look at it! It's great!

**Mum:** I think I preferred it with all the circles on the walls.

**Me:** What? When it looked as if it was made of cardboard?

**Mum:** Yes. This is just... it's too ostentatious. I like Paul McGann, though. Very good casting.

**Me:** You're only saying that because you fancied him in *The Monocled Mutineer*.

**Mum:** But he *is*. I like his costume.

**Me:** Oh, Christ. He's on a motorbike. What on *Earth* is he doing on a motorbike?

**Mum:** See? I told you it was too American.

**Me:** And the Master. Eric Roberts looks like a truck driver. He hasn't even got a goatee beard.

**Mum:** Er... did *Doctor Who* just say he was half-human? Since when has he been half-human?

**Me:** Since the writers confused him with Spock? Or He-Man?

**Mum:** Hmm. Well, I didn't think much of that.

**Me:** No. I mean, Paul McGann was good, and the TARDIS looked great, but... I don't know. Maybe the series'll get better.

**Mum:** They're doing a series?

**Me:** I think so. This is just the pilot.

**Mum:** Hmm. Well maybe you're right. Maybe it will get better.

In the event, of course, there was no series, and so we never got to find out if it would "get better." Instead, I went back to forgetting about *Doctor Who*, as if that one night of intense fandom had been a temporary, fevered bout of madness. If I thought of the series at all, it was with a kind of bitterness at what could have been, what "bloody Hollywood" had done with its one chance of bringing the show back.

What made that initial feeling of disappointment so acute, I think, was that I hadn't experienced it alone. In our sitting room, two generations of my family watched the 1996 TV movie and shook our heads and cursed under our breath and decided that it just wasn't good enough. Unlike many fans I've met, I didn't discover *Doctor Who* by myself; I was brought up on it. My Mum had been a fan since *An Unearthly Child*.

## *Born Again Whovian*

For many years, Troughton was her favorite Doctor - likeably eccentric and a little bit shabby; the perfect Doctor for a teenager in the late 60s. Hartnell, she said, was like a sprightly grandfather figure. Or, at least, that's how he seemed until her older sister, then a nurse living and working in London, told her she'd seen the veteran actor in a pub in White City and that he looked like "a grumpy old bugger." Pertwee was a little bit too silly for my Mum's tastes; his clothes (so much crushed velvet) and modes of transport (yes, *Planet of the Spiders*, I'm thinking of you), just a little bit too daft to be taken seriously. Tom Baker, in stark contrast, was just a little too macabre, too ghoulish (my Mum's verdict, not mine) to be likeable.

In 1981, poor old Patrick Troughton was usurped in my mother's affections by the new kid on the block: Peter Davison. My mum - like a great many people's mums - was very fond of the handsome and boyish fifth Doctor. Indeed, so fond was she of this incarnation, and so profound her sense of betrayal when he was replaced by the curly haired, garishly attired, and practically unhinged Colin Baker that we stopped watching the show altogether. Granted, his first story, the eye-burstingly dreadful *The Twin Dilemma*, may have played some part in this, but the sixth Doctor's spiky superciliousness - not to mention the fact that within seconds of his first appearance he'd tried to strangle his companion Peri - didn't help matters. In true *Doctor Who* fan style, my mother - and therefore our family as a whole - decided *Doctor Who* wasn't as good as it used to be, and we wouldn't watch it again until Sylvester McCoy took the reins.

Sadly, by then it was too late. Though the McCoy era heralded some classic stories (*Remembrance of the Daleks*, *The Curse of Fenric*), the head honchos at the BBC had lost all enthusiasm for the show. I'd like to say I remember the moment when *Doctor Who* was cancelled, but I don't. I'd like to say my mum and I broke down in tears, or camped outside BBC Television Centre in London armed with placards and thermos flasks of hot tea, but we didn't. Almost as soon as it was over, it was as if we'd forgotten it had ever been on at all.

And so began my 15 years in the wilderness. Save, of course, that one regrettable evening in 1996.

Cut to 2003. A young, aspiring writer, I'm at BBC Wales television centre in Cardiff, attending a talk by *Queer as Folk* and *Second Coming* scribe Russell T. Davies. He talks about the successes of his previous shows, and his excitement at bringing *Doctor Who* back to our screens.

My heart sinks.

With the kind of derision only a local boy can muster, I predict a disaster. Nothing good, I reason with unfettered snobbery, ever came out of BBC Wales. The TARDIS will be made of polystyrene and the Daleks will sound as if they're from Swansea. Even when, a year later, production begins and friends and colleagues mention seeing the TARDIS, or Christopher Eccleston, and Billie Piper at various locations around the city, I feel nothing but a sense of impending doom. Christopher Eccleston? As the Doctor? I mean... he was great in *Shallow Grave* and *Our Friends in the North* and *Cracker*, but as the Doctor? I don't think so. And as his companion, the singer of such dentist drill pop anthems as "Because We Want To" and "Honey to the Bee"? Please... give me a break.

Then I watch *Rose*.

Five minutes into the episode, I'm smiling. Smiling because it looks great; you know, like a proper TV series. Smiling because Billie Piper isn't a terrible actress; in fact, she's very good. Smiling because Christopher Eccleston's Doctor isn't wearing crushed velvet or a massive scarf or a wide-brimmed hat, but a fan-baitingly plain black leather jacket. Smiling because, yes, I recognize and live near many of the locations, and that's kind of cool.

Okay, I think. They got lucky. One good episode doesn't make a comeback. But with each new episode, the revived series proves me wrong. *The End of the World* shows they can do special effects. *The Unquiet Dead* has the spooky, eccentric Victoriana I loved so much as a kid. *Father's Day* actually makes me cry.

This latter episode is particularly resonant for me, because there's one person in my life who can't marvel at *Doctor Who's* spectacular comeback, and that's my Mum. She died, aged 51, in 2003, before the revival was announced. Having a story dealing with parental loss would be enough, but coupled with that is the knowledge that my Mum would have loved every second of the new series.

Even so, it takes a while to appreciate just how much *Doctor Who* meant to me as a kid, how important a part of my childhood it really was.

Shortly after the new series begins, I'm walking along London's Shad Thames with my then boyfriend, when I freeze in my tracks.

"This is it!" I shout.

"This is what?" He asks.

"This is the place where the Doctor shoved the Dalek through the window."

"What are you talking about?" asks my boyfriend, a Bulgarian who still won't know what a Dalek is until I point one out on the cover of *Radio Times* several weeks from now.

What I struggled to explain to him that sunny afternoon was that my earliest TV memory is watching *Resurrection of the Daleks*, aged five. I remember Peter Davison's Doctor pushing a Dalek from a third-floor warehouse window. I remember the uncharacteristic moment (still controversial among die-hard fans) when the Doctor plugs a prone and vulnerable Dalek full of lead. I remember the sheer thrill of seeing Davros for the very first time (having been too young to see his earlier appearances).

Fast forward a couple of years. I've had my first novel published, a (very) black comedy set in a British office on September 11, 2001. Off the back of that, I'm asked to submit ideas for a tie-in novel based on *Doctor Who*'s new spin-off show, *Torchwood*. Off the back of that, I'm asked to write a novel featuring David Tennant's Doctor.

Writing a *Torchwood* novel was one thing. Exciting yes, but the series was still new, the characters' names nowhere as iconic as they would become, and this was several years before Cardiff Bay acquired a shrine to the late, lamented Ianto Jones. Writing a *Doctor Who* story (*The Taking of Chelsea 426*) is something else entirely. The first time I type the word "TARDIS," I can't stop giggling. A couple of thousand words later, I type the word "Sontaran," and very nearly wet myself with excitement.

And the more popular the series becomes, the more I find myself surrounded by *Doctor Who*, the evidence of my childhood fixation turning up everywhere I look.

As I'm working on *Chelsea 426*, my Auntie Margaret (the same aunt who had called William Hartnell a "grumpy bugger") reminds me how as a child I'd pored over the copy of the 1977 *Doctor Who Annual* she kept in a cupboard for when nephews and nieces came to visit. Suddenly, I remember the hypnotic effect that book, and its psychedelically terrifying illustrations, had on me.

One afternoon, while searching through the collection of vinyl beneath my Dad's old stereo, I come across an album of *Children's TV Favorites* - cover versions of TV themes, including *The Pink Panther*, *The Wombles*, and *Doctor Who* - and I remember how I would listen to the latter over and over again, obsessed with the sheer, unequalled weirdness of it. No other piece of music sounds like the theme from *Doctor Who*, and no other piece of music ever will.

*Doctor Who* wasn't just something I'd loved; it was the reason I loved

many of the things I now loved. If I could happily listen to Brian Eno or Steve Reich, wasn't that because I became attuned to experimental bleeps, squawks, and buzzes made by the BBC's Radiophonic Workshop? If I could appreciate the nightmarish paintings of Francis Bacon, wasn't the 1977 *Doctor Who Annual* at least partly to blame? If I enjoyed films that were a little bit "timey-wimey," like *Donnie Darko* or *Twelve Monkeys*, couldn't this be traced back to a certain little blue box? Weren't mind-bending novels like JG Ballard's *The Atrocity Exhibition* or William S. Burroughs's *The Naked Lunch* less troublesome, considering I sat through - and enjoyed - the positively baffling Sylvester McCoy story *Ghost Light* aged 11?

One of the key figures in my return to the fold, what I began referring to as my "Whomitzvah," was my friend Tim. Unlike me, Tim has been a constant and consistent fan of *Doctor Who* his whole life. He grew up in Blaenafon, the same Welsh mining town where my Mum was born, and as a child was thrilled to learn *The Pirate Planet* had been filmed at the town's coalmine, the ominously named Big Pit; the same coalmine where my grandfather had worked. (In fact, thanks to its abundance of coalmines, factories, and quarries, Wales played host to *Doctor Who* on a great many occasions before the 2005 comeback.)

Tim owns a vast collection of *Doctor Who* DVDs, and so several nights a week, for two or three years, I'd find myself in his tiny, cluttered, slightly ramshackle little flat, clearing the piles of *Doctor Who Magazine* and *Doctor Who* comics from one side of his sofa to the other just so I could sit, and together we would watch *Doctor Who*.

And yes, sometimes we would laugh at it. Sometimes the effects (the dragon in *Dragonfire*, the giant rat in *The Talons of Weng-Chiang*) weren't great; sometimes the writing or the performances were a little on the camp side (stand up, Morgus in the brilliant *The Caves of Androzani* and Tobias Vaughn's eyebrow in *The Invasion*), but none of this matters. When the classic series is at its best, it functions almost like great radio drama; what matters aren't the practical qualities of the special effects on screen, but the great leaps of imagination they inspire.

What struck me, with so many stories, was how easily I could get sucked in, watching it with the same childlike sense of wonder I'd had 20 or more years ago. I have a mild form of automotonophobia - the irrational fear of ventriloquist's dummies, shop-front mannequins, and dolls - and sure enough, they all make alarmingly regular appearances in *Doctor Who*. Peking's homicidal homunculus, Mr Sin (from *The Talons of Weng-Chiang*), is as terrifying to me as any Weeping Angel, and infi-

nately scarier than the Daleks. Same goes for the Autons. I'm none too keen on spiders, either, and found myself hugging my knees with one arm and covering my eyes with the other through much of *Planet of the Spiders*, even when said arachnids looked like wind-up toys.

Saddest of all was the realization that my family had dismissed Colin Baker's tenure far too prematurely. Sure, those early episodes are a little creaky, and I'll never forgive *The Two Doctors* for the indignities it heaps on poor old Patrick Troughton, but some of his stories are up there with the best, and *The Trial of a Time Lord* is a fantastically entertaining (if occasionally uneven) piece of work.

The more I watched, the clearer it became. I wasn't a convert to the show; to be that, I'd have had to pass through a childhood devoid of *Doctor Who*. No... I was a born-again Whovian, and like the very worst born again evangelical, no sooner was the show back on TV than I began spreading the word. Fortunately, its return happened at the same time as my oldest friends began having children. Like a swivel-eyed Scientologist, I spied a whole new audience to bring into the fold, and I set about doing just that. Writing and contributing to *Doctor Who* books means I can do this covertly, giving my own books to nephews and nieces, and wow... isn't that nice? Uncle Dave made you a present.

The moment when I heard my three-year-old niece sing, "Tick tock goes the clock till River kills the Doctor," remains one of my proudest. But even if I weren't her uncle, I'm pretty sure she and her brother would still be fans. Within days of *The Sontaran Stratagem*, I walked past a neighboring school and heard a gang of young boys - rather chillingly - chant, "Sontar-ha! Sontar-ha!" The cultural phenomenon that was, for so many years, seen as something cult and specialist is once again the mainstream, as relevant a part of British culture as Marmite, the Beatles, and the Off Side Rule<sup>34</sup>. If my apostate years were born out of a mixture of embarrassment and shame, the Doctor's dazzling regeneration proved that not only is there no reason to be embarrassed about liking *Doctor Who*, but that there never has been. Many of the younger fans discovering it for the very first time will happily sit through classic serials, regardless that it wasn't shot in HD and doesn't feature an array of CGI monsters or spaceships. Their suspension of disbelief is, it appears, as easily upheld as my own.

Finally, if I needed any further proof that *Doctor Who* has been more to me than just a TV show, it's this.

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34. If you're not a football fan, don't ask. Just don't ask.

November 2009. I'm at a bar in Cardiff, celebrating the birthday of *Doctor Who* production assistant and fellow writer Scott Handcock. There are plenty of other people I know, a few I don't, and a mutual friend, Edward Russell (who also works on the show), introduces me to a very handsome Andrew-Garfield-lookalike called Dan.

"Wow," I think. "That guy looks like Andrew Garfield." (I'd had a bit of a crush on the actor since he appeared in *Daleks in Manhattan*.)

Four years later, Dan and I are still together. Weirdly, given that we met at the birthday party of someone who works on *Doctor Who*, attended almost exclusively by people who work on *Doctor Who*, Dan isn't even a fan of the show. Okay, sometimes I can force him to sit down and appreciate the splendor of *Blink* or *Night Terrors*, and - being an artist - he loved Richard Curtis's *Vincent and the Doctor*, but ours is best described as a mixed relationship, like the coming together of a devout Catholic and an affirmed agnostic. It's not that he doesn't believe in *Doctor Who*; he's just not sure...

Granted, should we ever get married, he will have to convert, and so we shall sit through hours of classic serials. I'll start him on *The Talons of Weng-Chiang* or *State of Decay* - he's a horror fan, so they should be an easy sell. Then we'll move on to the real fan-testing stuff: *The Happiness Patrol* or *The Two Doctors*. Yes... If he can sit through *The Two Doctors* - with its somehow mismatching Sontarans, its superfluous Spanish location shooting, and poor old Patrick Troughton's glued-on ginger eyebrows - he can sit through anything, and I will know then that we really were a match made in *Doctor Who* Heaven.

## Queer Doctor vs. Straight Trek?

Born and raised in Edinburgh, Scotland, **Paul F. Cockburn** has watched *Doctor Who* devotedly since 1970, with what he now realizes must have been (at times) a degree of fanaticism of genuine concern to his family. Hindsight shows, however, that the BBC TV show which hijacked his youthful imagination was simply the initial focus for life-long interests in storytelling and communication, both fundamental to his subsequent career in magazine journalism. Now working as a freelancer, Paul specializes in coverage of the performing arts, wider culture, and disability issues for a variety of print and online publications in the United Kingdom. Perhaps surprisingly, he has seldom written professionally about *Doctor Who*.

Like most LGBT people, I experienced some bullying at school. With hindsight, however, I know I got away fairly lightly. Thanks, in no small part, to the Doctor.

To explain; by my mid-teens, a few of my classmates were casting aspersions about my sexuality. Yet this wasn't simple out-and-out homophobia; to a degree they were actually distracted from that angle because they had something much easier to mock - namely, my continued interest in *Doctor Who*. At best, they regarded the long-running BBC show as one of those "childish things" they themselves had "put aside" when their balls dropped. That I continued to profess a love for cheap 'n' cheerful *Doctor Who*, rather than "cooler" science-fiction imports like *Star Trek* or *Buck Rogers in the 25th Century*, marked me out as being immature, rather than necessarily gay.

Yet, occasionally, blatant homophobia did raise its head; I still remember one guy goading me about the suggested possibility (for which, read: "gratuitous publicity stunt") that the Doctor following Tom Baker might be a woman. As the lad pointed out, that was something which would never happen to Captain Kirk. (Sadly, I realized early on in the discussion that there was no point mentioning that there was one episode of *Star Trek* in which Kirk's mind was placed in a woman's body.) The guy's point of view was clear enough, though; he thought that my being interested in a character who could change gender

implied something about my sexuality - and that "something" was disgusting and wrong.

A case of "out of the mouths of innocents, babes and bigots"? Ignoring the overt homophobia, was the guy actually on to something? Was my nascent, not-yet-consciously recognized homosexuality a factor in me becoming a fan of *Doctor Who* rather than *Star Trek*? Because, truth be told, I started watching both shows near enough at the same time in my life.

During the 1960s in the UK, *Doctor Who* was on air for 40-plus weeks a year. The move into color, however, coincided with the BBC's decision to produce fewer episodes - 25 for 1970, later 26 a year. This decision led to what, at the time, was a totally unprecedented six-month gap between the broadcast of the last monochrome episode of *Doctor Who* starring Patrick Troughton and the first full-color (not that many people in the UK had color TVs at the time) episode introducing Jon Pertwee in the title role. During this period, busy BBC schedulers decided to fill the vacant Saturday tea-time slot on their main channel with a new "sci-fi" series recently brought in from America - yes, *Star Trek*.

History now says that *Star Trek's* first run on British television (in the autumn of 1969) wasn't an unqualified success; the show provoked significant numbers of parents' complaints about the show's content, not least scenes showing children being violent against adults in *Miri*. As a consequence, BBC executives banned that episode and quickly checked the rest, deciding that another pair were too disturbing for that Saturday tea-time slot. (Unbelievably, out of unthinking habit, the BBC wouldn't renegotiate the rights to show these three episodes until decades later.) In retrospect, I can see how shoving *Star Trek* into the *Doctor Who* slot was a wrong move; the TARDIS-shaped "family tea-time" slot proved a poor fit for the starship *Enterprise*. It made sense that, when *Star Trek* returned to BBC1 later in 1970, Captain Kirk's three-out-of-five years mission would be berthed in a more grown-up, post-7pm midweek slot, where it would indeed prosper for many years. And that is where I discovered it.

But first, there was *Doctor Who*. My family had always watched the show, in the same way most families did, and I'd caught glimpses of the show for years. It's fair to say, though, that I only started watching the show on January 3, 1970 - specifically the transmission of the first episode of *Spearhead from Space*, when I was seven weeks shy of my sixth birthday, and my attention span, as far as television was concerned, had extended sufficiently for me to sit down and watch a whole 25-minute

## *Queer Doctor vs. Straight Trek?*

episode in one sitting. Soon enough, I was able to settle down to watch even longer programs, assuming they grabbed my attention. And, in the shadow of the moon-landings, anything about space travel tended to do just that.

Yet, unlike *Doctor Who*, I have no clear memory of sitting down to watch *Star Trek* for the first time. I'm positive it must have been that late 1970 run on BBC1, because I do vaguely remember being intrigued by the full-page comic strip by the great Frank Bellamy which featured in the BBC's program-listing magazine *Radio Times*. I can't be sure if that particular week's episode was the first I sat down to watch, yet I remember watching *Doctor Who* for the first time. In short, *Star Trek* clearly didn't make quite the same impression.

Assuming I have what might be termed an innate "fannish" tendency (a "fan gene" if you like), could it be that I became a fan of *Doctor Who* rather than *Star Trek* simply because I encountered the Time Lord first? That I could have been a *Star Trek* fan if the television schedules had turned out differently? It's a possibility, but - from my admittedly somewhat biased perspective - I somehow doubt it, not least because *Doctor Who* has a particularly British liberal attitude to things that is quite distinct from the gung-ho ethos of *Star Trek*.

While I certainly enjoyed *Star Trek* from the start, and have subsequently returned to many of those episodes with real affection and appreciation of their dramatic and televisual merits, the simple fact is that I wasn't at all inspired to play being Captain Kirk or Spock out in the back garden afterwards. Come those balmy evenings of nostalgia, I was out the back facing off invading monsters in the velvet cloak and frilly shirt I'd nagged my mum to put together for me.

Those garden games of *Doctor Who*, and my nagging for a foppish outfit, are certainly suggestive for one reason. While I've never been particularly outrageous in terms of my personal wardrobe, it's fair to say that from quite a young age I was never one for wearing uniforms unless I absolutely had to (for school). Indeed, I even resented having to wear similar clothes to my older brother - although, as an adult, I can understand my mother's desire to ensure we were both easily identifiable in large crowds.

*Star Trek's* protagonists were invariably dressed in what passed for futuristic military uniforms; anything more outlandish - that is, interesting - was worn either the guest female leads or the more (how shall we say?) "eccentric" aliens, such as the Squire of Gothos. In contrast, few would argue that Jon Pertwee's Doctor didn't stand out wherever he

went; and, at some basic level, I rather liked that. That my formative years as a *Who* viewer featured a larger-than-life Doctor against a supporting cast of military uniforms simply made the point more forcefully.

Not that I'm for a moment suggesting that the Doctor's penchant for somewhat eccentric, pseudo-Edwardian outfits was a blatant sign of the show's inherent "campness" that enthralled me as a child. I don't get "camp", I don't like "camp", I'm not comfortable with "camp." Brought up in a world where I was told there were boys and girls and nothing in between, I would argue that I first started watching *Doctor Who* at precisely the time when the show was possibly at its least "camp," thanks to producer Barry Letts and script editor Terrance Dicks's determination to ensure the show was more grounded in reality - more overtly science fiction than science fantasy.

Far from being camp frivolity, the Doctor's "eccentric" outfits symbolized something else; that he was a devil-may-care individual with his own sense of style and wasn't afraid to flaunt it to the world. It was the glove that fitted, given that the Doctor spent his time upsetting the plans of foes invariably intent on stamping their own conformity on the rest of the universe - be it the Master with his ridiculous plans for global/galactic/universal domination, the Daleks wanting to conquer and eradicate anything that was not-Dalek, or even nasty global businesses wanting to turn us all into clone consumers with no more individuality than maggots.

In contrast, *Star Trek* was - and I accept this is a slight generalization - about a particularly American-style Galactic Federation sorting things out to their own satisfaction, and invariably dealing with people dressed in similar outfits. In retrospect, I sometimes feel the Klingons had a point.

But it's not just about the clothes. These days, when journalists ask why gay boys might identify with the Doctor more than other heroes (and especially the likes of Captain Kirk with all those notches on his starship bedpost), they frequently hook onto the Doctor's supposed "sexual ambivalence" to the beautiful young females running at his heels. At the time, this simply didn't compute; as a young kid, I tended to find all that kissy-kissy stuff a tad boring, and I certainly didn't miss its absence in *Doctor Who*. Of course, as an alleged grown-up, I'm well aware that the "No Sex Please, We're Gallifreyan" ethos was an unintended consequence of ideas about what was allowable in child-friendly family viewing - and also the fact that the first two Doctors were essentially "crotchety grandfather" (William Hartnell) and "eccentric uncle"

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(Patrick Troughton). Interestingly, despite him being physically only a few years older than his travelling companions, current lead Matt Smith has been returned to this mode - he thinks dating is all about "scones and texting."

Actually, I'd go as far as saying that, when I first started watching *Doctor Who*, the fact that the third Doctor didn't spend any time trying to snog Liz Shaw, Jo Grant, or Sarah Jane Smith just didn't register. They had monsters to fight, mad scientists to defeat, and the off-screen wonders of Metebelis Three to enjoy. The fact that the third Doctor didn't try to get into Jo Grant's hot pants didn't make him any less of a man in my eyes. (And, thankfully, Jon Pertwee never did get those soft-focus close-ups given to William Shatner time and again in *Star Trek*.)

There's possibly an obvious reason for this; Jon Pertwee played the Doctor as, essentially, an ever-so-slightly heightened version of Jon Pertwee, and there's no doubt he was a hot-blooded male of the heterosexual variety. As the journalist Gary Gillatt wrote in 2011, while reviewing *Day of the Daleks* for *Doctor Who Magazine*: "More than any other incarnation, Jon Pertwee's Doctor is a great strutting rooster. He's the alpha male, the cock of the walk. Yes, he may sometimes look and sound like Quentin Crisp playing James Bond, but don't be fooled by the lisp, the frilly blouses, or the old lady hairdo. Doctor Three is our Time Lord's most testosterone-fuelled incarnation. He likes his wine vintage and his cheese pungent. He loves fast cars, wears his TARDIS key like a medallion, and no doubt reeks of aftershave (Hai Karate, of course). He's so powerfully potent, other men are emasculated merely by standing next to him. The boys from UNIT are as swooning and submissive as any girly assistant. Only the Master - the fox circling this hen house - ever poses any threat to the Doctor's harem, but even all his powers of hypnosis cannot rival a single Pertwee 'moment of charm'."

The third Doctor is the one incarnation who doesn't look out of place in a Manga cartoon. (Really. Go check it out on YouTube. It's great.) And, while the third Doctor was - unusually - willing enough to engage in fisticuffs (compared to his predecessor who invariably ran away or left that kind of thing to his younger male companion, Jamie McCrimmon), at least he was spared the somewhat fetishized punch-ups Captain Kirk repeatedly endured on those alien desert sands - with the delicately ripped shirt displaying his smooth chest, and that cute little trickle of blood from the corner of the mouth. In *Star Trek*, the only way men could touch each other was with a clenched fist; that didn't seem to be even an issue in *Doctor Who*.

Anyway, what I guess I'm saying is that it was the remarkably heterosexual third Doctor that I fell in love with as a young kid, not the smooth, caramel Captain Kirk. Pertwee's Doctor was the grown up I could depend upon to do the right thing, to stand up for the underdog, but who was human enough to recognize his own prejudices (viz the Ice Warriors in *The Curse of Peladon*). Some might argue Captain Kirk did that kind of thing too, but it was never with quite the same degree of style or brilliance, and he was invariably backed up by the firepower of the starship *Enterprise*. (I'll admit, though, than no one can out-logic a computer, or question an alien with delusions of godhood, quite like Captain Kirk.)

Brilliant though James Kirk was, though, I soon enough discovered the one thing the Doctor could do that the captain of the *Enterprise* - stuck, as he was, in unending reruns of those three original seasons - never could.

The Doctor changed.

Of course, I'd long known that there had been other versions of the Doctor - that's one of the advantages of having older brothers who had watched them, after all. Also, I had been given the briefest of glimpses of those earlier time travelers in the tenth anniversary story, *The Three Doctors*, and had avidly read the granddaddy of "behind the scenes" information, Malcolm Hulke and Terrance Dicks's *The Making of Doctor Who*. I also experienced, for the first time, the somewhat different approach taken by Peter Cushing when the two Dalek films from the 1960s finally made it to television. So, I knew that the Doctor - unlike Captain Kirk or Spock or Doctor McCoy - was far more "fluid" as a person. And that I found interesting.

It was nevertheless an emotional time when, in June 1974, I effectively saw my "fatherly" Doctor die, only to "regenerate" (a new word to learn) into someone called Tom Baker. Six months later, *Robot* launched the fourth Doctor into an unforgiving world. How did I react? Let's just say that, within 25 minutes, I was nagging my mother to knit me a long scarf, and that velvet cloak was relegated to the back of the wardrobe. If nothing else, I think that proved I was a fan of *Doctor Who*, not just the actor in the lead role.

However, if the Doctor has a rebellious streak and a tendency to face the world on his own terms (two other of the Time Lord's characteristics that are often said to resonate with gay men), how better could that be expressed than in the fact that, every few years, the Doctor completely redefined himself... and was doing this kind of complete, up-to-the-

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minute makeover years before Ms Ciccone ever thought of wearing a pointy bra?

Tom Baker's Doctor was more eccentric, more anti-establishment, more outlandish in his clothes, and (deliberately, on the actor's part) more consciously "inexperienced" when it came to even holding women - which just seemed right to me as I slowly meandered my way towards puberty. He traveled through a BBC-budgeted universe with the wonderful Elisabeth Sladen as Sarah Jane Smith by his side; two best friends, having adventures with not the slightest hint or suggestion of what tabloids would later term "hanky panky in the TARDIS." That was the *Doctor Who* I was watching when my balls dropped and I began to notice that my cock reacted more to men, rather than (as was clearly expected of me) women.

In many respects, I'm absolutely convinced that the Doctor and companions who remain most important to you as a viewer are not the first you watch, but the ones you watch when you hit puberty (unless they're the one and the same). That the fourth Doctor and Sarah Jane Smith seemed to have such a relaxed and genuinely deep friendship certainly rung a few bells, not least because it was precisely the kind of "unforced" relationship that I would continue to enjoy with many of the girls at school. It just seemed natural, at a time when my fellow schoolboys were beginning to view the female of the species with an increasingly heightened sense of frustration. A few years later, the fact that I was still able to have female friends was ironically taken as proof of me being gay. Which, in my particular case, I guess it was!

Of course, by my teens, Captain Kirk and the crew of the starship *Enterprise* had themselves returned, albeit on the big screen. I can't ignore the fact that it was great to have them back; nor do I deny that some of their cinematic adventures - particularly *The Wrath of Khan* and *The Undiscovered Country* - are firm favorites, rooted in personal nostalgia. Yet Captain Kirk was definitely no longer my hero in the way the Doctor continued to be, even when (by 1982) I was following the adventures of a Time Lord who was physically only 12 years older than me: Peter Davison.

Subsequently, *Star Trek* did itself change and evolve to a degree, albeit through the means of sequel series such as *The Next Generation* and *Deep Space Nine*. Again, I enjoyed these continuations, not least because they and the likes of *Babylon 5* filled a very small part of the gap left in my life by the demise of *Doctor Who* (at least on television) during the 1990s. Yet they never quite scratched that *Doctor Who* itch; in par-

ticular, *The Next Generation* all too often talked the talk of liberalism, but, frustratingly, seldom walked the walk - especially when it came to issues around sexual orientation or gender identity.

In 2005, *Doctor Who* triumphantly returned to Britain's television screens (and, not that long after, other television screens around the world). In the form of ninth Doctor Christopher Eccleston, he was different again - all survivor guilt and scuffed leather jacket, but he was still my hero, still a traveler for whom people's differences were to be celebrated rather than reviled. If there was a difference, it was that twenty-first century *Doctor Who* - under Russell T. Davies and now Steven Moffat - was much more open to the wonderful diversity of the universe in which we live.

Since its return, possibly the most marmite episode of *Doctor Who* - in the sense that you either really loved it or hated it - was the Russell T. Davies-written *Love & Monsters*. Yes, it's arguably the most obvious of the "Doctor-lite" episodes, but I'd argue that it encapsulates the magic of *Doctor Who* in one short quote:

"When you're a kid, they tell you it's all, 'Grow up. Get a job. Get married. Get a house. Have a kid, and that's it.' But the truth is: the world is so much stranger than that. It's so much darker. And so much madder. And so much better."

I couldn't imagine Captain Kirk saying that. *Star Trek* fans will often point to their show's innate optimism, the basic belief that (a) we have a future and (b) all our problems can be solved through people of all creeds and races working together. Wonderful though this is, at least in principle, I believe *Doctor Who* instead suggests that the universe is a wondrous and scarier place, where even the most mundane and everyday street furniture - a police box, of all things - can contain vast marvels and whisk you away to strange, far-away worlds.

But that's only part of it: at the core of *Doctor Who* is the idea that everything will be sorted out in the end. *Doctor Who* has sometimes been described as a "safe scare" for its younger audience, who delight in "hiding behind the sofa" while watching the show. But I think that ethos works for all its viewers - at the heart of *Doctor Who* is an acceptance of the strangeness of the universe, but that everything will work out in the end. I think that appeals to "the gays" more than the obvious "camp" costumes and monsters. Or, at least, that's why it continues to appeal to me.

## **Sub Texts: The Doctor and the Master's Firsts and Lasts**

**Amal El-Mohtar** discovered the Doctor in between bouts of lizard-catching as a seven-year-old in Zabbougha, Lebanon. She is a two-time winner of the Rhysling Award for Best Short Poem, has been nominated for the Nebula Award, and is the author of *The Honey Month*, a collection of spontaneous poetry and prose written to the taste of 28 different kinds of honey. Her fiction and poems have appeared in multiple venues online and in print, including *Strange Horizons*, *Chicks Unravel Time* (Mad Norwegian Press), *Steampunk: Revolutions* (Tachyon Publications), *Apex Magazine*, *Shimmer*, *Stone Telling*, *Welcome to Bordertown* (Random House), *Mythic Delirium*, *The Moment of Change* (Aqueduct Press), and *The Thackery T. Lambshead Cabinet of Curiosities* (Harper Voyager). She is in the last stages of a PhD in English literature and also edits *Goblin Fruit*, an online quarterly dedicated to fantastical poetry. You can find her online at [amalelmohtar.com](http://amalelmohtar.com).

When Derek Jacobi regenerated into John Simm at the end of *Utopia*, I was puzzled. My knowledge of *Doctor Who* up until that point consisted of the new *Doctor Who* and a handful of Pertwee-era novelizations that had not featured the Master. The episode's structure was clearly setting him up to be a Very Important Adversary, but then so were the Daleks, and the Cybermen, and any of the other Classic baddies that turned up over three seasons. But this was different; instead of identifying a threat for our benefit, the Doctor and the Master's on-screen relationship in the new *Doctor Who* begins with the Doctor subordinating himself to the Master, begging him to listen.

This was especially interesting to me given that New *Who* was, up until then, consistently casting the Doctor as *sans pareil* - a world-trotting wunderkind at large who, as the last of his species, would never really be equaled by another character's knowledge or intelligence. In an episode where the Doctor consistently rebuffs Jack Harkness's awkward advances and pleas for understanding, his subordination to the Master - especially the key moment in which he obeys the command to speak the Master's dynamic-establishing name - carries extra signifi-

cance. To see how their relationship developed over the course of *The Sound of Drums* was equally fascinating: to see the Doctor so entirely absorbed in and devoted to an episode's villain was unprecedented, and to see that same villain's obsession with the Doctor, returning the latter's attention and care like a distorted reflection in a fun house mirror, was tantalizing. I wanted to know their history, even as I was half-inventing it as I went along.

Here, I thought, were the proverbial opposites attracting - and not in purely platonic fashion. "I like it when you use my name," murmurs the Master in what can only be described as a paroxysm of delight when the Doctor calls him from Martha's mobile phone. "Are you asking me out on a *date*," he spits in amused contempt when the Doctor suggests they leave Earth and traipse the universe together as the last two Time Lords. Theirs is an intensely nuanced relationship with its own rules of engagement - one that, in my estimation, is both romantic and kinky.

Of course, hundreds of fanvids and fanfictions agree with this assertion; even the not-strictly-canon material that comes from the show's writers takes this as read. Steven Moffat's eight-minute-long *Children in Need* special *Time Crash* features the tenth Doctor and the fifth Doctor having the following blink-and-you'll-miss-it conversation about the Master:

**Tenth Doctor:** ... and the Master? Oh, he just showed up again, same as ever.

**Fifth Doctor:** Oh, no, really? Does he still have that rubbish beard?

**Tenth Doctor:** No, no beard this time. Well, a wife.

Further to which, Moffat's satirical *The Curse of Fatal Death* ends with the Master and the newly regenerated Doctor admiring each other's physical charms and walking off together arm in arm - which, while gender-essentialist and heteronormative in the wake of the Doctor regenerating into Joanna Lumley, is nevertheless an instance of their implicit attraction to each other recognized and made explicit.

I don't mean for this essay to be only an aggregation of shipping material. Fun as it would be, exhaustively combing through all the Doctor and Master's interactions over the years in order to underscore their validity as a One True Pairing is beyond the scope of this essay. (And, frankly, unnecessary, because their OTP-ness is obvious as the sun is hot. And hot as the sun is obvious.) What I want to argue instead is

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that the potent subtext from which fans and showrunners draw their inspiration is important to queer narratives, sometimes trumping the value of explicit representations in its capacity for empowerment. For instance, I was personally far more affected by and invested in what was suggested between the Doctor and the Master than I was by the outright statement of a gay Anglican-Military couple in *A Good Man Goes to War*, two seasons and one regeneration later - for reasons that, while perhaps obvious, I will discuss below.

Also, since my first experience of the Doctor and the Master's relationship was in fact their last, I will focus this essay, River Song style, on their first season together, book-ending their interactions and wrapping their Sea Devils, time monsters, demons, and assassins into a wibbly-wobbly circle.

###

Much of my experience of fan culture over the last five years has been one of conflict. There's a lot to be fought and a lot to be fought for when you're a queer woman of color with a hunger for stories: consuming film and television and books is often like being handed beautiful, elaborately sculpted meals with bits of cockroach poking antennae and carapace out of the sauces and soufflés. You try to eat around the bugs, try to surgically remove them, but you can't quite get away from the fact that they've flavored the dish and will probably make you sick. But you have to eat, or go hungry.

As a newly fledged teen coming into an awareness of my bisexuality, I craved media representations of same-sex desire. It wasn't out of a longing to see myself represented - I had not yet understood that this was something I would need to fight for - but quite the opposite: it was a need to not feel oppressed by the representations available to me where women were concerned, a need to see sex broken out of the paradigm of heteronormative desire.

It wasn't only about sex, either; it was difficult for me to conceive of a woman existing on her own terms without her narrative's trajectory leading inexorably towards a relationship with a man. Without having words to articulate it, I knew that no matter how strong or intelligent a woman was, her strength and intelligence could only exist in a definitional relationship with the strength and intelligence of men. If she was strong or intelligent, it was to shock a man, or impress him, or intimidate him, or be worthy of him. A woman's character ceased to be her own

thing as soon as a man came into the picture, which of course he could only do romantically. I hated this.

How freeing, then, when a woman desired another woman, in a song, or on television, or in a film, or in a play! How different was the dynamic - and how unproscribed! How gloriously full of potential! And when men desired men, how thrilling, how sexy, how arousing, to witness the performance of desire that had nothing to do with me, that wasn't trapping me into a narrative I detested and didn't know how to resist.

I found my resistance in subtext.

If consuming media was like picking bugs out of impressively prepared food, subtext was a waiter slipping me some ingredients on the sly with a knowing wink and suggesting I make something myself.

In many ways, it was even more freeing to me than explicit representations of queer desire, because it allowed, even depended on, my participation and imagination. By drawing me into a world of potentials which I could have a part in determining, it gave me power. It was like fanfic that met me halfway.

The new *Doctor Who* has often disappointed me with its frequent denials of subtext. This is not to say that Russell T. Davies and Steven Moffat don't give us queer characters - they do and have. The beautiful, heart-stopping kiss between the ninth Doctor and Jack Harkness made me gasp and cheer, and I still treasure it - to see two men kiss full on the mouth pre-watershed was something I had only ever dreamt of seeing. To be shown that the Doctor dances with women and men (and is confused when the latter are "a bit shy") is wonderful.

Since Moffat became showrunner, however, the reboot has mostly favored token explicitness over the vastness of subtextual potential, especially where men are concerned. Post-Jack-Harkness, there is a remarkable reluctance to show men flirting or being intimate with other men, even while they are in an established, explicitly marked romantic relationship - a reluctance that does not extend to women performing sexual desire for other women. Much as I delight in seeing the latter, it makes me uncomfortable to see women repeatedly sexualized when men are not; my Male Gaze sense starts tingling, and I find myself facing the same kinds of proscription I felt as a teen.

To take Series Six as a case in point, Canton Delaware III has a black male lover whom we never see, and the existence of whom is delivered as a punchline; we get a gay male couple in *A Good Man Goes to War* who have no names besides "the fat one" and "the thin one," also pre-

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sented as a wry joke which ironically lapses into tokenism while attempting to satirize it. On the other hand, the same episode brings us Madame Vastra and Jenny, where nothing is stated outright<sup>35</sup>, but quite a lot suggested:

**Jenny:** Clever, isn't he?

**Vastra:** And rather attractive.

**Jenny:** You do realize he's a man, don't you, ma'am?

**Vastra:** Mammals. They all look alike.

**Jenny:** Oh, thank you!

**Vastra:** Was I being insensitive again, dear? I don't know why you put up with me.

That last sentence is punctuated by Madame Vastra using the length of her tongue to kill a nearby soldier.

Add to that the scene where Amy flirts with herself in the *Comic Relief* mini-episodes *Space* and *Time*, and one sees a double standard emerging: the sexuality of women is something desirable and titillating, but the sexuality of men is minimized, contained, and laughed off. Female friendships are sexualized, while male romances are rendered platonic. The queerness of women exists between the lines, while the queerness of men is written out and, consequently, written off.

I am not arguing that subtext is categorically superior to text. I do, however, want to praise and celebrate potential in the wake of the actual falling short of the mark. What I saw taking place between the Doctor and the Master felt much more transgressive and subversive than watching Amy admire her own body - and, as it turns out, watching the classic *Doctor Who* origins of their on-screen relationship for my essay in *Chicks Unravel Time* bore this feeling out. Jon Pertwee and Roger Delgado's performances unfold over several serials into nothing so much as an honest-to-goodness kinky courtship.

Given how natural it feels to describe my relationship with subtext in terms of power exchange, it should come as no surprise that what intrigues me the most about the Doctor and the Master's relationship is the way in which they repeatedly command and yield power over and to each other. For sworn enemies who are out to destroy each other, they spend a bemusing amount of time tying each other up and gazing intently into each others' eyes.

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35. At least until the 2012 Christmas special, *The Snowmen*, which aired almost a year after the original writing of this essay, and which was met with delighted cheers and the sudden realization that this footnote would be necessary.

###

That the Master is the Doctor's equal and opposite is established in the former's very first story, *Terror of the Autons*, before he has even appeared. The bowler-sporting Time Lord who informs the Doctor of the Master's arrival on Earth expositis that they were rivals in the Time Lord Academy, where the Master's grades outshone the Doctor's. The Doctor huffs that the Master's weakness is vanity; the Master observes that the Doctor's weakness is curiosity. The Doctor proceeds to gratify the Master's vanity with his interest while the Master baits the Doctor's curiosity with his plots, to their mutual enjoyment and admiration of each other:

**Farrel** (the Master's lackey): And you're not angry?

**The Master:** Because the Doctor's escaped again? No. He's an interesting adversary. I admire him in many ways.

**Farrel:** But you still intend to destroy him?

**The Master:** Of course. And the more he struggles to postpone the moment, the greater the ultimate satisfaction.

And, at the end of the story:

**The Brigadier:** Think he'll turn up again, Doctor?

**The Doctor:** Yes, bound to.

**Jo:** You don't seem very worried about it.

**The Doctor:** I'm not. As a matter of fact, Jo, I'm rather looking forward to it.

I'm fanning myself over here.

The Master yearns for and relishes the Doctor's struggles while the Doctor amusingly observes that the Master is "bound" to show up again. As much as their relationship involves the Doctor being the one repeatedly and consistently held captive, the Doctor correctly identifies the Master as one who is in thrall to the relationship itself, one who cannot keep himself away. Like opposite magnetic poles, Master and Doctor are drawn to each other - but the Doctor always succeeds in reversing one polarity or the other just before they can touch. Either he convinces the Master to see that his plots will ultimately end in his would-be minions betraying him, momentarily aligning his interests with the Doctor's

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(*Terror of the Autons*, *The Mind of Evil*, *Colony in Space*) or he pretends to be on the Master's side in order to trick him into defeat (*The Claws of Axos*).

But, as with any romance, it is the journey rather than the destination that makes for good television. Though it is by no means the only scene in which the Master ties the Doctor up and threatens his life (always prompting the most fascinating facial expressions on the part of Jon Pertwee, lovingly focused on by the camera), one scene in *The Mind of Evil* sent me into raptures on Twitter because it seemed like my deliciously imagined subtext was actually becoming text.

The overall arc of *The Mind of Evil* is that a presumed Dr Keller (in reality the Master) has found a way to rehabilitate criminals by sucking all the "negative impulses" out of their brains and into a machine. The machine gains sentience and begins attacking anyone and everyone, feeding on their thoughts and fears. When the Master begins to lose control of the Keller Machine, he recruits the Doctor into helping him - but not before handcuffing him to a chair in the same room as the creature, sending out his minion in order to have some privacy, putting a device behind the Doctor's ear to make him more vulnerable to its power, and playing out the following scene:

**The Master:** As you see, I have effected the necessary repairs. But before I let you control this machine for me, which I fully intend that you shall, it will be very interesting to see exactly how long you can hold out against it.

(...)

**The Doctor:** You know, this is all very tiresome.

**The Master:** Is it? Oh, I really would like to stop and watch your nightmares.

**The Doctor:** Then why don't you?

After this banter, the Master turns on the machine, and leaves the Doctor to its hunger. The Doctor, suffering from debilitating fears to do with his past enemies and failure to save worlds, faints. When the Master returns, we get a few minutes during which the Master takes in the situation, dons a stethoscope to listen to the Doctor's hearts, dabs at the sweat on his forehead, and tenderly pats his face until he wakes up.

What has happened, in effect, is that we have watched the Master torture a sassy Doctor unconscious, then gently provide him with after-care and be solicitous about his wellbeing. We have watched the Doctor helpless in his tormentor's arms, and seen that tormentor be kind.

But perhaps the most remarkable thing about *The Mind of Evil*, and what really clinches my view of the Master as wanting to dominate the Doctor more than destroy him, is the moment when the Keller machine feeds on the Master's thoughts, revealing to the viewer what the Master most fears: to see the Doctor laughing at him.

The last Season Eight moment I want to address is one that enhances my enjoyment of the new *Doctor Who* Master's rejection of the Doctor's invitation to ditch Earth and travel all time and space together. In *Colony in Space*, the Master has stolen information about a Doomsday Weapon that has the power to make suns explode. Standing at the heart of it, the following exchange takes place:

**The Doctor:** So, you intend to hold the universe to ransom.

**The Master:** Doctor, why don't you come in with me? We're both Time Lords, we're both renegades. We could be masters of the galaxy! Think of it, Doctor, absolute power! Power for good. Why, you could reign benevolently, you could end wars, suffering, disease. We could save the universe.

**The Doctor:** No, absolute power is evil.

**The Master:** Consider carefully, Doctor. I'm offering you a half-share in the universe.

This is not a last-ditch effort to save his plan; this is the Master, ostensibly in control of this situation, inviting his equal and opposite to share absolute power with him. The eagerness and excitement with which he makes the proposition is not easily conveyed by the transcript, but it is definitely there; in fact, my first thought while watching was *That's so sweet, the Master is asking the Doctor out*. Given this scene, the bitterness with which John Simm's Master rejects the Doctor's "asking [him] out on a date" gains added significance: here is the Doctor, only sincerely offering that kind of partnership when the Master is literally the last Time Lord on Earth.

So many other aspects of *The Sound of Drums* and *Last of the Time Lords* have resonated with me in light of Season Eight: to see the Master place the Doctor in a cage and keep him there, in his line of sight, as he performs his evil deeds for his benefit; to see the Doctor reverse this by declaring that he will keep the Master in his TARDIS and have "someone to care for"; to see the Master dying in the Doctor's arms while the Doctor weeps over him, commanding him to regenerate to no avail. The push and pull of power between them is beautiful to watch - and to see the Doctor clutch the Master's head against his chest and rock back and

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forth in agonized tears is, to me, a much more powerful and moving instance of love between men than a half-hearted squabble between two husbands who don't have names before one of them heads off (badum tsh) to die.

Ultimately, I long to be shown as well as told about queer relationships on television. So often we only get one or the other - shown same-sex desire that dare not speak its name, or told about same-sex desire that dare not show its face. *Doctor Who* and its spin-offs are sadly not immune to this general phenomenon. Russell T. Davies in *Torchwood* has given us a lot of queer sex without meaningful queer relationships; Steven Moffat has given us queer characters in relationships who never so much as hold hands on screen. I'm looking forward to the day when my favorite television show lays out a feast for me that will leave me nourished and sated; until then, I'll be hanging out in this corner by the kitchen, sailing my salad ships across a potato sea of my own mashing. Oo-er.

## Nice TARDIS

**Jason Tucker** started watching *Doctor Who* when he was 12 or 13, which was right around the same time he realized he wasn't like the other boys. He's not sure if that's just a coincidence. While *Doctor Who* is his primary orientation, he occasionally finds himself curious about other fandoms. He helped to run Gaylaxicon, the annual GLBT science fiction and fantasy convention in 2009 and 2012, when it was held in Minneapolis. He has considered someday moving to England, where people like him are more accepted.

The young man smiled at me, as he admired my T-shirt at the local gay bar. During the ensuing conversation, I discovered that he was born after the original run of *Doctor Who* had left the air, becoming a fan during the David Tennant years. In every way, his appearance was that of a typical young gay man: A&F apparel, styled hair. What you don't see is that he loves *Doctor Who*. Like many gay men, he is nervous about being perceived as a nerd, and as such, hides his science-fiction tendencies behind fashionable outfits. Because I was wearing a T-shirt with a TARDIS on it, this out gay man, yet closeted nerd, had been able to identify me, and start a conversation that would have many other gay men rolling their eyes and heading back to Lady Gaga on the dance floor.

Most gay nerds had it bad in high school. They were already being picked on for being a geek, and if they came out, it just got worse. If they were lucky, they may have found a place in the gay community during that coming out period, and made friends who accepted them. They were finally one of the cool kids! But what would their new cool friends think if it was discovered that they loved *Doctor Who*? So back in the closet they went, but instead of hidden sexuality, it was a geek closet, filled with comic books, role playing games, action figures, and a multi-colored scarf. When they'd go out to the nightclub, it wouldn't be as a nerd. They'd be fashionable, and no one would know that they'd been watching *The Robots of Death* just hours earlier.

The problem with this scenario is that it's never enough. When

you're out at the bar, being one of the cool people, you find yourself yearning for the company of others who share your interests. But how do you find those people without outing yourself as a big nerd? You use code, of course! You drop hints, little phrases that only people who are fans would get, with the "Not-we" none the wiser. A Dalek T-shirt will be seen as being worn ironically by those who are unfamiliar with *Doctor Who*, while the true fan will be thrilled at finding another member of the Tribe. Ultimately, that's where the biggest hurdle lies - meeting other gay geeks, and, hopefully, forming a relationship with one of them. Meeting and falling in love with each other is kind of the Holy Grail for gay geeks. I've been lucky in that regard, having recently met someone who is mad about Harry Potter, and quite the Anglophile to boot. To find someone to watch *Doctor Who* with, to know that your annual vacations are going to be booked around attending Gallifrey - it's the stuff that dreams are made of and sitcoms are written about.

In the first episode of the 2012 Australian television series *Outland*, a sitcom about a GLBT SF fan club, Max is going on a blind date with uber-cool Dylan, and is wary of him finding out how much of a nerd, or "enthusiast," he really is. After seeing a science-fiction film, Dylan declares all SF to be "a bit rubbish," unaware that Max's flat is practically a shrine to *Doctor Who* and the fictional *Outland* series-within-a-series, *Space Station Beta*. Before allowing Dylan into the flat, Max has to de-geek the place, hiding toys and covering up DVDs and magazines. Dylan still finds a toy Dalek in a sugar bowl, and remarks about these "Conquerors of the Universe" being unable to go up stairs. Max cringes at the fallacious comment, but doesn't correct him, for fear of Dylan thinking him a freak. Later in the episode, Max's friend Fab discovers, while calming him down after a panic attack, that Max is ashamed of himself. Fab tries to tell him that it doesn't matter; life isn't like high school any more. Max responds, "It's always high school!" This illustrates quite well what goes through the mind of the average gay nerd, and why they tend to keep their geekiness locked away in the proverbial closet.

A closet is such an apt description for this state of being: it's a tiny little room where you keep things out of sight. The problem with closets, of course, is that they're never big enough. Whether real or proverbial, you always have too much baggage for them.

A geek closet is even worse, because it's crammed with comic-book long boxes, stacks of role playing games, racks of DVDs and paperbacks, multiple superhero costumes, and maybe a Tom Baker scarf and frock

coat or two. The geek closet bursts at the joins, and the items held within can't help but show up in the life of the closet's owner. What good nerd hasn't gone with friends to see *The Dark Knight* in a theater and thought to themselves, "That's not how Frank Miller wrote it!?" And if they actually say this out loud, the responses usually range from blank stares to jeers about only nerds knowing the source material, thus reinforcing their need to keep their interests hidden.

Here's my confession: I love *Doctor Who*. Okay, that's not really a confession (especially in this book), but it's been a big part of my life since I was 12 years old. I've never wanted to stop watching it, or keep my love of the show a secret. But I did, for a while. My family moved to a suburb of Minneapolis when I was in junior high, and as I went into my new high school, I found friends who were *Doctor Who* fans. We went to a couple of local *Doctor Who* events in the 80s and enjoyed watching the show together. I survived high school, and shortly thereafter, came out of the closet. I loved the friends I had in high school, but if there was one thing they weren't, it was cool. After coming out, I suddenly had cool friends! They lived in the city! They wore fashionable clothes! They went to nightclubs! I didn't hide my geekiness from them, but I certainly didn't broadcast it. *Doctor Who* was off the air, and my nerdy tendencies got shoved in the closet. The door may not have been locked, but it was firmly closed.

That could be how the story ends, with me having put away my childhood love of *Doctor Who*, and moving on to things that adult gay men liked: techno music, vodka, dancing shirtless at clubs, and definitely no science fiction! For a while, that was the case. I was going out dancing every Sunday to the 18+ night at First Avenue, and couldn't wait for the drab weekdays in between to pass by. That was my fabulous gay lifestyle at age 19, with no *Doctor Who* to embarrass me in front of my new cool friends. I didn't forget my childhood pleasures, though, and would page through the novels when I was at the bookstore. I never bought any, though, as they were from my "old life." In fact, looking at the science-fiction books was something I did somewhat furtively during that period. While I say period, it was really only for one winter, from October to April, where I hid these tendencies away from my new friends. It was during that winter, I met someone who would change my life.

One of my new friends brought me to my first major SF convention over Easter weekend in 1991. I was 19, gay, trying to not be a nerd, and had no idea what awaited me. Minicon 26 and its three thousand

## Nice TARDIS

attendees ejected me out of the geek closet at warp speed. Here was a place where I didn't need to hide my nerdiness! And there were thousands of people there! Some of the guys were even gay, and the ones that weren't gay were still likely to kiss other guys! I had found my Mecca, and it was called Minicon. The convention ended too early, and I started counting the days until the next one. The repercussions of this weekend, however, were that I knew I'd never be able to be happy without celebrating my inner geek. In fact, I was no longer interested in having an "inner geek," I wanted to have an "outer geek!"

Meanwhile, the majority of my new cool friends didn't know about how my ex-geek therapy had failed. Cool Jason was being supplanted by Nerdy Jason once more, and this was before "geek chic" had really started happening in straight culture. Nerds were not hip, whatever your orientation. Fortunately, there was a couple from the GLBT youth group I went to who were also Minicon attendees, and our friendship blossomed over shared enthusiasm for science fiction. I didn't know that they would be at the convention, and was surprised to bump into them there. It let me know that I wasn't alone, however, and gave me a connection between the gay world and the geek world. It also reinforced, somewhat, the idea that as gay men, we had to keep our nerdiness hidden. After all, I didn't learn about Minicon from them. In fact, it's likely that had I not run into them at Minicon, our friendship would not have become as deep as it has. Gays can be very judgmental - just wear the wrong thing to the gay bar and you'll find out how much. In my experience, there's really only been one subset of gay geeks who have never been shy about their interests: the gay *Doctor Who* fans.

There has been a lot of speculation about why so many gay men are drawn to *Doctor Who*, and I don't have a good answer to that question. It just seems to be the case that *Doctor Who* fandom has a higher than average amount of gay people in that number. It sometimes takes people aback when they start to realize exactly how many gay men will be at a *Doctor Who* convention. For my third Gallifrey One convention, in 2003, I arrived in Los Angeles a few days early, and stayed with some friends in the area. On Thursday night, I brought them all to the Van Nuys Airtel to introduce them to my fellow attendees. After meeting a few people, my non-fan friends took me aside and said, "I thought you said this was a science-fiction convention."

"It is," I replied.

"Then why is everyone gay?"

"Ah, that's because it's a *Doctor Who* convention."

They continued to be confused by this, but accepted it and went back to being the intrepid anthropologists, exploring the world of the gay geek, without actually being a part of it. They left at the end of the evening, bemused by their experiences, but not interested in delving deeper into the world of *Doctor Who* fandom. Meanwhile, my friends attending the convention were amused by the varying degrees of discomfort that my non-fan friends showed. It's one thing to keep your geekiness in the closet. It's something else altogether to wear it on your sleeve - or in the case of some, having it wound numerous times around your neck in multiple colors. A few times, the newcomers showed a sense of panic as they were brought into the conversation. A question like, "Who's your favorite Doctor?" may seem clichéd to most of us, but to them, it was the start of the Spanish Inquisition (insert obligatory *Monty Python* joke here). For once, they were outnumbered. The geeks, a lot of them attractive gay men, were the popular kids, and my non-fan friends were "uncool." It shook their worldview, and they clearly weren't thrilled with that.

*Doctor Who* conventions have been the place where gay geeks have really been able to be completely open about themselves, both as gays and as geeks. In the decade that I've been attending them, the number of gay *Doctor Who* fans showing up has grown by leaps and bounds, and we've found ourselves becoming our own little convention within a convention. A real camaraderie has grown up amongst the gay fans in our little fandom oasis. Of course, this just makes it that much harder to go back to the real world after the weekend is over. After truly being yourself for a weekend, geeking out with other gays without feeling embarrassed, awkward, or judged, heading back into the larger gay community can be something of a rude awakening. The joke that everyone you hung out with last weekend thought was hilarious falls flat this weekend, if anyone even gets it at all. Once more, you realize that you're in the company of people who just aren't going to understand where you're coming from most of the time, and you deal with it by compartmentalizing all of that geeky stuff, hiding it back in the closet for another couple of months until the next convention.

Online should be where it's easiest to be yourself. For the most part, it's anonymous, and in the words of *Outland's* Max, the Internet is just full of "headless torsos." Why should anyone care what a headless torso thinks? Of course the problem is that we do care, and even online we hide our interests. It's getting easier, though, and once you make that leap, you wonder why you waited. It was only in the last year that I

## Nice TARDIS

started putting “*Doctor Who* fan” prominently in my online profiles. Not too long after that, I received a message from someone who started out by saying that he loves *Doctor Who*, too! By having that common interest in *Doctor Who*, we were able to strike up a conversation. If I had left that out, not only would we not have met, but Chaz never would’ve become my boyfriend. If there was ever a case for coming out of the gay geek closet, that would be it. Gay geeks are out there, and they want to meet each other. But it takes someone making that first step out of the geek closet and announcing to the world that they love *Doctor Who*.

Truth be told, I live for the day when closets no longer exist, whatever kind of closet it is. But until people are no longer judgmental, they’re here to stay. Like it or not, these closets are a fact of life. And while I have reached a point where I no longer want to hide my gayness or my geekiness, I understand that others aren’t ready to come out of the TARDIS. Here’s where using the aforementioned code works best. You out yourself without outing yourself, and are able to meet those other closeted fans, building your own gay geek network. After all, that’s what keeps us in our geek closets - that lack of gay geek community. We find it at the *Doctor Who* conventions, but those are just one or two weekends a year. By finding this network, we can keep that convention feeling going for the entire year, and maybe even find others to bring to the convention next time. Wear a Dalek T-shirt out to the bar; drop an “Allons-y!” into a conversation, and whip out your sonic screwdriver at the next opportunity. Who knows, the person you’re flirting with might just ask you who your favorite Doctor is.

## The Incredibly True Adventures of an Intellectual Fan Dyke

**Sarah J. Groenewegen** was born in Sydney, Australia, but now lives in London. She's a writer who has had features and reviews published in various periodicals like the *Sydney Star Observer*, *Lesbians on the Loose*, and *SFX* magazine. She has delivered papers on queer theory at academic conferences and had essays published in anthologies including the *Time, Unincorporated* series. Her short fiction has won awards (Scarlet Stiletto, 2002) and been published in Big Finish's *Doctor Who* line, including the award-winning *Short Trips: Zodiac*. She writes a blog at [nyssa1968.blogspot.com](http://nyssa1968.blogspot.com). She is currently working on a science-fiction novel trilogy when she's not out walking in the British countryside and sampling the fine ales of that land.

They say there are three stages to a woman's life: girl, mother, crone. It's not entirely true, but the idea of stages in one's life still appeals. My relationship with *Doctor Who* has gone through various phases, like my awareness of my sexuality. Those stages often intersected, even though I didn't know it at the time.

When I was a toddler during the late 1960s, I regularly watched *Doctor Who*. I also watched *Star Trek*, *My Favorite Martian*, and *Lost in Space*. My parents hated science fiction, and the only reason I was introduced to these wonderful, sometimes funny, mostly scary worlds was because a cousin ten years my senior lived with us for a while for "behavioral issues." Television was about the only thing that used to calm her down. Science fiction was one of her loves. Any type of science fiction.

For me, it was always *Doctor Who*. I have no clear memory of what happened immediately after she left us, except that the other TV shows ceased to be regular features of my life. *Doctor Who* remained.

I grew up with Patrick Troughton, Jon Pertwee, and Tom Baker. One of the two Troughton Dalek stories must have been on when I could barely speak. My mother has a story of when I cried and cried and cried when a Dalek blew up. I wasn't scared. I was sad it had died. I'm sure a psychoanalyst would have a field day with that one.

## *The Incredibly True Adventures of an Intellectual Fan Dyke*

I grew up in Sydney, Australia, during the 1970s when the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) screened *Doctor Who*, showing Pertwee and Tom Baker stories in a fairly constant repeat cycle. Not all of them, though. In a twisted bit of logic, they had to cut whole stories, or slabs from them, to broadcast them in the children's time slot; the only reason they were shown then was because they defined *Doctor Who* as for children. In a further twist, some surviving snippets of those early episodes exist only because of the censor's scissors. In yet another odd little twist, I later discovered that many of the fans who would become my friends in Britain grew to love certain Pertwee and Tom Baker stories thanks to Aussie video recordings from those halcyon days of what then seemed to be endless repeats.

When I was nine, I had the most fantastic primary school teacher a kid like me could have. His name was Mr O'Toole, and he was a *Doctor Who* fan who used the show to teach us history and science. He got me to direct a little film about the Doctor meeting Napoleon Bonaparte and for another class we built "sonic screwdrivers" out of magnets. I remember being the only girl in the class who liked the show - almost all the other girls were too scared of it. My mates were mostly boys, when boys had boy germs (cooties). My school divided the playgrounds on gender lines, and when I was nine and ten, my friends and I existed in the boundaries of both. My best friend was a boy with whom I watched *Space: 1999* and *Doctor Who*. We lost contact when he moved to the country when we were nine, but years later I heard a whisper he ended up gay. *Quelle surprise*.

When I was 11, things started to change. The other girls started to get interested in the boys, and the things the boys were interested in. But they weren't interested in those things the same way I was. They didn't care about Davros returning in *Destiny of the Daleks*, or about how Romana's regeneration was "wrong." They weren't even particularly good at knowing there were different actors who had played the Doctor, and it's not like there were even all that many then. Four. Five, if you included Peter Cushing.

###

I didn't become a full-blown *Doctor Who* fan until the 1980s when I entered high school. By fan, I mean someone who went to fan events, had an insane compulsion to own everything connected to the show, and an insane compulsion to know every single weird fact that was pos-

sible to know about it.

Fanzines helped feed those compulsions. In Australia at the time, *Doctor Who* fanzines were mostly lists of facts and long rambling essays by university students about what was important, and why. As a young teenager, I wrote *Doctor Who* fan fiction, badly, but there wasn't really anywhere to send them. Thankfully, in retrospect.

I also produced a *Doctor Who* and *Blake's 7* fanzine called *The Union of Traken*. My co-editors were my younger brother and my best friend at school. At the time, we were all a mess of raging teenage hormones, but when you're in the eye of that storm, you don't really know what's going on. I remember those years as intense, confusing in parts, but mostly I could escape to comfortable fantasy worlds.

I was an expert *Doctor Who* fan by 1983 when Peter Davison was the Doctor, and he visited Sydney.

I attended an all-girls state high school and most of the ingredients were there for the stereotypical coming out story. My best friend and I were inseparable; other kids called us lesbians, but I had no idea what that meant. When I once naïvely asked my mother, I got such a strong mismatch of spoken word and body language communication, I'll never forget it. She said, "Lesbians are people from the Greek island of Lesbos." Her body screamed extreme revulsion and panic. We didn't speak of it again, and I never thought to look it up in a dictionary. My mother's reaction then freaked me out.

The thought of sex with another woman, let alone my best friend, never crossed my mind. If it ever crossed my best friend's mind, she never did or said anything about it with me. I found out years later that she ended up gay. *Quelle surprise*. Again.

Pretty much all the popular culture and sex education I was exposed to was about men's pleasure. Women existed pretty much to just have and raise babies. Not that I was reading or watching much fiction that had sex of any kind in it. It's tempting to think I was just being prudish, and to a degree that's right. Even though church wasn't a major feature of my childhood, Christianity was. My grandfather was a church minister. My family lived in a quietly Protestant Bible belt of Sydney.

I devoured any science-fiction book I could get my hands on, which meant mostly Isaac Asimov, Michael Moorcock, and Robert A. Heinlein. Yes, there was sex, but it was mostly heterosexual and mostly about men. Much of it objectified women. Even the Ursula K. LeGuin, Vonda McIntyre, Jean Auel, and Anne McCaffrey novels I read didn't reverberate with any other possibilities except make me realize just how objecti-

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fied any woman was - if they appeared at all - in any of the novels I read written by men. At some level, though, I just wasn't interested in sex.

Sex never leaked through into the fanzines I produced or the fanfic I wrote at that time. I've checked.

###

During my middle high school years, the pressure to have boyfriends intensified. My first official boyfriend I met through the pen pal section of the main Sydney *Doctor Who* fan newsletter, *Data Extract*. We were both Christians, and while I don't remember ever talking about it, sex wasn't on the agenda. Other than that, we had a typical junior high school relationship with a bit of hand-holding and chaste kissing, but with a dose of working out how to take photographs of *Doctor Who* from the television and how best to get an audio recording of the stories without parents interfering. Our conversation was also about the politics of *Doctor Who* fandom in Sydney at the time. I was friends with a bunch of people in Sydney's west, while he was with the group in the centre of Sydney. Sydney is one great sprawling expanse of quarter acre blocks, and while geographically my brother and I lived closer to those in central Sydney, transport lines meant it was easier for us to go west. The people out west were interested in more things than just *Doctor Who*, and included some women and girls. The ones in the central Sydney were almost all boys or men and exclusively interested in *Doctor Who*.

I can't remember how long our relationship lasted, but it was probably only a few months. I heard he's married with a family.

My second boyfriend was more serious. As in, we used to kiss properly and go on dates. He was a country lad, but he used to visit Sydney often. He was older than me and his best mates were worried about him being such an intense fan of effeminate pop stars like Boy George. They were relieved he had a girlfriend. We met at a *Doctor Who* event in Western Sydney, and he flamboyantly used to stride about with a Tom Baker scarf wrapped around his neck.

Don't worry. I won't bore you with every bloke who was interested in me, a young female in a very male-dominated fandom. Even when I drifted from *Doctor Who* during its hiatus (which seemed longer in Australia, but that might have been more to do with me moving from high school to university and moving cities from Sydney to Canberra), most of the guys I dated were fans of some sort or another. I lost my virginity on a drunken one-night-stand to a college rogue, which was

fun until he wanted me to touch his dick and I sobered up quickly and spent weeks that felt like years afterwards racking myself over what the hell was wrong with me. Not all my female friends at college were sexually active at the time, but those who were kinda indicated my reaction was odd.

University saw the death of *The Union of Traken* club and fanzine, but I started to go along to some general science-fiction conventions. Looking back, that was when I became a fan of fandom.

###

Sylvester McCoy and *Paradise Towers* got me back to *Doctor Who*. Yes, you read that right. But it was the New Adventures novels that dragged me back to *Doctor Who* fandom. Most of the people running Sydney *Doctor Who* fandom were young adults when I came back to the city of my birth to look for work. They were mostly blokes, but there were a few women. Kate Orman (later a *Doctor Who* novelist) was one of the women, and we became good friends.

In 1993, we ran a convention for the 30th anniversary with Mary Tamm as guest of honor. Unsurprisingly, a fair few of us came down with a pretty nasty con crud, which we dubbed Voltrana (after a kid had left a message on the hotel voicemail trying to say Romanadvoratrelundar). What was odd about this strain of con crud was that all of us who had it ended up gay. Those who escaped it didn't.

I was 25 and in the middle of an explosive burst of fannish creativity. I edited my own fanzine based on cyber-punk and the *Alien* films, wrote *Doctor Who* novels to pitch to Virgin Books, and wrote long rambling essays about what was important and why about the McCoy years, including the New Adventures. Intellectually feminist, but mostly unaware of my own sexuality and orientation, these essays obsessed about Ace and other girls and women in *Doctor Who*.

At a party later in 1993, we played a variation of the game Truth or Dare where the theme was who we fantasized about when wanking. The game collapsed quickly, before my turn to share, but it was with a puzzled little jolt I realized my list were all women. I must be bi, I thought. It took me a week to know that wasn't the case when I couldn't think of a single man who I was remotely interested in, romantically or sexually.

At roughly the same time, Kate Orman and I embarked on our fanzine masterpiece, *Bog Off!*, where we took the piss out of the other

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fanzines we wrote for and I celebrated the fact I had truly worked myself out. Reeling from the effects of lesbian invisibility in my childhood and teenage years, I used the deliberately crudely bunged together pages as a soapbox. I was out, proud, and couldn't hide any more. Didn't want to, didn't see the need to. I smiled when I read the rebuking tone of a letter writer taking Kate to task for pointing out her sexual orientation; we reveled in the punk freedoms we allowed ourselves. We wrote the truth, even when it puzzled others when it didn't seem to fit the rules. Kate wasn't remotely defensive about her orientation; she was stating a truth.

Reading back what we did 20 or so years ago, my eyes have moistened from the chat with other fans struggling with their own sexual orientation and sexuality we published (with their permission). Beautiful words by people struggling with racism, sexism, and dealing with their own prejudices about gays and bisexuals. Surprisingly little hatred from them, up front, at least.

The 1990s was actually a fairly good decade to come out as a gay woman. Sydney's Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras enjoyed mainstream popular support (but never government financial support), k.d. lang and Melissa Etheridge visited Sydney a few times, and it seemed you couldn't start to watch a high-rating TV series without one of the main characters being openly and happily gay, and most of them were women. Ellen Degeneres came out on the cover of *Time* magazine.

We marched one night together, my *Doctor Who* fan friends and I, to commemorate an anniversary of the Stonewall riots usually taken as the start of Gay Liberation in the western world. Two of us went to our first gay and lesbian party that night on a mission to score. I did, with a gorgeous young woman looking for a bit of fun, which was what I was after, too. We got a hotel room and fucked each other senseless. I never saw her again. She wasn't into *Doctor Who* and she didn't live in Sydney.

My first proper girlfriend was a *Doctor Who* fan. She'd been at our thirtieth anniversary convention and had come down with Voltrana, but we didn't meet back then. She started to come along to meetings, and then parties as we all got to know her better. She was younger than all of us. We were in a car ferrying Gary Russell to, or from, a *Doctor Who* fan event in Sydney when we had a quiet chat about stuff and it wasn't that long afterwards we got together. We had to deal with her mother freaking out; my parents were okay about it. We moved in together, and a short time later bought a house with a joint mortgage. We got referenced as a couple by name in Kate Orman's *Return of the Living Dad*, one

of the New Adventures. We also took on a column in the Australian *Doctor Who* fan newsletter *Data Extract*.

We did a *Doctor Who* fanzine together, which with a certain inevitability we called *Happiness Patrol*. It was 100% queer, and we went for a stylish look to sell seriously good writing from a wide range of fans. Fans who had never written for a fanzine before wrote the most amazing things for us: an academic shared his story about a *Doctor Who* fan friend who'd committed suicide, many others shared their coming out stories. So varied. Not all awful. For some, it was harder to be out as a fan of *Doctor Who* than it was to come out gay.

It was my girlfriend's idea to ask various *Doctor Who* actors to sign a dedication to its readers. Lis Sladen was first. Sylvester McCoy and Sophie Aldred were among those others who were happy to, in full knowledge of what we were doing. I had an amazing conversation with Nicola Bryant about discrimination against lesbians when she was in Sydney for a convention.

I've now met a lot of actors from *Doctor Who*, mostly from the 1963-1989 run. They've been more than just tolerating or accepting; I think that's a big reason for why my experience as a gay woman generally has been so positive. Lis Sladen's daughter, Sadie, attended a convention in 1996 in Sydney when she was fairly young, and not once did I get the remotest vibe from Lis or her husband, Brian Miller, that they were worried by all the gay couples.

Many of those gay couples were men, but there were a few women other than me and my girl. Some of the older fans I had known from when I was first going to fan gatherings in the early 1980s finally came out, too, feeling safer because us younger fans hadn't had too much trouble.

In the mid-1990s, I wrote my Master's dissertation on *Doctor Who* and its fans from a queer theory perspective. The theme was about outsiders and difference: the Doctor and his companions were all outsiders, the show a genuine original, the fan-as-(often)-bullied-outsider experience both within the greater science-fiction fandom and among those who aren't fans. Queers are outsiders, different. Perhaps that's one of the reasons why so many *Doctor Who* fans are gay. Not in a causal sense, but in that sense of recognizing and celebrating difference. Of being a safe space for those who'd otherwise be outsiders.

I wrote long rambling essays about being in love, about watching and reading *Doctor Who* from a queered perspective, and wondering about how it was some of the straight fans thought life was too gay through

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hanging around with us mob. Not just for *Happiness Patrol*; my rants were sought after by fanzines in Brisbane, Melbourne as well as my native Sydney.

We went online. In 2000, I met a Spanish lesbian in Barcelona who was curious about this *Doctor Who*; she'd read about it from the *Happiness Patrol* website. She was far from out, still living at home with ultra-conservative Catholic parents, and fascinated by people who didn't seem to be afraid.

The title of this essay comes from a jibe by some Aussie *Doctor Who* fans who had made an alternative convention name badge for me, calling me an intellectual fan dyke. It was meant to have been a secret, but when I learned of it, I instantly saw the humor. Their reaction to my reaction was odd, which led me to think there was venom in their jibe. I think some of it stemmed from the type of homophobia some gay people retain, with a dash of misogyny. *C'est la vie*. Worse were odd letters to fanzines with highly personalized attacks against my sexuality and gender when they disagreed with a view I had aired about something to do with *Doctor Who*. Something they never did against others who may have aired the same or similar views as mine. Yeah, that's not something that came just with the Internet.

###

It's the twenty-first century and *Doctor Who* has been back on the telly again now for a stupendously popular few years. I watch *Doctor Who* differently now. I'm still a fan, but while I go to the odd convention and write reviews of *Doctor Who* stories on my blog, I no longer feel the need to know every little fact and opine endlessly about what's important and why.

Ironic, since *Doctor Who*'s become so much more obvious about the gay thing.

At my first Gallifrey One convention - its twenty-first - I was privileged to lead the panel on gays and *Doctor Who*. It was in a decent-sized room, on late and up against the cosplayers' parade. I thought only a few would be interested, but instead it was standing room only. Not only that, while the majority were male, there was a large contingent of out lesbians wearing Captain Jack costumes. The conversation flowed and raised some fascinating things. As a Dutch-Australian at an American convention about a British TV series, I was struck by how much those different perspectives seemed to matter more than our sexual orienta-

tion. That, and age. I was in my early 40s, they in their early 20s. Battles raged in the United States about marriage equality and repealing the awful “don’t ask, don’t tell” rules for the US armed forces. But, significant other battles had been won during my lifetime. What we had in common was a love for a TV series (plus books, comics and spin-off shows) that gives us space to be whoever we are.

###

Who knows how much influence a TV show really has on politics and beliefs. All I know is that I’ve loved *Doctor Who* from when I was very young, and all through my life. I still love it, immensely. There are those stories I love to watch and re-watch and re-watch because they’re comfortable. Others I might like one time, and another time wonder what on Earth I saw in it. And there are a few I don’t think I’ll voluntarily re-watch except as part of a Time Team<sup>36</sup>-type watch.

Key in my love of *Doctor Who* is my love of the *Doctor Who* fans I have met. I love my friends who I have made through our mutual love of *Doctor Who*, even though we hold very different opinions on the stories we like and don’t enjoy quite so much. Not just the fans, but many of the actors and writers I’ve been lucky to meet. So many of them - fans and production team - are queer, and of those who aren’t queer the vast majority are people who support equality. Actively support equality by challenging those few fans who are bigots. They don’t speak for us, but with us, and more than once I’ve wondered how much of it comes from how the Doctor and his friends challenge inequality and oppression.

It’s for all those reasons that I feel incredibly lucky to have been born a queer who digs Time Lords.

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36. Meaning, as demonstrated by reviewers working for *Doctor Who Magazine*, determined to watch every story irregardless of quality/ personal taste.

## Bi, Bye

Born in Halifax, NS, raised (mostly) in Kingston ON, **Tanya Huff** lives in rural Ontario, with her wife Fiona Patton, nine cats, and two dogs. Her 27 novels and 72 short stories include horror, heroic fantasy, urban fantasy, comedy, and space opera. Her Blood series was turned into the 22-episode *Blood Ties*, and writing episode nine allowed her to finally use her degree in Radio & Television Arts. She put her time in the Canadian Naval Reserve to use in the *Valor* books, and based Austin and Sam in the *Keeper* books on two of her cats. She does not, however, have a hole to Hell in her basement. Her latest novel is *The Silvered* (DAW, November 2012), a heroic fantasy with werewolves and a Napoleonic tech level, and her next will be a third *Gale Girls* book, following up on *The Enchantment Emporium* and *The Wild Ways*.

The first time the ninth Doctor took Rose's hand, a mighty cry of protest rang out. "Oh Noes!" they wailed. "The nasty expectations of the modern world have sexualized the Doctor!"

They who?

I suspect *They* were those who can trace their *Doctor Who* awakening to the seven years the fourth Doctor spent wrapped in that multi-colored scarf. In spite of travelling with women who were smart and sexy (Sarah Jane Smith), wild and sexy (Leela), not one but two versions of a female Time Lord (Romana), as well as the urbane Harry Sullivan, and part of the crowd who ended up travelling with the fifth Doctor, the fourth Doctor managed to be about as asexual as they come. Seven years is definitely long enough to imprint an absence of any definable sexuality into susceptible minds.

But before the fourth Doctor, there was the third - living large as an aristocratic metro-sexual before the concept of metro-sexual even existed. He wore velvet and lace, and he spent as much time flirting with Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart as he did saving the Earth from wonderfully bad special effects.

And after fourth Doctor, there was fifth.

The fifth Doctor was *my* Doctor. (I was thrilled to discover he was also David Tennant's Doctor. But I digress.) Those who remember

Adric's shapeless pyjamas and Tegan's and Nyssa's impressive shoulder pads might also be wondering how on earth (or various other planets with quarries and access to the BBC's boiler rooms) could the fifth Doctor be any less asexual than fourth?

To begin with, the fifth Doctor was the youngest of the initial Doctors by some considerable margin. This is not to say that the young are inherently more sexual than the... middle-aged, but they're inarguably perceived that way. Second, the fifth Doctor actually cared about his companions, about who they were and about what they went through because they were with him. He cared to the point where he (warning: generalized spoiler) died for the last of them. Now, admittedly, sometimes the caring got a little much - while the tenth Doctor was known to some as "Emo Doctor," the fifth Doctor emo-ed first - but emotional connection is sexy. Especially when you consider the target demographic of *Doctor Who* for whom sex is mostly about making an emotional connection.

And then, there was Turlough.

Vislor Turlough, with his secrets and his repression and his intensity and his fetish-like school uniform. Turlough wasn't a companion; he was a relationship.

So when the ninth Doctor took Rose's hand, I was primed by the fifth Doctor - the less said about the sixth through the eighth the better - and I was happy for him. Rose, I assumed, was definitely going to be a lot easier to deal with than Turlough. (Okay, I admit I was wrong about that.)

When Captain Jack Harkness showed up, I was happy for *me*.

Granted, the good captain - and by his own account he was very good - appeared to border on being the classic slutty bisexual stereotype, not only wanting *all* the marbles but unable to commit to which marbles he actually wanted to play with. Putting the enthusiastic into enthusiastically non-discriminating, in the few hours covered by *The Empty Child* and *The Doctor Dances*, Captain Jack is shown to be in a sexual relationship with Algy as well as putting the moves on both Rose and the Doctor. His mere existence in a media where bisexuals are rarer than a Dalek's conscience was a cause for joy. And Jack isn't bisexual because he's "attracted" to both sexes, he's bisexual because he's *sexually* attracted to both sexes - and pretty much any other sexes that might show up but, for the moment, let's stop at two - and, what's more, he acts on that attraction.

Jack's existence, Rose's acceptance of his *enthusiasm*, and the Doctor's

joyful reaction to that enthusiasm - "I'm sure he would, Rose. I'm absolutely certain. But who with?" - proves two things. The first, that we have empirical evidence for bisexuals existing in the mythos of *Doctor Who*. The second, that the Doctor seems open to the idea. The ninth Doctor barely smiled, but he smiled about Jack.

Because the Doctor has been shown to be open to the idea, we can now look at every single one of his interactions through bi-focals. As it were.

We have been seen and, once seen, we can in turn see them. The section of the fourth wall labelled "queer sensitivity" has been broken.

Sidebar: There are complaints from the, shall we say, straighter parts of the world, that if you're queer, you're always trying to find the queer subtext. To that I say, "Well, duh." Everyone wants to find the "me-shaped door" that lets them into the story. Unlike those straighter parts of the world, we have to search for it because if it's there at all, it's usually buried deeper than the pea in *The Princess and the Pea*. Jack's very existence, the ninth Doctor, and Rose's reaction all told us there was something to search for. / Sidebar.

Was the Doctor flirting with Mickey? Might have been.

Were Rose and Jack and the Doctor behaving like consenting adults once the TARDIS door closes? Maybe!

When Jack went off to try and buy some time to keep the Dalek fleet from destroying the earth in *The Parting of the Ways*, he kissed both Rose and the Doctor goodbye - spending as much time lip-locked with the ninth Doctor as he did with Rose. Exactly as much time. Trust me. I have friends who timed it.

Unfortunately, this is a good as it gets, because by the end of the episode Jack has been left behind and the ninth Doctor has become the tenth.

As my third year sociology professor used to say, change is constant.

The tenth Doctor was no more like the ninth than the fifth doctor was like fourth. And that's as it should be. That's the way the Doctor rolls. The ninth Doctor was broken, Rose and Jack reminded him how to feel. The tenth Doctor was a romantic and when Madame De Pompadour broke his heart, all those feelings suddenly distilled into Rose, Rose, Rose.

But we'll give him his obsession with Rose because, after all, Jack wasn't around. He was off being amazing at *Torchwood* with the most sexually non-discriminating team assembled since, well, since ever. Suzie Costello died too soon (and too often) for us to be sure, but every

other member of the team except for Gwen was willing to switch hit every time they came up to bat. No fuss, no muss, no hang-ups on the plumbing. Owen was an opportunistic S.O.B., Toshiko wanted someone to love, and Ianto was in a committed relationship with a woman and then with Jack. And, Jack himself - while still the biggest flirt to ever take a ride in a police box - was shown to not only be, but to have been in, committed relationships.

Meanwhile, back in the TARDIS, we're having a fairly heteronormative season. It's as though all the possibilities but Rose and the tenth Doctor have drained off to pool at the Torchwood Hub. Bi-focals can pretty much only be applied to the sudden and intense bromance between Mickey and Jake in *Rise of the Cybermen* and *The Age of Steel*.

If the theme of Series Two was the Doctor falling in love with Rose, then the theme of Series Three was the Doctor dealing (or not dealing) with having lost Rose. Given that we're no longer focused on the unfolding of a tragic love story in Series Three, things loosen up a little and in episode two, *The Shakespeare Code*, things become explicitly possible again as the tenth Doctor and Martha visit William Shakespeare. When Shakespeare hits on both of them, the Doctor rolls his eyes and says, "And 57 academics just punched the air." It's funny, but it's not poking fun. Shakespeare's bisexuality is treated as entirely normal. Granted, in a show about a 900-year-old Time Lord in a police box, the bar for normal is set fairly high, but we've been told, once again, bisexuality exists in the world.

And it's a good thing they told us.

Because that's pretty much the last we see of it.

*Gridlock* gives us lesbian background characters as well as an inter-species relationship that hand-waves basic biology so vigorously, I'm amazed it didn't clear the air pollution away all on its own, but nothing to apply bi-focals to even though the Doctor bounced through any number of contained relationships.

And when Jack returns in *Utopia*?

He asks the tenth Doctor about Rose as though she was the only thing they had in common.

The tenth Doctor holds him at arm's length with a beetled brow and curled lip and a terse explanation of how he can't handle the fixed point in time that Jack has become. The phrase, "Me thinks the lady doth protest too much," can't help but come to mind. Well, my mind anyway.

Bisexuals still exist - they can't, after all, put Jack in all his great-

*Bi, Bye*

coated glory back in the box - but no longer in the Doctor's world.

The tenth Doctor and Donna are, adjusting for the new millennium, pretty much as asexual as the fourth Doctor and Sarah Jane. (They're also as amazing together as the fourth Doctor and Sarah Jane, but while that's worth mentioning, it isn't the point.) Then, when River Song appears in *Silence in the Library* to lock down the Doctor's heterosexuality, she's so kickass, it's hard to mind.

The tenth Doctor becomes the eleventh, and there's the Doctor and River and Amy and Rory or Amy and the Doctor or the Doctor and the TARDIS and oh, look another amazing gay character in Canton Delaware III, but the possibilities are getting narrower and narrower save for *Amy's Choice* - which is a twisty and fascinating episode - when the lack of choice is summed up by the Dream Lord asking, "Edward or Jacob?"

Sorry...

... summed up by the Dream Lord asking, "Now, which one of these men would you really choose? Look at them. You ran away with a handsome hero. Would you really give him up for a bumbling country doctor who thinks the only the thing he needs to be interesting is a ponytail?"

And all the potential introduced with the ninth Doctor and, "I'm sure he would, Rose. I'm absolutely certain. But who with?", is ironed flat as Amy, who clearly loves both men, never thinks to say, "Screw you, the three of us will work something out."

And the Doctor marries River Song.

And everyone at Torchwood who ever loved both sexes is dead. Well, except for Jack, but he can't die... as much as he probably wants to given the mess of *Miracle Day*.

And we take off our bi-focals because there's nothing left to see.

And those 57 academics sigh deeply.

## QUEERS DIG TIME LORDS

# In Praise of Mature Women, or, Why Donna Noble and River Song Totally Need to Call Me

**Jennifer Pelland** lives outside Boston with an Andy, three cats, and an impractical amount of books. She was introduced to *Doctor Who* on her local public television station about the same time she discovered Duran Duran, and she still loves both. A two-time Nebula nominee, her novel *Machine* and her short story collection *Unwelcome Bodies* are both available from Apex Publications. She also has an essay in *Chicks Unravel Time*. Because spare time is for the weak, Jennifer is also a performing belly dancer and an occasional radio theater actor. Plus, there's that whole pesky day job that pays the bills. For more, including photos of the aforementioned cats, visit [www.jenniferpelland.com](http://www.jenniferpelland.com).

In the summer of 2012, BBC America ran a series called *The Brit List*. First up was the "20 Sexiest," and coming in at No. 20 were "The Women of *Doctor Who*." After doing a quick retrospective of the original run of the show, they focused in specifically on the women of the reboot: Rose, Martha, and Amy.

Because they were saving River Song and Donna Noble for last, right?

Right?

Wait, why did they just move on to No. 19 without...?

OMGWTFBBC?!?!?!?

(Just to add an extra layer of bisexual irony to this, I only tuned in to this special because they promised me Tom Hiddleston, who was a mere footnote in their story about Kate Winslet. #BBCfail.)

So, backing up a bit...

I was a late bloomer, so growing up; I didn't have any *Doctor Who* girl crushes. My Whovian adolescent crushes were of the boy flavor, consisting of Jamie McCrimmon, Vislor Turlough, and the fifth Doctor. By the time I figured out that I wasn't 100% heterosexual and that perhaps my interest in Tegan Jovanka had had a little more to it than I'd realized, the show was only a couple of months away from hitting its almost 16-year

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hiatus. I came out to *Star Trek: The Next Generation* and the deliciousness of Ensign Ro Laren, then followed her with crushes on Susan Ivonava, Aeryn Sun, Zoe Washburne, and Kara Thrace, to name a mouth-watering few. Now there's a nice collection of tough broads with nary a little girl in sight. Yummy.

By the time *Doctor Who* came back, my *Who*-crush tastes had matured right along with me. Doe-eyed girls with zero body fat and eerily unlined faces? I can't relate to them. They haven't had a chance to have life beat all the perkiness out of them, plus gravity still hasn't noticed their breasts. Now, on the other hand, world-weary yet sassy women of a certain age who have something to hang onto? Oh yeah. Bring 'em on.

Now, at this point in my essay, I could easily burst into a spectacular feminist rant about how society is afraid of mature women's sexuality and the ridiculous double-standard that lets older men be "rugged" while older women are "saggy." I could even roll my eyes at the blatant tokenism of people pointing to Helen Mirren and saying, "But what about her? She's hot!" Yes, she is, and no, that doesn't mean that anti-woman ageism is dead any more than Barack Obama being elected President of the United States means that racism is dead. But that's a rant for another time. Instead, I'd rather serve the cause with raves instead of rants for a change.

I think I may be the only person I know who liked Donna Noble from the moment she first opened her mouth in *The Runaway Bride*. What's not to love about a brassy broad who doesn't take shit from anyone? Okay, her willful ignorance was irritating, but that just meant that she had room to grow. And best of all, right from the start, there was zero attraction between her and the tenth Doctor. Finally, a woman with good taste! I mostly wanted her to be *a* mate at that point - to take her out to the pub for a fun night of drinking and shouting and slapping random strangers. It took her coming back as a companion for me to want *to* mate with her.

Because during that break from the Doctor, she grew. She started to take interest in the world around her - the *universe* around her - and even devised a cunning plan to locate the Doctor again. It took Captain Jack decades of staying in one place with a dismembered hand in a jar to pull that off. Donna did it in less than two years using solely her wits and not a single discarded body part. I think the exact moment I fell for her was when she called the tenth Doctor, "just a long streak of nothing." Ah, a girl after my own heart.

Plus, rude and ginger. Even the Doctor knows that's a desirable combination.

And so I fell for this big girl with a big heart, the super-temp, the most important woman in the universe. There's something undeniably appealing about an older woman who knows how to have fun and who doesn't look like she lets her dress size dictate her drinking limit. She was snarky, funny, and utterly unselfconscious in the service of a laugh. A good sense of humor is devastatingly sexy.

My love of Donna is about all about the little human things that make her special, like that sexy little mole on her chin, the way she's able to use her temping experience to save the world (or some other world), the jokes she cracks at all the wrong moments, her complete and utter lack of an inside voice, and the way she can kiss someone hard enough to cure cyanide poisoning. She's the kind of woman who likely got a regrettable tattoo while drunk in Ibiza a few years back, and you know she'll laugh about it when you discover it while peeling off her Spanx with your teeth.

Remember that tough broad thing I mentioned earlier? Donna counts, but as an emotional tough broad rather than as a physical one. That biting humor of hers is her way of protecting a very vulnerable core. Trust me, I recognize the symptoms. If you can keep everyone laughing, then you can keep them from noticing that you're keeping them at arm's length. The one time she'd trusted her heart to someone, he'd broken it in a spectacular, nearly Earth-destroying fashion. One can only dream that she was primed and ready to swear off on men forever at that point. All she needed was the right woman to show her the way. Sigh.

And let us not forget her strength throughout the horrific events of *Turn Left*. It's much easier to be the little girl with the big gun than it is to be the woman struggling to hold her family together while her world falls deeper and deeper into a dystopia. And... and then her sacrifice at the end... and then the DoctorDonna... and...

Sniff!

Oh god, I want to hug her so bad right now.

Of course, we couldn't have Donna stick around. Noooo, we needed to get her out of the way so the long streak of nothing could have a season-long emo-fest. I never forgave the tenth Doctor for what he did to her. He lobotomized Donna. My Donna. All because he couldn't stand the thought of having an equal by his side. Oh, sure, he made excuses, but if it had been Rose, you know he would have found a way.

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It's a large part of why I was so glad to see him go.

But before we lost Donna, we met River Song. And like the first appearance of Donna, the first appearance of River wasn't particularly crush-worthy. Of course, the poor dear was stuck in a spacesuit the entire time. When she was brought back in the eleventh Doctor's run, we finally got to see those arms, that hair, that ass in taupe spandex...

Ahem.

It was easy to fall for River Song. She was built to inspire fangirl lust. She's as adept with a gun as she is with a quip, and oh, that saucy little smirk and the even saucier, "Hello, Sweetie." She's a woman who looks like she knows exactly what to do with you to turn you into a happy, exhausted, incoherent puddle, all without mussing that magnificent hair of hers. And like all good rides, she's got something to hang onto for your safety. She wasn't wrong when she said, "Ooh. It's all going on down there, isn't it?"

But I don't just love her for her looks and her libido. Professor River Song, with her Ph.D. from Luna University, is a woman with a brain, and if I need to tell you that brains are sexy, then I don't know why you're reading a book about *Doctor Who*. Unlike traditional companions, she's someone who can hold her own in conversations with the Doctor, and she has an uncanny knack for being able to manipulate him time and time again to, for instance, get him to join her at Stonehenge, or change a fixed point in time, or have him set up an emergency diving pool on the side of a skyscraper. This is a woman who was clever enough to hide who she truly was from everyone, even as she was living her life out of sync with the rest of them. Hell, her brain is so awesome that she somehow managed to remember who the Doctor was when the rest of the universe had forgotten him, and then found a way to get Amy to remember him back into existence so he could show off his awesomely bad dance moves at her wedding. Now *that* is one sexy brain.

And did I mention that gun of hers? I don't know what it is about tough chicks with guns, but hoo doggy. Whether she was wearing an evening dress, or denim, or that aforementioned taupe spandex, she could rock a gun like nobody's business - with balletic grace, even, when the Doctor's back was turned. If River hadn't been programmed to focus her all on the Doctor, she could have easily become the unholy marriage of Captain Jack and Indiana Jones, wenching her way through space and time in a push-up bra and spandex pants, all while amassing an impressive pile of relics to keep her entertained between lovers. Indiana Jones... Now I'm picturing her with a bullwhip. Yeah, that's a

nice picture.

For once, I actually didn't mind that a character found the Doctor attractive. It helped that she wasn't yet another woman mooning after the tenth Doctor. This was love between equals, not unbalanced lust, and while the root cause of it ended up being creepy as shit, it was still oddly romantic. Who wouldn't want to win the devotion of a kick-ass archeologist with a name that strikes fear in Daleks' atrophied hearts? Who wouldn't be honored to be loved by someone willing spend a life-time in jail for you while living out a backwards love story that only gets more and more tragic for her the longer it goes on? Besides, any woman who will eventually lure the pre-pubescent eleventh Doctor into having a threesome with himself is clearly a woman to be reckoned with.

Now, the question is, what does she do when she's not with the Doctor? Is she monogamous, or does she like to keep busy while she waits for her love story to get around to the good parts? Steven Moffat has confirmed that, like everyone else who's spent time in the fifty-somethingth centuries, she's bisexual<sup>37</sup>, and since she's a time traveler who's bummed around quite a bit on present-day Earth, I may actually have a chance to bump into her. If you know what I mean. When the Doctor's not around. Which seems to be an awful lot of the time. So, she's got hallucinogenic lipstick and poison lipstick. Hmm... I wonder what other kinds she has? The mind boggles at the possibilities.

Plus, her dad is pretty hot.

Sorry, I'm bisexual. I had to sprinkle in a little boy love. It's the law. Don't worry, Rory. I won't bang your daughter when you're around. I'm considerate that way.

So there, I've said it. My *Doctor Who* crushes have nothing to do with the so-called "20 Sexiest" Brits. Take that, BBC America.

Although, speaking of the "20 Sexiest," I should take a moment to note that I'm not about to argue with one of their choices. I certainly wouldn't kick Martha Jones out of bed for eating crackers. Unlike Rose and Amy, she's, well, she's a grown up. She has an education, a profession, and her own damned apartment. Plus, she's *gorgeous*. My god, those cheekbones! But... she's not done yet. She needs seasoning, like the horror of finding her first gray pube. Man, that's a shock that you just never recover from. Plus, there's something just a little *too* perfect about her. She's a safe crush. An expected crush. What's the point in being a queer nerd if you do the expected thing with your hormones?

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37. [twitter.com/steven\\_moffat/status/200839207386746880](https://twitter.com/steven_moffat/status/200839207386746880)

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So give me an older woman with dangerous curves, even in places where she's not supposed to have them. Give me Donna, so we can hit the pub, do crazy mimes at each other from across the room, then cackle, toss back shots, and have a go at it right on the bar. Give me River, so we can reenact every cheesy lesbian prison cliché, then run off together in the TARDIS to plant false relics in sealed tombs, just to give her fellow academics fits. Or give them to me both at the same time so I can suggest that they do naughty, naughty things to each other while I watch. Or maybe I can be the hummus in a Donna/River sandwich and...

Ooh...

Ahem.

I'll be in my bunk.

## **We're Here, We're Queer, Rate Us on iTunes**

**Erik Stadnik** lives and works in Alexandria, Virginia, and came to *Doctor Who* shortly after the launch of the new series. Memories of childhood exposure via PBS now triggered, he has thrown himself into *Doctor Who* fandom, appearing on podcasts, writing essays and blog posts, and attending conventions in a vain attempt to make up for all those years watching vastly inferior television. His other nerdy interests include theater, classical literature, and the history of philosophy. You can listen to him on the *Doctor Who Book Club* podcast (subscribe in iTunes!), read his musings at [erikandhispointlessblog.blogspot.com](http://erikandhispointlessblog.blogspot.com), or follow his most frequent method of spouting off on Twitter: @sjcaustenite.

I podcast because I'm gay. Or to be more accurate, because I'm gay, I'm a podcaster.

Let me unpack that a little.

In the summer of 2009, there was a show called *Torchwood: Children of Earth*, in which a popular (gay?) character named Ianto Jones was killed off. Almost immediately, a "Save Ianto" campaign sprung up and grieving fans began leaving flowers and mementos near the Millennium Center in Cardiff. This was a testament to the impact the character had made, and was touching to see as an outpouring of genuine emotion - the arousal of which, we should remind ourselves, is the very point of drama. Less touching but no-less-seemingly heartfelt were the charges of homophobia levied at the episode's writer, John Fay, and series executive producer Russell T. Davies. This was just another instance of the gay martyr syndrome, they said. The show was reneging on its "promise" to show a loving same-sex relationship, they said. Blog posts were written, flame wars erupted - in a few extreme cases, death threats were even made. Charges like this, lobbed at one of the queerest shows on television and at Davies, one of the most powerful openly gay figures in British media, confused many fans, including the hosts of *Radio Free Skaro* (RFS), a popular Canadian *Doctor Who* podcast.

The hosts of RFS, three straight men, felt it might be inappropriate

for them to look at the issue in all but the most causal of ways, but they also realized it needed to be discussed, so they sought out “experts”: namely, queer fans willing to come on to discuss the issue in a “very special episode” of RFS. Though I’d never met any of the hosts, I’d interacted with them some via Twitter and the like, and I was asked to be part of the panel - and I readily agreed. I joined a very occasional podcaster (Canadian and sometime substitute *Radio Free Skaro* host Katrina) and another neophyte such as myself (Nat from Nottingham). Rather surprisingly, I think we turned out a fairly decent episode - and in fact, the chemistry between the three of us was so good that by the end of 2009, I was asked to join a podcast that they two of them had launched together: the fandom-centric *Bridging the Rift*, now defunct, but notable for, among other reasons, being the first *Doctor Who* podcast with an all-queer hosting line-up.

What’s interesting about this story is that, when RFS wanted to get queer voices to discuss the Ianto issue, they had to go outside the realm of the existing podcasting community. There were already several solid *Doctor Who* podcasts on the air, even a queer voice or two scattered among them - not that you would necessarily know that by listening, however. “Yes,” I can hear you saying through a rift in the space-time continuum, “but that was ages ago. The podcasting community has exploded since then - there must be loads of queer podcasters now.” And that’s where you’d be wrong.

It’s certainly true that the podcasting community has exploded since then. There are literally dozens of *Doctor Who* podcasts. (According to the Doctor Who Podcast Alliance web page, there are 87 as of this writing. While that includes some that I think are essentially defunct, such as *Bridging the Rift*, it also misses several that I listen to regularly.) As far as I can tell, none of them - not a single one - focuses on the queer fan perspective on *Doctor Who*. Even on my show (the *Doctor Who Book Club Podcast*), where I have a gay co-host, the fact that we’re both gay rarely comes up, and is almost never determinative in how we approach the material we read - and on the whole I think that’s a good thing, because that’s not what we’re trying to do. But surely, someone out there has both a queer approach to *Doctor Who* and a microphone, no? It’s as if the whole idea of Queer Studies never made it as far as podcasting, or at least not *Doctor Who* podcasting. Why should a fandom that’s so queer there’s literally a book about it (a book you’re currently reading - a fact I can detect via that same space-time rift) have such poor queer representation in one of the most burgeoning areas of fandom?

“But wait a second,” you ask (that convenient rift again), “why does it matter what the LGBT community thinks about *Doctor Who*? I mean, they seem like perfectly nice folks and all, but are their opinions on *Doctor Who* fundamentally better than the opinions of any average straight podcaster?” Well, clearly, no - the theoretical queer opinions being mooted here aren’t fundamentally better, but they are fundamentally *different*. And if the podcasting community is to be anything more than an echo chamber powered by Blu Snowballs, Dropbox, and Audacity, then it needs different voices, clashing and dissenting - hopefully respectfully and intelligently. On this, I think, pretty much all people involved in podcasting (podcasters and listeners alike) agree - and yet, queer voices in *Who* podcasting are nearly as scarce as ever. The question, of course, is why?

Questions like this almost never have easy answers, but I think there are two main forces at work. One is, oddly enough, the show’s resurgence in popularity. Newer fans don’t view the show as something outside the mainstream that only people on the fringes watched after age 12; rather, it’s a show enjoyed by viewers of all ages. Like many other elements of geek culture, from video games to gadgets to super heroes, *Doctor Who* left the geek ghetto and burst onto the wider stage in a way it hadn’t really done since its heyday. It is the very definition of a mainstream phenomenon, even here in the States, where it sits somewhere between tea and droll wit in the list of British things Anglophiles can’t get enough of.

And that’s part of the problem: not its American popularity in particular (though I’m sure some fans would disagree - they’d be wrong, but they’d disagree), but its popularity generally. Not for the show; contrary to what the perennial naysayers would have us believe, I don’t think the show has ever been in a stronger position. No, rather it’s a problem, or at least a complication, for one of its traditional fan-bases: the LGBT community. As a legacy fan who didn’t really give myself over completely until the new series, I’m going on anecdotal evidence here a bit, but by the late 80s, and certainly during the wilderness years of the 90s, *Doctor Who* fandom had a decidedly queer streak to it. The brilliant writers who became *Doctor Who* novelists, the folks over at *Doctor Who Magazine*, the fans who organized and attended conventions all over the English-speaking world - essentially, the people who kept the show alive when both the BBC and the general populace seemed content to let it die - while not uniformly queer, certainly had more LGBT persons than your average random sample down at the Chick-fil-A. And of course,

lest we forget, the show was resurrected by the guy who got famous for writing *Queer as Folk*. Better minds than I will grapple with the issue of why *Doctor Who* has such a following in the queer community, I just know that it did, does, and hopefully always will.

And before you tut-tut, yes, those gay voices are still there - writers like Mark Gatiss and Gareth Roberts aren't going anywhere soon, God bless 'em. But they are less prominent than they once were, both among the people making the show and in the fandom that follows it. The sheer number of new fans, especially straight young fans, has diluted the gay element of fandom. In a very real way, *Doctor Who's* popularity may leave the show's longtime queer fans feeling a little like outsiders in a fandom they once considered their own. I think we could all agree that more people watching *Doctor Who* is a good thing, but it may not be an unalloyed good for everyone, especially if the cost of gaining two straight fans is losing one queer fan.

Which brings me to that second force I said I saw at work in the relative dearth of prominent gay podcasting voices - and here's where it gets complicated (see what I did there?), more serious, and more personal. As far as society has come in terms of LGBT issues, we are still, when it comes down to it, an oppressed minority. I don't toss around that term lightly, either. Many LGBT performers still feel as if they need to hide their sexual identity for fear of losing mainstream fans; major British newspapers feel free to make sport with the plight of transgendered youth; and in most US states, I'm still not legally allowed to marry the person of my choice. Yes, we've come a long way - but the queer community still has a long road ahead before we achieve full equality, both in society and under the law.

Perhaps the most insidious thing about engrained and institutionalized discrimination like this is that, no matter how hard you try to combat it, some part of it seeps deep down into your subconscious and makes a home there. You tell yourself that your opinions on "non-gay" topics aren't as valid as those of a straight person. "Who wants to hear me go on about *The Caves of Androzani* or *The War Games* or *Delta and the Bannermen*? They're not 'queer' things (well, *Delta's* debatable). I'll just stay over here and only express my opinion on matters where I'm an 'expert'." You speak up less, and you censor yourself more. Over time, you may even find yourself trying to be someone you're not for the sake of fitting in. You stunt your real personality, hide it away, live behind a mask. Growing up queer in a heteronormative society can rob you of your voice.

And podcasting is all about the voice, isn't it? And not just your ideas or your viewpoints, the references you drop and the ones you miss - it's also about your actual voice, an aural thing to be listened to by strangers while they clean their houses or drive to work. LGBT folks are especially attuned to how their voices "give them away." People talk about being able to "pass" for straight - as long as they don't have to talk. It's always a challenge for anyone to speak up in a crowd and, if necessary, to shout to make your voice heard. It's even harder when you know, even when you try to forget it or convince yourself that you're wrong, that someone, somewhere, might start to listen and mutter the word "faggot" under their breath before skipping to the next track on their iPod. I doubt that's ever actually happened to me, but I think it says a lot that I would be saddened rather than surprised if it had. Everyone hates their speaking voice - that's a universal truth - but I don't think straight podcasters worry as much about having to introduce themselves as "Rebecca" when their voice doesn't sound traditionally feminine or saying the phrase "the Medusa Cascade" without their sibilant s's making them sound like a silly stereotype. Just looking at that sentence is enough to give me a feeling of unease. When your voice is taken away from you, what do you have left?

Paradoxically, it also strikes me that the more podcasts there about the *Doctor Who* universe, the harder it is for queer fans to take up the microphone. The more voices there are, talking about the same episodes of the same shows, the harder it becomes for anyone to justify adding one more voice to the crowd, even when there are still things left to say. What's more, when so many of those voices focus on how attractive Amy Pond is or make dismissive comments about the so-called RTD "gay agenda," you can even start to feel that not only are your opinions unnecessary, they're also unwanted.

Oh, I don't mean to imply that there's rampant homophobia or transphobia in the podcasting community - I've never encountered anything of the sort, either directly or indirectly. But there is a certain amount of echo chamber mentality, where ideas on one podcast are reflected in feedback from another which is seconded on a third, and so on, and so on. This cross-pollination affects so much of what's discussed that it's far too easy to forget that different opinions do exist. From which stories or Doctors are viewed as the best to which gender the Doctor is supposed to be to what makes for a "hot" companion, actual fan opinion is fairly divided, full of sharp delineations and gradual shadings. The podcasting community, though, is much more tightly knit and

uniform in its opinions than fandom as a whole - and it just keeps growing. A host from one show will join with the host from another to form a third, new show. People who submit feedback to their favorite podcasts will start their own. When you already have a built-in listenership, it's easy to cross-promote your new show or get your friends to play your promo on their show. The circle grows and expands, but its basic composition changes surprisingly little.

To step into a crowd that large, as interconnected and interdependent as the podcasting community is and to say, "Actually, I see where you're coming from, but you're completely wrong and here's why," takes the sort of faith in one's voice that is, unfortunately, often a victim of the broader heteronormative society we all live in every day. These two forces at work, the popularity of the show and the internalized doubt, eventually combine to overwhelm the prospective queer podcaster who wants to talk about how hot Rory is, why Captain Jack was a good (or bad) role model for the LGBT community, or anything else this brilliant, maddening, amazing TV show has to offer. With the number and comparative homogeneity of the podcasting community, it's almost as if all those echoing voices are saying, "The straight fans have got this part of fandom taken care of, thank you very much. You can go about your business on LiveJournal or whatever it is you do." They reflect the mainstream nature of the show, not so much the glorious, thriving diversity on the fringes. A heteronormative society is being reflected in a heteronormative podcasting community. And I genuinely believe all of fandom is the worse for it.

As I said - the show has gone mainstream. And good for it - that's the only way it's going to stay on the air. But the mainstream is just that: the center. There are still those fans who feel disenfranchised, who find themselves on the fringes of both fandom and society as a whole - queer fans not least among them. After 50 years, the Doctor is still an outsider character, someone whose outlook and actions speak to people who feel as if they don't fit in anywhere, who feel like there has to be another way, a better way to live your life. He speaks to the outcasts because, at his core, he is one. And so the outsiders get drawn in to the show, and they find a vibrant, diverse fandom of cosplayers and bloggers and prop makers and toy collectors and podcasters. Only the podcasters aren't so diverse, are they?

So, what's a queer *Doctor Who* fan to do? Well, if you like listening to podcasts and feel 100% satisfied with the current selection... nothing, I guess. Just sit back and listen and enjoy - and don't forget to rate us in

iTunes. However, if you agree with me and you don't think that LGBT issues are being dealt with in a way that you find interesting or insightful, or if you don't hear them being addressed at all, or if you simply think that ideas on the show are worth being heard, then I have a simple request: start your own *Doctor Who* podcast. Yes, there are dozens - but none of them has your voice, does it? The podcasting community only exists because hundreds of fans thought, "Hey, I don't hear myself out there. No one's saying things that I would, about the stuff that I would, in the way that I would. I should fix that." And the only way to fix that, the only way to make sure your opinions, your thoughts, your voice is heard, is to speak up. Speak out. Speak into the microphone and put it out there for the world to hear. It's what the Doctor would do, and you know it.

In short, and to borrow a phrase, you need to be the change you want to see in the podcasting world. And that holds true for everyone - male, female, black, white, Latino, Irish, Australian, gay, lesbian, transgendered, young, old, even straight folks - whoever you are, however you identify, and whatever anyone else may try to tell you, your voice is unique. It is valuable. It is important. And someone, somewhere wants to hear it - maybe even needs to hear it. *Doctor Who* is the show that can be anything - there's certainly space in our fandom for your queer voice, so use it.

## Secrets and Lies

**Scot Clarke** lives in Toronto with his partner Ravi and dozens of houseplants that threaten to engulf their Ikea furniture. While he makes his living as a graphic designer, he keeps one ear open for the queer sound of a groaning police box materializing in his walk-in closet. He was a regular contributor to the fanzine *Enlightenment* and co-edited its sister publication *Myth Makers* for several years. He'd like to thank Vivian Fay, Count Scarlioni, and the Cassini sisters for all their love and support.

When I was 13, I had a secret. Now mind you, what 13-year-old doesn't? This was 1983 in a small town on the west coast of Canada. About as far away from something as anything. My weekdays consisted of boarding a crammed school bus and making my way to the only seat in the back amongst the bullies. The school week would drag by, a litany of humiliation, Clearasil, and stress.

But come Sunday night, at 11:30pm, the rest of the family asleep, I would sneak into the family room and switch the television on. I indulged in my secret: the spooky music, the stony face of Tom Baker. The stage was set to enter another world. A world of adventure, colorful characters, and death. *Doctor Who* was dangerous. Yes, for all its wobbly sets and rubber monsters, the show (this was the Hinchcliffe/ Holmes era, after all) was dark.

This appealed to a kid who was regularly labeled a fag and harbored numerous revenge fantasies towards any number of nasty characters in my life. Like many of my ilk, I was seduced by the idea of being whisked off in a blue box to places unknown, but I was also endlessly fascinated with the sense of doom that shadowed the characters on *Doctor Who*. Possession and body horror were weekly on the menu, and I ate it up. The Wirrn from *The Ark in Space* or the flesh-consuming Krynoids in *The Seeds of Doom* stole identities and transformed their victims into grotesque versions of the human form. I craved transformation; of crossing a line I couldn't return from. It was puberty with the added complication of being gay; isolated and alone as I was being "transformed."

I was Keeler - a botanist forcibly turned into a Krynoid - lying in bed,

covered in foliage, being fed raw meat by Hargreaves the butler; or Noah awoken into a new world, but unable to partake of it because of the hideous Wirrn-monster growing inside of him. (Poor old Vira, betrothed to a man who preferred the company of insects!)

But that was on Sunday night.

The rest of the week, I kept my secret. Nary a word of traveling Time Lords or metal encased mutants was whispered at school. (Okay, that's not strictly true, there was the kid who lived in a trailer out in the woods with his dad and always had ink all over his fingers - he mentioned it once.) It was as if the program didn't exist. There was endless time given to Jedi Knights and the allegorical exploits of flesh eating lizards. But I instinctively knew that *Doctor Who* wasn't a subject to be broached.

Not so for speculation on my sexuality. "Are you a fag?" was an endless chorus from one particularly nasty classmate. I lived for the weekend when I could slip into my secret world.

The Doctor was a character who didn't care what others thought of him. He could waltz into a situation, do whatever he damn well pleased, and then bugger off again at the end. In short, he could "come out" without having to live with the consequences. It's very appealing to be different when you don't have to stick around.

*Genesis of the Daleks* distilled this concept perfectly. The idea that the Doctor, Harry and Sarah are trapped on Skaro, with their fates tied to the Time Ring given to them in the TARDIS's absence, is one that resonated deeply with me. They become enmeshed in a nightmarish world where they have to justify themselves to everyone they meet; a xenophobic battlefield where to be a Thal amongst Kaleds, a Kaled amongst Thals, or a Muto anywhere is precarious and deadly. The Time Ring, like the TARDIS itself, is a symbol that allows the travelers to hold onto their otherness. It makes them special, and not really part of events. This conceit was enormously comforting to me. I could endure a great deal if I believed that I could be whisked away at any moment.

But the funny thing about *Doctor Who* is that it changes on a dime. All of the death and darkness of those years gave way to something far more whimsical and light. By the time the Doctor and Romana embarked on the quest for the Key to Time, I too had found my purpose: high school had released me from the dark corridors of junior high. I was streamed away from people who had caused me such grief. I had discovered drama class and like-minded peers. I made new friends and many aspects of my identity could be chalked up to my new interests. Life became light and frothy, just like the Graham Williams years. And

of course full of denial.

Suddenly, colorful clever villainesses were the order of the day. Each time the TARDIS door opened, there was less chance of horror, more likely you received a quip and some outrageous new concept from the pen of Douglas Adams or David Fisher. The program became an “escape to” rather than an “escape from.” I wanted witty banter with Vivian Fay and Amelia Rumford, I ached to swan around Paris looking for bouillabaisse (at least until I found out it was fish soup), I wanted to bring down an enemy with a cutting witticism. Breaking the rules was about having style.

But like writers and painters in Paris at the end of the 20s, it couldn't last and reality set in. Whimsy was chucked in favour of the hard science and technobabble ushered in by producer John Nathan-Turner and script editor Christopher H. Bidmead. At the time, I grooved with the portents of change. Like every teenager, my problems seemed huge and questions of dating and university were no longer vague specters in the future. Friends around me were pairing up and we were suddenly expected to choose our futures. Alas, there was no Watcher (from *Logopolis*) hovering in the background waiting to show me the way. I fumbled forward, half in denial, half craving what I didn't understand.

And then, suddenly, even the Doctor was young and attractive. And there were domestics and petty bickering in the TARDIS. Adric didn't fit in; Tegan questioned everything; and Turlough was up to no good. *Doctor Who* was no longer pure escapism, it was mirroring real life and a little too closely. But the program was still my little secret; a bit of myself that I held back from the rest of the world.

That is, until I went to university. Like any young person, my entire world was turned upside down. I could no longer ignore questions about my sexuality. Enter the geeks: a couple of anglophiles, some diehard SF fans, and some utterly un-categorical individuals. Mind you, this was the dawning of the great renaissance of science fiction on television with the premiere of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. Almost my entire dorm floor would watch *TNG* each week. But there was another smaller entourage that braved the late night viewing of *Doctor Who* (this would inevitably also include a few miscellaneous potheads and drunken dorm boys). I encountered my first experience of opinions being voiced about my beloved program. It was exhilarating and disturbing: it was *Doctor Who* in the cold light of... er late night. There was Dave, the hippy from the Seattle who romanticized Season Eleven, declaring the third Doctor/Sarah pairing to be the ultimate Doctor/companion pairing. And John,

whose grandparents lived in Birmingham and had spent his summers there. Each Saturday, *Doctor Who* was loved, mocked, dissected, dismissed, and puzzled over.

And then, like the John Nathan-Turner years, things declined; *Doctor Who* outlived its welcome. I had other things to do and it just wasn't holding my interest. I sporadically caught a showing of a new McCoy story, but somehow the program felt disjointed. Ace's journey from outsider to self-discovery was hollow and studied. Sylvester McCoy rolled his r's just a little too often for my taste.

I just sort of stopped watching.

About a year later, I was watching late night television with a new friend. Flipping through the channels, we're assaulted by the garish titles of the sixth Doctor. I eyed Cindy from the corner of my eye and contemplated a quick switch of the channel. Worse yet, it was a rerun of *Attack of the Cybermen*.

"*Doctor Who*, I haven't seen this in years," she smirked. We settled back into the couch. Now I should add that Cindy had one of the keenest intellects of our generation and was doing a minor in Women's Studies (we both had nerdish leanings I should add).

Peri burst onto the scene in her pink sausage casing. Cindy burst out laughing, and I couldn't help following her lead. Trying to explain the plot to her was like trying to untie St. Aquinas's ontological argument. And so we proceeded to flame the entire story. We were a two-person mob waving our pitchforks at the screen; *Attack of the Cybermen* didn't stand a chance (as a footnote, a few years later, I heard through channels that Cindy had come out).

*Doctor Who* ended about a year before I came out. Despite the fact that I'd stopped watching, I remember feeling a pang of sadness at the time. The sense of loss was tied more to the past than the present.

Coming out is a funny process. There are many commonalities across the board, but ultimately it affects us all in very unique ways. When your world is shaken and your identity challenged, you can grab on tight to what is familiar and comfortable. Or you can do a one-eighty and try and dump everything that came before. Being gay *and* a geek felt like too much of a burden.

The term "Wilderness Years," attached to the years between 1989 and the show's return in 2005, was equally apt for my relationship with *Doctor Who*. An entire community grew up around the Virgin New Adventures novels, but I resisted entering into that world. I would occasionally browse the SF/fantasy section of the bookstore, reading the

odd synopsis.

On one inauspicious occasion and in a fit of pique, I actually threw all my Target books in a dumpster out behind my apartment building. In my defense, I did have the intention of taking them to a used bookstore, but my move was proving to be more than a little traumatic, and I've always had just a little of the drama queen about me. It still pains me to this day that I could dispose of any books that way, but alas I did.

And then in 1994, I was pulled back in. I was in a relationship with a man who was attending an Anglican parish in downtown Toronto. While visiting a fellow congregant, I was surprised to see a model TARDIS on a table in his apartment. I wasn't prepared for how excited it made me feel. It was like I was greeting a very old friend in the process of meeting a new one. In the years to come, the fellow congregant, Graeme, would slowly introduce me to the world of *Doctor Who* fandom. To say it was overwhelming would be an understatement. I began by writing a column for *Enlightenment*, the fanzine for the Doctor Who Information Network (DWIN) and slowly got my feet wet attending Toronto's *Doctor Who* tavern and local conventions. It was a strange experience to encounter people who also shared such a passionate relationship with the program.

But being a *Doctor Who* fan still carried the stigma of second-class citizen, even among the larger genre community. This drew *Doctor Who* fans together more closely in the "struggle." One couldn't help but recognize a certain similarity between the gay community and *Who*-dom. Both had to carve out spaces in the larger community.

Then a curious thing happened. The dreams of thousands of fans were answered, and *Doctor Who* returned as a regular episodic television program. And it was popular. With the mainstream. *Doctor Who* was popular. I can't stress this enough. Because a little earlier, we had simultaneously experienced a similar integration of GBLT reality into the larger community (at least, in the West). Newfound tolerance and even celebration of queerness has occurred. Same sex marriage has become a reality in numerous places.

Meanwhile, on *Doctor Who*, queer characters and references have become commonplace, with even charges of a "gay agenda" being leveled at Russell T. Davies's vision of the program. As a fan, you're rarely at risk of a sideways glance when you proclaim your love of the show. It's now possible to walk down main street arm in arm with your favorite Gallifreyan.

Curiously, it was with great subtlety that RTD peppered *Doctor Who*

with bits of queer-ish-ness. Probably my favorite bits are the Cassinis from *Gridlock* and Sky Silvestry from *Midnight*. The former offers the curious reality of two female partners being mistaken for sisters even five billion years in the future, as commentary on our own times and tapping into the larger truth that difference will always be with us, suggesting that acceptance is more cyclical than linear. What I love about Sky Silvestry is that her sexual identity is revealed through a simple pronoun and nothing more.

While there is something exciting about sharing *Doctor Who* with the world, it also feels like something has been lost, too. A kind of intimacy, a sense that we the faithful were there during the dark, difficult days. One hears the same sort of sentiment every year during Toronto Pride. With the acceptance of swelling crowds and big-name sponsors, there comes a kind of pining for the struggles of the past.

But what does it mean to be out as a gay man and as a *Doctor Who* fan in an era where sexuality is viewed more as a spectrum, and genre programming spans the “500 channel universe”? New *Doctor Who* shares many of the same core attributes that its earlier incarnation did, but it’s also expanded its format greatly, reflecting both the natural evolution of television and the myriad of other genre influences out there. A *Buffy* fan might enjoy a similar quirkiness in *Doctor Who*, or fans of British programs like *Being Human* or *Sherlock* might be drawn to the writing of Steven Moffat or Toby Whithouse. There’s a bit of an a-la-carte feeling to contemporary approaches in how we move through our entertainment selections. Or alternatively, surfing online.

Comparatively, identifying as queer is no longer the binary choice it once was. These days, people are much more comfortable moving along the spectrum of sexuality. I have a friend who identifies as a lesbian, but is in an open relationship with a bisexual man. But by strict definition, isn’t she then bisexual? You’ll be in for a heck of a debate if you try telling her that. For anyone who complained that Russell T. Davies’s ITV series *Bob and Rose* (about a gay man in love with a straight woman) was unrealistic and harmful, the world seems to have caught up.

Coming out seems a much more complicated prospect than ever before. I mean if I declare myself a *Doctor Who* fan, does that automatically make me a fan of Steven Moffat’s vision of the program? I might even venture to say that I refuse to watch a Chris Chibnall episode on principle.

Of course I’m being a bit cheeky, but at the heart of what I’m trying to express is that coming out is an ongoing process. Every time I encoun-

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ter a new person in my life, I'm making a decision about how much I'm going to share with them. Curiously, as fans we often feel a great need to profess our judgments and opinions of a given episode, era, or Doctor. It's remarkable how personal those moments get, and how strongly emotions begin to fly. I often find it difficult to share my own feelings. The 13-year-old who used to cherish the exploits of his favorite time traveler, all alone, is still in there, even if buried deeply.

There are times, when the world weighs a little too heavily, when I want nothing more than to escape into that secret world of *Doctor Who*. The one that offers escape and needs no justification. A *Doctor Who* with no plot holes, no perceived gay agenda, and no analysis.

That's my little 30-year-old secret.

## Long Time Companions

**Melissa Scott** was born and raised in Little Rock, Arkansas, and studied history at Harvard College, where she was involved with the now-defunct college-sanctioned SF 'zine that spawned the Harvard/Radcliffe Science Fiction Association, and was introduced to a new round of media SF, particularly *Doctor Who*. She earned her Ph.D. from Brandeis University in the comparative history program. Over the next 28 years, she published 30 original novels and a handful of short stories, most with queer themes and characters. She won the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer in 1986, and won Lambda Literary Awards for *Trouble and Her Friends*, *Shadow Man*, and *Point of Dreams* - the last written with long-time partner and collaborator, the late Lisa A. Barnett. She has also been shortlisted for the Tiptree Award. She won a Spectrum Award for *Shadow Man* and again in 2010 for the short story "The Rocky Side of the Sky." Her most recent novel, *Lost Things*, written with Jo Graham, was published in 2012, and its sequel, *Steel Blues*, is scheduled for spring of 2013. She can be found on LiveJournal at [mescott.livejournal.com](http://mescott.livejournal.com).

I credit the fourth Doctor.

In January 1979, I was on my way to the Million-Year Picnic in Harvard Square to pick up some comic books, and saw a familiar figure leaving the store. It was Lisa Barnett, who I'd been introduced to the previous fall by a classmate of mine who'd said vaguely that he thought we had some things in common. So of course I said hello, and we got to talking. It was cold on the sidewalk, but the conversation was exciting, and after a bit she suggested we have dinner and get warm. I thought this was a lovely idea, and we found our way to a nearby crepe place, where we continued to talk through appetizer, dinner, and a lingering dessert. As it became clear that we needed to vacate the table, she mentioned *Doctor Who*.

"Who?" I said, without originality. At that point, I didn't even know it was a joke.

"Oh," she said. "You've never seen...?"

"No," I said. "Tell me more."

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"It's about this Time Lord - he travels through space and time with his companions. In a TARDIS, which is disguised as a British police call box." She stopped. "You don't have a TV, do you? Because it's on tonight. We could catch it if we hurry."

There was a television in my dorm suite, an old black-and-white set belonging to one of my roommates. By some miracle, none of them were home, and - more miraculous still - we were able to fiddle with the antenna and actually get a picture on Channel 2. The theme music came on, unique and unforgettable, and we were off: the second episode of *The Talons of Weng-Chiang*.

I'd never seen anything like it. There were awful parts - the "Oriental" makeup on John Bennett, for one, and the portrayal of the Chinese characters in general - and there were wonderful bits, and there was a good deal of just plain weird, much of which came from jumping into the middle of a serial, but there was one thing I was sure of: I wanted more. Lisa and I sat on the couch, and she listened while I babbled about the episode - look, that was the Giant Rat of Sumatra, from Holmesian canon! Professor Litefoot and his housekeeper Mrs Hudson! Victorian theater and stage magic and nods to *The Phantom of the Opera*! Leela! Tell me about Leela! Lisa had to explain to me that she was from a primitive planet, and how she came to be traveling with the Doctor, and then all of a sudden it was nearing midnight and the last train back to Dorchester where she lived. I walked her to the subway station, and we made a date to watch the show together next week.

By the time the serial was finished, I was definitely in love with *Doctor Who*. I was also, sneakily and confusedly, very much in love with Lisa. I had had no idea I wasn't straight, but it was rapidly becoming clear that this was the person with whom I wanted to spend the rest of my life. Whatever that meant, wherever that took me, I was willing, just as long as she was there. And it was starting to look as though she felt the same.

We watched the show religiously - it was a wonderful excuse for hanging out for hours - and when we couldn't manage to be in the same room for it, we called each other on the phone and watched together that way. And talked after the episode as well, for long enough that after two months of this my roommates staged an intervention. They were willing to let me have the TV for that one night a week, but they drew the line at three-hour telephone calls. They would like to use the line themselves, and, besides, it wasn't as though I was talking to a boyfriend.

Two months after that, I'd disabused them of that notion: I was talking to my girlfriend. I was gay, Lisa and I were a committed couple - on our way to being long-time companions, as the *New York Times* euphemism of the 80s had it - and would remain together until her death 27 years later. And, though the initial passion had cooled just a little - we were no longer completely and fannishly obsessed, especially now that we were living together and didn't need excuses to hang out - we were both still extremely fond of the Doctor. Boston's public television stations facilitated the affair, airing the series a year or so behind the BBC, and running yearly fund-raising marathons in case you'd missed any of the episodes.

For several years, we had a standing date with Lisa's oldest sister, who had a bigger TV than we did: Sunday afternoons were for SF indulgence and a pitcher of manhattans, beginning with ether Hammer horror on the local UHF station, just making the transition to cable, or some other SF show - *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea*, original *Star Trek* - but always ending with *Doctor Who* on PBS. We taped favorite episodes and hauled them out when PBS made us wait too long between series; we caught episodes at conventions; we bonded with friends, and cemented what is a 30-year-and-counting friendship with a couple of guys from Maryland through the good Doctor. I have taught three people how to knit so that they could make themselves the fourth Doctor's iconic scarf. (I draw the line at 15 feet of garter stitch myself.) Lisa and I bought a house that could best be described as a TARDIS: it's bigger on the inside than it looks from the outside. We were eventually civilly united the year after Vermont made it legal - a double ceremony with our friends and fellow fans from Maryland. And along the way, I wrote and sold 20 science fiction and fantasy novels, three of the latter written with Lisa.

Of course, there were many reasons that Lisa and I liked *Doctor Who*. There were the randomly gorgeous period costumes, in stories like *Silver Nemesis*, *Ghost Light*, and *Horror of Fang Rock*. Having the BBC's wardrobe rooms to draw on made for wonderful eye candy. And we never know when we were going to spot actors we knew from other shows, like Brian Croucher, or from various stage productions, like David Collings and Christopher Benjamin. Seeing Benjamin as Mr Vincent Crummles in the Royal Shakespeare Company's *Nicholas Nickleby* was startlingly like seeing a reprise of Henry Gordon Jago in *The Talons of Weng-Chiang*.

There were also the bits of dialogue, immortalized on the dozens of buttons that we purchased at conventions. From *Frontios*, the fifth

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Doctor's exasperated, "Oh, you're going to kill me! There's a finely tuned response to the situation!" Or *City of Death*, and Eleanor Bron and John Cleese's cameo appearance as art connoisseurs. Their reaction to the TARDIS's disappearance is priceless: "Exquisite," drawls Bron, and that's all you need to know. For years afterward, I could rely on Lisa to edge up to me at dull parties and pompous meetings, lifting an eyebrow. "Exquisite," she'd murmur, in perfect imitation, and it was usually all I could do to keep a straight face.

And, there was one thing more that made *Doctor Who* different: the companions. Anyone could be one - that was the lesson we took away from *Doctor Who*. You could be a Time Lady or a scientist or a journalist; a medical doctor or an air hostess or a member of the Sevateem; a mathematical genius or a schoolgirl with a gift for explosives. There was the lovely feeling that there was nothing in the show that *excluded* queer people - nothing in the show said that, should a blue police box appear in Boston, a pair of baby dykes would be automatically disqualified from coming aboard. All that was really required was that you were willing to go, or, since it seemed as though half the companions joined up by accident the first time, that you were willing to stay. That you were willing to take the chance on something that seemed unlikely and wonderful, even if it might cut you off from home and family for years. The Doctor told you it would be worth it, and he kept his promise.

It was not, at the time, all that different from coming out. When Lisa and I got together, there were some real risks for both of us. We were both in school. I was living on campus, my parents paying my way; she was still living at home, and, while she had a part time job, it wouldn't support her, never mind both of us. But this thing we'd found between us was amazing enough that it made the risks seem negligible by comparison. Her family ended up being perplexed, but accepting; they even let us live with them for several months before we could get our first apartment. Mine were less approving, and I didn't go home for some years rather than go without Lisa, but eventually they came around, and were staunchly supportive during her illness. I have never regretted our decision to be as out as we could manage. It was worth the risk, the jump into a new world, and I think most of the Doctor's companions would say much the same.

Lisa died of a metastatic brain tumor in 2006, the result of inflammatory breast cancer, two days shy of our 27th anniversary. We hadn't watched the new series at all: by the time it aired in the US, she was failing badly, and we were caught up with moving her to hospice care.

Several weeks after she died, I stumbled across the ninth Doctor, the double-episode story *The Empty Child* and *The Doctor Dances*, and I was transfixed. The Doctor was back, a new and fascinating regeneration, and his new companion was just as fascinating. I adored Rose from the start, the wandering child in the gas mask was one of the creepiest things I'd ever seen on *Doctor Who* - or anywhere - and then there was Captain Jack Harkness.

Jack was queer as they come, even when he was flirting with Rose; it was bi flirting, somehow, an entirely different valance than a straight man. When he went off to "distract" the guard, I wanted to cheer just because it was there, explicit, in actual words: Jack was queer. And even when I was afraid they were going to kill the queer character, at least they were going to let him go out with style - and a martini. I cried at the end, and I was crying not just for the resolution - just this once, nobody dies! - but because Lisa hadn't lived to see this. She would have loved Jack, loved that the Doctor had acquired a queer companion.

Jack's presence made explicit what had always been there in potential: queer folk were just as welcome, just as useful as companions as anyone else. Lisa and I had been long time companions, too, starting with the fourth Doctor. We hadn't been excluded, and we'd known it, somehow. And, at the same time, nothing had changed. Jack is an omni-sexual fifty-first-century Time Agent turned con man. The Doctor welcomes the oddest folk as his companions. You just have to be willing to go.

That, I think, is the ultimate reason that I love *Doctor Who*. For whatever reason - probably because it began as a show fully aware that children are watching - this was a show in which the protagonists were not required to demonstrate their heterosexuality at every turn. And that left room for queer imagination, for less obvious possibilities. Anyone could go with the Doctor, if they'd make the leap in the dark. Some risks are well worth taking, and that's one thing this long-time companion believes with all her heart.

## **Jack Harkness's Lessons on Memory and Hope for Cranky, Old Queers**

**Racheline Maltese** is a performer and storyteller focused on themes of sex, gender, desire, and mourning. Her training includes a journalism degree from The George Washington University, as well as acting and directing coursework at the Atlantic Theater Company Acting School (New York City) and the National Institute of Dramatic Art (Sydney, Australia). She wrote *The Book of Harry Potter Trifles, Trivias, and Particularities* (Sterling and Ross, 2007) and also works as an independent scholar focused on pop culture topics through her affiliation with The Society of Friends of the Text. Racheline's fiction, nonfiction, and poetry have appeared in numerous outlets, and she is a regular speaker on pop-culture topics at fan and academic conferences. She also voiced Desire and Delirium in a benefit performance of Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman* for the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund. Additionally, Racheline is the co-founder of Treble Entendre, a musical theater production company dedicated to musicals with subtext that makes you want to sing. Racheline lives in New York City with her partner; sometimes she sleeps. You can find her on the Internet at [www.LettersfromTitan.com](http://www.LettersfromTitan.com)

"You people and your quaint little categories."

—Jack Harkness, *Torchwood: Day One*

When I was growing up and coming out in the 1980s, categories mattered a lot. Categories were an organizing principle of our community, and, perhaps more importantly in retrospect, there weren't that many of them. You were gay, lesbian, or straight; you were trans or not trans; you were HIV-positive or you weren't.

What you weren't was someone like me: a girl who felt like a boy, but only part time, and someone who was attracted to men and women, but was never going to want or be able to pass as straight. Which isn't to say I didn't know people who were queer and bisexual, but it is to say that using those words was more fraught in 1986 than it is today.

But words we did use. Labels and categories mattered and continue

to matter, even as they have seemed to proliferate to describe the many shades of our not heterosexual existences. For example, this week I'm a masculine-identified genderqueer pansexual woman in a lesbian relationship, but I prefer the word *gay* for political reasons. What was once shorthand for what we are has become a toolkit for answering essay questions, and the LGBT group of my university years has now expanded to include at least twice as many letters.

Even if I can't keep up, even if I'm the cranky queer who wants these kids and their giant acronyms off my lawn ("In my day, we only had four letters!"), the acknowledgement of more identities can only be to the good, even if sometimes I feel as if this phenomenon has left me behind.

Sometimes I miss it, the simpler, clearer, more brutal and absolutist world I grew up gay in, and that's where Captain Jack Harkness comes in. Because while many *Torchwood* viewers have relied on the character to learn about a fifty-first century where no one will blink at our labels if we even choose to use them, I fell under Jack's spell for two completely different reasons.

The first was that he's served to remind me that the twentieth century - my own gay and brutal twentieth century where I came out because ACT UP said SILENCE = DEATH - really happened. The second was that he's taught me how to be a boy.

###

It gets better.

Captain Jack Harkness may never have been part of this particularly American anti-bullying campaign, but that's effectively what his presence in the Whoniverse tells us. Labels don't matter, sex isn't shameful, and the relationship between your gender and sexuality is whatever you say it is and only as important as you want it to be.

Even if the fan culture around *Torchwood* hasn't always been as enlightened at the fifty-first century - such as hating Gwen Cooper for being a woman while insisting Ianto Jones conform to a number of feminine stereotypes because of his involvement with Jack - the fact remains that *Torchwood* represents a future a lot of us want, as long as it involves less death and destruction and fewer aliens.

The problem with the future, however, is that sometimes it makes you forget the past, and no one knows that better than Jack of the tangled timeline, Jack who cannot die, Jack for whom our labels must seem

so much worse than quaint, but brutal too.

While historical content about Jack's sexuality has only been present in passing in *Torchwood*, its presence has always been wrenching. Not just because *Torchwood* is a show about loss and Jack is a personification of that loss, but because it reminds us that sometimes, there can be comfort and familiarity in even the most terrible things.

In *Immortal Sins* (episode seven of *Torchwood: Miracle Day*), we are treated to a number of flashbacks of Jack in early-twentieth century New York City as he meets and becomes involved with a man named Angelo, recently arrived from Italy.

The episode is deft in its portrayal of their courtship. Jack is bold for the time, but he still uses the caution of hints and leading questions. While *Torchwood* presumably lacks an audience that remembers pre-Depression America, these scenes are profoundly truthful for anyone who grew up in a time and a place where people didn't talk about their identities, and every expression of desire - every glance - carried with it a risk of exposure and violence.

Captain Jack Harkness may be our hate-free future, but that's arguably only meaningful to us as queer viewers because he has lived our past, even if it's often one we're supposed to be trying to forget.

*Immortal Sins* contains a critical moment that evokes this tension between the promised future and the reluctantly remembered past, when a criminal contact refers to Jack and Angelo as *finnoch* - an Italian word that technically refers to a bulb of fennel, but is also a nasty, anti-gay slur.

I grew up hearing that word from my father and his siblings. They're first generation Americans, from a Sicilian family, and if they don't have the language, they certainly have its curses. If I ever heard it used in regard to someone who was actually queer, I can't tell you, but I heard it constantly as a way to dismiss men they viewed as irrelevant, weak, and irritating.

*Finnoch* was a fighting word in my childhood, one that men had to defend themselves from at all costs.

To hear it on *Torchwood*, about characters as bold as Jack and Angelo, was jarring. It was also familiar, an oddly comforting taste of terrible home that must echo the way Jack Harkness may well miss the more brutal parts of his fifty-first century. Because no matter what Jack says later, sometimes there's nothing quaint about our categories, something which as a traveler here he likely has plenty of cause to know.

###

I resisted *Torchwood* when it first came on the air. I wasn't a *Doctor Who* fan, and friends' insistence that "everyone in *Torchwood* is bisexual and it's awesome" didn't particularly offer a narrative hook on which to pin my desire for queer content.

Eventually, however, someone said the fatal words that will make me watch *anything*. "So there's this guy, and I think you'll identify with him."

The problem with that, though, is that I'm not actually a guy. At least, not in body. And that's not an issue of what's under my shirt or in my pants nearly so much as it's an issue of being 5'5" and 110lbs. To say I'm slight is generous; my wrists are so delicate that I cannot wear bracelets without their falling off, and I seem like I have hips only because I do not have shoulders.

For most people, these things wouldn't matter. After all, we watch TV at home, on a couch, and it is the mind that identifies, not the flesh. It shouldn't matter, not really, how poorly we'd fit into the bodies of people we'll never be.

It does, however, matter for me. Whether that's because I'm fannish and love to cosplay, or because I'm the sort of queer person that gets called *Sir* when I wear a dress and *Ma'am* when I dress like a man, hardly matters.

In the world, whether I want it to be so or not, my gender is *other*. I don't always look the way I feel, and strangers have been reminding me that I'm *not right* since I was eight years old and would ask my parents how they got their little boy into the all-girls school that I attended.

This otherness may come from many things, from the shape of my face, to my body language, to my insistence on taking up space in this world. But it also comes from growing up a gay person when I did, in a world my friends and my partner (who is 12 years my junior) may not remember, but Jack Harkness certainly does.

*We're here, we're queer, get used to it.* Being out when I was a teenager was about making sure I could never pass as straight, displaying signifiers that meant I could always be identified by my own kind.

But one of the things that happens, if you grow up queer in a world that doesn't really like you, is that you feel like you don't deserve things. Those things differ from person to person. For some people, it's friends; for some people, it's family; for some people, it's love; for others, it is success.

For me and my girl-boy face, it was beauty and desirability. I grew up thinking that to want me was shameful, and by the time I was done with college and had a string of girlfriends and boyfriends both gay and straight (I was the exception to a lot of rules) behind me, this was something I was even more sure of.

Wanting me was disruptive to people; I was poison.

So when Captain Jack Harkness came along over ten years later, and my friends were right, I did identify with him (the loss, the longing, the very feminine “come and get me, boys” mode of flirtation), my first response was despair that he was not the sort of queer identity I was entitled to; he was so much more of a man than me, and too handsome.

My second response was to get on the Internet and *freak out*. Because I didn't deserve to connect with a character everyone wanted. I wasn't attractive, I wasn't attractive like that, and it seemed disrespectful to a show I was quickly coming to love to so overstep my bounds.

“Come on,” said an ex, “Whether as fashion inspiration or cosplay, you'd make a great Jack Harkness. You're totally that guy.”

“I'm short. I have no shoulders. I have a terrible smile. It's... I can't even think about it,” I said, and went on to note that the only boy I'd never looked stupid as was Severus Snape, and that's because he was supposed to be ugly.

“You have gotten so much play because of the Snape thing, it's ridiculous,” he reminded me. “Try it.”

And so as Jack Harkness was busy reminding me of my past in a less queer friendly world than the one we're building in this twenty-first century, he also became my gateway to learning how to be the boy I'd always felt like half the time anyway.

I dragged friends on shopping excursions where I fretted about trousers that over-emphasized the hips I was trying to conceal, and complained about my inability to find shirts that fit me without the telltale feminine darts.

I bound my breasts with sports bras (good) and ace bandages (bad). I explored packing, but discovered, like Jack himself, that I couldn't stop thinking about my dick, which was incredibly inconvenient and consistently hysterical.

But most importantly, when I wore my costume, I felt beautiful. And so I didn't just wear it to cons. Oh no, I wore it to a swing dance night at the Player's Club in New York City where I clumsily dipped a friend on the dance floor and sent us both sprawling onto the ground. When I heard another event guest say to their companion, “I wish they were

our friends," I hollered, "Join us!", because I was Jack, and Jack can get away with anything.

Suddenly, people wanted me because I had the balls (synthetic and starting at \$29.99 at Toys in Babeland) to say they should. It was a revelation, not just because of my obvious self-esteem issues, but because I was well into my thirties and clearly my identity had not yet entirely settled.

As much as I insisted on still having a fondness for the shorter, simpler acronyms of my gay life in the 1980s, Jack Harkness was right and the categories I had lived by were not only quaint, but little; they couldn't contain me or my queerness.

So I started to build a men's wardrobe for myself - not for cosplay - but for my actual self, a girl named Racheline who sometimes thinks of herself as a boy named Martin. I shopped in the boys department at Macy's and found myself a tailor that was not only happy to make me a suit with built out shoulders to effectively hide my feminine hips, but knew enough to ask if I dress left or right.

I learned to tie ties. I bought cufflinks. I worried after pocket squares, and saved articles from *The Wall Street Journal* that talked about stores specifically for short men. My partner, a girl who likes girls, learned when to call me handsome, and I wondered if I would smile, should my father see me in a suit and hiss *finnochio* at me.

Suddenly, being free to be a man also left me free to be a woman, and I started buying dresses. A lot of dresses. "Do you think Jack would wear this?", I would ask fannish friends playfully when we went shopping. They would give me detailed explanations of their yes or no responses, and laugh only because we were having a good time.

For the first time in my life, I didn't feel like someone pretending to be something they weren't. Clothes were not costumes I had to fake fitting into, but items of beauty - male or female or categories be damned - that I was entitled to thanks to my fixation with a bit of winking fiction.

The future, I was learning, was very appealing.

###

But as the world changes, even for the better, things are lost: Our community's urgency about AIDS, our relentless political drive, our culture distinct and separate from a heterosexual world that wasn't ever going to let us in.

*Jack Harkness's Lessons on Memory and Hope for Cranky, Old Queers*

Don't get me wrong, there are good things about Pride parades filled with corporate floats and every discussion of queer identity not necessarily being about life and death issues.

But the quaint little categories that helped me become who I am were largely born of hardship and a group of people fumbling their way into activism through a profoundly dark time. To give up the memory and knowledge of that to the temptations of a fifty-first century - or even twenty-first century - world, would be a shame.

But as Jack Harkness helped teach me that it's acceptable that I am more than one thing, he has also become a tool for me to talk to younger fans about what it was like to be queer 25 years ago.

Sometimes it is easier for people to understand what really happened ("I used to go to ACT UP protests, and all the cops wore rubber gloves, because they thought we wanted to give them AIDS") when stories tell them it is so, as if our collective fictions are more reliable than individual memory.

But what I have also discovered in Whoniverse fandom, which has always been very queer and very queer-friendly, is that Jack also serves as something like a code between those of us who are older, who remember caution, fear, and disease, and who maybe even have fathers that would call us *finnoch*.

These older queer fans and I admire each other's cosplay, and wonder if Jack ever met David Bowie or went to Studio 54. But it's the things we don't wonder about that make Jack a unifying force between us queer fans of a certain age. For Jack, we know there must have been lovers lost not to aliens, but to AIDS, and scars no longer visible from a beating or a thrown bottle. If it's true for us, it somehow must be true for him, surely.

Ultimately, as a queer fan, the idea of Jack Harkness carries not just some of my hope for the future, but a reminder of our survival of the past. He didn't just free me from the confinement of my own quaint little categories, but allows me to hold onto them like a talisman, while also providing a common language to talk about the real world moments that I am grateful that many younger, newer fans have not had personal cause to know exist.

As much as Jack is often a footnote to long-time Whoniverse fans, with *Torchwood* just an odd blip in *Doctor Who's* 50-year history, he's really a remarkable personification of what has always made the show more than a family show filled with rubber monsters and rock quarries. Because Jack Harkness's immortality is, like the rest of the Whoniverse,

*Racheline Maltese*

about how we continue in the face of loss, and while that's a very universal story, it's also, unavoidably, a very queer one.

## **My Straight Best Friend**

**Nigel Fairs** trained at Bretton Hall. As a writer, he has had more plays produced than Shakespeare, and six musicals. He has also written and composed for audio serials based on *Sapphire & Steel*, *Dark Shadows*, *The Tomorrow People*, *Blake's 7*, and *Doctor Who* (for Big Finish Productions), and, since 1995, monthly murder mysteries for the 368 Theatre Company. As an actor, his favorite roles: John George Haigh in his own award-winning play *In Conversation with an Acid Bath Murderer*, Frank Churchill in *Emma & Noel Coward in 'Two Flats and a Sharp'* (Classic Reaction Theatre Company), Christopher Wren in *The Mousetrap* (West End), the lead in *Everyman* (Brighton), and the Black Dalek on *Blue Peter!* His latest play, *My Gay Best Friend* (co-written and performed with Louise Jameson) is currently touring the UK, having won the Angel Award at its premiere in the Brighton Festival.

*Before we start this whimsical little tale, I've been asked to say a little more about its protagonists. My name is Nigel Fairs, I'm an actor, I'm gay, and yesterday was my 49th birthday. Like most actors, I'm prone to crippling bouts of self-doubt and self-loathing, which only seem to completely vanish when I'm inhabiting someone else's skin on stage or on film. This afternoon, my Straight Best Friend confessed that she'd been kept awake all night by one of these bouts, which I found both bewildering (because it was her) and reassuring. She's called Louise Jameson, she's an actress, and she made her first appearance on Doctor Who (as the warrior girl Leela) on January 1, 1977. I mention that because it's the day I learnt that I could act.*

*Something quite interesting happened to me last week, when I was 48 and 358 days old. Ever since I was 13, I've had a recurring nightmare in which I am walking down a corridor at my archaic Grammar School. That's all I'm doing: walking down the corridor. But the feelings that come with it - the terror of the daily bullying and taunting, voices that I've managed to internalize ever since - are overwhelming. I left that hideous place in 1977 and hadn't been back until last week, when I was asked to run a drama workshop there. After the workshop, I borrowed some keys... and walked down the corridor. Obviously I was a sobbing mess by the time I reached the other end. I also set*

Nigel Fairs

*the burglar alarm off. As I cycled away from that place, alarm bells ringing behind me, I felt that something had shifted inside. But what a shame, I thought, that it had taken 35 years to face and defeat those particular demons. If only I could talk to my 13-year-old self and let him know that everything would eventually be all right...*

*Oh one other thing before we start. I've told you that my name's Nigel, I'm a 49 year old gay actor, but did I mention that I've got a time machine?*

"I'm going to be honest with you," I start to say.

Oh God, though, look at him. So young, so trusting and politely compliant, so unaware. Life is simple for him, organized into 45-minute chunks by archaically gowned masters of Latin, Maths, or English from Monday to Friday and then, at the weekends, that headily exciting countdown to *Doctor Who* (via *Space:1999*, *Basil Brush* and the football results) on a Saturday evening and the same again on Sunday (*The Brothers* via horridly overcooked sprouts for lunch and the delights of marmite and cheese sandwiches at tea-time). He can't see how comfortably wonderful and safe all that is, of course; he vaguely resents his parents, just like any other 13-year-old; he *hates* Latin almost as much as sprouts. He has a little nervous blink and occasionally his lips twitch, making him look rabbit-like and vulnerable; the more dramatic arm movements won't start for another year and the eventual neck spasm (that will plague him into his forties, perhaps beyond) is almost two decades away. No spots yet; they'll arrive late in the day and won't disappear until they're burnt off his face, back, and chest by a vicious new drug and half-minute blasts of ultraviolet in his mid-twenties.

His fair hair and national health glasses (stuck together with a plaster) make him look a bit like *Joe 90*, which is fitting. In sharp contrast to his brother's or classmates' healthy idea of Heaven being a football pitch, this boy is happiest sitting at the top of the stairs drawing *Thunderbirds* or *Captain Scarlet* comic strips. Virgil Tracy is his George Best, SPECTRUM his Leeds United. His fantasies take place in a pink Rolls Royce, not between goalposts, or even the sheets. Love to him is "underneath the willow tree" that *Oliver!* has been dreaming of on his parents' much-played LP, or laughing in the rain, "walking hand in hand" with Neil Sedaka. Sex is equally unattainable, unimaginable even. Though he has been deliciously shocked by the heady rush of his first orgasm (on the toilet whilst guiltily admiring the tantalizing glimpse of a testicle on page 56 of one of his father's *Playboys*), the idea that the furtive fiddling with Jamie from up the road could or should ever lead

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to a similar explosion, let alone love, has not yet occurred to him. Neither has the guilt or self-loathing that will accompany the eventual enlightenment.

He lives in Hassocks, a small village in many ways, nestling below the sprawling South Downs. Beyond the hills lies Brighton, a town considered as immoral as Sodom or Gomorrah. But he has been protected from all but the slightest mention of anything deviating from normality, which of course must be preserved above everything else in Hassocks.

Brighton to him is a sticky bun and milkshake in *Forfars Café* during school holidays, Slade and Queen singles from the bargain bucket in Woolworths, sausage rolls on the beach with his amazing grandmother and an assortment of aunts. It's the tiny waxwork museum, Louis Tussaud's (great-grandson of the more famous Madame in London), the hall of mirrors on the West Pier, that spot on the promenade where he saw Sid James go-karting along the front whilst filming *Carry On Girls*. In 26 years' time, he'll stand on that spot to watch the West Pier burn, silently mourning her passing with hundreds of fellow Brightonians. A city by then, Brighton will have become his spiritual home; from the moment he catches the extraordinary sight of two men walking along the beach hand in hand, he'll know he *has* to live there. In Brighton, there's love and laughter to be found in the rain (but not with Neil Sedaka) and an awful lot more under a variety of trees and bushes in its parks and gardens.

But now, here in Hassocks, any clue to another, less palatable world has been swept under the carpet almost immediately: his mother, confronted with the mention of the Jeremy Thorpe scandal one lunchtime, flicked the wireless off with a curt, "Yes, well we don't want to hear about that, thank you very much!" And his equally well-meaning grandfather will soon give him his one, hilariously ironic, piece of advice about life: "Keep away from the homosexuals."

It's not really his family's fault that he'll grow up too timid or afraid to make a first move with a boy or even dare to express his feelings in anything other than cryptic poems scribbled into heavily coded diaries. How could his parents know any better? They're only trying their best to shield him from the awkward truth that some of us are born different. Some of us are "unlike," "abnormal", *special*.

Oh how I long to tell him all this, but then could or should I? What about the Blinovitch Limitation Effect?

"I'm going to be honest with you," I say, and then, as he smiles politely, trying not to blink or twitch, I roll out the big one: "I'm a time

traveler. I've traveled in time to see you today."

His eyes widen.

"What, like Doctor Who?"

He twitches.

"Yes, like Doctor Who. Just like Doctor Who. In fact, *Doctor Who* is exactly what I wanted to talk to you about..."

As a matter of fact, *Doctor Who* isn't what I want to talk about at all, but it's a good place to start, because, for him, that's the only connection he could possibly have with what I need to say. It's January 1, 1977, you see, and this evening he caught the first glimpse of the woman who will eventually change his life for the better in so many ways.

An hour ago, she arrived in his parents' neatly manicured lounge with a dramatic flourish of music that seemed to be saying, *Right, this is where we really start, this is it, folks*. Proud and defiant in profile, dark eyes burning, it's a sight he'll never quite forget. Although he'd blurted out to the bullies on the playing field that he "wasn't interested in *Doctor Who* anymore," that he wouldn't even watch it when it came back on. He'd known, of course, that he would. It never occurred to him to wonder what difference it made to them what he did or didn't do, at home or otherwise. Nor did it occur to him to report, challenge, or even question the slap around the head with which his Geography teacher had broken his glasses earlier that week. He simply assumed that people who write serials for the school paper, don't like cross-country runs, or draw Thunderbird 2 on their school books *deserve* to be branded a "little pool" and hit in double Geography, making it acceptable for the playground bullies to follow the glowing example and make his school life a private misery.

Earlier today, he sidestepped a pulverizing from one of them by employing a hitherto-unrecognized skill, one that will come to define him and eventually bring him into direct contact with the dark-eyed warrior on his television screen.

He acted.

A puncture had meant he'd had to walk his bicycle back home from his grandmother's house. He knew that his parents wouldn't be home for at least an hour and a half, but he wanted to watch *Doctor Who* without his grandparents' well-meaning questions and comments. The front door key, he knew, was hidden under a brick in the garden.

Bored of their Saturday afternoon, a group of boys set out to find something to amuse them and had found him. They started with name-calling, which he ignored, as he did the spitting; it was only when the

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tallest of them kicked his bicycle and threatened to, "beat your brains out, benny boy!" that his heart really started racing and his pace quickened. To his alarm, tall boy followed him all the way up the Close to his parents' house and, terrifyingly, up the little slope that led to the back garden gate. Blood pounding in his ears, he realized that tall boy was going to follow him past the hidden key and into the back garden, where he would be trapped. Worse, the other boys were boldly following his example. A few paces ahead of them, he leant his bicycle against the garden shed and strode towards the French doors that, had they been unlocked, would have given him an escape route into the lounge. As his tormentors arrived by the shed, he turned towards his own reflection and said, "Dad, there's someone in the garden. I think they want to steal your car."

For a moment, tall boy froze. Then he and his gang ran away.

I want to tell him to tell his parents what happened, both in their garden and at school. I want him to be indignant, angry even, about the bullying and proud of this afternoon's quick-thinking. But he can't talk to his parents. Not yet, anyway. That'll come later. Nearly 35 years later. It'll start to happen over a kitchen table one blissful January evening, when his parents are eating a delicious roast prepared with love by the dark-eyed warrior who appeared in their lounge less than an hour after their son learnt how to act just outside it.

"That's what *sushi* means," she'll tell him, "'Prepared with love.' This roast chicken is *sushi*."

She's no longer the dark-eyed warrior off the telly; her eyes are an astonishing blue, and her face is so full of passion for Shakespeare, theater, lovers, life, and everything that makes it worth living that sometimes he'll think his heart will break with gratitude just by looking at it... *especially* when she's helping him to break down the walls between him and his parents in that apparently effortless, generous way of hers. She'll describe her own family as "dysfunctional" and yet, when he meets them, he'll marvel at their openly expressed feelings for each other and reflect with joy on the role that she's taken with his.

But that's not the sort of thing that this twitching, timid, 13-year-old would understand, is it? What can he possibly know about the comfort of friends or the wisdom of experience?

"I'm going to be honest with you, "I say. "I'm a time traveler. And I want to talk to you about *Doctor Who*."

He leans forward and blinks.

"Is Jon Pertwee going to come back?" he asks, "He was my favorite.

I mean, I quite like Tom Baker. He's got teeth like my art teacher. But it's not quite as good as it used to be."

His world is so small and yet so much bigger than that of his tormentors. They'll probably still live here, or in a small town just like it, with their small lives and their small minds, when he has the ability and opportunity to experience so much more. Like most homophobes, tall boy is probably gay himself. Maybe one day he'll realize what a total dickhead he's being and come to terms with himself.

My head is spinning. His parents will be home in half an hour. How do I start to say what I want to say? *You know that brilliant actress who played Leela just now? One day you'll both be sitting in a Jacuzzi in Provence at four in the morning, telling each other how much you love each other... and then you'll write a play about it, and you'll even win an award...*

No, that'd be too much. He hasn't even decided he wants to be an actor yet.

*You know that brilliant actress who played Leela just now? In a couple of years, when you've changed schools and nobody bullies you any more, you'll go on a theater trip and you'll see her in King Lear and you'll finally get Shakespeare and know what you want to be: an actor... And then, years later, you'll dry disastrously because you suddenly realize that you're playing Gloucester opposite her Lady Anne, and, had your 13-year-old self ever imagined this would happen...*

No, this is hopeless. Better to start at the beginning, of sorts.

It'll be backstage at the Barbican. He'll be 32, he'll be so gobsmacked at finally meeting her, so transfixed by her unexpectedly piercing blue eyes, that all he'll be able to say is, "Beautiful... You were beautiful." It's a moment that'll make him squirm with embarrassment for years afterwards, until he finally tells her and of course she can't remember it.

And then, 11 years on from that, he'll hear her speak his lines for the first time in an unkempt studio in South London, and, if that's not enough, he'll have to stand in for the actor that's supposed to be playing the scenes with her. By then, he'll have decided that acting's too cruel a profession for him, giving up the gruelling onslaught of auditions, rejections, and criticism for another profession. Having come to the conclusion - after three major relationships and a fleeting handful of minor ones - that he is unlovable, he will be channelling all his energy into being a therapist. He'll believe that, by sitting with other people's neuroses and depressions, he can make his own miraculously disappear. It's a laughable delusion, as is the one that he could ever truly give up his real vocation. Between clients - quite literally, in the therapy room - he'll

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be penning scripts, dreaming up story arcs and creating a family of characters for an audio version of one of the television programmes that, even now, on January 1, 1977, are helping him bear the uncomfortable realities of his school life.

*That actress you just saw will one day scream at her fictional daughter using words you've written, complaining about how unbearable it is to have a child that's different and impossible to understand. And she'll do it so well that you'll be moved to tears; it'll be as if you've heard your own mother say the things you've always been afraid she's feeling.*

Okay, there's no way I'll ever tell him that. Perhaps I'll make it simpler.

*She'll be your friend.*

That's more like it.

*One day she'll be the only person in your entire world that you can think of to confide in about the fact that a lesbian couple have asked you to become the father to their children.*

Hmm. Maybe not so good.

"Blimey!" she'll say to him, "That's a surprise! I thought you wanted to talk to me about your career. I never imagined it would be anything like this..."

And she'll give him the most frank, honest advice he could possibly ask for, about her own experiences and expectations as a hard-working single mother, about his hopes and fears, and it'll be that afternoon that he'll realize he's almost forgotten about her being one of the finest actresses he's ever known and considers her a friend. A confidante. Someone who understands what it feels like to be different, to be bullied, to have passion.

Not that her professionalism or brilliance will ever cease to amaze him. Another year on, when the cast of young people they've gathered together are about to perform an exciting piece of theater for the first time, she'll sit them in a hushed circle on stage and deliver such an inspirational speech that the performance will take on an almost religious fervor.

"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate," she'll quote to them, "Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, 'Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?' Actually, who are you *not* to be?"

The theater was once a church; she might as well be a High Priestess conjuring up magical spirits from its once-hallowed walls.

Thanks to her, he'll reconnect with the passion he'll come to feel about theater, before the neuroses take hold and blur his vision. Buoyed up by her encouragement, her belief in him, *her* passion, he'll abandon the therapy room for good and have the courage to walk the road less traveled, with her by his side. He'll start believing in himself for the first time in his life, turn his back on the voices that tell him he's an unlovable, useless freak, start to care less about the critics and the bullies. He'll love his own creativity because she'll help him to express it without fear of having his glasses broken.

In Stratford, during the interval of the David Tennant *Hamlet*, he'll watch a fan, sweetly pale and trembling, ask her for an autograph, and marvel at her generous response, knowing that in his head the boy's probably saying, "Beautiful... you're beautiful..."

Hers will be the hand that gently rubs his back after he's shakily delivered the eulogy at his friend and mentor's funeral. And when he returns the favor by accompanying her to say a final farewell to the gentle man who made much of her career possible, they'll laugh about his panic attack driving across the Severn bridge and being in floods of tears over *The Afternoon Play* on Radio 4.

"You were supposed to be supporting *me!*", she'll giggle.

I can't tell him any of this. If I did tell him, his life might take a different course and he might never meet her.

I might never have met Louise Jameson, and that thought just doesn't bear thinking about.

"I like Leela, though," he says, "I think she's going to be good."

I smile.

"Yes, she is," I say, "And she gets even better. Just you wait till you see her in the Japanese prisoner of war camp. You'll love her in that."

"Are the Daleks in that one?"

I laugh.

"In a way, I suppose you could say they are."

I'm not going to say what I came to say. It was enough to see him on this night where he saw my Best Straight Friend for the first time, and to reflect on the unexpected routes that our lives can go down. Bruce Forsyth's on the telly, teasing a woman in a brown hat and the matronly kind of glasses that my Junior School teacher used to wear.

"Well, Nigel," I say, "it's been lovely to meet you. I'd better get going. I've left my TARDIS on a double yellow, and I'm meant to be writing a play in 35 years. You'll like it. You're in it."

"Me?"

*My Straight Best Friend*

"Yes. You! Enjoy *The Generation Game*. Bruce Forsyth leaves next year, but he'll come back, eventually, for a while. Just like Jon Pertwee. And they remake *Thunderbirds* too, but it's rubbish."

Thirty-five years later, I'm sitting with Louise Jameson in a pub in Port Isaac, a picturesque fishing village in Cornwall. On the table between us there are two netbooks, one glass of Chablis, one of Rioja, and a half-eaten bowl of olives. We've spent the last week writing a play together. It's been an exhilarating and revealing experience; the play has proven to be rather more candid and autobiographical than either of us anticipated, and, at times, a lot darker than the camp romp we anticipated. The working title of the play is *My Gay Best Friend*, and we've just read each other our final scenes.

There's a moment of stillness.

I'm in tears.

"Are you crying?" she says.

I nod.

"You old poof!"

I love that woman.

## **A Kiss from Romana: Lesbian Subtext in *The Stones of Blood***

**Julia Rios** is a writer, editor, podcaster, and narrator. She promotes QUILTBAG speculative fiction with *The Outer Alliance* (in part by hosting the *Outer Alliance Podcast*), is one of the three fiction editors at *Strange Horizons*, and occasionally reads stories for places like *PodCastle* and *Pseudopod*. Her fiction, articles, interviews, and poetry have appeared in *Daily Science Fiction*, *Apex Magazine*, *Stone Telling: The Magazine of Boundary-Crossing Poetry*, *Jabberwocky*, and several other places. Julia is half Mexican, but her (fairly dreadful) French is better than her Spanish. She loves cats and colorful things, and expresses the latter by dyeing her hair bright colors and messing about with papercrafts.

Unlike most *Doctor Who* fans I know, I met the Doctor as an adult. I didn't spend my whole childhood wanting to run away with an odd man in a blue police box, or having nightmares about the strange monsters cobbled together from spare props in the BBC back room.

Though I had a typically geeky childhood, full of outcast moments and dreams of escape, I came to the Doctor as a grown up who'd traveled quite a bit and even spent some time living in a foreign country. I'd already realized that no matter how far I wandered, I wouldn't escape the uncertainties of being me. Though I'd been through my fair share of angst about orientation and gender identity, I was mostly over it by that point. Mostly.

I've always found gender incredibly confusing. I never quite know if I am going to wake up feeling like a floaty princess dress is the right outfit for the day, or whether I should be wearing clothes from the men's department. Sometimes, I think I must be femme, or else why would I have wanted layers of lacy petticoats as a child? But other times, I take a hard look at other women around me, and they all seem to understand a secret female code that I've never been able to crack. My sister and her friends know the right way to dress, and how to wear makeup, and how to have girls' nights. I always wonder why we can't just invite everyone, and then I start to get twitchy when I realize that I am clearly going to be out of place as the only person with hairy legs and

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no makeup, and I start to panic at the idea that a pedicure is somehow supposed to be fun and not torture. Suddenly, all those years of standing awkwardly at the edges of school dances come rushing back, and I know that I have still not mastered this whole “being a girl” thing.

When I wear dresses, it feels like a costume. Looking back on the little girl version of me who wanted acres of fluffy lace, I realize I was pining for a Really Good Costume. Even as a tiny kid, I wanted to have it all, and if I couldn’t, then I wanted to set aside this pretense and wear sturdy pants and shirts that I could do practical things in. Like muck about in the dirt.

The first thing I noticed about Tom Baker’s Doctor was that he showed up everywhere in his own version of practical clothes. Which, okay, included an impractically giant scarf, but I got the feeling right away that he was always comfortable, and he certainly had no trouble mucking around in dirt. The next thing I noticed was that his companion changed clothes all the time, and this seemingly small thing started me thinking a lot more about gender.

Mary Tamm’s Romana is relentlessly femme. She wears pink ruffles and high-heeled sandals, and her hair and makeup are always immaculate. But when I say relentlessly, I’m not just talking about her fashion sense; I mean she owns it. She’s got a voice like soft toffee, and the poise of a lion; she’s the Doctor’s equal, not his sidekick or inferior. She’s obviously not romantically interested in the Doctor, either. Later storylines with Lalla Ward inspired lots of fan shipping (and with good reason - the actors briefly married in real life), but Mary Tamm’s Romana is her own person.

I loved her immediately.

As a female who tends to find women more attractive than men, I’m always interested to see beautiful, capable women in my entertainment, and I’m especially pleased to find lesbian content in my favorite shows. It’s exciting to see how far we’ve come culturally. These days, we can see Toshiko on *Torchwood* making out with a female alien, or cheer for the kickass human/Silurian lesbian couple who make on-screen jokes about their sexuality. For a long time, though, there was a little thrill to seeing the thinly veiled and technically deniable subtext under the surface of shows whose characters couldn’t have overtly non-heterosexual relationships. From Susan’s bond with Ping-Cho in the Season One story *Marco Polo*, to Ace’s many, ahem, *close friendships*, viewers like me have delighted in reading between the lines. *Doctor Who* has always offered a variety of excellent female characters, but perhaps unsurprisingly, my

favorite companion is the first one I met, and my favorite ladies-who-love-ladies serial is *The Stones of Blood*.

Aside from having one of the most awesome lesbian storylines in all of *Doctor Who* history, it's got a brilliant trio of very different, very strong women, and they each approach gender in their own ways.

When Romana first arrives on the scene a couple of stories before *The Stones of Blood*, she's been assigned to keep an eye on the Doctor, and she takes the job seriously. She's not his granddaughter, or a human, or some sort of stranger who knows nothing at all coming in. Romanadvoratrelundar is from Gallifrey. She knows how the TARDIS works, and she even has some skills that the Doctor doesn't have. For instance, they're on a quest to assemble six pieces of the Key to Time, and the Doctor is rather hopeless at fitting the segments together - but for Romana, physical puzzle solving is a piece of cake.

It's not just Romana's besting the Doctor that makes me love her, though. She's also calm and assertive when she doesn't have knowledge or skills that the Doctor has. Sometimes she doesn't know an awful lot, but the way Tamm plays her, even obvious questions come across as frank and logical. She's not afraid of admitting it when she doesn't know something, and she's not afraid of asking for help if she needs it. To me, that makes her braver and stronger than a more macho person who won't admit ignorance for fear of looking dumb.

And, okay, nobody's perfect. She *does* accidentally erase all of K9's knowledge about tennis, but I think that just adds to her charm.

Since she's also gorgeous, it comes as no surprise when esteemed archaeologist Professor Amelia Rumford (Beatrix Lehmann) and her very good friend, Miss Vivien Fay (Susan Engel), are both utterly taken with her on sight.

Now, I'm a history geek, so of course when I saw this story for the first time, I had to look up all the information I could find about the person who played the amazing archaeology professor. I had a hunch that her butchness might not be just an act, you see... I'm not sure if I was right, but I was certainly rewarded for checking.

Beatrix Lehmann was a working actress for more than half of the twentieth century, and she was fairly openly queer. Photos of her as a young woman show that she was beautiful, and she must have been just as charismatic back then as she was in later years. She was Tallulah Bankhead's understudy in the late 1920s, and Bankhead's lover and co-star, Glenn Anders, said that he thought Bankhead must have been in

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love with her.<sup>38</sup> She came by it honestly, too. All the Lehmann siblings were part of the Bloomsbury set, which centered on literary greats like Virginia Woolf. Beatrix's brother John was a gay man who managed the Woolfs' press before starting his own publishing house, and her sister Rosamond wrote novels with QUILTBAG characters as early as 1927. Back then, it was brave to be as open as the Lehmanns were; male homosexuality was a crime in the United Kingdom, and female homosexuality was certainly frowned upon if not technically illegal. Civil rights for QUILTBAG people didn't start in earnest until 1967<sup>39</sup>, and even then they happened slowly. Most of the changes in laws about consent and adoption and so forth didn't happen until the late 1990s and early 2000s. No one in the Bloomsbury set really got to see those changes. Not all of them even made it to what we'd now call senior citizenship; too many died young, whether due to illness, war, or suicide. In light of that, seeing Beatrix Lehmann as an old woman in a wonderfully capable and unapologetically butch role is extra awesome.

Professor Amelia Rumford is a strong presence from the moment she strides onto the scene in all her butch glory. She immediately challenges the Doctor's knowledge of archaeology, introduces her good friend, Miss Fay, and then puts Romana to work. She takes femme Romana seriously as a scientific equal right away, which is fantastic - this serial gives us a beautiful example of different kinds of women working together, and supporting each other. Of course, the next thing Amelia does is agree with the Doctor that Romana's strappy heels are super impractical for rough surveying work, but, well, she has a point. One gets the impression that like many butch lesbians, Professor Rumford would never wear uncomfortable shoes. In fact, she spends the whole episode in rough archaeologist work kit with a bandanna around her neck and solid walking shoes on her feet. She's also got practical short hair, and fabulous swagger.

The Doctor ends up out of the picture for large swathes of this storyline, which leaves the three women with plenty of chances to interact. When they do, we see them talking about academic and scientific work,

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38. Lobenthal, Joel. "Something Different." *Tallulah!: The Life and Times of a Leading Lady*. New York: Harper Entertainment, 2008. 114.

39. The Sexual Offences Act 1967 decriminalized homosexual acts in private between two men over the age of 21. This was a major step forward, but still a long way from ideal. It only applied in England and Wales (Scotland didn't follow suit until 1980), and its definition of private places excluded hotels and residences where other people might be present, even in a separate room.

disparaging men, and, ah, eating sausage sandwiches. I'm still not entirely sure how to take that last bit, but it seems oddly suggestive, doesn't it? It's Amelia who says that there's nothing like a sausage sandwich when one is trying to work something out. Maybe it's that it seems like a food coded as masculine (no delicate cucumber sandwiches or scones here), or maybe it's the implication that Professor Rumford chews up manliness like nothing, but damned if it doesn't make her seem even more butch than she did before.

In the DVD commentary, director Darrol Blake says Beatrix Lehmann took the part because she loved dogs, and wanted to know how K9 worked. This makes her enthusiastic interactions with the tin dog more delightful than they already would have been. For Whovians, getting the chance to explore the world of the show is a bit like a dream, so it's especially endearing when the actors clearly feel the same way. Lehmann seems to have as much fun with this role as her character does with the adventure.

And that brings me to another thing I absolutely adore about *The Stones of Blood*: Professor Rumford is one of the best random one-off companions ever. She takes everything in stride, from robotic dogs to bloodthirsty stones to alien ships in alternate dimensions, and she does it all with a gleeful confidence that's adorable and contagious.

Even the Doctor is super-impressed with Professor Rumford, as well he should be. When the local druid cult plans to sacrifice him, Amelia hears the Doctor calling for help, and rides to the rescue on her trusty bicycle, neatly saving his life. When he asks what brought her out in the dark, she says she was bringing Romana a flask of tea. Because of course she wants to see more of Romana. Who wouldn't?

When they work out that Romana is missing, the Professor doesn't wring her hands in helpless despair; she revels in the knowledge that, "Things are getting exciting." She's intrigued by K9, but also interested in the alternate dimension, the Ogri, and all of the Doctor's many devices. She even rebuilds one when it breaks, with only K9 to help her. And K9 likes her. You might say a robot dog can't possibly really "like" anyone, but he totally does because she is basically the world's biggest mensch.

Vivien Fay is a little less menschy and a little more evil, but she's yet another fascinating strong female character, and she is clearly a lesbian, too. Even she is impressed with the Professor. When Amelia gets in her way, Vivien actually has a soft moment and asks Amelia to move out of the line of fire. And that's not all that Vivien does to indicate her lady-

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loving ways. When Amelia offers Romana a ride on the back of her bicycle, Romana demurs, but Vivien cagily says it'll be a new experience for her. Rawr.

Vivien doesn't seem to be bothered by Amelia's advanced age, which makes sense once you realize she's been around for at least 4000 years. As a little historical lesbian Easter egg, when the Doctor is working out who Vivien has posed as for the past several hundred years, he mentions that she was Mrs Trefusis, coincidentally the same name as one of Bloomsbury set author Vita Sackville-West's famous female lovers.<sup>40</sup>

Vivien turns out to be an alien criminal, who eventually transforms into her true silver-skinned body, and spends the rest of the serial being deliciously vile. She's somewhere in-between Professor Rumford and Romana on the butch-femme scale. More femme than butch in her dress choices, but more butch than femme in the way she carries herself. She dresses throughout in dresses or pantsuits that are coded as female (even doing her rough outdoor survey work in a pastel pink blazer and slacks), but she wears them in a way that is much more robust than delicate, and her voice is lower and more growly than Romana's. Vivien's voice is powerful, charming, and utterly dangerous. It's understandable that Amelia is taken with her, and bittersweet when she has to help cause Vivien's demise.

Vivien toys with men, and one gets the impression she isn't above flirting with them in order to get what she wants, but through all her ploys, it's clear that she thinks very little of males as a class. She values women, though. She clearly likes spending time with Amelia, and cares deeply enough for her not to want to kill her. She also seems interested in Romana. The tells for this are small, but varied. From the start, she enjoys working with Romana, and is hopeful that Romana will come to tea. We learn later that she's arranged to have her local druid priest attempt to kill the Doctor, but I get the impression that in her ideal scenario, Romana comes to stay and be another lovely companion at the cottage.

So, to recap, we have a high femme knockout Time Lady, who is all about equality between the sexes, a soft butch radical lesbian separatist alien who thinks men can sometimes be useful (more often than not for their blood, which can feed her pet rock army), and a fabulous super

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40. Violet Trefusis had a relationship with Vita Sackville-West, which started when the two were children, and continued for roughly 11 years. In *Orlando* (the title character of which is a fictionalized version of Vita Sackville-West), Virginia Woolf even based the character of Orlando's first love, Princess Sasha, on Trefusis.

butch archaeologist who seems so confident in herself than she doesn't mind what men do, and assumes she can do it right alongside them.

These three women present very different pictures of what it means to be female. They're all strong, capable, interesting people, and they have their definite styles. Amelia's rough practicality is deliberate, and different to the Doctor's version of that same ideal. Vivien's idea of practical involves more "fitting in" with the contemporary fashion (something that is certainly useful when your goal is to convince people you're human and not an ancient alien). Romana's version of practical is whatever makes her feel happy and pretty. She enthusiastically applies herself to whatever work is needed, and she'll try to find something acceptable to the locals wherever the TARDIS happens to land, but one of the ways she asserts her personality is by choosing feminine things. When she's on Earth, that means pink jumpsuits with strappy sandals, or skirts and blouses in a fashionable 1970s pseudo-Victorian style. When she's in other places, this might mean satin robes, or ostentatiously feathered cloaks. As noted before, her hair and makeup are always perfect (even when she's been dangling off the edge of a cliff for hours).

Romana dresses for each new adventure like it's the best excuse ever to put on a costume. I can identify with that, even though I think actually she'd know that secret female code I find so baffling. What I love about her is that she'd be okay with me not knowing it. She'd accept me in whatever state I happened to come in, just like she accepts Professor Rumford.

Though it's not clear how Romana feels about either of the other women, it's pretty clear that she's totally okay with them being lesbians, and even finds it charming that Amelia is obviously crushing on her. The biggest clue about that is the kiss she gives Amelia at the very end of the serial. After they've sorted out what was going on, and taken care of the trouble, the Doctor makes a beeline for the TARDIS, and the next adventure, whatever that might be. Romana, however, hangs back and walks alongside the Professor, clearly charmed. When she asks if the Professor will write about everything that happened, Amelia says that she still has her academic reputation to consider. Romana seems to view her at this point as a curiously precocious child, which is funny considering Lehmann's got a good 50 years on Tamm. It makes perfect sense in the context of the characters, though. Romana is a young Time Lady at roughly 139, but of all the main characters in this serial, Professor Rumford is actually the youngest.

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I've never been sure what sort of attractions Romana feels in general, but in that moment I think she knows she's making a human woman's dreams come true, and she seems pretty happy to do it. Amelia has been magnificent company throughout their brief time together - she even saves Romana not just once, but a couple of times. Romana is impressed, and she shows her appreciation by bestowing a kiss upon Professor Rumford's cheek. It's a small gesture, but to Amelia, it's a heart-fluttering brush with the sublime. Her hand raises to her cheek, then settles above her heart, and there's a delighted gleam in her eye when she watches the TARDIS disappear and repeats, "I do have my academic reputation to consider."

My heart can't help but flutter, too, at the sweetness of it, and at the thrill of recognition that all Whovians seem to feel; this show accepts us, whoever we may be.

## Bothersome Otherness

**Martin Warren** lives with his partner Mark in the English coastal town of Saltdean. A lifelong fan of *Doctor Who*, one of his earliest memories is of watching Jon Pertwee in color on his parents' black & white telly. This ability to embellish the mundane has proved useful ever since, and his efforts to bring a dash of vinegar and zest to life have been generally, though not universally, appreciated. Pausing only to draw breath and refresh his glass, he hopes this essay leads to frenzied autograph sessions around the globe, lucrative modeling offers, and the batting away of lightly muscled fanboys. His essay is dedicated to his best friend, Jonathan Lewis, who correctly identified that Martin has no inner child. He has an inner adult.

*Doctor Who's* concepts and core character have been around for long enough to be accepted by most as something more than just a TV show. Admittedly, there remain those impervious to its charms and dismissive of its status, but then there are also those who insist that social media is nothing to get excited about.

*Doctor Who* has outgrown its television origins to become comic strips, paperbacks, a musical stage play, audio adventures, reconstructed dramas, slash/ fiction, computer games, blog fodder, magazine blurb, screenplays (as yet unrealized), chart hit, parody, and more. Its ubiquity and longevity have transformed it from humble broadcast to zippy cultural text. Its pervasiveness and sprawl have made it a Moment that can be read and appreciated through various lenses. You want a feminist perspective? Check. Marxist critique? Check. Conservative ululation? Check.

Gay, male appreciation? Hello there!

This *gayze* is nothing new; there's long been a link, both implied and explicit *between* and *about Doctor Who* and its male gay fans.

Over the last decade or so, seemingly limitless numbers of online commentators, trolls, flammers, and activists have wondered about the proposed preponderance of gay male fans. Many of the creative team within and without the Whoniverse are gay men. But...

Does it matter? Is it important? Does it mean anything?

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If we accept that *Doctor Who* is a text to be enjoyed and “read” by everyone, then the answer is “yes.” Yes, it does matter. The views and relationship of its gay fans are as important (or not) as anyone else’s. There is room for all; another point of view isn’t going to diminish others.

And if you don’t accept that premise, then you might as well go and make a cup of tea and return this book from whence it came, because you’re not going to have a very happy time reading it.

In this essay, I’m going to try and tease out the compelling “Otherness” of the Doctor; his *uncanny* nature, slight other-worldliness, the similar but arms-length reflection it affords - in particular, to some gay men.

Moreover, I posit that those of us first encountering the Doctor between *roughly* 1967 to 1989 would have a profoundly different relationship with this Otherness than those that encountered him later; primarily because of the place of gay men in society (well, England, to be specific).

And if this all sounds a bit boring and you’re looking for the “phwoar” in a Queer book, then just skip to the end to read my “Sexy Guys in *Doctor Who*” conclusion.

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To avoid confusion, though I’m sure it sticks out like a celery stalk, I ought to point out that I’m English and was born in 1970. I’m also gay ... yes I know it’s a shock, so re-align your pearls, settle yourself, and read on ...

I started watching *Doctor Who* in the early seventies; Saturday evenings were the high point of my week - the excitement beginning to build from the conclusion of *Grandstand*, through *Jim’ll Fix It* and into those beguiling opening titles. I watched breathlessly through the seventies and on through the eighties, but with decreasing fervor as I got older and as the program changed. Still, I stuck with it until the end of its original incarnation (1989), got excited then disappointed by *The TV Movie* (1996), and then thrilled by the 2005 return.

By 1984, the Doctor was being played by Peter Davison, he of the “open face” and “cricket costume.” Having started with extravagancies of Jon Pertwee and grown up with the eccentricities of Tom Baker, I thought Peter was pallid, pale, and pointless, and I certainly wasn’t going to *actively* identify with him - so flippin’ there! (Brave heart, dear

reader, I came round to him in the end.)

But that's the weird thing about role models isn't it? You don't choose them, they choose you; all those internal complications, nascent naggings, half formed identities... all that *teenage stuff*, it just squirms and leaks and bleeds into your life. I didn't seek a role model, but there had long been one around (though I didn't recognise him at the time). Who's that in the mirror? Doctor Who? Doctor Me? Doctor You.

There is something to be argued about my experience as a child, then a nascent gay teen, then a fledgling queer adolescent, and finally a cognizant gay man about the Otherness of the Doctor and the idea that this might have been attractive. His ability to change yet remain the same, his isolation in the midst of a group that loves him, the push and pull of wanting to belong and yet resisting acceptance.

It's all there, writ cringingly large if one wants to read it that way - the psyche of many a gay man, exhibited and performed out loud, an Alien Other. Thankfully, an Other that had positive elements and bestrode the universe, charming millions and defeating baddies (rather than - say - piloting a ship and boldly leading a team of outer space explorers).

It's attractive, compelling, flattering, and slightly embarrassing to realize this in hindsight - but the Otherness parlayed by the character of the Doctor was something *identifiable*, a character upon which my subconscious could settle my own cohering identity.

The fact that the Doctor used not to have such open affection for women played its part. It meant there were no awkward insistences of heterosexuality to reject; however, the fact that he's now had a few lady kisses and has been demonstrably in love with a woman doesn't repel me, it's not his *sexuality* that appeals to me - it's his *character*, his intelligence, his difference. It's my reflection in his positive traits that appeals, not whom he might choose to take into one of the more secluded rooms of the TARDIS. It's an exercise of self-reflective flattery - begun in childhood and continuing into adult life.

Ask a teenager to explain themselves, and you'll - at best - get a shrug and a baleful look. Ask them to talk about their emotions, and you'll get pushed away; it's too incoherent a mess to articulate. But ask them what they like or don't like, and you'll likely get a passionate and polarized litany of loves and hates. Or, to put it another way, through my childhood I invested in and learnt from *Doctor Who* a psychology and cohering identity, and in doing became cemented as a lifelong fan.

The fact it took time to happen is no surprise. As a three-year-old

watching Jon Pertwee, I had no conception of sexuality - mine or anyone else's. And even if I did, I couldn't articulate it. That bizarre dialogue arrived later and became articulated by that other Great British Alien: David Bowie. It was Bowie who released the tension and made it possible for me to start articulating that "something" that I was considering. It might not have been coherent, but it certainly by gave me the chance to tie my flag to a particular pole and see what happened; "Boys Keep Swinging," indeed. The Doctor afforded me ways in which to nurture a growing part of my psychological make-up; a man famed for his use of make-up allowed me to explore through him, aspects of my sexuality that were beginning to make themselves known. Lucky me.

Popular culture continued to burp up other passing avenues of identification, smaller role-models and passing fancies; were I to compile a list, it would comprise personalities and characters drawn primarily from film and television - a very seventies and eighties experience. Where my predecessors might have turned to literature for succor, I turned to broadcast media. For the purposes of this, I'm sticking with the Doctor, otherwise this is going to be a very confusing essay about wanting to love but not knowing how to, rather than something vaguely coherent about otherness and projection.

###

As *Doctor Who* and I journeyed on together and as I got older and the program changed, we began to unpeel from one another. Like skins from an ungrateful onion, I began to disassociate myself; initially feeling the program had lost its way, then becoming "too old" and finally just seeing it as a childhood curio... but never totally letting go.

In part, fuelling this change was the growing commentary around the program itself and the opportunity to gain some critical distance. That this coincided with my late teens and early twenties helped shore open the gap that had been growing between us for a while. The lexicon and values that began to emanate from discussions *about* the program rather than the program itself started to form a language, a mode of discussion and appreciation/ criticism that made it possible to stand at a slight remove and see the thing anew. A meta-text was emerging; post-modernism was arching its cool eyebrow and the notion of "*Doctor Who*" was becoming something not only to be enjoyed as a TV show, but as a cultural text.

The current vogue for blogging, tweeting, or chatting in forums takes

this for granted, but there was a time when *Doctor Who* was simply a TV show. The way we ingest *Doctor Who* now is fundamentally different. I'm proposing this might also affect the way it might relate to our sexualities. And hold on at the back, it's going to take a few paragraphs before we get to the "why" of that idea.

# # #

Way back in the last century, BBC Worldwide decided to re-release the available televisual history of *Doctor Who* on DVD. This represented a key shift in its appreciation, for not only did the DVDs come with restored picture quality and sound, they came with commentaries, features, and documentaries. This changed the way we experienced the program and moreover what it meant. It made a leap from contemporary broadcast media to historical artifact.

I can't begin to tell you how odd it feels to experience relatively recent parts of one's life as commodified history, as a commercial concern. We *Doctor Who* fans are incredibly fortunate to have had immaculate care and attention lavished on every DVD release, but the experience of having one's own childhood replayed as a historical document is strange. The overall effect is a feeling of an inward telescoping of time, which makes me feel at once happy for the availability of the programs, grumpy about seeing my childhood offered back to me as history, and... O.L.D. (and there are three innocent letters guaranteed to send a shiver down the spine of any man).

Perhaps though, this telescoping of time and collapse of linearity is just the state we live in now? A constant present where all things are accessible and relative? Like living in our own TARDIS, dimensions in time are shifting, opening and closing as we live through them. All those old McLuhan truisms, Wildean quips, bon mots from Coward, and Things That Your Mum Said start to ring not hollow or witty, but *true*; and that's *terrifying*.

Now, this is not a bad thing, or a good thing, it's just a *different* thing. I've attempted to telegraph that it was the Doctor's Otherness that offered a template upon which I could scribe my sexuality. I'd been watching *Doctor Who* as the gay me began to develop, morph, and finally emerge, offering a safe and trusted role model; one that was the same nationality as me, was heroic, kind, clever, charming, bonkers, sad, happy, lunatic, and smart, and only seemed refreshed by constant change.

## Bothersome Otherness

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Still with me? Thank goodness. Here comes the “why” - why I think the viewing experience has changed, and why that might have had an effect on role-modeling and emerging sexuality.

My experience of *Doctor Who* was broadly chronological; I watched it as broadcast, in order from Pertwee to McCoy and beyond and I grew up with it. Nowadays, fans have Options. We can now watch new episodes in order *or* out of sequence, as broadcast *or* as i-cast, old episodes can be viewed in *any* order and as they come with a whole associated paratext, comprised of a melange of cover art, documentary, commentary, and reminiscence.

This way of experiencing the program, the very fact that nearly 50 years of TV history can be dipped in and out of at will changes its meaning. Perhaps not significantly, but certainly it has an effect. I'd argue that the effect of watching something from start to finish is different to watching selected bits and pieces. For *Doctor Who*, it changes narrative flow, alters the chronological development of characters and - most importantly for this argument - does something really *odd* to the central character.

The Doctor is no longer someone who went chronologically Hartnell, Troughton, Pertwee, T. Baker, Davison, C. Baker, McCoy, McGann, Eccleston, Tennant, and Smith, but could instead go... well, you can offer your own permutations here; I do have a word limit. This potpourri of potential Doctors effectively foregrounds his Otherness, diluting the matter of the actor playing him and providing the gay viewer a whole series of “Othernesses” to identify with. Othernesses that come with contextual identification, a place in history and a sense of their status in the pantheon; a smorgasbord of potential “Doctor Yous,” offered in a safe and understood cultural moment.

I was quite prescriptive earlier in my noting of the period 1967 to 1989; I chose this rather arbitrarily, but within some parameters: 1967 was the year homosexuality was decriminalized in England and Wales; in 1989 *Doctor Who* concluded its initial telestial run.

There is no need to be overly specific here, I could have rounded it nicely from 1970 to 1990 and that would suffice, but the piquancy of 1967-1989 and their meaning for this essay add a little specificity. Between 1967 and 1989, a couple of generations of English gay men were born (including me) into a world where homosexual acts (under specified conditions) were legal. Over time, this legal change began to

morph into accepted societal norms; prejudice weakened, attitudes changed, and equalities began to un-wrinkle. Growing up during this transition and being subject to the way it was playing out shaped the identities of many (but not all) young gay men who were concurrently offered a culture that was tolerant and had legal protections, whilst simultaneously encountering instances of resistance and (sometimes) hatred.

The cultural ebb and flow of law and morality slowly washed societal norms to the point of acceptability until the mid-eighties when AIDS emerged and changed the entire ballgame.

It's hard now to remember what that was like, but the sudden specter of an unstoppable killer disease, spread by sex and seemingly inflicting gay men only stopped *progressive social attitudes* in their tracks. Its global nature linked not only amorphous gay communities in suffering and resistance, ultimately resulting in a new and urgent form of activism; it also gave a locus, name, and medical argument for those opposed to homosexuality *per se*.

What it also did was render the sexless TV gay stereotype redundant. Love them though I do, representations of gay men on TV 1967 to 1989 were almost by definition effete and sexually inert. AIDS and its terrible consequences highlighted the *sex* of homosexuality and made it a palpable reality; not only was society at large having to face up to a harder-edged world, it was having to face up to gay sex... English people even - gulp - became able to say the word "condom" without muttering or blushing.

Sex and sexual acts themselves had been forced out of the closet and into an embarrassed then quickly chastened (Western) world. Sex, gay sex, and the consequences of sex went from unmentionable to lingua franca and a whole world of previously corseted conventions were discarded; and like a punter unbuttoning the jeans of a rent boy, everything flew into our faces.

###

Which brings me to *Torchwood*. I have to admit the first series left me rather cold; I reckoned it SF with swearing. Like a sixth-form drama, it was too earnest, too emotionally raw, and tried too hard. The overall effect was like being flirted at by a tipsy 17 year-old-boy, all horny intent but with a flaccid dénouement.

Captain Jack, however, was another thing entirely. His introduction

## *Bothersome Otherness*

during the 2005 *Doctor Who* revival was interesting; a pushy moue from Russell T. Davies, seemingly thumbing his nose at social conservatism and expanding the remit of what was acceptable as family (read: children's) viewing on primetime BBC. It worked due in part to the writing and in part due to John Barrowman's super-charismatic performance - both on and off screen. For every moment of plot-based flirtatiousness, there were at least five more on chat shows and panel games that were ribald if not priapic. Here was a character and actor who didn't use camp to signal his sexuality, but used his sexual prowess, good looks, and charm.

It also worked because things had changed. Due in part to the consequences of AIDS and the re-sexualization of gay men, and in part to societal norms that (though disrupted in the mid-eighties) began to cohere toward the mid-nineties. By the time Jack and *Torchwood* had arrived, a whole slew of new rights and laws were beginning to affect cultural and moral mores.

These in turn shaped a world where young gay men not only felt comfortable coming out, but *expected* equality, fairness, and respect. The Otherness felt by "my" generation was slowly being replaced by a confident Ordinairiness, a strident "so-what-ness," a cocky "that's me-ness," exemplified and telegraphed to a national audience by Captain Jack and his polymorphous pleasures aboard the TARDIS and beyond.

Possibly in the absence of anything else, the Doctor's Otherness had appealed to me as a young person and I'd identified with that. Over time, legal, cultural, and social advances saw television able to offer an out gay role model for a family audience whose very Ordinairiness was his calling card.

Captain Jack, as he first appeared in *Doctor Who*, was a sexual omnivore - apparently capable of getting horny for anyone, and permitted to say so. Sex had rarely troubled the world of *Doctor Who* (it wasn't totally absent, but was reasonably coy and up the viewer to determine), but now it was on screen in the form of a randy yank with an eye for the ladies and the lads. A revelation and a minor revolution.

For me, it underlined a moment of change. If Otherness was being replaced by Ordinairiness, was the correlation also true? I think it is. An out gay role model is in part a reflection of the society that produced it, and in part society demanding that role model.

It may have taken a journey through time and space to get there, but we were all finally able to be *Loving the Alien*.

*Torchwood*, like me as a teen, got over its initial priapic sweariness and

settled into something less eager to shock and less earnest. Sexuality and sexiness became background whilst narrative and entertainment came to the fore.

Otherness and identity; periphery and centrality; the push and pull of identification, confidence and sexuality; who knew all this could be contained and played out in a TV show? Who. Knew.

**Postscript:** I did tease earlier with a promise about sexy guys in *Doctor Who*. I mean, what would an essay by a gay man be without some adoring words about the top totty we've been offered over the years? I also feel, given that I mentioned it earlier, that I ought make good my promise, and it's a thank you for sticking with me as I meandered toward my conclusion. Though for those of you that skipped straight here; naughty; stand in the corner and wait to be spanked.

*Doctor Who* hasn't gone in for much in the way of homoeroticism, or really any kind of eroticism; not surprising, really, as it's aimed a family audience. However, a crumb is a feast to starving man, and over the years I've spotted a few morsels. If straight guys can ogle Nicola Bryant's bobbing breasts in *Planet of Fire*, then I can equally appreciate Mark Strickson in his Speedos. Lovely thighs.

I also offer for your consideration:

- *Jamie McCrimmon/Frazer Hines*; the legs and face, and body. Oh just Frazer Hines.

- *Ben/ Michael Craze's* hair and cheekbones. Hello, Sailor.

- *Tor/Hal/ Jeremy Bullock* (*The Space Museum* and *The Time Warrior*). Shiver my quiver.

- *Clifford Jones / Stewart Bevan* (*The Green Death*). There's Lovely.

- *The Brigadier*. For those who appreciate a bit of discipline and authority.

- *Vaber/ Prentis Hancock* (*Planet of the Daleks*). Nice name. Hancock.

- *Desiccated Camper/ James Murray* (*The Stones of Blood*). Just a few seconds screen time, but he did have his shirt off... before a stone drank his blood.

- All those weirdly camp but alluring disco robot men (*Destiny of the Daleks*). "You will be effeminated"!!

- *Seth/Simon Gipps-Kent* (*The Horns of Nimon*). Bless his little chest.

- *Adric's lads* (*Full Circle*). But Not Adric. Sorry love.

- *Colin Frazer/ Alastair Cumming* (*Arc of Infinity*). Nice name... Alastair.

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- *Jondar*/ Jason Connery (*Vengeance on Varos*). Shirtless and prone.
- *Gazak*/Steven Mackintosh (*Timelash*). An official Teen Crush.
- Sil's uncredited bodyguards (*Mindwarp*). Muscles and harnesses.
- *Mike*/ Dursley McLinden (*Remembrance of the Daleks*). Too good to be true.
- *Captain Sorin*/Tomek Bork (*The Curse of Fenric*). Euro-solider eye candy.
- *Indra Ganesh*/Navin Chowdry (*Aliens of London*). Office hotty.
- *Captain Jack*/ John Barrowman - For those who like a sparkle in the dark.
- *Danny Bartock*/Ronny Jhutti (*The Satan Pit*). Dan the Man.
- *Jeremy Baines*/Harry Lloyd (*Human Nature*). Eye eye.
- *Quintus Caecilius Iucundus*/François Pandolfo (*The Fires of Pompeii*). Shortus Skirti.

And there are so many, many more, but I'm going to stop now as I'm feeling the need for a little lie down.

## **PVC Made Me a Gay**

**Gary Russell** has been involved in the world of *Doctor Who* for as long as he can remember (and that includes remembering Hartnell regenerating into Troughton - yes he's that old, and more!). A lifelong love, adoration, and even slight obsession with this one TV show led to him joining the Doctor Who Appreciation Society in the late 70s, eventually ending up on the organizing committee of said fan club and editing their newsletter. He also edited his own award-winning fanzine *Shada* between 1980 and 1985, and in 1983 began writing regularly for Marvel Comics' *Doctor Who Magazine* - an association that still continues irregularly today. Over the last 30-plus years in fandom (dear God...), he has edited *DWM*; written quite a lot of novels, computer games, comic strips and non-fiction books on the subject; moderated DVD commentaries; produced and directed about 100 audio dramas; script-edited the *Doctor Who* TV series; and produced two animated stories and a number of Adventure Games. He has also script-edited *Torchwood* and *The Sarah Jane Adventures*. In what laughingly passes for his spare time, he has written books about *The Simpsons*, *Frasier*, *The Lord of the Rings* movie trilogy, collected far too many books, DVDs, CDs, action figures (a.k.a. "dollies" apparently), and Converse. Yes, bloody Converse. He lives in Cardiff, has no pets, and frequently wanders around his home talking to himself and scaring the neighbors...

When I was seven years old, *Doctor Who* was the biggest thing in the world. Not just to me, but to everyone at school. To *not* watch *Doctor Who* made you a bit weird, bit of an outcast. Not just the boys, but the girls. No one didn't watch it. Except Janet Greene. She didn't have a television - her parents didn't approve apparently.

I just felt sorry for her - 30 kids at playtime discussing Autons and Axons, Primitives and planets, monsters and Masters, and she couldn't join in. But she listened - and one day someone asked me what we wanted to be when we were grown up. Doctors, nurses, cooks, and astronauts were always popular. "Mailer from Stangmoor Prison," was my response. To be honest, I remember explaining to poor television-deprived Janet what I meant, but I'm not convinced more than three other people there understood either, but they were all happy for me to

patiently explain to poor Janet, nodding along like she was mad for not knowing who this totally unimportant character from a *Doctor Who* story from, well, weeks ago was.

Janet was incredulous. Because I didn't want to be the Doctor? No. Because I didn't want to be the Brigadier, or Yates, or even Benton? No. Because I wanted to be the bad guy? No. Well then, she frowned, "Why do you want to grow up to be this man?"

"Because he wore black and it looked really good on him," I replied.

My friends started to disperse, and I wasn't sure why. But my mate Paul Trotman's muttered "You liked what he wore???" should've been the clue. "Girl," he added, and that was the first time I heard that word used as an insult. It wasn't the last, but it has stayed with me. Obviously, I didn't know I was a homosexual man when I was seven (others may claim they did), but if I sit down and think what was the first gay thing I ever did/ said, that's the point I come back to.

*Doctor Who* has never struck me as a "gay" program. Okay, so the lead character doesn't shag everything that moves. Many people will tell you that this may be why queer men find the program safe - they didn't feel compelled to cheer on the hormonally obsessed lead, like they would Captain Kirk. I think that's bollocks - *Star Trek* is actually the odd-one out. *Lost in Space*, *The Six Million Dollar Man* and a majority of other pubescent "hero" program weren't about shagging either - but no one points at their fandoms and goes "bunch of gays". I suspect this is because *Star Trek* owes far more to the *Flash Gordon* and *Buck Rogers* melodramas of the 30s and 40s, as well as then-current (i.e. 60s) popular sci-fi clichés (hullo, *Magnus Robot Fighter*) than it does to mainstream fantasy. Gene Roddenberry was always upfront about how he saw *Star Trek* as a Western in space, and there are fewer genres more macho and save-the-girl-get-the-girl-into-bed-fuck-her-senseless-and-she'll-thank-you-afterwards than a Western.

But *Doctor Who* just didn't have that - to me. Love/ sex rarely raised its head in *Doctor Who*. I can only look at this from my childhood angle (i.e. up to the end of the Pertwee era, for convenience's sake), at which point only Jo Grant and Vicki had actually left traveling in the TARDIS because they feel in "luuurve." But does that really make *Doctor Who* a "gay" television show? Did that anodyne asexuality make it safe for burgeoning gays and lesbians to watch and admire and feel safe? Surely if it did, we'd all be equally passionate about Daktari, Marine Boy, and Champion the Wonder Horse. (Mind you, I was never too sure about Marine Boy and Splasher - there was something odd going on there...)

But seriously, does *Doctor Who* get singled out for its asexuality = gay-sexuality simply by the fact it sits in the adventure/ fantasy genre?

I'm sure cleverer writers than I can ascribe queer politics and memes, undercurrents, and subtexts to the show very eloquently - many of which will be in this book. But I can say quite truthfully, *Doctor Who* didn't make me a fag. *The Tomorrow People* is far more responsible for that. For those unaware of this show, look it up on Wikipedia, then come back here and carry on reading (or give up and turn the page - there's probably an essay by Paul Magrs, and it'll be far better than this waffle).

So, anyway, *The Tomorrow People* - group of teenagers, outcasts in most respects, with a secret they couldn't share with their friends or families and were only truly accepted by the others in the same boat. Hello! Creator Roger Price might just have stuck a big pink triangle on the set and painted TIM in rainbow colors. And there I met my first real boyhood crush - the divine Peter Vaughan-Clarke: skinny, geeky, sarcastic, and a grin to die for. Eleven-year-old Gary was in love. *Doctor Who* never offered me this - everyone on that show was too old to be crush-material.

I honestly don't think I suddenly went, "Ooooh I like guys," at that point, but hindsight is a wonderful thing, and now I can say with complete authority that this absolutely was the point where it must've started; that the genetic quirk that made me what I am, sexually speaking, kicked in.

Years later, Big Finish (go look them up on Wikipedia too) added a third audio play range, and *The Tomorrow People* audios were born. And I wrote the second one. And brought Peter Vaughn-Clarke's character, Stephen Jamieson, back. And I was directing it. And for the first time in my life, I found myself facing someone I knew was responsible for shaping the person I am today.

Now, I'm not a placard-waving gay; my sexuality neither defines nor controls me. I tend to say I'm homosexual rather than gay (gay being more lifestyle than orientation, to me). Gay is gay bars, gay clubs, gay pride marches, etc. That isn't really me. I avoid *most* of the clichés. (I don't get excited by ABBA, Kylie, Bette Midler, or Bette Davis. I have no fashion sense, I have no "product" in my bathroom, and I have zero tolerance for drag. They really ought to take my gay card away frankly, I'm such a disappointment to "the gays.") But "gay" is a handy piece of shorthand, and usually conveys what one needs to know about me if you are daft enough to care.

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So, there's (disappointingly heterosexual) Peter Vaughan-Clarke in the studio. Like lots of people, he doesn't look the same in 2001 as he did in 1974 to 1976. Except when he smiles, something inside me goes "awwwww," and I stare slightly dreamily at him through the glass of the studio into his recording booth. And nothing else happens. Literally. Until one of the other *Tomorrow People* actors, lovely man called Nick Young, says, "Are we doing a readthrough or what?" Which breaks my reverie. Sort of.

Now you've all had that moment haven't you? That awful moment when your brain is momentarily paralyzed inside your head, shrieking, "What the holy fuck are you doing, you insane gibbon? Shut up, don't speak, don't open your mouth. No, no, no, I'm your brain! I know what you are thinking. I also know you shouldn't say it out loud. Oh, hell! No, shut up you cretin!" But your body has decided, "Today is the day I tell the holier-than-thou brain 'you're not the boss of me,' so I'm ignoring you!" And the brain tries one last desperate time, "Yes, yes, I am, that's exactly what I, as the brain, am - in fucking charge of you! Don't do it!!!"

The brain lost. The brain lost out to the switch-flicking finger, and the noise-making mouth and even the lean-in-closer-to-the-talkback-mic-cos-that-wont-make-it-worse-as-you-speak-like-Hannibal-Lecter. And I said gleefully, and totally inappropriately, "You are wholly responsible for making me a gay."

There was a long pause before Peter said, "That's... nice," and Nick says, "Aaaand moving on..." And we did. And it was never mentioned again that day.

It was mentioned the next time I saw Peter, at a party. He brought it up - it seemed to have piqued his interest. He'd never seen himself as the kind of person, least of all when a teenage boy who would turn heads, bless him. I pointed out that I knew I was not alone in thinking this about him, and he was immensely flattered.

And that got me thinking because a few years later - when I was about the age he'd been when he had quit *The Tomorrow People* - I appeared in a television series (*The Famous Five*, yadda yadda Wikipedia, yadda). And since that incident with the adult Peter Vaughan-Clarke in the studio, a number (a small number, I hasten to add) of guys in their thirties have said to me, "You were my first crush and responsible for making me realize I was gay." Suddenly, I began to feel incredibly proud of that fact. And no, before you snigger, I've never picked any of them up. But it's a curious feeling of responsibility to think that people had posters of you on their wall, or pictures in a scrapbook, or did drawings

in schoolbooks because they “fancied” you. I’ve met lots of girls in my life who did that regarding me (usually followed by, “But my god, you’ve got fat,” but I swear no guy ever confessed it to me until after my Peter Vaughan-Clarke moment).

Frazer Hines (if you need to look him up on Wikipedia, you ought not to be reading this book) was famously lust material for Joe Orton, who confessed to mentally undressing him after watching an episode of *The Underwater Menace*. And I know people whose early crushes included Michael Craze, Matthew Waterhouse, and/or Mark Strickson. But on the whole, other than individual guest stars for an episode, *Doctor Who* is relatively lacking in potential burgeoning, homosexuality inspiring material for me. Yet while every fandom going has a gay contingent, *Doctor Who* boasts a larger percentage than most.

Okay, so let’s say, in a cheeky blanket-statement manner, *Star Trek* fans tend to become scientists, doctors, and such like. *Doctor Who*, in Britain particularly, obviously impressed on youthful minds of its male and female audiences a love for the media. So many people making TV, film, and radio - or writing books and scripts - were inspired to start by this mad old show. They’re not majoratively gay, by the way. When I moved to Cardiff to work on the show for Russell T. Davies (you know, the guy with the “gay agenda,” yaaaawn), I was surprised at just how very few queer men and women were on set. The cliché I expected simply didn’t exist. Thinking now, I can think of maybe a dozen crew across six years. The fact that Russell and Phil Collinson were so visibly gay creates, I think, an image that this was some hugely camp old set with everyone mincing around. Indeed, I actually think this is a huge misconception of the industry as a whole and mirrors *Doctor Who* fandom. People outside fandom (and a fair proportion inside) will say, “It’s full of gays.” It isn’t.

What has actually happened however is this minority gay contingent has become louder and more proactive than the rest, percentage-wise. The gays get off their asses and make things happen. That’s true of British, Australian, and US *Doctor Who* fandoms. The heterosexual side of fandom is massive and far outweighs the gay, but the gays are very visible and their presence is felt simply because they run lots of things.

At least, that’s my experience of 33 years of active fandom. Others may offer an opposing view.

Blimey. Writing this, I’ve also realized that I’ve had five boyfriends in my life - all of them through fandom. That’s not a bad thing, by the way; it means they “get” my weirdness straight away. But I do wonder what

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it must be like for someone to go out with a “not-we.” But that’s a whole different book, I imagine...

## **Torchwood, Camp, and Queer Subjectivity**

**Brit Mandelo** is a writer, critic, and editor whose primary fields of interest are speculative fiction and queer literature, especially when the two coincide. She is the senior fiction editor for *Strange Horizons* magazine and has two books out, *Beyond Binary: Genderqueer and Sexually Fluid Speculative Fiction* and *We Wuz Pushed: On Joanna Russ and Radical Truth-telling*. Her other work - fiction, nonfiction, poetry (she wears a lot of hats) - has been featured in magazines such as *Stone Telling*, *Clarksworld*, *Apex Magazine*, and *Ideomancer*. She also writes regularly for *Tor.com* and has several long-running column series there, including *Queering SFF*, a mix of criticism, editorials, and reviews on QUILTBAG speculative fiction. Her preference for Time Lords grew out of a chance encounter with a dashing Captain, and has only grown since.

The first thing I saw of *Torchwood* was a clip excerpted from the opening episode of the second season - *Kiss Kiss, Bang Bang* - and you can probably guess which one. (If you answered, "The bit where James Marsters and John Barrowman have a ridiculous make-out brawl, destroying a bar in the process," you are correct.) I can't remember now where the clip came from, whether a friend had sent it or I found a link somewhere in the depths of LiveJournal, only that I watched it over and over with an increasingly giddy sense of awe. It wasn't just the fact that there was apparently a science-fiction program airing that would show two men in a passionate kiss on screen - significant in and of itself! - but that the framing and presentation of the scene spoke clearly with a language familiar to a queer audience: camp. The direction of the scene, the music, the acting - it's all intensely over-the-top, high-drama, raising the specter of nostalgia to give it the finger. Additionally, the gaze of the camera focuses on queer desire as sexy and a source of delight; that way of looking is another welcoming signal for a queer audience.

And it's hardly just that single scene. As I discovered upon diving into the series itself, then only two seasons long, the ethos of camp and of a distinctly subversive, queer gaze is just plain everywhere. There's a pervasive queerness in both the visual landscape and the narrative perfor-

mances. While *Torchwood's* over-determined, theatrical/affected grittiness and sexuality have been criticized, often as "trying too hard," I think that those criticisms are sort of missing a key point. The exaggeration is *doing something*; in a queer(er?) reading it is not an accident, it is an act of camp. Exaggeration and theatricality call attention to themselves; they offer a dangerous space, playing through humor and critique, for the readers to question essentialist tropes and ways of making meaning. In short, there's something about *Torchwood* that's even queerer in the theoretical sense than just having visible sexuality between characters of the same gender (though that's pretty fucking important in context, too, so we'll get there). It offers an experience of *readability* for a queer audience on several levels, direct and implicit alike. It entices a queer gaze and queer subjectivity, on screen and off.

So, first: what's all this about camp and strategies of queer gazing/reading? I'm aware that I've just been tossing some stuff out there without unpacking it. While I'm not sure that I was explicitly considering these things while watching *Torchwood* for the first time, in retrospect, it explains so much of what hooked me hard and fast to the show. Additionally, I really love thinking this kind of thing out: as a queer viewer, what's going on for me when I watch a show like *Torchwood*? Why did I fall head-over-heels in love with it when I encountered it - like, marathon-the-whole-thing-in-a-week love? Is it just that I'm a nerd, and I really like having my SF as queer as possible? (Well, probably, but still.) All of those questions led me to wanting to explore the machinery that's chugging along in the show, and to think about how it might speak to a larger audience in the same ways. After all, there's clearly something going on that made a lot of queer folks, myself included, want to sing our joy about time travelers and alien encounters and sexy interpersonal drama.

Returning to that scene, where the captains meet and wreak havoc, is one way that I can explore some of the crunchy, fun ideas that watching *Torchwood* left me with, particularly those about its camp aesthetic. Because fun is a major thing at work in camp: the power of the exaggerated to make you laugh, and think while you're laughing. The two processes balanced in that short scene are comedy and eroticism, both tied to a cultural language of camp, to which they're well suited and in fact necessary. The interrelationship of camp and gay culture hearkens back more than just a few decades, and for a lot of QUILTBAG folks, some of the first stuff we may have seen that looked *a little bit like us* came in the form of campy, over-the-top comedies. The prospect of humor allowed

the subversive nature of parodic gender performance and non-hetero-normative behavior to slip under the radar. So, at least for me, the sense of camp in *Torchwood* is part of its distinctly queer ethos, part of what makes it speak directly and understandably to me. If we take camp according to the terms I've been applying to it throughout - exaggerated, theatrical, parodic, ironically nostalgic, over-the-top in reference and performance alike - it's pretty obvious where *Torchwood* fits on the continuum; John Barrowman's performance of Captain Jack Harkness alone dings every point on the checklist. But of course there's more. (Can I make an obligatory joke now? Because *Torchwood's* queerness is, in fact, bigger on the inside: the further you explore, the more rooms there are to peek into.)

For example, the introduction to the bar scene is heavy with filmic quotations, particularly of the Western genre. In fact, let's just say that we're clearly being set up to think Western: there's an outlaw sitting at the bar waiting for the lawman to come, drinking, while the lawman approaches the outside of the bar with chin lifted dramatically. It's heartily masculine, recalling a thousand other similar scenes - the footsteps approaching from behind, slow and resolute, as the camera cuts across Marsters's eyes while the music cues up. The (saloon-esque) door slams open with a shot of Barrowman's feet surrounded by the flair of a long coat. The two men stand, feet braced confidently apart, facing each other across the room; Marsters unsnaps his gun holsters. *Nostalgia everywhere!* Overt references to the masculine (but notably homophobic and in denial of its homoeroticism) Western genre! We get the intense approach, the 20 paces and a moment of fierce staring. What we expect to happen next is a speech about getting out of town, based on the conventions that this scene has adopted - or maybe a gun battle.

Instead, the forbidden scene of the Western bursts to life in a literal and metaphorical conflagration (look at that wall-mounted fireplace!): a passionate, clothes-pulling, wriggling, heavy-breathing snog. These men have held each others' gazes, read each other, and where genre dictates a refusal of the erotic, *Torchwood* flips the table and starts the fight. It dives into parody, into shattering the previously encouraged nostalgia, to allow the eruption of a queer experience. The delightful shock, the *frisson*, of that moment hooked me. As the distance closes in the sexual clash between the captains, the parody flares and reminds the audience with comedy and exaggeration that this scene is a forbidden scene, a queer scene in which men perceive and communicate sexually with other men, and not only in the Western that it's referencing - in

science fiction, too.

Of course, it's totally not over there; no, one little moment of nostalgic eruption and parody isn't enough for *Torchwood*. The next moment breaks through another barrier of normative perception into a space of theatrical parody: the last thing Anglophone culture expects of two men in an erotic embrace is an immediate and gleeful reversion straight back into the territory of the male-bonding movie. The moment that Marsters punches Barrowman is a pivotal one, a split-second that tipped *Torchwood* from *maybe good enough* to *oh, thank you* in my mind, because it isn't played how one might expect. In the traditional film narrative, the eruption of erotic desire between men must be punished, often by the overreaction of one of the men in question. A punch to the face isn't unheard of. But, the context here tosses that through the bar as thoroughly as the captains do each other moments later. Captain John isn't punching Jack for kissing him, to disrupt the moment of erotic connection - he's *continuing* it. Jack's answering laughter is a sound that blooms with invitation and the ensuing fight is nothing if not hilariously over-the-top, and yet clearly still designed to engage with the sexual tension between these men as masculine, tough guys. The typical scene of male bonding through interpersonal struggle is here given a twist via the theatricality of the fight and its unmitigated sensuality. The sexual connotation is not hidden but enhanced, painted across the screen by their continuing laughter and obvious delight.

We are made to think, at least subconsciously, about all of the barriers that have just been broken: the barriers against men's desire for each other in generic convention, the barriers surrounding the stereotyping of queer men, the barriers of representing men in an erotic act together in a mainstream program. All of these subversions are achieved via a camp performance of exaggeration, nostalgia, and parody. Without camp, the humor that allows for the release of dangerous tension while simultaneously poking fun at and shining light on important issues, these moments would be potentially impossible to represent in our problematic pop-culture context. Camp *disarms*. Where this scene in a more subtle, "serious" performance might raise the hackles of the wider TV-watching audience, the sharp edge of comedy defuses the potential threat. And yet, the queer audience, familiar with camp, is tuned to the subversion that is even more thorough because of this illusory disarmament. This camp aesthetic is strewn across the entirety of the show, though I suspect that the scene at the bar is one of the more powerfully obvious instances - and the fact that it's pervasive *matters* to the experi-

ence a queer person might have watching it. A show with one “camp”-referencing character (generally a gay man) played for derisive comedic effect is doing something entirely different from what *Torchwood* is enacting on every level. The first is hostile to the gaze of a queer audience, though it may seem to welcome moments of identification (and folks, me included, are often willing to put up with the hostility for a little glimpse of representation). The second, though, is a text where the queer audience’s gaze is the gaze of the camera, of the narrative, of the characters - subjectivity is holistic, entire, and palpable.

These ways of gazing aren’t always campy, of course. The idea of gazing in film originated as a way of understand how film texts are read by the audience in terms of sexuality and gender; a queer gaze is one in which the filmic text’s “eye” (and, therefore, the participant audience’s eyes) replicates structures of viewing readable to members of a queer audience. In particular, I would note the manner in which the camera in *Torchwood* frequently lingers with loving and erotic detail on queer men’s bodies in a way that is alien to mainstream programming. The majority of the sexual energy of the camera seems to be invested in shots of John Barrowman, rather than of Eve Myles or Naoko Mori. How many times in each episode do we get close-ups of his face, his chest, and occasionally a classy butt-shot? (The answer is *a lot*.) Erotically charged scenes between Jack and a variety of other characters are the height of the show’s sexy potency; lingering shots of his embraces with Ianto fill a great deal of screen-time, backed by romantic music. Sexual scenes between queer couples are filmed not for camp or comedic effect but for sensual impact - the camera doesn’t just love women, it loves men and women in a delightful variety of combinations. However, the constant sexualization of women with women on film creates a more problematic space for queer gazing on women’s bodies. The scene in *Day One* discussed below is a case of *Torchwood* replicating the normative structure - though, Tosh’s equal engagement with the erotic scene between women (Gwen and Carys) destabilizes that a bit. It is *possible* to read scenes between women with a queer gaze, but the history of queer women’s representation in pop-culture makes that reading inevitably, depressingly problematic. I may enjoy, as a queer woman, watching Tosh and Mary together; it seems to be shot for me. But, on the other hand, it could be read through a heterosexual gaze that delegitimizes women’s desire as well. It’s a sticky wicket.

This may all sound a little questionable or esoteric, but I think these lenses of reading are a significant reason so many queer viewers were

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not only drawn to *Torchwood* but spread the word about it to friends, partners, and the community at large. Let's be honest: I know plenty of folks who don't like science fiction - how strange! - or British television that still made an effort to watch *Torchwood*, and enjoyed it. Whether or not this queer intelligibility was created with intention or by happy accident, I don't care. (Though I'd say that signs point strongly to "intentional." Russell T. Davies has repeatedly noted his desire to represent more minority narratives in the *Doctor Who* universe, after all. And he also created *Queer as Folk*.) All I know is that, in *Torchwood*, I found a space where my ways of making meaning as a queer and genderqueer viewer were fully engaged - where I could read every character queerly, where the relationship contexts were variable and frequently non-traditional, where the sense of possibility for gender and sexuality was expanded both in narrative and visually. Frequently, the hostility and danger of the world "outside" of both the text and our literal homes is unintelligible - not readable on a rational level, producing disassociation and disconnection. That normative storytelling and media reproduce these situations of incomprehensibility is, unfortunately, inevitable. *Torchwood's* active refusal to participate, its insistence on changing the game and the context - using camp, using strategies of visual presentation - mark it as unique.

And on that note, I also love it because it's literally - not just theoretically - *full of queers*. While discursive spaces and ways of structuring narratives about reality that read queerly are awesomely interesting for me, when we get down to business, representation matters a hell of a lot, too. *Torchwood* is pervasively queer not just on the implicit and subtextual level, but all over the place. The two sides of the "why do I love this show?" coin are these united and co-supporting presences of the queer, the Other, the silenced subject. I've been talking a lot about a scene between two men performing aggressive masculinity, but *Torchwood* offers subjective space to a variety of points on the spectrum of sexual identities. Of the main cast, every character has moments of category-slippage if not outright queer identification - even Gwen, who is nominally heterosexual, has a moment of erotic contact with a woman who is possessed by an alien who feeds off of sex (*Day One*). Admittedly, that scene is problematic as all hell, but it still allows for some intriguing and revealing commentary on the cast, what with it being the second episode. As Gwen is making out with the alien, Owen, Tosh and Jack watch on a monitor; when Tosh notes that Gwen has a boyfriend, Jack's response is merely, "You people and your quaint little

categories." (That phrase, really, summarizes a great deal of what *Torchwood* is doing with its commentary on gender and sexuality that makes it so damned appealing to a viewer with a non-binary identity.) Tosh's half-hearted suggestion of rescuing Gwen which follows, too, is covered by her clear erotic interest in the scene playing out on the monitor, much like Owen's and Jack's. Tosh also has a sexual relationship with a woman, Mary, in the episode *Greeks Bearing Gifts*, though her eventual romantic interest shifts toward Owen. And then there's Owen himself, who we know via the first episode has used an alien pheromone device to (with very dubious consent) seduce a straight couple. Also, though he shows frequent and generally sleazy interest in women, he has moments of chemistry with Jack.

Bisexuality - and, in Jack's case, omnisexuality - are the norm in *Torchwood*, rather than being the exception. Non-binarized relationship structures and sexual preferences are the perpetual background of each character's life. Note the scene in *Adrift* where, when Gwen interrupts Jack and Ianto during sex, Jack tells her that there's always room for three - and, rather than refusing, Ianto makes a joke about Jack cheating at "naked hide and seek" as if extending his own end of the invitation. For that matter, the predominant relationship of the series is a relationship between two men, Jack and Ianto, each of whom has also had relationships with women in the past (and, in Jack's case, other species). Though their relationship is immensely complicated, occasionally messy, and certainly provocative of plenty of criticism from queer readers, the fact remains that the major outlet of erotic energy, courtship, and desire in *Torchwood* is a queer male couple who aren't particularly fond of labels. Heteronormativity has been destabilized pretty thoroughly; rather than forcing audiences to read queerness into a text (the usual coping action for queer audiences in heteronormative situations) via subtext and implication, *Torchwood* is explicitly, hugely queer all on its own. While it would be nice to have a little bit more about the fluidity of gender in the show - everyone's gender identities are fairly straightforward, though Jack questions his categorization more than anyone else - it's still a pleasure to have a whole team of variously queer folks to engage with. Where most shows offer a queer reader one point of identification, generally a gay or lesbian character, *Torchwood* offers a not just variety but *majority*. There are no Kinsey zeros in the main cast of *Torchwood*, a major shift for a show aired not on a specifically LGBTQ television station, but as a mainstream SF program.

Frankly, it's good to see yourself on the screen, and it's great to see a

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world that is understandable - *readable* - through a queer gaze, that is not innately hostile to that gaze but welcomes it, romances it, plays with it. *Torchwood's* occasionally problematic, but still genuinely delightful, queerness certainly welcomed me, romanced me, and offered me a sense of play in the oft-contested space of gender and sexuality. The rarity of this kind of open readability in the mainstream is worth noting one more time, too: while science-fiction TV may often lend itself to over-the-top performances, it has very rarely lent itself on a major broadcast channel to speaking in the language of queer camp. So it's not just a matter of watching, of audio-visual pleasure - it's a matter of *showing*, of representing silenced subjectivities for a wide audience of viewers in a public space that has, generally, been hostile to or ignorant of queer gazes, identities, and stories. Whatever else we may want to say about *Torchwood*, it's pretty damn queer, and that brought me a lot of joy. (Plus, it's got weird aliens and time travel!)

## **The Doctor: A Strange Love, Or: How I Learned to Stop Hating and Love the Who**

**Hal Duncan** was born in 1971, brought up in a small town in Ayrshire, and now lives in the West End of Glasgow. His first novel, *Vellum*, won the Spectrum Award and was nominated for the Crawford, Locus, British Fantasy Society (BFS), and World Fantasy awards. Along with the sequel, *Ink*, publications include: a poetry collection, *Songs for the Devil and Death*; a stand-alone novella, *Escape from Hell!*; the chapbook, *An A-Z of the Fantastic City*; essays and columns in a number of venues; and short stories in magazines such as *Fantasy*, *Strange Horizons*, and *Interzone*, and anthologies such as *Nova Scotia*, *Logorrhea*, and *Paper Cities*. Other proud achievements include the staging of his “gay punk Orpheus” musical *Nowhere Town* by a theater group in Chicago, his collaboration with Scottish band Aereogramme on the song “If You Love Me, You’d Destroy Me” for the *Ballads of the Book* album from Chemikal Underground, and his role as judge on the 2012 BFS Awards. A short story collection is forthcoming next year from Lethe Press. You can find him in person at any meeting of the Glasgow SF Writers Circle, or online at [www.halduncan.com](http://www.halduncan.com). Homophobic hate-mail once dubbed him “THE.... Sodomite Hal Duncan!!” (sic) He’s getting a T-shirt made up.

### **2005**

I remember the excitement when *Doctor Who* returned after its long years in the wilderness. I remember the buzz at the fact Russell T. Davies was helming its regeneration, this SF scuttlebutt snatching the interest of fellow members of the Glasgow SF Writers’ Circle. As we sat in the pub after a critique session, I remember shrugging off the chat of straight comrades focused on Davies’s *Casanova*, then airing on BBC1, how I gave a bit of a *pshaw* at that string on Davies’s bow, excellent as it might be, and talked instead of *Queer as Folk*. Fuck David Tennant playing the most red-blooded rake in hetero history; they should’ve seen the swagger of Charlie Hunnam’s Nathan strutting into school to “Sexy Boy,” heard Aidan Gillan’s Stuart out himself with a veritable “I am faggot, hear me roar” speech that turned an onslaught of homophobic slurs

into a paean of defiant pride.

If you wanted to know why Davies was being tasked with raising a series dead nigh 20 years, it was the sheer vitality of his *Queer as Folk*, as far as I was concerned, that announced him as exactly the man to do such a thing, exemplifying the essential quality of any creator (or queer) of real capacity: *cojones*. Utter fearlessness. And you only had to watch that Channel Four miniseries to see the countless references crammed into it, making it at times a blatant love letter to the Time Lord who dare not speak his name, a shameless supplication at the hexagonal altar of the TARDIS's console. Davies was bringing back *Doctor Who*? No shit. He'd only written an eight-episode advert of his ardent desire to do so some five years previous.

If *Doctor Who* was coming back then, I wasn't at all surprised that it was Russell T. Davies making it happen. And if anyone had the chops to do it... well, if I were the Emperor of Television, I'd give the guy who made *Queer as Folk* a blank cheque and just let him do whatever the fuck he wanted.

And yet...

And yet I sat intransigently, on Saturday, March 26, 2005, on my tod in a hotel bar in Hinkley, drinking Guinness and reading Borges (yes, pig-headedly reading the ponciest book I had to hand) while the rest of Eastercon in their entirety were off watching the return of this landmark of British television, never mind British *SF* television. Okay, some of the con-goers may have been off at dinner or elsewhere. I know one or two who insist they remained refuseniks like myself. But I remember a bar desolate of everyone but myself and the barman, and I'm damn sure I wouldn't have been reading if there was anyone else there to have some craic with. About the only other thing I remember from that convention is joining in a recurrent rendition of "Born Free" kicked off by some fellow inebriates, so I'm not saying my memory is perfect, but that empty bar is crystal clear in my mind, as is my sullen grump at being deserted in the noble cause of Getting Shit-Faced for the sake of fucking *Doctor* fucking *Who*.

While I have fond memories of the TV show from my childhood, the point is, I have to admit my own relationship to the series has been... somewhat less adoring than Davies's through the years. To put it mildly.

The curmudgeonly naysayer's stance with which I *refused point blank* to be sucked up into the excitement of its rebirth, the stubborn enmity with which I'd have happily raised a shotgun at the phoenix rising from its ashes and shot the fucker out of the sky... it would also be putting it

mildly to say that attitude has softened considerably as the new *Who* won me over, sucked me in during its latter seasons with Moffat's fairytale approach, the charm of Matt Smith, Karen Gillan and Arthur Darvill, the good old-fashioned fun of it all; I do really rather like it now, look forward to new episodes, babble happily with mates over its twists and turns, imagine the twists and turns I'd bring to it - which is the ultimate proof of fandom, I think, that investment of imagination.

It's just that mine isn't a story of loyal fandom through the years rewarded by its resurrection. It's one of frustration, disenchantment, disdain that's only grudgingly turned back to appreciation. But hey, it's maybe more of a tribute for all that.

If *Doctor Who* could turn a hater like *me* around from where I was at seven years ago or so... well, that's fucking saying something.

### 1988

So how did my opinion of it sink so low? I mean, I have all the requisite childhood memories of behind-the-sofa viewings. That's such a cliché, I'm half convinced they're ersatz, constructs patched from second-hand tales so familiar I just *think* they happened to me, a racial memory of the Doctor written into the twentieth century's mass unconscious to be inherited by our descendants millennia down the line. But I do remember envying the kid dressed as a Dalek at one primary school Halloween party, my excitement at K9's appearance on *Blue Peter*, or when the Peter Cushing movie turned up as a Saturday afternoon TV matinee. I had that show carved into my consciousness every bit as much as any pre-teen geek in that time and place. So how could I have had so little time for it that even the promise of Russell T. Davies in charge and an actor of Christopher Eccleston's calibre in the role didn't sell me on at least a peek at the premiere when it returned?

I blame Bertie Bassett. Bertie fucking Bassett.

I'm guessing for those who remember Sylvester McCoy's run on the original series, I don't need to say much more than that. But for the benefit of those who don't, you've got to imagine a perfect storm of mind-numbing awfulness - the shoddiness of sets and costumes at its nadir in a robot suit that 1970s kid's Halloween outfit would have outshone, the ideas and execution of scripts that were increasingly puerile, the broad brush-stroked camp of a SF show that the controller of BBC at the time had, I understand, nothing but contempt for as kitsch even as he *made* it kitsch, pressuring producers to play it lighter - and me, a 17-year-old, a gay and a geek, at that age of adolescent disavowals of all

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childish things. It was 1988, I was living in a shithole nowhere town in Scotland; MAD was going to kill me if HIV didn't, I couldn't lay my coming-out on my folks while we were mourning a dead brother, and the Kandy Man, *Doctor Who's* very own Jar Jar Binks, was the last straw for me, the nail in the coffin - nay, the veritable bullet in the head of that particular childhood dream of escape.

A *Doctor Who* monster that looked like a bad fancy dress party outfit mimicking the mascot for a brand of Liquorice Allsorts. Bertie fucking Bassett.

I'd had my doubts for a while, even before the cheesy cannibal old-dearies of *Paradise Towers* a year before, which turned those doubts to serious mixed feelings. I'd entered the true fan's masochistic torture of carrying on with something even as you find yourself screaming, "Why?! Why?! Why are you doing this to me?!", but with that Kandy Man episode enough was enough. I had to face the fact that I just... didn't really like it anymore. That I *really* didn't like it anymore.

I may or may not have been carrying a Rambo knife to school in those days, in the inside pocket of my trenchcoat, getting my head shaved into a sort of botched Mohawk by way of Davey Crockett, graf-fiting life-size demons and Charles Manson quotes around my native housing scheme, wishing I was raised in some corner of space and time with no gun control so I could go Columbine ten years before Columbine. The family friendly fantasy of *Doctor Who* connected with me about as much as Narnia. So, like the Narnia books and *Star Wars* figures, Lego bricks and Wombles records, it was consigned to the bin of Kid's Stuff, purged from my imaginative life as part of a quintessentially immature renunciation of the immature. There's nothing more adolescent than the repudiation of the juvenile.

This is just shite, I decided. Unmitigated shite.

**1990**

Talking of unmitigated shite, the first "story" I ever submitted to the Glasgow SF Writers' Circle was an oh-so-clever plotless vignette in which a mysterious gent comes out of a police box in Victorian London and kills a prostitute. (Or kills a prostitute and goes into a police box. I can't remember.) You see what I did there, right? Huh? Jack the Ripper's purported medical skillz, his escape from recorded history into a forever-unnamed enigma... could it be? Surely not!

I remember Bill King, a member already starting to publish - books for *Warhammer*, a story in *Interzone* - described it as "bad *Doctor Who*

fanfiction." I was most dischuffed, not even so much at the story being called out for its literary worthlessness as at the suggestion I was writing *as a fan*. How? How could he mistake my attack for adoration? How could he think I liked *that show*? Bill was absolutely right to cut my scribbling down with a simple snicker-snack, of course. He was kind, in fact, to a piece of derivative drivel which thought itself a radical inversion of a cultural icon when it was just piggybacking on other people's creative work while hypocritically taking a potshot at it. And he might well have nailed me on the attitude too. Having burned my copy of that "story" long ago (although, annoyingly, I know there are copies still out there somewhere, kept by members of the Circle), I can only look back on it via memory, but in doing so I rather suspect now that you could call it, in large part, a case of fallen fandom.

There is no hate greater than that for something we once loved. Maybe. Which is to say, I suspect such an essentialist pronouncement is actually complete bollocks, that there are *way* greater hates in the hearts of homophobes and whatnot, but there's certainly this powerful animus born of disenchantment, a backlash enmity when the bond is broken. Call it the Jar Jar Binks Effect. Call it "Yes, George R.R. Martin *is* My Bitch" Syndrome. Call it whatever, it's that abiding ire at something you've delighted in betraying you, as it seems, simply by ceasing to delight. It's the frustration at that thing not being what it once was, not being what it could still be or might become again. It's the investment of imagination turned sour.

Thinking about it, it may even be truer to say that there's no hate greater than that for something we *still* love, because that hatred must be *beyond reason* to outweigh the love, oblivate it from awareness. Your classic closet case homophobe would fit quite nicely with that, and I can't help thinking that even in its tawdry spite that story idea is a tacit acknowledgement of the power of the Doctor stripped back to core archetype and two key attributes. Visage and garb, persona permutating through each generation, with only the TARDIS and sonic screwdriver as constants, the Doctor is the eccentric professor (Challenger, Quatermass, Van Helsing, Zarkov), but with eccentricity unbound to trickster (Anansi, Coyote, Loki, Reynard). And I do like a good trickster.

Stripped of his name, actually, with an age rendered indeterminate by contradictions of a series making up backstory as it went along, and with the capacity to travel everywhere and everywhen, he's in some ways a truer trickster than any out of myth, since he could theoretically *be* any of them. As the Prisoner of another classic British TV series shucks

the specifics of name to become an archetype in flesh - the secret agent as rebel - so the Doctor is beyond the particularities of these mere immortals. Like the Prisoner, he cannot be pushed, filed, stamped, indexed, briefed, debriefed, or numbered, as *this* trickster figure or *that* trickster figure. He can't be boxed in like that; his box is bigger on the inside than out, might as well be bigger on the inside than the entire outside that surrounds it.

Somewhere in that TARDIS, I like to think, there is a door that any companion who thinks they've mapped all the nooks and crannies of this most infernally-internally-fankled contraption might discover, a door they might open to find an entire cosmos within.

*Of course* for all the spite, I was writing that "story" from a fringe of fandom, as fanfiction. The banal and blundering stab of a scalpel - *look, look, the Doctor is the Ripper* - wasn't to kill a trope I hated, topple an idol I reviled. Underneath, it was a fan's desire to slash Kirk and Spock, queer Harry and Draco, write the *Star Wars Episode I* where Anakin is a bold young blood and Mace Windu a ronin Jedi, where there's at least a flavor of Luke and Han. This crude "subversion" was about the Doctor being, in my still-invested imagination, beyond a kid's TV clown, capable as Coyote or Loki of amoral and downright immoral actions. (Like, say, the genocide of the Daleks.)

It's funny. With the Victorian mien of Hartnell, I can't help thinking my vignette is a response to its cliffhanger, where the Doctor's all set to bash in a caveman's skull. (Chickenshit! I remember ranting at some point. They should have followed through, not reined him in to a cosily quirky do-gooder. That's where it all went wrong!) But I don't *think* I'd seen more than clips of the original pilot until its repeat in 1991, a year *later*, when I recall a thrill of possibility, feeling that *this* was an interesting Doctor, profoundly ambiguous, a potential cold-blooded killer.

An enigma really, as he should be, I thought, with all that baggage of backstory yet to be developed.

## **1982**

My own backstory. If my opinion of *Doctor Who* had fallen so low in 1990 that I bristled at the very notion of being thought a fan, that must have been some love being obliterated, no? Well, sure. My Doctor was Tom Baker. Nuff said.

And while Baker was a hard act to follow, I'd stuck with the show after his departure. It even took on new appeal, I have to admit. I was 11, and suddenly the Doctor was a Peter Davison young and blond

enough to rewrite in my head as hot; and a younger Doctor went rather well with the young male companion he inherited from Baker, the definitely fanciable Adric. Not that I fancied him, mind. It was just... Adric and the Doctor, the Doctor and Adric. They just went together so well, him and him. Not that I thought of them that way, mind. No, no, no. Or if maybe sometimes I did, it didn't mean anything. Much.

In truth, it wasn't even the actors themselves, the actuality; but the *idea* of Adric and the Doctor held such appeal. They weren't the It Couple of my budding pubescent fantasies, but the set-up was the stuff of dreams, cavorting around time and space with (or as) a mysterious nameless adventurer, as (or with) his terribly clever sidekick. Adric had a gold star you could kill a Cyberman with. And Cybermen were cooler than Daleks (on account of being silver cyborgs rather than giant pepperpots with plungers). So that was cool. Apparently there were some female companions in the mix too. Apparently my 11-year-old imagination edited them out of memory on the fly.

And then the fuckers killed the kid, and it was so much for that unwritten fanfiction of wistful daydreams. It was wonderfully sad at first - tragic even, *romantic* even - but from there on in, it was a slow slide down through Colin Baker to Sylvester McCoy, hopes of another young dynamic Doctor dashed with each regeneration, hopes for another young male companion thwarted too. I rather liked Peri, but all too soon she was replaced by the insufferably shrill Mel, and then the insufferably spunky Ace. A tomboy? Wasn't it about time for an *actual* boy again? Wasn't there a place for a plucky young *lad* aboard the TARDIS? I'm not proud of the part of it that was just aversion to girl cooties, but I'm not ashamed of the part that was a desire for... a promise I'd glimpsed at age 11, a potential that crumbled to distant memory with each passing year. So, by the time the fuckheaded image of a killer robot modelled on Bertie Bassett came waddling on screen in 1988, I'd lost any of that fannish investment in a franchise as a locus of fantasies extending beyond the screen or the page.

I've heard from gay Whovian friends the degree to which queers, it seems, seriously *do* dig Time Lords, heard them talk of an inordinate proportion of my homo bros within the fandom, heard how they identified with his alterity, his sexual ambiguity as regards all those female companions. But for me that appeal diminished episode by episode even as my sexuality kicked in, even as I began to realize just how Other I was. In the era of Boy George, the gaudy flamboyance of camp and kitsch was something I decidedly did *not* identify with as a queer kid,

something I recoiled from as a gilded cage of stereotype, a future written for me. I'm a rubbish gay, don't do camp at all. Where once my imagination had been so enraptured in the mythos I might well have dreamt, like a young Russell T. Davies, of actually being let loose in that playground, now I saw little in it calling to me. *Doctor Who* was just an increasingly rare example of a fantastical British TV series, rather overshadowed by the likes of *V* and *Max Headroom*. Hell, even *Automan* and *Manimal* were slicker for all their schlockiness.

### **1986**

The demystification of a nameless enigma didn't help, as the continuity I'd paid little attention to as a pre-teen came to seem increasingly... well, not that wondrous. I'm also as rubbish a geek as I am a gay, to be honest, with about as much concern for the pseudo-factoids of continuity as I have for the exact number of hairs on the arse I'll happily proffer to be kissed by anyone who feels the irresistible urge to correct me that Adric's gold star was in fact five-pointed if I refer to it as six, or vice versa. Whatever. I really don't give a fuck.

To me, the vague backdrop of Time Lords had been little more than a substrate for the equally nameless and equally mysterious Master to emerge from, a dry history tome easily shelved in the back of my brain under Don't Care. My formative years were those with the Doctor sent by a bona fide *cosmic power*, the White Guardian, in search of the very Keys of Time, exploring beyond the known universe itself, and all of this topped off with the wild weirdness of the Watcher as a spectral future self. But then, slowly, it permeated into my ickle noggin that this archetypal man of mystery was a literal alien, with two hearts and an origin on a planet called Gallifrey, only one of a host of *mundanely* alterior beings of flesh and blood. It all seemed so... *Really?* So... *That's what you're going with?*

Coming out of an 18-month hiatus for the program, in which I'd aged from 13 to a smidgeon short of 15, when *The Trial of a Time Lord* hit the screen in 1986, I was just the right age to sit watching a return I *did* eagerly anticipate, only to frown as it shoved a kangaroo court of Gallifreyan bureaucrats down my throat. If I could deal with them killing off Nicola Bryant's Peri and bringing in Bonnie Langford's Mel, the whole mythos seemed stripped of all the shiny. So much for the trickster; the trickster was just another Time Lord, and Time Lords were just tossers with two hearts and 12 jump starts when they died.

They'd made him... normal.

**2010**

But the Doctor is remade constantly. A New Year, a new Doctor, a new showrunner too. I saw the last episode of Davies's tenure in a holiday cottage with friends who *just had to see it*. I'd caught a fair few episodes of the revived show by then, found it mostly... a pleasant surprise. I'd skirted it, flirted with it, put off by this episode, drawn in by that. Among my mates, conversations were unavoidable. Captain Jack, I freely admitted, had real panache. Those Steven Moffat episodes were, yes, rather good. So, as I sat with them watching the grand showdown of the Doctor and the Master, the obstinate anti-fan in me sank into the sofa and into the story, and I found myself wondering, what with all the furor over the Doctor's coming death, if maybe they were going to do something truly special. I thought of regenerations: two Doctors in four seasons, and all it would take is an accident or a movie deal to knock us another Doctor on; the Time Lord was and is running out of time. So I wondered: Did Davies have a card up his sleeve, not just another regeneration, but some new twist to slingshot the show out of tomorrow's dead end?

It would be kind of cool if...

I was a little disappointed when it *was* just another regeneration, but by that point it was too late.

I tuned out for the interminable goodbye sequence of that episode, Tennant's 20-minute last hurrah. I was busy thinking of what *I* would have done in Davies's place, which is to say, of course, surrendering to the power of the character, the potentials of the premise, even the possibilities in bits and bobs of backstory - which I'd later double-check on Wikipedia, idly burrowing through pages on Omega and Rassilon, imagination invested. I sat down for the first episode of the new season to see what Steven Moffat would make of it. I watched Matt Smith conjure an eleventh Doctor who sparked off memories of the glory days of Tom Baker. I found that Amy Pond appealed, that River Song rocked. I came out to friends who for years had known me as an intractable naysayer: Yeah, I watched *Doctor Who* this week.

*You watched Doctor Who?* they said.

Actually, it was kinda cool, I said. I like that Moffat actually *uses* time travel.

**2005**

I see continuity, I want to fuck with it. Continuity is just... so not me. It might be innate. A few months after that Saturday at Eastercon,

when I sat in a hotel bar drinking Guinness and reading Borges rather than watch *Doctor Who*, Worldcon came to Glasgow, and I ended up on a panel with Geoff Ryman, who told of a conversation with a reader. They'd written a dissertation on the works of certain writers, himself included. They had a thesis of "queer time" - that queer writers often seemed to unmoor their characters from linear time, destabilise continuity. Was it to do with a sense of alterity, alienation from the cycles of generations, the normalities of families where child becomes parent begets child becomes parent... and so on? He found it intriguing, as I recall, albeit he remained sceptical.

I thought of my own first novel, just about to be published, full of all manner of transtemporal shenanigans, travel not just back and forward in time, but side to side, up and down, history mashed up with the future, parallel worlds of weird Britannias. The phrase that the TV Tropes entry on *The Book of All Hours* uses for it: "timey-wimey."

I see continuity, I want to fuck with it. Imagination invested again, I yearn for a Doctor stripped back to archetype and attributes, unbound.

## **2012**

Oh, to be given the chance to chart a new course for him out of continuity. I suspect many fans would hate me for it, but I'd blow the entirety of his backstory to dust. I'd give you the bloody end of his 12 regenerations, the Master standing over the corpse of the thirteenth Doctor with a gun... as he regenerates again. I'd have the shock of shattered pseudo-fact written on the face of the villain as he shoots the man again. Another regeneration. Continuity? At a recent convention, so I hear, Steven Moffat canvassed the audience for opinions on the notion of a female doctor. Opinions were not positive. But the Doctor is a man, many of the fans said. He has to stay a man. They wanted the cosy certainty of established imaginings perpetuated, normativity sustained. To them his male gender was like his Gallifreyan birth, his two hearts, his 12 regenerations. And? I think.

I have a friend who's so utterly devoted to the "fact" of those 12 regenerations, he just *can't* accept the idea of the show carrying on past that mark.

*But you can't accept the idea of the show ending!* I say.

*I know!* he says. *But he's only got 12 regenerations.*

His devotion to a self-made double-bind that would kill the show he loves, I just find nuts. The devotion of those fans to the Doctor continuing in his established gender, I find infuriating. Misogynist heteronorma-

tive bollocks in the name of reactionary geekdom. Decades of throw-away trivia, hokum, and hogwash made up on the hoof, the happenstance that the actor brought in as replacement has never, to date, been female - which is less happenstance, more the blinkers of bias. All of this, this *continuity*.

If you love something, set it free, they say, and shouldn't a trickster, of all things, be absolutely free.

So I'd have the Master standing over the Doctor's body shooting each regeneration in turn, and each time another regeneration coming, a defiance of every hidebound little Hitler and reassertion of the trickster's glorious and irrepressible mutability.

*BANG!* Regenerate!

*BANG!* Regenerate!

*BANG!* Regenerate!

*BANG!* Regenerate!

*BANG!* Regenerate!

*BANG!* Regenerate!

I'd carry it on as long as was dramatically sustainable, until the audience must surely have lost count, every regeneration a swing of a baseball bat, smashing the status quo into oblivion, out of time and space itself; and the very last regeneration would be a woman whose first words after taking the emptied, clicking pistol out of the Master's hand and punching him in the face with a fierceness to make River Song look demure would be, straight to camera, "FUCK YOU!"

You want backstory? I understand Andrew Cartmel had a plan to rewrite the very founding of Gallifrey by Rassilon and Omega, with the Doctor in the mix. Sounds good to me. I'd give you that in utter contradiction of his supposed 900 years. I'd give you that 900 years too though, give every geek the fricking date of his birth, his parent's names, his favorite childhood hobby, his first kiss from a girl, his first kiss from a boy, his first every dreary and diminishing detail you could dream of in your urge to bind him into boring stability, leaden pedantry. And then I'd simply give you a foundling on Gallifrey adopted by his mother, an unearthly child, not newborn but newly regenerated, his first regeneration only the first *known*. There's whole seasons could be spun taking the audience back to the very birth of this two-hearted Time Lord only to make it a mere landing post from which, looking back and beyond, to the where and when of his original origin, we'd see only a void of utter mystery. Let the accreted kipple of those 900 fictive years and 50 actual be compacted and capsuled, gently put away in a trunk so the

*The Doctor: A Strange Love*

Doctor could walk away from it all restored to the purity of this beautifully simple trickster with a police box and a sonic screwdriver.

That TARDIS? I'd have it stolen originally from a Gallifreyan scrapyard, already old when the "first" Doctor filched it for his travels, that chameleon circuit faulty because it's engaged in camouflaging the interior, its own machinery, to emulate the TT Type 40, Mark 3 which it never actually was, being instead the prototype of all. I'd have a young male companion find that door into its inner cosmos.

How would I wrap up my tenure? Why, I'd give you a Master driven to madness finally somehow finding the one way to end the Doctor's life, the two of them locked in mortal combat, like Holmes and Moriarty at the Reichenbach Falls, both wounded to death, and at the last, the dying Doctor whispering one word into his or her victorious foe's ear: a name? His death would be spectacular, celestial, *absolute*. And finally the maniacally laughing weeping Master would fall to his knees, to regenerate in a universe empty of the Doctor, into an actor who looks unmistakably, unquestionably, the spitting image of a young William Hartnell. With a new moniker and mission to don.

And a fez, of course. Fezzes are cool.

Wait, what? they'd say. The Master can't become the first Doctor! You just spent three seasons tracing that Doctor back to his childhood! He's a foundling! But, but, but...!

And I'd shrug, let whoever came after me sort that one out.

## **A Man is the Sum of His Memories...**

**Neil Chester** was born in the week-long gap between the final part of *The Mind of Evil* and the opening part of *The Claws of Axos*. As such, his life has always been a balancing act between prison-storming gritty realism and day-glo psychedelia. Or something like that. After an enjoyable, *Doctor Who*-worshiping childhood/adolescence in Devon, he moved to Brighton in 1990 to study librarianship at university. At the time, the university options for this subject were Brighton, Aberystwyth, and Loughborough - Brighton was always going to be the winner under those circumstances! He's stayed in Brighton ever since and likes to think of himself as thinly traveled but widely read. He runs the library at a local college, and considers Giles from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* as something of a librarian icon. He currently lives with his Spanish flatmate who views classic *Doctor Who* with a mixture of bemused tolerance and derisory laughter. He's a keen cyclist (for fun, not sport) and an even keener cook, enjoys being a mildly eccentric uncle, and dabbles in PhotoShop with more enthusiasm than skill. He still retains his fear of spiders, largely thanks to *Planet of the Spiders*, but has pretty much conquered his fear of ugly Toby Jugs. This essay represents his first-ever published work.

"These aren't real trees, this isn't the real Earth, and you're not the real Sarah!"

—The Doctor, *The Android Invasion*

**Saturday, November 29, 1975.** We're at my (paternal) grandmother's, all sitting in her kitchen after a roast dinner. We went to my gran's most Saturdays for dinner - a roast with all the trimmings, a gravy boat of gravy and another of mint sauce, the whole lot. I liked coming to Gran's, but it's not without peril; there were two toilets - the outside one was full of spiders, which I hate, but the upstairs one meant going past the glass cabinet at the foot of the stairs that contained the two ugliest Toby Jugs<sup>41</sup> known to man, which terrified me! Needless to say, I tried not to go to the loo at Gran's unless I really, *really* had to!

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41. Pottery jugs of famous people or characters, often seated.

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"We" consisted of the three of us: me, Mum, and Dad. My little brother won't come along until midway between episodes three and four of *The Talons of Weng-Chiang*. Dinner was finished, but Mum and Dad still sat at the dining table, Gran's in her armchair at one side of the fire, and I was in the other, next to the television. The only other armchair in the room was the dog's, and she's not giving it up for anyone. Gran never used the sitting room; that stays pristine and unoccupied. We're always in the kitchen. And now a familiar game began. It's nearing time for *Doctor Who*, and Gran came out with her usual response, "Oh, you don't want to watch that rubbish. No, you're not watching that, not on my television." I begged and pleaded to be allowed to watch it. My parents knew that it's a game, but at four years and eight months old, I genuinely believed that she's not going to let me. And then, at the last minute, she "relents."

"Oh, alright then," and on goes the TV.

The armchair's about eight inches away from the TV and at right angles to it, so I was suddenly watching the Doctor and Sarah's antics in a mysterious village in close-up, peering through my fingers at the scary bits. The episode doesn't really stick in my memory, although I'm very familiar with it now, but I clearly remember the ending - the Doctor turns on Sarah, shaking her, demanding to know where the real Sarah is, she breaks away and falls backwards, and as she rolls over her face falls off! Circuitry and a pair of boggling eyes stare up from where Sarah's face should be. Crash! Zoom! My first ever *Doctor Who* memory.

My childhood, and in fact my adult existence, is crammed with bits of *Who* and *Who* memories; it's threaded through my entire life...

###

I nagged and nagged until my (maternal) grandmother knitted me a *Doctor Who* scarf. It was my pride and joy for some time. Twelve feet long in alternating bands of blue, yellow and red - looking back at it now, it wasn't particularly accurate, but I thought it was great. I used to wear it to school, and I remember the other kids tugging and pulling at it. I was very indignant when one dinner lady told me that if I couldn't control my friends, then I'd have to stop wearing it to school. I remember thinking, "But controlling them is *your* job!" I did, reluctantly, stop wearing the scarf to school after that. I think it's still in my parents' attic somewhere, curled up in a neglected, multi-colored wool ball.

As you may have gathered from this, I was never a trendy child - I

Neil Chester

received a pair of brushed denim flared jeans, which I loved, almost exactly the very week, in fact, I think the very second, that flares went out of fashion. Likewise, I got my *Six Million Dollar Man* style denim jacket just as everyone was losing interest in Steve Austin and moving on to other things. Because of this, I was never too bothered about following fashion, or about what the other kids said. So the scarf was joined, a couple of years later, by a cricket jumper knitted by the same gran. My mother was also employed to iron stick-on blue frills on the front and wrists of a blue shirt. And, to my shame, I recall a white shirt which had red questions marks added to the collars. It's no wonder I was teased at school. I'm fairly sure, looking back, that the frilled shirt, coupled with an ill-advised pair of checked trousers, got me called "a poof" long before any thoughts of sex or attraction ever even entered my head.



Me and my brother Lee (circa 1979)

###

One very large part of my childhood *Doctor Who* fandom was the Target novelizations. The very first one I received was *The Brain of Morbius*. My parents had been out, leaving me and my baby brother in the care of a grandparent, and when they came back, they had a present

for me. I remember being handed the slim, yellow-covered volume. It seemed unbearably exciting, to know that there was a whole *Doctor Who* story in the book - one I could enjoy over and over again. Coming, as it did, right after *The Android Invasion*, I had vague memories of Morbius: the creature, the storm, "Sacred fire, Sacred flame!" Sarah being blind. The novel brought it all back to life in my mind. I was only six, so reading the whole thing myself was a bit beyond me. Mum read it to me at bedtimes until I was able to read it myself. She was never a big fan of *Morbius*, finding it too gothic and gruesome. I think she was glad when I could read it myself.

*Morbius* started an obsession with the Target novels, and when I was a bit older I raided the library for them. The library copies were always hardback and covered in plastic to protect the dust jacket - at each visit, I'd usually leave with at least two of the slim hardbacks to devour. Even now when I think of certain Target novels, I immediately picture a slim, plastic-coated hardback.

Among my favorites were *The Web of Fear* and *Planet of Evil* - both conjured up a creeping sense of unease and images of terrible, unseen monsters hidden in the fog/ web/ jungle. I regularly visited the library to see what new Targets they had, scouring the shelves for ones I hadn't read. It's no exaggeration to say that it was those Target novels that started my love of reading. They also started my love of libraries - *Doctor Who* may not have made me gay, but it almost certainly made me a librarian! In fact, I started volunteering in my local library when I was about 14, at least in part so I could borrow more Targets.

In the days before videos, DVDs, and audio soundtracks, the Target novelizations were a gateway into an unseen world of *Doctor Who* - like the TARDIS, they could whisk you off to adventure. I wonder how many *Who* fans, like myself, were, effectively, taught to read by Terrence Dicks, Malcolm Hulke, David Whitaker, and the like.

The Target novels weren't just a thing of my childhood - they grew with me so that they seemed to get more sophisticated as I got older. And so when I went away to University in 1990, the recently released *Remembrance of the Daleks* and *Ghost Light* came with me. The final few Targets led neatly into the Virgin New Adventures, which I used to pick up every month from a lovely little independent bookshop in Brighton. No matter how thinly stretched my student grant, I could always pick up a new *Doctor Who* book...

And, of course, the Target novels are currently enjoying resurgence with the lovely, extras-packed re-releases and lovingly re-created covers.

I bought *Doctor Who and the Daleks* for my niece, a voracious reader, for her twelfth birthday and - even though she's no knowledge of any Doctor before David Tennant - she loved it. It's great to know that it's capable of enchanting a new generation decades after it was originally written.

###

As well as the Target novelizations, there were other bits of merchandise to keep a young *Who* fan happy in the 70s. In comparison to the enormous range of accurate figures and toys that are available now, it seems very paltry indeed, but back then it was a treasure trove. There were some odd pieces - one thing I particularly liked, and that was readily available in my local newsagent at pocket money prices, was the *Doctor Who* transfer set by Letraset as part of their Super Action Heroes range. This consisted of a fold out scene of modern-day Earth under attack from the Daleks, with the TARDIS standing in the middle of the battle zone. You could then apply transfers of the Doctor, Sarah, various UNIT soldiers and Daleks, flying saucers, laser beams, and explosions as you saw fit. The same company also produced Batman transfers and the possibilities of a crossover were never far from the mind of an inventive six-year-old.

Transfers, Target novels, and, of course, *Doctor Who Weekly* from 1979 were about all that was available in my hometown. The Pram and Toy Shop in Exeter was the main supplier of more expensive/ exciting treasures, such as the *Doctor Who* dressing-up outfit which was produced in 1976. This consisted of a plastic tabard on which was printed an image of the Doctor's jacket and scarf and which came with a, in retrospect slightly scary, Auton-like Tom Baker mask. With this, you could be the Doctor, albeit the Doctor with one fixed expression, fighting monsters and exploring alien planets, possibly whilst eating a Dalek Death Ray ice lolly - ah, that minty goodness. There was also a *Doctor Who* board game, complete with TARDIS-shaped dice shaker that could, if you could persuade your parents to play, while away an hour or so of a rainy afternoon.

However, principal amongst the toys for the 70s fan was the range of *Doctor Who* figures that were produced by Denys Fisher in 1977. I was lucky enough to be the proud owner of a Doctor figure, and whilst it may not have looked an awful lot like Tom Baker, it was an almost unbearably exciting thing to own. He came in an illustrated box with

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two (easily lost) sonic screwdrivers - one for everyday and one for best, and a spare scarf, just in case. And unlike other toys of the period - I'm looking at you, *Star Wars* figures - he came with real, fabric clothes. Well, apart from his unusual plastic hat and shoes.

Sadly, my Doctor was never joined by Leela, but a female school friend had a Bionic Woman doll and, when available, she made an acceptable substitute companion for the Doctor. My Doctor was eventually joined by K9 and later the Palitoy talking Dalek. And then, at Christmas, I was lucky enough to be given the accompanying TARDIS. Hours of adventure with the Doctor cleverly disappearing and reappearing from the interior. Sadly, my grandfather broke it by being a bit heavy handed with the buttons, but my dad was able to fix it - who knew that he was a temporal engineer? I also received the Palitoy talking K9, although he was, for obvious practical reasons, considerably larger than the Denys Fisher one and so was terribly out of scale - the Doctor could've ridden on him. Not that a mismatch of scale stopped the two of them from having all sorts of adventures together.

###

*"To Neil, (7) - Happy Days Tom Baker Doctor Who 1978"*

**1978** - *Doctor Who* comes to Devon! The most exciting news was that Tom Baker was to do a book signing in the Woolworths in Exeter. My parents happened to be going to Exeter anyway, so after a lot of excited seven-year-old pleading, I was taken along, rather than staying like my baby brother with an obliging relative, and a trip to Woolworths was added to the agenda. When came to the store, it was packed with equally excited kids and harassed parents and there, behind a table, imposing in full costume, was the Doctor himself - all wide eyes, curly hair, and masses of scarf, just like on the telly! The idea was to select a Target novel and then get it signed by the Doctor, and there were rows and rows of colorful, shiny Target novels - almost as exciting as the presence of the Doctor himself.

The queue was fairly big, and since my dad officially doesn't do queuing, he drifted off to look at unspecified electrical equipment elsewhere in the shop while Mum and I joined the queue. I wasn't bothered about the line myself, as it just gave me more time to select the right book. It had to be the right choice - something exciting that I hadn't read before, but appropriate to the event. Oddly, some people seemed to be getting books that didn't feature Tom Baker! Finally I chose *The Face of Evil*,

resplendent with a bright blue cover and a striking picture of Leela on the front. Eventually, I made it to the front of the queue and came face to face with the man himself.

"Hullo. And what's your name?" he beamed. I don't recall being nervous - talking to the Doctor seemed perfectly natural, how could you be nervous? Whilst signing my book, the Doctor chatted away.

"Do you live in Exeter?"

"No, we're from Honiton."

"Ah! Did you come here specially to see me?"

"No," I replied, in the loud, clear, unselfconscious voice of a child about to unwittingly embarrass a parent, "we came here to get my mum's gallstones looked at!"

In retrospect, I think I should have been able to hear my mother blushing. I certainly recall laughter from some of the other nearby parents. The Doctor chuckled and handed me my book. My audience with the Doctor was over and one embarrassed parent and one delighted, oblivious child wandered off in search of the other parent. Some time later, a voice over the shop Tannoy announced that Doctor had to leave now as he'd parked his TARDIS on a double yellow line.

I've never quite lived my medical indiscretion down with my family, especially in 2005 when I gained a collection of gallstones of my own. Still, you can't say I don't give an honest answer.

###

**April 1983** - The 20th Anniversary Longleat weekend. Knowing they'd get no peace otherwise, my parents agreed to take us for a family day out to Longleat. I was probably the most excited I've ever been. I was just 12, my brother just six, both of our birthdays having been the month before, and we were bundled up in the back of the car in matching parkas. It's about an hour and a half to drive from Honiton to Longleat, but it felt like about a week. My memories of the day are fragmentary; it was a long time ago, and was so unbearably exciting that the whole day has become a jumble of memories with a few standout moments.

One of my abiding memories of the day, though, is queuing - the queue of traffic into Longleat; heat haze shimmering over the lines and lines of cars; queues into the tents and exhibitions; a lengthy, snaking queue for autographs in the Orangery. It was after about an hour of this particular line that my dad's famous antipathy to queues struck again,

and we abandoned the autograph queue in favor of more wandering about.

The queues for some of the display tents were also enormous, and there were "UNIT Troops" around doing crowd management. They didn't seem to be terribly alert, however, to crafty 12-year-olds slipping into the exit and wandering round to their heart's content.

Aside from the exhibitions, the main attraction was, of course, the actors from the show. Excited children mobbed them every time they set foot outside of the tents where they were giving talks or competing auctions. I remember catching a glimpse of Peter Davison, in costume and surrounded by a thrashing ball of kids, barely able to escape. We weren't meant to "bother" the actors when they were "off-duty." Needless to say, none of us paid the slightest bit of attention to that! My brother and I were part of a group of kids following Elisabeth Sladen and Carole Ann Ford around - Sarah Jane Smith and the Doctor's own granddaughter! It was exciting being so near to them - my personal first *Doctor Who* companion, star of my very first *Who* memory, and the first-ever *Doctor Who* companion.

The group of us followed them up a flight of stone steps outside Longleat House. At the top, the two ladies stopped and, after a brief consultation, turned to face the waiting crowd. "Come on darling," announced Lis Sladen, reaching out a hand to grab a nearby child, "let's go walkabout!" Her hand fastened around my brother's wrist and she led him off down the stairs holding his hand. My *brother*! And I'd been standing right next to him! *He* didn't even know who she was! I mean, really! It's just not on. Many years later, when *School Reunion* was broadcast, my brother took great delight in explaining to my niece who Sarah was and how she'd once held his hand in preference to mine. Life's just not fair! The ladies were charming and friendly and incredibly patient with a bunch of excitable children, happily chatting and signing autographs for some time before making their escape.

Our final encounter with a *Doctor Who* star came very late in the day on the way back to our car. We ran into a charming, and beardless, Anthony Ainley, also clearly trying to get back to his car. Like Lis Sladen and Carole Ann Ford before him, he was friendly and more than happy to sign an autograph and pose for a Polaroid. That photo is still in my parents' attic somewhere, along with a few others from a fantastic day, with Anthony Ainley standing smiling in the foreground, and over his shoulder, in the background, my mother looking on nervously.

*Neil Chester*



Me, Lee, and a Sontaran - Longleat, 1983



Patrick Troughton signs for fans - Longleat, 1983

*A Man is the Sum of His Memories...*



The Master (off duty) - Longleat, 1983

###

**Tuesday, January 10, 2012.** Settling down to watch the newly released DVD of *The Android Invasion* with my friend Fig, glass of wine in hand, and I enjoy it just as much as I did 36-odd years ago, although I'm sitting considerably further back from the TV this time! I'm well aware of the plot holes and flaws - the creeping sense of mystery beautifully built up by the first episode and completely undermined by the title, which gives the whole game away; the (frankly) ludicrous nature of the Kraals' plan; and the implausibility of duped astronaut Guy Crayford not having looked under his eyepatch for two years! It's still a fun story, though, full of great moments. Tom Baker and Lis Sladen rushing around the English countryside is a quintessential *Doctor Who* image for me. And the moment where Sarah's face falls off still gives me a momentary frisson...

## **Spoilers: A Letter to Myself, Age 16**

**Kaia Landelius** is a Swedish writing fairy who lives with a very bossy cat. She has opinions about sewing machines. Once she took a picture of a blue police box without knowing it was a nerd icon. She knows better these days. Her first-ever published short story, "Nine Times" (*Worlds Next Door*), was nominated for an Aurealis Award in 2011.

*I grew up believing that Fantasy was Lord of the Rings and that Science Fiction was Star Trek. I judged both viciously without ever having seen a minute of either. This is a letter to my teenage self, explaining that actually, sometimes "realistic" TV holds less realism than the fantastical, and that Rachel and Monica of Friends are as mythical as Sontarans and Daleks. Even if their haircuts were cuter.*

Kaia,

I'm going to tell you a secret. Well, several.

I know, you think you know everything. You're 16. It comes with the package. You refuse to admit you might not have it all one day: an apartment like Rachel and Monica's, a cool job like Dr Corday, and a bar full of friends and colleagues like Ally McBeal. That's what you're dreaming of - friends and dates and not being so damn shy and boring and alone.

None of your dreams involve monsters or explosions. There are no other worlds, no trips into the past or the future, and what's even worse: you don't even know to miss them.

You don't realize how amazing a girl has to be to face a Dalek or a Weeping Angel, to travel through the time vortex, to stand eye to eye with a Cyberman, or to live with a crack in her bedroom wall. All you want is Rachel's cute haircut and adorable (yes, you find her adorable; what the hell is wrong with you?) outbursts and bad taste in men.

I'll tell you one of those secrets now:

Rachel Green has nothing on Sarah Jane Smith. On River Song. On Rose Tyler, Martha Jones, Donna Noble, or Amy Pond. I wish you could see it. You're going to have to wait way too long to fall in love with a

show that isn't here yet, because you're growing up in The Wilderness Years and even if you weren't, Swedish television doesn't like science fiction any more than you do, and the Internet barely exists.

When I write this, it's 2012, and I'm 32, and isn't that a terrifying prospect? Rather than rehashing the politics and history of the last decade and a bit, let us focus on the important thing: a TV show you won't hear about for another 14 years. It's about time travel, so what's more fitting than me telling you now what you have to look forward to?

This show has the female heroes I wish you'd had back then. I want to give you (well, me) a bit of River, a bit of Donna, and a lot of Amy, and see the difference it would have made to your self-esteem. It might not work, I know, but let this old lady hope for the best.

You can do so much better than pretending to be that girl with cute hair, or getting boys to like you. And while you're at it, maybe try to figure out why that last part is so very hard.

We'll get there. Trust me.

### **The One with Rose, Nancy, and the Gas Mask Child**

*The Empty Child/The Doctor Dances* (by Steven Moffat)

It's 1941. Nancy is waiting for people to hide in their bomb shelters so she can usher her street urchins into their houses and eat their dinner. It's how she keeps these kids fed. Kids just like her brother, the empty child in the gas mask. When she tells the Doctor that she's doing just fine on her own, I want to hug her and high five her, both at once.

There are a lot of strong women like this in *Doctor Who* - guest stars and companions both. This episode doesn't just feature Nancy, the girl struggling with so much guilt and sadness and maternal guilt, but also Rose Tyler herself.

Rose is very much a love-or-hate character, with fandom as likely to criticize her for everything she does wrong, or awkwardly, or with giggles, as they are to identify with her and love her for it.

Me? I often find Rose painful to watch, because she's so young, so innocent, and will happily follow her man to the end of the world and back. You would do the same thing, Kaia, and that's why I cringe. That's also why you would have liked her way more than I do. And while I find her problematic, Rose is still an active character; she gets things done. She even saves the world occasionally. And that alone is enough to make me wish I could throw her at you.

In *The Empty Child/The Doctor Dances*, Rose is the one who finds a way out when the boys are too busy comparing sonics, and gives Nancy the

hope she needs to save the world. That's actually the best part of this story. It's not the 900-year-old jaded Time Lord who saves the day; it's the girl who lives on the streets with a gang of homeless kids.

Nancy is the one who has been coping with all this for so long. She's not a time traveler and knows nothing about aliens. But she does the best she can for herself and the kids she *can* help, and if that means she has to threaten a man three times her size, she will.

And she does.

At the end, when Nancy confesses her secrets, revealing her maternal guilt about the boy who is not her brother after all, she has to trust him and the Doctor. She has no reason to do so, but she takes the risk, and saves the day. What could Rachel and Monica ever do to top that?

### **The One with Martha, Joan, the Fob Watch, and the Sniveling Doctor**

*Human Nature/The Family of Blood* (by Paul Cornell)

So Kaia, Martha Jones is one of your favorite companions. Or she will be, anyway. All companions have their blind spots, and Martha's is the most obvious of them all. It takes her about four seconds to fall hopelessly in love with the Doctor. He is oblivious, and at one point she actually jokes with Captain Jack about how he doesn't notice. But there is so much more to Martha than her hopeless crush. It's especially apparent in this story, where she's stuck in 1913 with a Doctor who has turned himself into ordinary human John Smith and can't remember her. Until he gets his personality back, Martha has to quietly run the show, and she does it beautifully, despite the fact that he left her playing the role of "servant" in a world where women of color aren't seen as worth much. But Martha sticks with her Doctor and when the dangerous aliens finally track them down, it's Martha who takes charge.

In the face of danger, John Smith snivels and tries to run away. "God, you're rubbish as a human!", Martha yells at him.

There's another great woman in this episode. Joan Redfern is the one the human "Doctor" falls in love with while Martha watches. And while Martha takes the lead in keeping everyone alive, it's Joan who figures out the puzzle of John Smith all on her own.

Ultimately, Joan has to let go of her fiancé and their future together. She does so heroically, with the sort of quiet bravery *Doctor Who* has explored many times: Reinette in *The Girl in the Fireplace* and Rita in *The God Complex* are two of my favorite examples. Yes, the snapshots of their lost life together (the wedding, the kids, John Smith on his death bed)

are on the cheesy side, but *Doctor Who* doesn't shy away from yanking at the heart-strings. It shows exactly how much Joan is giving up.

This episode is mostly Martha, though. She's amazing, with a drive and determination that you don't find on TV where you are (okay, maybe in *E.R.*). She's insanely attractive, all brains and stubborn conviction, and I know that you would have seen that, even if you wouldn't have figured out why. She's not a good servant, being too loud, too impulsive, and full of spirit. But that's what makes her awesome, and that's what makes her Martha.

She's the hero you'll love most, from her Shakespeare adventure, to her UNIT days, and even *Torchwood*. Your Martha.

### **The One with Donna, Rose, and "What If"**

*Turn Left* (by Russell T. Davies)

You will love Donna too. In fact, you will love all the companions, because that's part of loving the show. After Rose and Martha finding the Doctor attractive, it's so refreshing to meet a woman who complains that he's too skinny and answers every suggestion of them being a couple with a horrified, "NOOOOO!"

I realize that I'm not selling the show effectively to a teenager who likes flirting and romance in her TV women. But honestly, Kaia, you need to stop idolizing glamorous girls with serial dating problems, and dreaming of your future husband and children. Come play with the kickass women instead. Donna is strong and amazing. She tells the Doctor off, demands that he saves people even when he thinks he can't.

Later on, you'll be absolutely furious about the way they write her out of the show (what the hell, RTD, *what the hell?*), but before she disappears, you'll see her in this dystopian story that will break your heart.

*Turn Left* shows us a modern Britain where people become refugees in their own country and immigrants are shipped off to labor camps. The Doctor isn't there to save the world this time, but Donna's there instead, with Rose nudging her towards making the bravest choice she ever could.

*Doctor Who* is full of people who do things that terrify them. That's a good lesson to learn, Kaia, and not one you can find at Central Perk.

But let's go back to Donna and Rose, and the way they stand in the middle of a UNIT base, discussing how to save the world. There are no small problems in *Doctor Who*. Everything is at stake. Even a Donna who has never seen the universe with the Doctor has to be brave and leap out there. You could really use that sort of thinking sometimes. Not that

you'll ever be thrown back into the past and having to run like mad to turn things right, but the sentiment still stands.

Throw yourself out there. Being noticed is not the most dangerous thing you could face.

### **The One with Amy, Rory, and the Duct-Tape Warrior**

*The Girl Who Waited* (by Tom MacRae)

Amy Pond, man. She's exactly like so many of the girls you've had crushes on. What? Don't look at me like that. There were crushes - especially the one on that girl on your soccer team. Perfectly innocent, you say? You just admired her skills as a kickass defender, uh-huh. Sure.

Time to breathe into a paper bag yet? Anyway, Amy. She's hot, let me tell you. It's not the most interesting thing about her, however much fans talk about her short skirts and long legs. That gorgeous red hair is nothing compared to her story with the Doctor, and her beloved Rory, and the way she deals with the challenges she comes across on her travels with them.

In *The Girl Who Waited*, Amy lives alone for 36 years, because of a screw-up of the timeline. She becomes a much older, jaded, duct-tape warrior. Her armor is stitched together and broken in places, just like this version of her.

Amy Pond, the girl who waited. Some critics of the show say that Amy isn't strong, because all she has to do is wait, wish, hope, and remember. I disagree. Amy is, more than any other companion, the one that 16-year-old me would identify with. She may be married and a mother, but she's also just the sort of strong you admired back when I was you.

This episode is one of her best. Karen Gillan's portrait of the two Amys is beautiful, and the contrast between them is startling. Young, fresh faced Amy, annoyed with being left alone, but convinced they'll come for her. Old, jaded Amy, trusting nobody but herself. She tells the Doctor that she hates him, he abandoned her, and that she's just fine on her own.

What gets me every time is the way old Amy tells Rory that she won't bravely stay behind. That she'll kick and scream and fight for her life. It's so very Amy, that bit. And that's why you'll come to love her, Kaia, why she'll mean so much to you. Think for a moment about how a character like that would make you feel, and how she might've given you the courage to admit who you really were, long before you did. Maybe if you'd had a stronger role model, you wouldn't have had to

spend your teenage years aware that *something* was wrong, but not knowing what it was.

You're queer, babe. You've always been. And you're not alone. You may think that you're the only one, apart from the Carol the ex-wife on *Friends*. ("She always drank her beer out of the can - I should've known," Ross says at one point, which is a great joke! Absolutely hilarious!)

Amy might not seem the least bit queer, but I still think she could have taught you a thing or two.

### **The One with River Song, the Lipstick, and the Army of Angels**

*The Time of Angels/Flesh and Stone* (by Steven Moffat)

And then you get River Song. Love at first sight, of course, because you'll remember her from *E.R.*, which 16-year-old you watches religiously. Your friends argue whether Noah Wyle or George Clooney is hottest. You're busy looking at Julianna Margulies and Alex Kingston instead, thinking they are insanely cool and strong and smart... yeah. This is what I'm talking about.

River Song will blow your mind, because she's even more amazing than Dr Elizabeth Corday, one of the strongest women you've idolized on TV. Yes, that character was played by Alex Kingston, too. A pattern is emerging.

In *The Time of Angels*, River throws herself out of a spaceship, safe in her belief that the Doctor will come and catch her. The ultimate trust exercise, over and over. They also face an army of Weeping Angels, one of the most terrifying monsters in *Doctor Who* history.

Amy is in this one too. One thing I love about *Doctor Who* is when the companions aren't jealous of each other. Amy and River laugh and tease the Doctor together, and will make you all squishy inside.

The most heartbreaking part of River's story is that she and the Doctor meet in reverse order. Each time we see her, she knows a little less about the Doctor, and he knows a little more. He's slipping away from her. And while I'm not an enormous fan of love stories in the TARDIS, that makes even my cold little heart hurt. You would be devastated by this, just like you were when your favorite med student died in *E.R.* (*Friends* never made you cry like that, though - it didn't run deep enough.)

You will love River Song with all of your heart. You will watch her episodes from back to front, to watch her journey from scared and young to the amazing archaeologist tracking down the Doctor in a fifty-

*Kaia Landelius*

first century library. Yes, she's an archaeologist and a professor, the psychopath and the killer, the prisoner and the femme fatale. In this episode, she wears oh-my-God-are-you-serious tall heels and a long dress to meet the Doctor, only to wipe the lipstick off and put on fatigues when things get serious. She's so many things, River Song, and you will love every single one of them.

So here we are, Kaia. This is the show you'll love like a madwoman in a decade and a half, full of amazing and complicated female heroes that make you proud and brave and strong. I wish you'd had them as a teenager, as role models to show you that even in pretendy worlds, there's room for women who have a greater realness and strength to them than sitcom world allows. I know you won't give up on your favorite shows just yet, but there will come a day when your focus shifts, and oh how I wish that this peek into your future would make it happen sooner.

Speaking of the future, the world won't end when you figure out the truth about who you are, and it especially won't end when you admit it to your family ("that explains a lot" and "okay" and "that's pretty cool" are a few of the reactions).

Oh, and don't get in that stupid fight with your first girlfriend because you don't want to go see *The Lord of the Rings* movie. "It's not realistic" really isn't a valid reason to cut off so many fantastic stories from your life.

Here's a secret you didn't see coming: one day, you'll want to be a writer of magical, utterly "unrealistic" stories about brave, hot women. And it won't be the TV you watched as a teenager that will inspire you. It will be Rose, Nancy, Martha, Joan, Donna, Amy, and River. Sorry you have to wait so long to meet them.

Still, *Doctor Who* will be worth the wait, and while you're killing time between then and now, how about checking out *Buffy* while Sarah Michelle Gellar's clothes are still fashionable? You'll kick yourself if you don't. That show? *Full of Hot Women Heroes!*

Much love,  
The terribly old, cynical, squeeeful *Doctor Who* fan version of yourself,

Kaia

## The Heterosexual Agenda

**John Richards** is an award-winning writer and broadcaster. He is best known for co-creating and writing the ABC1 television series *Outland*, the best gay-and-lesbian-science-fiction-fan-club comedy ever made. He is also a presenter on the *Boxcutters* podcast, which won a Chronos Award in 2011 for their "Writing *Doctor Who*" special featuring Paul Cornell and Rob Shearman. He was part of the acclaimed radio comedy team The Third Ear, which produced a regular sketch comedy show on RRR, a sitcom for ABC Radio National, and wrote and performed material for the television series *Something Hot Before Bed*. He has hosted shows on RRR and Joy 94.9; written for stage, radio and television; and is a regular contributor to publications including *Encore* and *Cult*. He has inspired two characters in Australian novels, and his shoulder appears in the feature film *The Extra*. He lives in Melbourne with his husband and two cats.

When I was a child, I wanted to live in the future. Years later, I would achieve that goal, but by then it would be renamed "the present" and it wouldn't seem anywhere near as interesting. My future had hovercars and teleportation, moonbases and zero-g haircuts. The *real* future, on the other hand, seems to consist mostly of conversations about real estate and too many episodes of *Glee*.

I liked all versions of the future. The bleak dystopias where tribal groups of survivors fought over the last remaining grapefruit. The intriguing "day after tomorrow" dramas where everything looked the same, only people had electric hats and every room had an automatic door, for some reason. Even the beautiful black-and-white retro-futures that showed up in old films late at night on the ABC, where everyone wore robes and lived in huge white buildings with art-deco windows. The ones where any moment you'd expect Fred and Ginger to run in and start dancing.

The *Mad Max* films were obviously appealing, with their double-hitter of action-packed melancholy and homoerotic fetish-wear. Indeed, when Frankie Goes to Hollywood's "Two Tribes" came out in 1984, the combination of electro-pop, gay sex, and nuclear war was like a Venn

diagram of my 12-year-old mind.

But my favorite future, the one I wanted to live in, was glimpsed in the science-fiction television and movies of the 1970s, especially the cheaper English ones that featured out-of-work Shakespearean actors in purple wigs or covered in bubble-wrap. Worlds that were held together with imagination and gaffer tape, where tin foil was plentiful and everything was shiny - my favorite color. This was a future in which everyone wore silver; a jumpsuit; or a silver jumpsuit. These were shows that practically *smelled* like plastic, especially if you sat as close to the television as I did.

And, clearly, my favorite was *Doctor Who*.

Sure, I dreamt that one day I might grow up to be Servalan from *Blake's 7* (and today I still have her haircut), but it was the Doctor I wanted to run away with. In Australia, *Doctor Who* played constantly: Monday to Thursday at 6:30pm, usually coupled with the *Goodies* or *The Kenny Everett Video Show* to bring us up to the 7pm news. The cash-strapped ABC was crazy-mad for repeats, so I grew up with Jon Pertwee, Tom Baker, and Peter Davison all being the "current" Doctor. When they reached the end of the most recent episodes, they would simply start again at the beginning of *Spearhead from Space*. Or sometimes they'd just show *The Green Death* and *The Seeds of Doom* over and over (as an adult I know that can't be right, but my childhood memory is certain they played those two stories more than any other). I don't remember being that discerning a viewer, loving Hinchcliffe's gothic period as much as Williams' space-disco era, Pertwee's sub-Bondian antics as much as Davison's explorations into the idea of "self" as expressed through rubber snakes and mirrors. As a child, I even liked K9 - I even liked Adric, if I'm honest. Possibly because we had the same haircut.

I loved many things about *Doctor Who*, but one of the biggest draw-cards was something I wouldn't have been able to articulate at the time. There was something subtly different about the show and the way its lead actors interacted - an absence that made my heart grow fonder. *Doctor Who* was possibly the only show on television that avoided any mention of sex, either overt or subtextual. *Star Trek* appeared to be about one man's attempts to sleep with a pantone color chart of alien women, and *Blake's 7* had all those knowing looks in it (sometimes more than half the episode would be characters staring significantly at each other while Orac hummed Gershwin tunes in the background).

But *Doctor Who* - and the Doctor - was adamantly, steadfastly neuter.

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In the great experiment of TV sexuality, *Doctor Who* was the control. Yet by removing the romance element, *Doctor Who* became a safe haven for gay children. By being the only show on television in which the male lead wasn't trying to get it on with the female lead, it lent a "breathing space" to the queer child. The show wasn't saying, "You should be like this," it wasn't even asking, "Why *aren't* you like this?" It was just absent, open, a gap.

As a gay child, this led to a sense of relief. The heterosexual virility of, say, Gil Gerrard as Buck Rogers - with his furry chest and tight acrylic spacesuits - made my pulse rate quicken, but I knew he didn't bat for my team. He reminded me I was different. The Doctor, on the other hand, didn't care.

In 2007, I interviewed Sylvester McCoy - the last of the original Time Lords - and asked him why *Who* had such an appeal for gay fans. He responded: "In the early days of *Doctor Who*, I got the impression that what attracted many people to it - especially people who felt lonely or cut off from the rest of society in many ways - they were attracted because you could go wherever you went, you could *be* whatever you wanted to be in science fiction. And they transposed their fantasy onto *Doctor Who*. And I think for the gay community, which has become much stronger now, but in those earlier days, I think... it was still hard. It was still not accepted, as much as society accepts it now, in Britain. And I think that was one of the things... it was a place where people could go and find a kind of communication... a little home."

This wasn't deliberate, of course. It was simply the approach of the time, a belief that a BBC "family" series wasn't a forum for sexuality of any sort. It was unseemly, somehow (in a 1980s interview, original producer Verity Lambert recalled there had been discussion that "there was something not quite proper about an old man travelling around the galaxy with a young girl for a companion"). The show was intent on casting the Doctor as clearly a father figure, not a romantic lead.

*Doctor Who* finished when I was 17, which was also roughly when I discovered boys. I learnt that loving *Doctor Who* was now seen as odd and I learnt to hide my love of space-glitter. I became a man, and I put away *Who*-ish things. At least, publicly. The rise of the Internet allowed many of us to lurk, secretly checking out the Outpost Gallifrey forum, but always ready to summon porn onto the screen if anyone walked in the room. There were gay men who were happy to walk down the street in arseless chaps, but kept their action figures hidden away.

Then 2005 happened, and everything changed. *Doctor Who* was

back, and it was a ratings smash. Yet while it was clearly the same show, with the TARDIS, the Daleks, and a vaguely recognizable version of the theme tune, something had shifted. The Doctor was now a romantic lead, sexually available and clearly heterosexual, in a way we had never seen before. (Well, apart from the 1996 Paul McGann US telemovie, but to quote one of Russell T. Davies's other works, "Paul McGann doesn't count." At least, not on the telly.)

The Doctor's relationships with his companions were now that - relationships. Rose Tyler loved him, Martha Jones loved him, and even Donna was given a tiresome running gag stressing they weren't a couple. The Doctor held hands, the Doctor kissed, and *New Earth* even went to the trouble to stress that the Doctor had a penis. Really? The Doctor has a penis? Was that something audiences needed to be reassured about? Had the world gone mad?

Yet bizarrely, certain loud and odd sections of fandom started to cry of a "homosexual agenda." Even though the show had become adamantly heterosexual in a way never seen before, the fact that the series now included an occasional gay (or gay-coded) character was a sign for them that the feminist-nazicrats were forcing dildos down the throats of our children, which at the very least was a choking hazard. For these people, the existence of gay characters was too much. What they never seemed to notice was what the gay characters actually *did*.

For a start, they had a fairly high mortality rate. Not that surprising in an adventure show like *Doctor Who*, you might think, but so far no gay male couple has ever survived to the end of a story. Jake and Ricky in *Rise of the Cybermen*, Roger Curbishley and Davenport in *The Unicorn and the Wasp*, and even Jack and Ianto in *Torchwood* all suffer at least one death, and all are presented as collateral damage halfway through the story and not as a tragedy in themselves. Not as something that really *mattered*. For a show that was willing to rip universes apart just to get Rose's mum and dad back together, the show was surprisingly trigger-happy when it came to the gays.

Lesbians, incidentally, come out better - the couple in *Gridlock* survive to the end, as do the Silurian/Victorian maid duo in *A Good Man Goes to War* (and seriously, why haven't they been given their own spin-off yet?). And if you want to be totally nit-picky, Canton Everett Delaware III still has an off-screen boyfriend when his adventure ends, but since he's only mentioned in the closing seconds of the episode, there probably wasn't time to kill him off.

In 2012, Adam Richard and I created the narrative comedy *Outland*

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for ABC1. *Outland* was about a gay science-fiction fan club, and was the first show on Australian television in which all the characters were gay. By making *all* of them gay, we felt we could tell stories about their relationships and self-discovery without having to make “the big gay show” - homosexuality was the background radiation of the program, not the subject matter. They were the heroes, the “normal” defined within the series. The first episode was about Max - our “everygay” - “coming out” as a *Doctor Who* fan, partly based on my real-life experience.

In episode four, I gave Andy a speech summing up my feelings on homosexuality in New *Who*. The televised version was filtered slightly, but here’s the original text:

“The scariest thing I ever saw in *Doctor Who* wasn’t when I was a kid. It was in that David Tennant story, the Cyberman one, on a parallel earth? And there was another Mickey, who was a freedom fighter, and when he died, the first Mickey decided to stay and carry on his work. But parallel Mickey was obviously gay, and he had this boyfriend, and at the end of the story, the boyfriend and Mickey are going to go liberate Paris. And I thought - here you are, off to the most romantic city in the world, with a man who looks exactly like your boyfriend, except... he doesn’t love you anymore. And he never did. Your lover is dead, but every day, you’ll have this reminder with you - a man who will never love you, who would be repulsed if you tried to touch him. You can’t grieve properly because he’s still there, but it’s like your relationship, your pain is... beneath contempt. You’re now totally alone, and that’s supposed to be a happy ending... And that’s the scariest thing I ever saw on *Doctor Who*.”

Incidentally, there are those who claim Ricky and Jake were not a couple simply because the only line of dialogue overtly stating this was cut from transmission. Yet it was clear from my first viewing of the show (long before I knew of the cut scene) that they were together. The fact that the line was scripted and filmed means the actors were aware of the relationship, and it’s clear in the performances, the direction, and even the camerawork. A prime example is the way Jake and Rose are framed when Mickey returns without Ricky - the shot presents them as emotional equals, lovers awaiting a return from the battle. Yet there are fans who will argue the characters are still straight unless categorically stated (the same goes for Tommy, the young boy in *The Idiot’s Lantern*). The show is now so overtly heterosexual that to be anything else requires documentary proof (much like the Turkish Army, not a comparison

you're ever likely to hear again).

Yes, the force behind all this was a gay man, but to say Russell T. Davies was pushing a gay agenda is like saying Barbara Cartland was a feminist warrior. But was RTD setting out to present gay characters' relationships as second-class? Of course not. He was presenting a mainstream, populist entertainment within the culture of its time. It is significant, however, how off-handed the show is about dead gay boys. In *The Age of Steel*, Jake is sent off on a happy ending without a single tear, while in *Doomsday*, Rose gets to blubber away on a beach for an hour and her lover *isn't even dead*.

And if this wasn't enough... in *Aliens of London*, the word "gay" appears. Rose Tyler - our viewpoint character, the woman who represents us - uses it when referring to the Doctor. And she uses it to mean awkwardly uncool and wrong. Davies is clearly using it to reflect the language of 2005, but it still feels like a betrayal. The re-appropriation (or re-re-appropriation, if you will) of "gay" to make it a negative word is part of a culture-war against homosexuality, an attempt to put gay men and lesbians back in their place. Anyone who thinks it isn't only needs to read the comments left on campaigns like thinkb4youspeak to see how "you're being over-sensitive" veers into "and you're all perverts/going to hell/going to die," often in the same sentence. Language is important. Using "gay" to mean "terrible" is without doubt a deliberate act of homophobia. To hear "gay" being used against us in *Doctor Who* was a slap in the face.

The Doctor was now like all the other leading men on television, a straight man with a straight girl in a straight, straight world. The show that was a safe haven when I grew up was now putting in the same entry rules as everyone else. Sure, people point to Captain Jack, but Jack is omnisexual in an unthreatening way that owes more to Mr Humphries on *Are You Being Served?* than Jean Genet, and no gay boy is going home with a partner (yes, Jack's probably getting lucky with Midshipman Frame at the end of the tenth Doctor's lap of honor, but no-one's really seeing that as a long-term relationship, are they?).

I know. Betrayal. It sounds ridiculous. After all, it's only a TV show.

And if you really believed that, you probably wouldn't be reading this book. Television is important. We fans know that more than most. TV reflects life, but it also guides it. It helps us decide what to do, where to go, what to wear, what to buy. It tells us what is normal. If Rose Tyler uses "gay" to mean terrible, why shouldn't the kids watching? And why should gay couples be treated the same as straight ones, when the show

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makes it clear they're just there to raise the stakes and clearly aren't as important as "real" people?

When I was a gay kid growing up in the middle of rural Australia, *Doctor Who* told me it was okay to leave. That you could travel, you could create your own family; you never had to go back. *Doctor Who* said life could be like *The Wizard of Oz*, only you didn't need to go back to black-and-white at the end.

By contrast, New *Who* seems obsessed with nuclear families, of returning home, that you will never be more than you are now (with Donna's fate being possibly the most overt demonstration of this - she came in a bride, she left a bride, and any growth she may have achieved has been wiped from her mind).

As a child, I used to dream the Doctor would take me away from all this, never to return. Now you're only ever a mobile phone call away from suburbia. There is no escape.

Things alter slightly when Steven Moffat takes over, but it's still a show about heterosexual couplings and magical babies. The Doctor's sexuality has thankfully been dialled down (in *A Christmas Carol* in particular, he's reminiscent of Jim Broadbent's shy Doctor from *The Curse of Fatal Death*), but he's still resolutely heterosexual, and apparently obsessed with marriage. This leaves us with the slightly odd situation of an implied liaison happening off-stage between the Doctor and River Song, which the show is trying to address without showing. And *A Good Man Goes to War* abruptly establishes two peripheral characters as a gay couple, only to kill one of them horribly (and unmourned) a few scenes later. At this point, it's almost parody.

Times change, and television changes with them. As mentioned earlier, the asexual version of the series I grew up with wasn't the result of a deliberate decision, but the reflection of the production methods of the day. As late as the 1980s, producer John Nathan-Turner was stressing there would be "no hanky-panky in the TARDIS." Turlough and Peri may hold an impromptu wet T-shirt competition in *Planet of Fire*, but romance would only appear as a prelude to character departure. From a narrative point of view, love and death are roughly equal. Adric's self-sacrifice at the end of *Earthshock* is no less jolting than Leela's choice to stay on Gallifrey with Andred, or Peri running off to shack up with Brian Blessed. Either way, it was a one-way journey out of the series.

(Although to be fair, Blessed does have his attractions. John Geilgud is supposed to have once said, "Oh that *Brian Blessed* is an awful man... but he's a lovely *bit of rough!*" And it's hard to watch his episode of

*Survivors* without staring at those arms.)

By contrast, modern television-making is all about romance and relationships. Plot is now less important than, "emotional storytelling," a limited series of emotional beats the audience has come to expect. In the 1996 telemovie, Paul McGann's kissing was seen as an aberration - now it's a matter of course.

But it's not for me.

Do I want to watch a romance between a mature man and a woman 900 years younger than him? No. Apart from anything else, it's just creepy. Sylvester McCoy also commented on this: "When I did it, it was policy... the relationship with the female companion was... more like a father figure.... There was a great affection for them but he was by himself, alone. And [with] the new Doctors, it's kisses and things... it seemed odd."

Did he ever want to make the role a romantic lead himself?

"No. Not really. Because I grew up with that Doctor as well, the Doctor in that mode. In my head... he was an old man, they were old men, really, so it was a bit tasteless, if you know what I mean. But now they've become young... it's a new way."

It's not the *Doctor Who* I grew up with any more. And that's fine. The show changed, and so did I. *Doctor Who* is a broad church. It's unlikely any fan loves the whole series equally. Those Graham Williams stories I loved growing up, I find unbearable now. There are millions of fans out there who would find the idea of a non-romantic *Doctor Who* unthinkable, if not unwatchable. I'm not a fan of the RTD years as a whole, but I can appreciate individual episodes - there's a lot of enjoyment to be had with *Tooth and Claw*, *The Empty Child*, or *Gridlock*. I really liked *The Age of Steel*, regardless of my concerns about the ending. And *Blink* is easily one of the best hours of television ever created.

So I give thanks and praise to Russell T. Davies for bringing the show back, for making it such a success. It's entirely likely an asexual Doctor would've flopped, that a large audience needs that romantic element front and center now. And even bigger than the show itself, the success of *Doctor Who* gave UK television the bravery to make other genre television after nearly two decades of timidity. Would we have *Life on Mars*, *Being Human*, or *Black Mirror* if *Doctor Who* hadn't proved the English viewing public can watch more than *Emmerdale*?

But I wonder whether the children watching it now - the ones who know they're different, the ones who get taunted at school and know the word "gay" is a bad thing to be - I wonder if they'll remember it

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being as important as we did in years to come. Or will it just be another show they vaguely remember being on the telly?

## Hey Mickey, You're So Fine

**Naamen Gobert Tilahun's** introduction to *Doctor Who* came with the 2005 return of the series, and he instantly fell in love. While he doesn't have a Doctor yet, the ninth Doctor and his mix of insanity, practicality, and obvious imbalances comes the closest. Always having been more interested in the companions and their reactions than the Doctor's, his list of favorite companions runs the gamut from Ace to Mickey to Donna. His biggest *Doctor Who* regret is that the classic series went on hiatus before they filmed *Ice Time*, the episode that would have sent Ace off to train to become a Time Lord. One day, he hopes to write the episode where the Doctor finally regenerates into a female body. His free time is spent keeping up with pop-culture, reading about cult mentality, history, genocide, feminist theory, the consequences of technology, psychology, transhumanism, created-worlds/universes and queer theory, and science fiction/fantasy, as well as studying marginalized religions, and trying to distill *all* of these interests into some sort of single coherent story. It hasn't worked so far, but he remains optimistic. Naamen is a writer, bookseller and production coordinator currently living in the Bay Area. He received his M.F.A. in English Literature and Fiction from Mills College in 2010. His essays and reviews have appeared online and in print in *The Angry Black Woman*, *The WisCon Chronicles*, *io9*, and *Fantasy Magazine*.

My queer identity's relationship to *Doctor Who* is hard to define - part of it has to do with the endless possibilities speculative fiction always offers, and of course the most obvious example of alternate sexualities in the *Doctor Who*'verse is Captain Jack Harkness. But when I think about my relationship with the show, and about the personal connection I feel as a fan - as a queer fan in particular - I keep coming back to my gateway character: Mickey Smith.

If that seems a strange choice - some people don't even consider Mickey to be a "proper" companion, thinking the first companion of African descent was Martha Jones - it helps to understand that I'm always on the lookout for non-stereotypical portrayals of people of color and queer people in television and movies. Growing up African-American and queer, I couldn't help but notice the definite dearth of

characters that looked like me, acted like me, desired like me. And while you could argue that there are more characters of diverse sexualities and ethnicities on television now, there still isn't a major presence of characters of color or queer characters in the speculative genre.

When faced with that absence, we search for tiny details. We reinterpret the characters we already love, and try to make an argument for connection. We become detectives looking for any evidence to support our personal theories. And I find so much of myself invested in Mickey's journey throughout his four seasons on *Doctor Who* - the path he takes might be long and scattered, but he grows and matures from being a gibbering coward into someone who protects entire worlds. I find it so easy to cherish him as my hero.

### **It's a Queer, Queer World After All**

*Torchwood* has become synonymous with alternative sexualities in the *Who*'verse, but that queer sensibility began in *Doctor Who*. *Doctor Who* exists in a pansexual, omnisexual, queer world - one where gender and species can have very little meaning in a relationship. There are many casual mentions of non-heterosexual and non-heterospecies sex/interactions and none of them are treated as shocking by anyone, even new companions who've only had Earth to define their social interactions. The episode *Gridlock* alone contains an older lesbian couple, a younger interracial heterosexual couple, and an interspecies couple with children. In fact two companions - Rose Tyler and Martha Jones - develop romantic feelings for the Doctor and one, Amy Pond, attempts to sleep with him despite categorically knowing he is not human. He is an alien, possibly as physically different from us internally as any alien being though he may resemble us on the outside.

Russell T. Davies gives us a universe where sexuality is a non-issue, where one is assumed open, rather than straight. No one is shocked by sexuality because no one cares. Some critics have labeled this a "queer agenda" despite the fact that heterosexual pairings/flirtations far outweigh the number of queer relationships/mentions. The world of *Doctor Who* is not one in which queer sexuality is the norm - rather, it is a world where queer desire is present and acknowledged, not stifled.

### **How I Learned to Like Mickey**

When Mickey was first introduced, in *Rose*, I was excited to have a young man of African descent as well as an interracial relationship featured. As the episode went on, I became more disillusioned with his

character - his mumbling, stumbling fear played on problematic stereotypes of incompetent Black people who must always be rescued. The question wasn't fear - who *wouldn't* be terrified when suddenly confronted with an antagonistic intelligence of living plastic? The issue was the bumbling affectation and the way that both Rose and the Doctor looked down on him. It felt as if he were there to be mocked, so in comparison we could see the intelligence and bravery of Rose. He also seemed overly aggressive and possessive in regards to his relationship with her. This is a common media characterization of men of African descent in romantic relationships, especially interracial ones. When Rose and the Doctor left him behind, I almost cheered because that meant I wouldn't have to deal with his anger and buffoonery in the next episode.

When next we see Mickey in *Aliens of London/World War Three*, he is bitter, having been a suspect in Rose's disappearance. I appreciated and understood his anger, and respected him for it. His partner leaves him to go off with an alien for a year - during which time, he is a suspect in her murder, never mind the emotional toll of her disappearance. Then she reappears, acting like nothing is wrong? Of course he's pissed. As viewers, we know it's not her fault, but he doesn't so his anger makes sense. Mickey has found courage since his previous appearance and is actually a help to the Doctor, trusting him and ultimately saving the day. Suddenly, I wanted to see more of Mickey Smith.

I got my wish in *Boom Town*, where I truly began to like him. Before the actual plot of the episode begins, we see Mickey, Captain Jack, Rose, and the Doctor hanging out, having lunch, being friends. Mickey's camaraderie with them was lovely and also showed this wasn't the first time they'd spent time together. Later in the episode, when Mickey tells Rose he's been seeing someone else, it's done with anger. Many fans took Rose's side, which is easy to do. As I said, we're meant to identify with the companions; we follow Rose on her adventures, saving people, exploring the universe, and it looks as if Mickey is trying to take that away from her. It's natural to fall on Rose's side; we're supposed to want to wander the universe like vagabonds.

However, from Mickey's POV, their relationship is certainly no bed of roses. Someone you love leaves with an alien for a year, you grieve, you're accused of their murder, questioned, labeled a suspect. She never returns for long before disappearing again. You wait for the times they return, but between those moments you are alone. In many ways, Mickey is the one truly isolated by the combination of their romantic

relationship and Rose's travels. He can't see Rose, and can't even talk about her - or where she's gone - to anyone except for her mother Jackie. There's a whole part of his life that's on hold for those few-and-far-between moments when she returns. Who wouldn't get tired of that? Rose shouldn't have to give up the universe for Mickey, but neither should he have to give up his life in order to have a semi-"normal" dating life. Their situation is one where no one is truly to blame and all the options are unfair in some way. The only way to let them both grow as people is to break up.

Mickey's walking away without a goodbye isn't meant to be a rebuke to Rose. It's to show that he is no longer willing to put himself on hold for a Doctor-related emergency, because there will *always* be a Doctor-related emergency. I started to see the growth in his character, making a decision that hurts both of them to allow them both potential for happiness elsewhere. It's a mature and painful thing to do.

### **Taking a Real Trip: Space, Time, and Mirror Worlds**

When we see Mickey in Series Two, in *School Reunion*, it's important to note that *he's* called the Doctor and Rose in on the case at hand. He's discovered something dangerous and alien in origin. Unlike others who ignore the danger the Doctor shows them, Mickey keeps his eyes open and investigates on his own. Now that he knows there are aliens out there that wish Earth harm, he's determined to do something about it. By the end of the episode, Mickey takes the Doctor up on his previous offer to accompany them in the TARDIS. The delay in his decision to journey through space and time has been smart - he stayed on Earth, trained himself, fought, and joined the Doctor when he could be of use. Mickey is only with them for a few episodes, but he gains more valuable training that will help in his next trip.

Alternate worlds are dimensions where we've made different decisions, where we're completely different people, or where we are almost exactly the same or any possible gradient in between. What's interesting about *Doctor Who's* alternate worlds, specifically in *Rise of the Cybermen*, is that they want to have it both ways. The trappings of this alt-world are extremely different, but the characters themselves are almost the same - if they're in different positions, it's through circumstance. This fact is heavily implied by the personality of alternate-Jackie being a more extreme version of "our" Jackie, the way Rose reacts to alt-Pete, and the confusion between Mickey and alt-Ricky.

By the end of *The Age of Steel*, the alternate version of Mickey - alt-

Ricky - is dead, and Mickey decides to stay behind to care for his grandmother, who is still alive in the alt-world. He plans to take alt-Ricky's place leading the rebel group, the Preachers. His goodbye with Rose acknowledges the end of their relationship, but the affection that remains is obvious. In the initial plans for *Rise of the Cyberman/The Age of Steel*, alt-Ricky and his fellow revolutionary Jake were lovers. There even exists a filmed scene where Mickey and Jake discuss the nature of alt-Ricky and Jake's relationship. Though the scene was cut from the broadcast, it is still available on the DVD. I think of that relationship as a legitimate part of *Doctor Who* canon. There's nothing in the episode that contradicts that interpretation of the relationship, and while the most obvious proof of the relationship may have been removed, for fans used to looking for miniscule clues, the obvious stuff can just be a hindrance to the fun of discovery.

Though Mickey reacts in the scene by saying he won't be taking up that role of alt-Ricky, the similarities/relationships between people and their alt-counterparts shows differently. Jake has just lost his lover, and Mickey has just said goodbye to Rose for good. It seems likely the two would come to care for one another. Everything that attracted alt-Ricky to Jake is likely to work on Mickey and vice-versa. That's how it works for Jackie and alt-Pete. The existence of Jackie is the temptation the Doctor uses to convince alt-Pete to save her home; the two even have a loving reunion only minutes after they meet. They are in love only because they were in love with each other's alternates. When Mickey decides to stay in the parallel world, it is ostensibly to take care of his alt-grandmother. However, Mickey's initial conversation with Jake suggests they'll be heading to Paris - called the most romantic city in the world - soon. Considering that Mickey's grandmother (remember, the reason he says he's staying) lives in London not Paris, you have to wonder why the two of them are headed there?

### **Just a Quick Trip Across the Void**

When Mickey returns to our universe, he does so because he's followed the Cybermen he's been fighting back to his home dimension. In *Army of Ghosts/Doomsday*, Mickey has already infiltrated the organization that the Doctor and Rose discover is responsible. Think about that for a moment. By the time the Doctor shows up to investigate, Mickey is already in place and trusted. That's quite the show of ingenuity and bravery for someone who started off as comic relief. We are also treated to the return of Jake and alt-Pete, having all teamed up to track down

the Cybermen. When Mickey and Rose are trapped by the Daleks, their banter and connection is more like friendship than anything they've had before. There's definite affection between them, but not necessarily romantic feeling.

The Doctor's plan for getting rid of the Cybermen and Daleks involves opening the void between universes - since both have crossed the void, they are covered in voidstuff and will be sucked in. The problem is that many of the protagonists will be sucked in as well. Jake and Pete decide to return to their home dimension, *and* Mickey and Jackie decide to accompany them before the Doctor opens the void so they'll be safe. Perhaps it's not shocking that Mickey decides to return - after all he has been living in the alt-world for a while now. However, when showed alongside Jackie joining alt-Pete, it resembles two couples returning home. Jackie and Mickey from our world have lost someone they've loved, Pete and Rose respectively. Pete and Jake from alt-world having more recently lost their loved ones, alt-Jackie and alt-Ricky.

The alt-world was used to repair things broken in both worlds. Jackie Tyler lost her husband Pete years ago, alt-Jackie dies, leaving alt-Pete alone. Eventually, the two left behind marry and have a child. Later, Rose is left in the alt-world with a human clone of the Doctor. He's described as a Doctor as full of rage as when the original and Rose first met. The implication being that she's tamed a Doctor once before, and with this one being human, he can love her back and grow old with her. Is it impossible to believe that this alt-world allowed one more broken couple, Mickey and Jake, to have a second chance?

When Mickey makes his final return to his home dimension in the Series Four finale, *Journey's End*, he returns as a valuable ally on par with former companions Martha Jones, Captain Jack Harkness, Sarah Jane Smith, and others. At the end of the episode, he decides to stay in his home dimension, stating that his alt-grandmother is dead now. And Jake? No explanation is given, and I can't help but think this means Jake is dead as well. Mickey would never leave a friend or ally behind. He is back because there is now nothing to hold him to the alt-world.

### **Mickey's Final Journey**

It's only when looking at Mickey's overall journey as a whole unbroken arc that you truly see his evolution. When his journey begins he is a bit buffoonish, cowardly, and emotionally defensive - just look at his early interactions with the Doctor. The last time we see him, Mickey has been a revolutionary, lost his lover Rose, lost his lover Jake, and traveled

back and forth from parallel dimensions before returning to help his allies.

He is nowhere near what he was in the beginning, where his “cowardice” was comedy fodder, where the Doctor called him “Mickey the Idiot” and “Ricky” all the time. Mickey is now a fighter in his own right and has been through the hell of war. He is comfortable in his skin and has grown-up, taking a physical journey as well as one of emotional growth. Mickey’s journey is a complex one involving alternate worlds and planet hopping, but is also a simple one that everyone can relate to - growing up and facing our fears. The last time we see Mickey, he’s married to another former companion, Dr Martha Jones, working together as independent alien hunters.

When I first saw their relationship portrayed, it felt a bit off. The two had barely spoken on the show, and it felt like a retread of the old stereotype/ tradition wherein two characters of color must fall in love/ marry - not for any commonality, but because they are the only characters of color. Prior to this, Martha was engaged to a completely different man, with no interaction with Mickey. I’ve since decided to view their bond as being one of former companions. They’ve each had experiences few would believe, their travels with the Doctor giving them many things in common. They’ve changed so much that they’ve both gone on doing the Doctor’s work without the benefit of his knowledge, technology, or alliances. To my mind, this makes them braver than the Doctor; they won’t regenerate should something go wrong, but they are still ready to take on horrors to help. While the genesis of their marriage still makes me uncomfortable, the fact that there are actual similarities between them that have nothing to do with race makes the situation infinitely more palatable.

### **Mickey, My Queer Hero**

When I conceived this essay, I thought it would be one in which I tried to convince the reader that Mickey was queer. Instead, it ended up being about my love of *Doctor Who* and Mickey Smith, which is a good thing. We need more love among fans for Mickey Smith and the actor who played him, Noel Clarke. Whether you think he’s queer or not, you can’t deny his journey has been a long, rough one that changed him in numerous ways. His screen time was not as prolific as some other companions, but he’s an official companion in my eyes. Mickey goes from being the annoying kid in the first episode of the returned series to an alien hunter in his own right, a defender of Earth and my queer hero.

## **Mutants, Monsters, Mutts, and Mentiads**

**Cody Quijano-Schell** is a writer and graphic designer based in Des Moines, Iowa. He has written and edited for Obverse Books, Big Finish Productions, and elsewhere. He also appears in the short fiction anthology *Shenanigans: Gay Men Mess with Genre* from Obverse Books. He is the creator of *The Periodic Adventures of Señor 105*, an ongoing novella series inspired by the masked Mexican wrestler monster/sci-fi/fantasy/spy movies of the 1960s. The missing story of *Doctor Who* he would most like to see returned to the archive is *Marco Polo*, because Tegana looks very handsome and ice hot in the telesnaps.

Three life-changing events happened to me in the later half of the 1980s:

1. My parents divorced.
2. I consequently moved from living on a farm to the second largest city in South Dakota.
3. I came to the realization I was gay.

Maybe I'm lucky that so many things happened at once. Circumstances gave me no time to focus on a single issue. I needed something to latch on to - something accessible when I was with either parent, in city or country, that didn't involve me having to pretend to be interested in girls.

School is often a hard time for gay kids. Like Susan Foreman or an X-Men mutant, I carried a secret. Fortunately, I didn't have nosy teachers or Professor X following me home to find out what my secret was.

During the school week, being seen as an SF-loving nerd, as well as an awkward country bumpkin, covered all the bases of my lack of success or interest in girls. This wasn't a pretense; I really did love *Doctor Who*, not just because it saved me when I needed it most.

I felt like an outcast. It's no wonder that queer kids identify with mutants. The X-Men and other comic-book heroes are common cultural touch-points, but *Doctor Who* is also riddled with similar outcast

mutants. *Doctor Who* is also queer.

### **Queering Thals and Daleks**

In the early days of *Doctor Who*, the Thals are described as horrible mutants living in the wastelands of Skaro. When we finally meet them, they're these fabulous beings with blond hair, blue eye shadow, and false eyelashes. That's about as queer as you can get! The evil, single-minded, conservative, fascist Daleks hated them.

Okay, so perhaps the Thals weren't quite so fabulous in the black and white televised story, but they certainly were in the Peter Cushing movie *Dr. Who and the Daleks* (1965). There's a moment from that film that's always resonated with me. Susie Who is the first to meet a Thal. Lovely little Susie is a bright child who sees beauty in science and smiles delightfully as she cautiously cradles a petrified flower in her hands. There's a moment when she tells the marvelously glammed-up Thal, "... but they called you monsters." The Thal replies, "If they called us monsters, what must *they* be like?" This has obvious real-life parallels for a queer person who's endured the attitudes of hateful politicians and religious leaders.

There's an aspect of the Daleks that's rarely touched upon. They're powerful, but isolated. They're strong, but encased in complicated battle armor. They hate anything unlike them, and never interact with each other without this armor between them. The Thals on the other hand, have individuality and are willing to accept those different from themselves, even the Daleks. Having a hard, dangerous shell like a Dalek has its appeal if you're not secure with your sexuality, but being free and fabulous like the Thals has a greater appeal. Which group would a queer child potentially identify with?

### **Transforming Mutts**

Another marvelous mutant tale is the appropriately titled Jon Pertwee adventure, *The Mutants*. In this, people go through natural changes, but are afraid and ashamed of them in the way a queer child might be afraid of their natural sexual preferences or gender identities. Scientific and historical ignorance leads to the seemingly monstrous Mutts being persecuted by the authorities in much the same way as queer individuals in many societies.

Eventually, the Mutts become amazing, sophisticated creatures of light. Many queer children go through a similar process, considering themselves disgusting and ugly like the Mutts, and then accepting them-

selves while gaining self-love.

The transformations of the Mutts, and the Doctor's regenerations for that matter, are similar to that of a caterpillar becoming a beautiful butterfly. In many Latin American cultures, the word for butterfly - "Mariposa" - is often used as a derogatory term for queer individuals. Considering this process of self-acceptance, and the beauty of the end result, it's no surprise that many gay men have embraced the term proudly.

Pride can be hard to cultivate. Finding out you're not alone is an important part of the process of self-acceptance. A queer child might be aware of their feelings, and also be aware of gays and lesbians in society or pop culture, and yet not be eager to identify themselves as such. That hesitation can be easy when people you know villainize queer people as being dirty, diseased, or mentally ill.

### **Mentiad Culture**

In the *Doctor Who* story *The Pirate Planet*, young men are periodically transformed into psychic beings called Mentiads. When Pralix's family and loved ones discover that he is one, they try to hide his mental "sickness" from their neighbors, and indeed, society. The other Mentiads appear to be predatory, tracking down Pralix and claiming they want to "harvest" him. This heavily echoes every paranoid conspiracy theory that homosexuals are out to recruit young men into their decadent lifestyle.

The Mentiads appear to be an evil threat, when in fact they're a force for good. They don't prey on each other; they naturally gravitate towards each other. They're joined as a group because they're stronger together. And indeed, gay culture can be an incredibly positive thing.

Being aware of gay culture doesn't mean it's easy to enter it. I had a few gay friends in high school, but it wasn't until college when I found the right group of people.

I moved away from the Black Hills of South Dakota to Iowa to attend college. College wasn't my only reason for moving to Iowa - the state has long been known as an island of progressive thought in the Midwest. Thanks to the emergence of the Internet, I discovered gay friends in Iowa before even moving there. Another huge appeal of Iowa was that it had been broadcasting *Doctor Who* on public television continually for *decades*. Obviously, Iowans are enlightened.

I first met a group of gay *Star Trek* fans and held a weekly "Trek Night." After *Star Trek*, a few of us who would stay watch old episodes

of *Doctor Who*.

Suddenly, *Doctor Who* wasn't such a solitary thing for me anymore. Being gay wasn't as lonely either. I made gay friends and met transgendered people for the first time. Again, I found myself in a dramatically different social setting, another huge step away from the fearful, isolated life of a South Dakota farm boy.

### **The Wilderness Years**

Looking back, the years when *Doctor Who* was off the air were among my favorite. The Virgin New Adventures novels were a welcomed development. It seemed as I grew up, *Doctor Who* was growing up with me. These new *Doctor Who* stories were even more adult than those shown on television, and the Missing Adventures book line soon followed, with the exciting new stories fitting in-between the televised adventures.

Then lines ended and new ones began, like the Eighth Doctor Adventures and the Past Doctor Adventures. I didn't realize it at the time, but a lot of these books were written by openly gay authors such as Russell T. Davies, Craig Hinton, and Gary Russell.

Then in 1998, Paul Magrs's first eighth Doctor book, *The Scarlet Empress*, changed my life. For the first time, I experienced gay characters being openly embraced in *Doctor Who* fiction, and the character of Iris Wildthyme was a revelation. Like the Doctor, she traveled in time and space, but with fabulous gay companions while naughtily breaking lots of temporal rules.

Iris was a bit like a mischievous, weirdo Doctor. Her companion, Tom, was a gay man who had adventures alongside her. This was *years* before Captain Jack kissed the Doctor on screen. Iris has gone on to appear in more *Doctor Who* books, audios, and even comics before having her *own* audios, novels, and anthology collections.

Before now, there had been many queer people working behind the scenes of *Doctor Who* - such as director Waris Hussein and producer John Nathan-Turner - but gay characters were not openly embraced in the series. It was really exciting to have a queer-friendly character in a *Doctor Who* book who was a fascinating character in her own right. Iris gave the Doctor a run for his money, inserting herself into the Doctor's timeline without care for temporal causality. She was someone who *even the Doctor* thought was strange. This lady was for me!

### **New Who, New Opportunities**

After college, I moved to a nearby city to live with my then-boyfriend. Not long after that, new *Doctor Who* returned to television. Around this time, I slowly became aware of a community surrounding *Doctor Who* in the form of online forums. For the first time in my life, I found myself making friends with people whose interest in *Doctor Who* ran even deeper than mine.

While it was fun to meet like-minded people, I found it disappointing to discover that some *Doctor Who* fans were just as rigid and intolerant as any other kind of person. People who insisted “the Doctor can’t be black” or “gay characters have no place on the show” seemed oblivious to the values held by the main character. And how could anyone hate *Delta and the Bannermen*? Fortunately, I also discovered a beautiful group of open-minded and creative people.

I met Stuart Douglas of Obverse Books after he dug my submission out of the slush pile for their first Iris Wildthyme collection. Having a story published in the same book as one of my heroes, Paul Magrs, was a joy beyond belief. However, the most valuable things I took away from the experience were lasting friendships and creative partnerships.

So I’ve gone from being an awkward kid *reading* SF books to becoming an author *writing* stories as a way of interacting with other people! Just like *Doctor Who*, I’ve come a long way since the beginning, and the stories continue.

Earlier I mentioned Susan Foreman having a secret in that first episode of *Doctor Who*. In the unaired pilot of *An Unearthly Child*, Susan splatters black ink onto white paper, and lets it smear, unsure what shape’s developing. She works at the image and catches herself, frightened when she realizes that she’s subconsciously revealed her biggest secret - she’s drawn the console.

Queer kids start off the same way as Susan did. The shape is uncertain, and it’s hard not to reveal who you are. You feel like an unearthly mutant. You can’t wait to find those people with whom you can share your secret. As with her grandfather and Ian and Barbara, there might be a lot of yelling, and somebody involved in the conversation might be severely shocked and pass out. You might worry that no one will understand, but people are usually so much bigger on the inside. But like the end of *The Edge of Destruction*, everyone will hopefully soon be throwing snowballs and having fun.

That’s what *Doctor Who* is to me; friendship, discovery and the possibilities of the universe mixed together in a brilliant burst of snow!

## Same Old Me, Different Face: Transition, Regeneration, and Change

**Susan Jane Bigelow** is a speculative fiction author, reference librarian, and political columnist from Connecticut. She writes the Extrahumans series (Candlemark & Gleam) about super-powered people living in a dystopian future. Her short story “Ramona’s Demons” was recently published in Topside Press’s inaugural anthology *The Collection: Short Fiction from the Transgender Vanguard* (2012). Her political column appears weekly at *CTNewsjunkie.com* and in several Connecticut newspapers. Her obsessions include writing, biking, reading, science-fiction television, and brewing up the perfect cup of tea. She currently lives in a quiet town in northern Connecticut with her wife and their four alarmingly large cats.

“New teeth. That’s weird.”

—The tenth Doctor, *The Parting of the Ways*

“I’m a girl!”

—a horrified eleventh Doctor,  
finding longer-than-expected hair  
in *The End of Time Part Two*

What draws me into *Doctor Who* more than anything else isn’t so much the amazing adventures, the travel through time and space, or the season-spanning story arcs (though I do love those), but the way that the Doctor and his companions are ephemeral. Companions come and go, joining and leaving the TARDIS with regularity. Minor characters appear, stick around for a few episodes, and then leave again. The TARDIS itself gets remodeled from time to time. Even the Doctor is never the same; he has the remarkable ability, at the moment of death, to become someone new.

This is what I love about *Doctor Who* most of all. It’s never the same. It’s always changing, always regenerating into something new and unexpected. There’s a constant sense of renewal, punctuated by those heart-breaking, impossibly sweet moments when one Doctor dies and a new

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one is born, throwing the universe of the show into chaos.

I've watched those scenes over and over. They matter to me.

###

Here's a story I heard: somewhere there was a transgender woman trying to explain her transition to a geeky-but-otherwise-clueless friend. Nothing she tried could really convey what she was going through to him, until she described it in terms he could grasp. "It's like I'm the Doctor," she said. "Except I'm regenerating into a woman."

His eyes lit up. He got it then.

###

I often wonder if the Doctor ever goes through the centuries of accumulated crap that must be in the basement of the TARDIS, pulling out mementos of old companions and vanished selves. *Ah*, he might think. *Here's that old hat! or My leather jacket! I missed you!* Maybe he'd rummage through, thinking *Here's a celery stick; I wonder what was with that?* and think about times long past. The few times he's met up with his former selves, they sometimes get along famously, sometimes not. There's always a strange tension. The new Doctor has to deal with versions of himself he had let go of, while the older Doctors always know that the new one is their inescapable future. It must be both comforting and very, very frightening, for all of them.

I was cleaning out my desk recently when I pulled out an old photograph, in a wobbly metal frame. A boy, a young man really, grinned up at me. His hair was long, his smile was girlish.

I searched his face, looking for traces of my own. I wondered, briefly, what I might say if I met him now. Maybe just... be careful. There are hard years coming. Or maybe I'd say nothing at all. How could I possibly explain? Those feelings you keep having, I might say. Those strange gender-related yearnings, those little subtle wants and needs you've felt since forever will get more intrusive, until you can't ignore them anymore. You'll start to change, a little at a time.

Then, at the right moment, all of this incredible energy will swirl around you, all this marvelous and frightening potential will build up, and you'll change.

You'll become me.

Susan Jane Bigelow

###

We all have a Doctor who is *our* Doctor, the one we love best because he was the first one we watched. Mine's the ninth Doctor. His time was so brief, but so very memorable! I fell for that manic smile, the moments of darkness, the mystery of him. When he regenerated into the tenth Doctor, I felt lost at sea for a while. Who in the world is this new person, I wondered, in place of the old?

Everyone else in his life reacts the same way. Rose Tyler, after finally accepting that he was who he said he was, asked, "Can you change back?"

"No," replied the Doctor.

How must it be for the Doctor, to wake up as someone new, and have to explain it all to his wondering, terrified, and uncertain companions?

###

In 2009, it all came to a head for me. All of the little doubts and signs flared up into a great big deal, and suddenly I couldn't take a single step without thinking about gender. The little private name I called myself when I was having trouble, or when I was certain no one else could hear, suddenly became more real. One hot day in July, I stood on a little dock behind the place where I work, looking out over the lake.

*Let's just say it, I thought. Let's get it out in the open. Then I'll find out it's not true and I can move on with my life.*

Dragonflies hovered and darted in the heavy summer air.

"I am a woman named Susan," I said to the lake, and the entire world changed. It was true, so true, and how could I ever take it back now? I walked back to my office, shivering in the humidity, seeing the world through new eyes.

In that terrible, awful, wonderful moment I set in motion a process that I sometimes loved, sometimes hated, and sometimes wished I could stop. I began to become someone new.

###

For transgender people, becoming a self that's more authentic on the outside, more in line with who we understand ourselves to be on the inside, can involve all kinds of journeys and transformations. For those who decide to move from one gender to another, there's often a coming

## *Same Old Me, Different Face*

out period - a time when family, friends, lovers and co-workers need to be told. Then there's the actual shift, which can involve anything from a change of name and pronoun to hormones and even surgeries. There's an incredible amount of diversity among transgender people, however, and no two journeys are ever exactly the same.

Each stage of whatever transition someone decides to take is wonderful and painful and altogether strange. It's a weird thing, being reborn.

###

There's this fantastic sequence at the end of the tenth Doctor's life where he goes around seeing everyone he loves, sort of as a way to say goodbye. It's strange, isn't it? We all know he's not dying, not *really*; he'll have a new face soon enough and be reborn! And yet he's incredibly sad, and he spends his time wrapping up all these loose ends. He watches Donna get married, he saves Mickey and Martha from a Sontaran, and even sees Rose one last time.

It's a way of trying to let go. For him, it doesn't work all that well. He's still not ready, when the time finally arrives.

It worked a little bit better for me.

In January 2010, I had a day off from work, and I was feeling restless. I drove down to my old hometown and parked at the library. I strolled over to the nearby park and hiked around the pond. I peered over the rail of the bridge as the water crashed down Mill Pond Falls, remembering sitting atop the rocks as a kid, reading comic books.

I walked into the town center, marking places I'd been. I bought some cigarettes and smoked a few, something I hadn't done since college. Finally, freezing and worn out, I made my way back to the car and drove past the house I'd lived in when I was little, the high school where I'd done my student teaching, the woods where I'd spent hours alone, making up stories.

It hit me as I sat at a red light on Cedar Street. *What am I doing here?*

I was saying goodbye to it all. I wasn't really leaving, I'd be back soon enough, but I was saying goodbye to things as they were. It was a moment of calm, one of many last chances to be that old familiar self before I became her, this abstraction, this stranger.

I was afraid. So I grounded myself in memory and home, and it gave me the strength to carry forward.

I came out to my mother the next day, and the next week I'd be back there in my parents' house, trying to answer questions about who I was,

and what I was going to do. My father initially thought I had a testosterone deficiency, and would be taking more of that. No, Dad, I had to say at last, I'll be taking estrogen. I'm going to be a woman.

Oh, he said, and something fell apart.

*Goodbye, goodbye*, I thought. *Goodbye*.

# # #

So, I thought several months later, turning back and forth in front of the mirror. *Who are you?*

The woman there stared back at me.

She had long hair, wavy and blah brown with a tendency to frizz into a tangled mess. The remains of a pot belly. Hormones had been kind, she had proportional breasts, a reasonably feminine face, and a surprisingly big butt.

Not perfect. Better than it was, but could be better. I wasn't pretty. I wouldn't turn heads. It was mine, though. *Still*, I thought, *maybe some hips would have been nice. And if my boobs want to get bigger or my face become a bit less mannish, that's cool too.*

"That's the trouble with regeneration," the fifth Doctor complains while staring into a mirror, not long after shredding the scarf of the fourth into string, "You never know what you're going to get." It's true. Any transition is a roll of the dice. Die and come back, take your hormones, cut your hair, lose or gain the weight, and you end up getting what you get.

The Doctor always finds the good things about his new appearance. However he's come back, however different he might be, he finds something to like. He may criticize and note what's different, but there are always parts of himself that he finds incredibly wonderful. There's often a scene of the Doctor staring into the mirror, insufferably satisfied with himself. "Sideburns!" the tenth Doctor exclaims gleefully. "I have sideburns!"

There's always a sense that because this new body is his, it is therefore excellent. And why not? For me, it's so easy to fall into the trap of female beauty standards. I struggle with self-acceptance all the time. But, I think, looking at myself in that mirror, *I have the curve of my back. I have this smile. These eyes, that hair, those legs.*

Because it's mine, and it finally feels right, this body is excellent.

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###

One of the most fun parts of any regeneration sequence is when the Doctor rifles through his (or someone else's!) wardrobe, looking for something to wear. It's one of the only times he actually ever changes clothes, and whatever clothes he comes up with always say something important about his new personality. Bow ties, sticks of celery, leather jackets, a scarf, every Doctor has his own distinctive style. Some of them are, well... regrettable? "You aren't serious," Peri says to the sixth Doctor, once he's clothed in his multicolored, clashing suit. "I'm always serious," he replies haughtily.

It still always takes him a little while to figure out what it is he likes, now that he's someone new. The clothes are a way for him to determine not just what he likes, but who he is.

Early on in my transition, I shifted styles constantly. I was a woman, but I had absolutely no idea what I actually liked when it came to women's clothes. I went through a mercifully brief phase which I called my "Pretty Pink Princess" period, in which I bought a bubblegum-pink dress, a too-short miniskirt, and a bunch of other stuff that now sits in the back of my closet, feeling bad about themselves. I can remember putting on the pink dress one day, while my wife gave me a look that very clearly said *You're not serious*. But at the time, I was! Thank goodness that passed.

I tried on different styles, trying to find something that fit my personality. I eventually arrived at a style that I like to think of as Modern Day Frump, which fit my job as a librarian and writer fairly well. And yet, I have a closet full of pretty things, springy things, and sometimes even fun things. This is a long process.

I'm still experimenting. Maybe someday I'll hit on something that I really, really love.

Maybe I'll find that great hat and scarf combo, or decide that yes, the bow tie is cool.

###

A few years later, my wife picks up the phone. "Hello?" She rolls her eyes. Telemarketer. Looking for a person under my old name. "No, I'm sorry," she says sweetly. "He died."

We laugh, it's our joke on them, but it's true enough. He did die, in a way.

“To save my own life, I changed my body,” the tenth Doctor said. For some transgender people, that’s literally true, though it wasn’t for me. I didn’t feel like I’d commit suicide if I didn’t get treatment. Not everyone does. But I did save something precious when I changed, and I found important things too.

I saved my life, from a certain perspective. But I also lost it.

How is that not true? I gave up the life I had. I became someone new, and the old person went away. There’s a grieving process for family and friends, and my wife and parents went through it. My wife took time to mourn who I’d been - her husband who slowly vanished, melting into something she couldn’t predict. My mother took it hard, too. She’d loved having a boy, and she loved the man I’d been. My mother had picked out my name, my father informed me. And here I was, throwing it all away.

It took a long time for everyone to come to terms with, and even find things to love in, a new me. I’ve always been grateful to my parents, my wife, and my friends for their acceptance. Not everyone did, however, and so some parts of my old life were locked away forever.

So I died. Or did I? Same old me, different face, right? Except... how does anyone go through it all, from coming to terms with it to coming out to actually living as someone new, and not change in important, all-consuming ways?

A new me. I remember the old me. I remember that I was him, and he was like me. Except... I’m older. Wiser. Stranger, in some ways. Like him, but different in all kinds of little ways. I cry more easily, I can’t lift the heaviest things, and I’m far more aware of how I look, who’s around me, and what I’m doing. Life as a woman has changed how I perceive things, and how I react to situations. Parts of me are the same, but the transformation has irreversibly changed others.

The Doctor’s personality shifts around, too, but at his core he’s the same man. He always has a soft spot for humans. He needs company. He’s curious, reckless, clever, impulsive, and incorrigible. But other things change, and sometimes he’s broody and sad, while other times he’s bouncy or gruff or simply alien.

You never know what you’re going to get.

But the best part is that his companions always adapt. It’s just one more alien thing about him, and though they may miss the old Doctor, there’s always so much to like about the new one. Change keeps happening, after all.

Wouldn’t it be great if everyone were as accepting of other humans?

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###

The moment of regeneration itself is one of the most magical *Who* moments. In a single instant, the Doctor becomes someone new. His number increases by one. It looks painful, some of the time, while other times it's almost peaceful. It's always breathtaking.

These moments, and the times where companions join or are leave the TARDIS, are what give the show its life and endurance. Not just because new, fresh faces can be brought in to replace the old, but because there's a sense of being limited by time. The Doctor and his companions can travel through time, but they never seem to have enough of it. In the end, the companions leave, are left, or die, and the Doctor changes into someone new. They can fight the same old enemies and go to the same places, but it's never the same thing twice. The experience, for both the characters and the audience, is always being reborn.

Fundamentally, for me, *Doctor Who* is about change.

You don't have to have gone through a gender transition to understand the power of regeneration, though I have to say that it doesn't hurt. Everyone goes through profound personal changes and transformation during their lives. If you look over your life, for instance, I'm sure there are many moments where you can draw a bright line, and forever mark each side "before" and "after." *Before college. After she died. Before I moved away. After we married. Before I came out.*

*After the day at the lake.*

There was a moment, on the last day of work I spent presenting as a man, where I threw myself away. It was a strangely normal day, like we'd planned it. There would be a meeting of all my co-workers the next day to explain that the quiet guy with the ponytail would be coming to work a woman from now on. That was my journey, and that was how I did it.

I went back down to that dock where I'd found myself a year before.

The dragonflies were there, the water and humidity were there, just as they'd been before. I took out my name badge. I'd received it when I'd started my job, years ago now. At the time, it had been a symbol of rebirth, of escape from my old life as a high school teacher. Now it had become a dead weight around my neck, in more ways than I could possibly have imagined back then.

*I should say something*, I thought. The water rippled, roused by the wind. A heavy, oppressive heat made me itchy in my collared men's shirt, and made me intimately aware of the sports bra underneath concealing my new, growing breasts. Change was already upon me.

Susan Jane Bigelow

"Goodbye," I said to the name badge at last, adding as an afterthought, "Thank you."

I stretched my arm back, held still for a split second, then threw. The name tag arced out over the water with a *shiiiiing* sound, and hit the surface with a dull splash. It reflected the light of the sun one final time before sinking out of sight forever.

Possibility and power swirled around me. "I name myself," I said into the sudden stillness, and spoke my new full name. I felt the future click into place. *There. Done.*

I died, and I came back, in that instant. That was my bright line, one of the brightest of my life.

So when I see the light of regeneration surround the Doctor, I get goosebumps.

*Don't go*, is my first thought.

But then as the light consumes him, I think, *Yes, go, go! Transform. Be someone new!*

*Good luck!*

And I feel that light all around me, as well.

## **The Girl Who Waited (for the Guidance Counselor to Get to His Point)**

**Rachel Swirsky** holds an MFA in fiction from the University of Iowa. Her short fiction has appeared in numerous magazines and anthologies, and has been nominated for the Hugo Award, the Locus Award, and the World Fantasy Award. In 2011, she won the Nebula for best novella with "The Lady Who Plucked Red Flowers Beneath the Queen's Window." She would like to repeat, for clarity, that the following piece is in fact *entirely* autobiographical and includes absolutely *no* fictional elements.

It will surprise no one who has given the matter any deep consideration that, given the existence of an extremely powerful being who is documented to engage in time travel and have a predilection for messing about with human history, it follows that there would be many individuals - even possibly contemporary ones - who have had experience with the aforesaid entity.

(In point of fact, the ubiquity of the entity's interaction with humans raises a number of world-building questions. Why would the time-traveling individual insist on secrecy? Indeed, if the universe is regularly punctured by web-winged time-eaters, evil scarecrows, and farting things in zip-up human suits, then how is it even possible to maintain secrecy?)

Setting my parenthetical meandering aside, the point here is simple: if a time-traveling madman with a screwdriver exists then, logically, he's already got acquaintances among us. In fact, at this very moment, he may be raising a banana as he flips through this book (a copy found on the shelves of an abandoned used bookstore in a far-flung post-apocalyptic future), wearing an amused and condescending expression as he "keeps score" of his past exploits.

Look. Enough beating around the proverbial bush. Let's just be honest. If the Doctor exists, someone knows him. And yes, that person is me.

Excuse me. Perhaps that was a bit misleading.

I want to be extremely clear. I, Rachel Swirsky, have never met any individual who referred to himself as the Doctor, except for an extremely pretentious academic who is best left out of the discussion. I have never entered a blue police box; I have never seen a screwdriver wielded with the confidence of a gun and the elegance of a fencing foil; I have never been annoyed (in person) by the tendency of villainous robots and aliens to repeat stock phrases as if they were using tedium as a battle tactic; I have never applauded for a shriveled old creature until Tinkerbell was revived by the power of belief.

That particular time-traveling entity and I have never crossed paths. Remember that. It's important, especially if you're a lawyer.

Now, if I happen to have encountered someone who shares traits in common with that individual - well, it's a big universe out there. I assure you that it will be purely coincidental if there is any resemblance to persons either living, dead, or desperately trying to retcon the number of regenerations they're allowed.

My acquaintance, the Guidance Counselor, resembles - but is legally distinct from - the Doctor.

Also, he's a much more entertaining drunk.

"You know, fuck it," the Guidance Counselor slurred to me just the other night, pushing a bottle of whiskey into my face. "Everyone thinks they're so fucking on it. They look at me and they think they know everything. They see a pencil-neck geek who wears bobby socks and an ascot and they say, 'Oh, how *quaint*, how *eccentric*.' Do they ever think about what's beneath? You know? Do they ever try to untie the ascot? Oh, sure, there's the academic shit, the essays and the rambling on message boards, the critiques and the deconstruction. Well, fuck your deconstruction! I'll deconstruct your face! I'll deconstruct your nose with my fist! I'll deconstruct... I'll deconstruct—"

It was at this point that the Guidance Counselor lost track of himself and began squinting at our surroundings, looking for inspiration. He looked down at his lap and for a horrible moment I thought he was going to threaten to deconstruct his trousers, an impression that was only worsened a moment later when he proclaimed:

"I'll deconstruct the motherfucking moon!"

Fortunately, bare ass cheeks did not ensue.

The Guidance Counselor and I were sitting together in an Iowa field, the requisite corn aspiring to grow as high as an elephant's eye. Light breeze stirred the night air, providing all-too-brief respite from the humidity. In the distance, we could hear the lows of cattle busy fertil-

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izing the American heartland.

We'd brought a couple of blankets and laid them out next to each other so that we could recline and watch the night sky as we drank. Empty beer bottles lay scattered at our feet. Only the headlights of my car, parked a few feet away with the doors open, illuminated the concealing night.

Above, the stars shone the way they do over open spaces, all blaze and splendor, freed from the competition of city lights. That's the sort of thing that always becomes more portentous when you're sitting with the Guidance Counselor. They don't seem as far away, those stars. The danger they contain, the violence, the adventure, the strangeness.

"I probably could," the Guidance Counselor mused. Catching my confused expression, he clarified, "Deconstruct the moon. I'd need a big lever and someplace to stand..."

"How about a soap box?" I suggested.

He stuck out his tongue.

He has a long tongue. It's not forked, but it's unnaturally pointy.

We were deep into our bottles by then. Gin-soaked enough that our moods had become fluid, could shift from derisive to angry to melancholy and then back again, all in the space between tick and tock.

"They never look underneath the surface," the Guidance Counselor repeated. His finger absentmindedly stroked the rim of his near-empty bottle. "They never think, what if I'm wrong? What if I don't know him at all? What if I don't even understand the fundamentals?"

"Well, you know," I said. "People. They kind of suck."

But he wasn't really listening.

He was building up to his reveal.

That's something else that tends to happen around the Guidance Counselor. You'll be in the middle of your life, and it's just your life, the way lives are. Then all of a sudden something happens, and you realize that your life was just the exposition, that suddenly you're in the rising action, rappelling up the mountain of plot, striving for that dizzy summit that propriety suggests we really shouldn't call a climax.

He thumped the bottle onto the ground and turned to me decisively.

"I'm a woman," he said.

"In what sense?" I asked.

I mean, I had to ask. You never know with him. Could be alien sex-switching microbes, or something to do with alternate universes, or a rather silly metaphor.

"Spiritual," he said. "Mental. Metaphysical. *Essential*. If you prick

me, do I not bleed? If you provoke me, do I not roar?"

She launched to her feet.

"Biology isn't destiny! Even if it were, time travel doesn't work like that! I reject essentialist notions. Just because I appear to be a man, must I be in essence a man? No! When they say that the Guidance Counselor has never been a woman, they are wrong, they are misguided. How blithely they erase the yearning, the suppression, the struggling against a perceived identity that isn't really your own..."

"Wait," I said. "You've gotten all muddled. Who blithely erases your... uh... whatever, blah, blah, blah." I eyed her abandoned bottle. It contained more liquid than mine currently did. "You've probably gotten, um, confused because you've schmunk, brunk, er, drunk too much. B-better let me finish that."

"On their Internets, in their letters, in their essays and ruminations, those who watch me complain that no matter how many bodies I go through, I always end up as a man. They want to know if I'll ever present myself as a great ape with matching chromosomes. But they've missed it. The vital fact. I'm *already* a woman."

"Oh," I said. "That sense."

She grabbed my wrist and hauled me, weak-kneed and protesting, to my feet. I stumbled as she dragged me toward my car, its doors still thrown open to the Iowa night, and pushed me into the backseat where her TTMCTM (Time Traveling Milk Crate™) sat among junk mail and half-read magazines.

"I shouldn't tell you!" she proclaimed. "I should *show* you!"

With groaning and squeezing and swearing and shoving, into the milk crate we went.

###

First things first - you need to know this.

The damn thing is smaller on the inside.

###

Okay, perhaps this bears some expositing.

You may be wondering, for instance, how I met the Guidance Counselor.

I don't remember. I was fucking drunk.

Well, that's not entirely true. I was at a bar in the French Quarter of

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New Orleans where I'd gone after researching a story about a pre-Stonewall lesbian couple.

(I'm a short story writer. That doesn't mean that you should mistake this for fiction.)

Though the place had once been a landmark of queer history, it was no longer full of sequined, sultry flappers, and dashing women wearing men's button-downs. It had become a dreary, black-painted place with an unadorned bar at which no one sat, an empty dance floor, and a rope blocking the way upstairs.

I took my pick of barstools and ordered a gin and tonic.

I drank the gin and tonic.

I ordered another gin and tonic.

I drank another gin and tonic.

There may have been some amount of swish and repeat.

Things got a bit... fuzzy... or, rather, shiny... the borders of my vision dazzled as if I was staring into a bright light... there were people's voices, the smell of smoke... a brassy laugh that kept rising above the din... the sequins and the sultry voices and the grinning girls with popped collars...

I can't tell you the sequence of events; it was all out of synch. I remember it the way one remembers a dream. Flashes. Smiles. It all seemed perfectly natural at the time.

Someone was leaning on my shoulder, and someone else was throwing a punch at the girl next to me, and someone was tossing pocket change into an empty glass. A shout: "Flatties! We're going to get copped!" There was a crazy din, people stumbling over each other, pushing, hollering. I raised my glass in the direction of the bartender (who had already cheesed it, but I wasn't sober enough to notice) and said, admiringly, "Man, you guys go all out when you go retro."

A tall, slim, ebony-skinned gentleman drifted toward me. His was the one slow-moving body in the crowd. The opera cape slung over his shoulders rustled with his approach. (This was the guidance counselor's last incarnation, of course. Her current form is milk-pale, rose-cheeked, and stout about the trunk and legs.)

He laid his hand on my arm. "Pardon me, gal," he said, slowly, in a voice that blended the best, mellow tones of British and Southern, "but I think you've got the wrong end of the stick."

I then noticed that I had, all unawares, clutched the end of his walking stick. I let it go.

"You don't seem to know where you are," he continued.

"In New Orleans," I replied.

He gestured broadly, encompassing the scene with his gesture. "I don't mean locally. Or even temporally. You don't seem to know where your, ah, what's the expression? Where your head's at."

"On my shoulders," I replied.

He tilted his head. "You're rather drunk, you know."

"Yes."

"That's probably why you thought that was funny." He paused. "You need orientation."

I asked, "Like freshman orientation?"

He smirked. "You can call me the Guidance Counselor."

Outside, there were shouts and footsteps. People were pounding on the door.

With a flourish, the gentleman offered his hand. "You'd best come with me," he said.

Later, when the milk crate had safely delivered us back to Iowa, he leaned against my doorframe, outrageously and gorgeously out of place in red-lined black silk.

"Sometimes people time travel on their own," he explained. "It's rare, but when it happens, it's dangerous and glamorous. Like dancing on an open flame." He grinned. "All the things I like best."

"Are you sure," I retorted, "that it wasn't just a costume party?"

From his cape, he withdrew a candy cigarette in a long, golden holder, which he proceeded to raise to his lips. "I try never to be certain of anything."

# # #

It takes a long time to get anywhere in the milk crate. Or at least it *feels* like it takes a long time to get anywhere in the milk crate. My happily drunken state wore off quickly.

We were jammed together, her elbow pushing against my eye, my knee wedged someplace totally inappropriate, exhaling hot air on each other while the TTMCTM made wheezing noises.

"It does that," the Guidance Counselor said, "to annoy me."

"Why does it want to annoy you?"

"It doesn't like time travel."

"But it's a time travel machine. Crate. Thingy."

"It's lazy."

With a bone-jittering thump, we landed on solid ground. The

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Guidance Counselor pried open the crate's lid. "Here we are," she said. She stepped out gracefully, untangling herself with ease while I tried to force my cramping muscles into some semblance of an upright position.

Once I made it out of the crate, I saw that we had landed someplace truly strange - not, itself, an oddity when one is traveling with the Guidance Counselor. We were in an alleyway from which I could peek out at a major street. Tall but narrow, brightly colored buildings were crammed into each other, competing for space, their peaked roofs making the horizon into a zigzag. Blinking lights cascaded from windows, competing with neon, ropes of sequins, and joyful effigies made of tulle. Murals painted in primary colors splashed across the walls that dared to be blank.

"Welcome to the future!" the Guidance Counselor said.

I squinted at one of the murals. "This looks like San Francisco."

The Guidance Counselor looked annoyed. "It is San Francisco," she admitted. "San Francisco in the future!"

I pointed to a billboard visible in the distance. "Why is Paris Hilton advertising Coca-Cola in the future?"

"Fine. It's San Francisco a few months in the future. Are you happy now?"

We walked out onto the street. Revelers shouted to us. There were leather girls with whips and drag queens in pink wigs, and more than a few gay couples in khakis who looked like they'd strolled in from Kansas. The Guidance Counselor, in her rumped ascot and striped bobby socks, looked more in tune with our surroundings than I did in my generic early-Iowa-autumn long skirt and light coat.

A nearby girl was inflating rainbow-colored balloons, shaping them into cocks, and passing them out. I narrowly avoided being given one.

"Gay Pride parade?" I asked.

The Guidance Counselor turned to me, excited. "No! This future is so tantalizingly close to you! I just couldn't wait for you to see it. A team of rogue geneticists in Iceland is already working on genetically recoding the virus they plan to release globally. It will erase gender essentialism, heteronormativity, and all the trite hang-ups about sex that have bound human societies since Og differentiated himself from Ogga. In the future, every day is pride day!"

I pointed at the billboard again. "If this is a gender utopian future, then I must ask once again. Why is Paris Hilton advertising Coca-Cola?"

The Guidance Counselor pouted. "You're no fun anymore."

"You said you wanted to show me something. What is it?"

"This," she said.

This time her voice rang with sincerity.

"Even in your world, there are people who get it. People who understand. Chromosomes aren't destiny. Men can wag their wrists. Women can have penises. Everyone can fix a truck or dress in satin or lip synch for their lives!"

Six naked men painted in the colors of the rainbow ran by, screaming.

"Community," I said. "That's what you wanted to show me."

I paused, looking out wistfully at the rabble rousers, the dozens of red and blue and purple balloon penises bobbing in the sky.

"I understand," I said. A bit sadly, I added, "I wish it were a virus. Almost. If everyone really could be themselves... if that were the future..." I shook my head. "Is that the fantasy you come here for?"

"That," she agreed, "and I want to come out."

###

Questions that have probably occurred to you by now:

Why does the Guidance Counselor always take people to places that revolve around a twentieth-century ideological perspective?

Why does she, as an alien, have an identity that slots into the binary sex division entrenched in human culture?

Since she's an alien time traveler who has lived for a gobsmackingly long time, why has it taken her so long to come out?

These are good questions.

These are the questions I asked her as we walked to Union Square.

She did what she always does.

She replied with jokes.

###

In Union Square, a crowd of gay men had set up a stage, on which they were conducting a beauty contest for men with highly defined, glistening abdominal muscles.

The Guidance Counselor leaped onto the stage, brushing aside the bicep-brandishing beaus, and seized the microphone.

"I'm a woman!" she shouted.

I shrank away from the crowd, trying to make myself look as if she and I had arrived separately, and I had no idea who she was.

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"People have asked!" she said, pulling the microphone free of its stand. She stood back, her free hand sweeping outward, her body language like that of a minister addressing his congregation. "They have wanted to know! When would I be a woman? Well, I am! I am! I am the Guidance Counselor! And I am a woman!"

I expected people to boo and shout for her to let the beauty contest continue, but I had underestimated that strange quality of hers, that sheer charisma that crowns her queen of any crowd, that lets her martial small, ragtag bands of people so that they can face down aliens and robots and sentient garbage dumps.

They congratulated her, they cheered for her, their sister and their comrade. They raised her aloft and carried her through the crowd. She pulled out her ever-ready sonic screwdriver mixer and poured one for everyone. They were pink for the occasion. We drank them with umbrellas.

People wept and told her their own coming out stories, their travails with bullies and unforgiving parents. The beautiful, oiled men embraced each other, bare chest to chest, weeping with catharsis. Others joined in, too, BDSM queens and topless ladies and couples with small children who had collected large bundles of abandoned penis balloons, all of them trading stories and tears.

I waited, patiently, at the back of the crowd, holding my story to myself, as I usually do, because I'm much better at talking about other people's stories, even when I'm writing memoirs, as you may have noticed.

She came back to me as I'd known she would, beaming, a rainbow pin tucked into her ascot, her empty screwdriver mixer in hand. "Beautiful," she said. "All of them, beautiful. All of it, beautiful."

I smiled. It was hard not to smile while watching her glow pinkly with all that joy. "Now that you're out, are you going to transition?" I asked. "Dress like a lady? Wear clothes without nearly enough pockets? Shirts that button down the left-hand side?"

She gave me a look of genuine, shocked offense. "What makes you think I'm not already dressed like a lady?"

I paused, mouth open.

She straightened her ascot. "How do you know what ladies wear in the future?"

She had a point.

I looked around at the crowd, still laughing and weeping and hugging despite the fact that their charismatic authority had slipped away. It was

such a happy moment, such a resonant and perfect moment, that I dis-trusted it immediately.

"Well, then. What now?" I asked.

"I live my life," she replied.

"No, I mean, what now on this trip? I've been around the crate with you a few times. It's sometime around now when the giant invisible space rats appear."

She raised her brows. "Giant space rats?"

"Swarms of radioactive space flies. Aliens using disco music to take over the world. One of your time-traveling doppelgangers who got loose when you visited the beginning of the universe."

Sighing, she said, "Rachel, I brought you here because I wanted to share one of my most intimate moments. I travel through history. It's my life, my calling. And yes, sometimes there are monsters, there are big flashy moments, there are times when someone has to save the galaxy. And yes, a lot of the time that's me. But what I've learned, what I want to show you, is that really history is made by the small moments. By coming out. By sharing stories."

Half-turning, she gestured into the crowd where a young boy was listening to a drag queen tell the story of her first performance.

"He's going to grow up and because he was here, because of the many moments in his life, including this one, that will have made him into a man who understands and cares for everyone, no matter who they love, this little boy who will be a straight man is going to help enact legislation that will end homophobia in the United States. Not Band-Aid it, as all the legislation before it will do, but end it, in a way most of the people in this crowd would never think possible."

She reached for my hand.

"That's what I want to show you. You can be so cynical. You write about the future, but sometimes you have no hope for it. You need to see this. There is hope. Things will be better."

As her voice trailed off, it became laughter and music. Rather, I heard the laughter and music of the crowd behind her, which had begun to sing, and - was it? Yes. A camp song. A song the Guidance Counselor had led them to.

*Someone's laughing, my Lord, kumbaya.*

*Someone's singing my Lord, kumbaya.*

She smiled. I smiled. The world was all rainbows.

"The giant invisible space rats," I said. "They're right behind me, aren't they?"

*The Girl Who Waited (for the Guidance Counselor to Get to His Point)*

The Guidance Counselor's gaze flickered. Taking care not to move her mouth, she said, "Yeah, but they don't know I've noticed them yet. Play along for a second while I get my mixer ready."

"Oh!" I exclaimed. Hamming it up, I added, "You are so right, Guidance Counselor! I have been too cynical! But now I see the error of my ways!"

"Don't overdo it," the Guidance Counselor chastened. She pulled the sonic mixer from her pocket and brandished it in the air. "Get squeaking, space vermin!" she shouted.

And we fought off the space rats.

But that's the boring part of the story.

## QUEERS DIG TIME LORDS

# *Space Helmet for a Cow: An Unlikely 50-Year History of Doctor Who (preview)*

*Doctor Who is both the greatest and – frequently – the most insane TV show ever made. Which other program, for example, would dare to sink Atlantis, wage inter-planetary war and crash Concorde - all in BBC Television Centre, on a budget that would barely cover a sitcom?*

*As wryly reported by Paul Kirkley (SFX magazine), Space Helmet for a Cow is the story of how, over 50 years, a bunch of very clever, very dedicated and sometimes plain crazy people made Doctor Who happen, often against seemingly insuperable odds. It's a story of triumph and tragedy, tears and tantrums, and an awful lot of men called Donald.*

*It also answers the burning questions few have dared tackle before. Questions like: How does a talking cabbage get an Equity card? What would have been in William Hartnell's Glastonbury set? And if you meet a Yeti coming out of a loo in Tooting Bec, how long should you give it?*

### **Section 1: Adventures in Time and Spain... in Space!**

#### **1963: BBC dragged kicking and screaming into the 50s**

Sydney Newman was once described - by the Controller of BBC Television, no less - as "a Canadian who looked like a Mexican." This is both racist and wrong. With his bow tie, bushy black eyebrows, slicked back hair and comedy moustache, Newman looked like a cross between Groucho Marx, a travelling showman and the Joker's jollier, less psychotic uncle.

What he decisively didn't look like, when he joined the British Broadcasting Corporation in 1963, was any of his colleagues. It's often said Britain was psychologically still stuck in the fifties until the Beatles came along; if that's true, many at the BBC were still struggling to let go of the forties. Run by people who'd cut their teeth in radio - the wireless was still very much the respectable medium back then - BBC Television existed in a world of Harris tweed and Windsor knots, the air thick with pipe smoke and the tang of dry sherry. You've seen *Mad Men*? Well it

was absolutely nothing like that.

Since arriving in Britain in 1958, Newman had been working as a senior drama producer at independent television franchise ABC, where he had successfully launched stylish espionage caper *The Avengers* and the groundbreaking anthology series *Armchair Theatre*.

The latter had created a stir by broadcasting plays about "real people" - some of whom didn't even have servants or a separate parlour for Sundays. *I know!* Newman recognised that, while television was a mass medium, its drama output was largely aimed at an educated elite. "Damn the upper classes," he said. "They don't even own televisions."<sup>42</sup> (Some of them did, of course, but they kept them discreetly hidden behind tasteful antique tapestries and only wheeled them out for coronations and state funerals.)

The BBC's diet of classic serials and drawing room dramas looked particularly dated in the face of the new breed of "kitchen sink" realism that had swept through theatre, literature and film: by 1963, John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* was already seven years old, and social realist writers like Alan Sillitoe and Shelagh Delaney had seen their books and plays adapted for the big screen. Some of them were even set in the north. *I know!*

But the Beeb's phalanx of ex-wing commanders and recalled foreign bureau correspondents weren't ready for the kitchen sink quite yet. (Indeed, what would a sink even be *doing* in a kitchen - it ought to be in the scullery, surely?) So it came as quite a shock when this brash, nonsense Canadian was brought in as the new Head of Drama Series and Serials. (Readers in the United States might like to ponder just how conservative the Corporation must have been at the time for a Canadian to be considered "brash".)

One of the first conversations between Newman and his new boss Donald Baverstock - after the awkward one about the best place to buy tortillas and sombreros in Shepherd's Bush - concerned the need for a new programme to fill a gap in the schedules between Saturday afternoon sports mainstay *Grandstand* and *Juke Box Jury*, a sort of musical crown court in which groovy hep cats like Pete Murray, Alma Cogan and Thora Hird passed sentence on the latest single releases.

Newman, who had previously produced the children's serials *Pathfinders in Space* and its sequels, asked Donald Wilson, his pipe-smoking Head of Serials, to convene a meeting to discuss ideas for a new

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42. *Doctor Who Magazine* #141.

science fiction series. Wilson invited input from Alice Frick and John Braybon, two of three story editors who had authored reports on the potential for a sci-fi series the previous year. (The third was Donald Bull: basically, if you wanted to work for the BBC in the early 60s, it helped to be called Donald; even Frick had considered changing her name and investing in a briar pipe and a tin of Ready Rub.) Also present was staff writer Cecil Edwin Webber - known to all as "Bunny". Probably best not to ask.

It was Wilson who first floated the idea of a time-space machine, while Braybon favoured the idea of a group of scientific troubleshooters. Webber was tasked with developing some of the ideas further, and his proposal, delivered at the end of March, included the following character suggestions: A "handsome young hero (to appeal to teenagers)"; a "handsome, well-dressed heroine (appealing to older women)" and a "maturer man, 35-40, with some 'character twist' (appeal to fathers)". It says a lot about the era that 35-year-old men were considered "mature"; this was in the days when they had to look and act like grown-ups, instead of dressing like teenagers and spending all day playing *Angry Birds* on their iPads.

Newman liked the characters, and the time travel concept (he had previously tried to launch a time travel show at ABC), but vetoed the "troubleshooters" notion in favour of his own idea of a senile old man who had fled his own planet in a time machine. He would be accompanied by a teenage girl, while an older couple would provide the romance. In other words, being a typical manager, he ignored nearly everything his staff had said and told them to do it his way instead.

Newman also insisted he wanted the programme as "rooted in reality" as possible and to avoid science fiction clichés, while early paperwork pointed out the series should be classified as "neither fantasy nor space travel nor science fiction".

Webber came back with a revised proposal for a series he was now calling *Dr. Who*. It would consist of serials of six or seven 25-minute episodes about four people travelling through space and time in an unreliable invisible spaceship. The foursome were identified as: Bridget, or Biddy, a "with it" 15-year-old girl, a 24-year-old school teacher called Lola McGovern (who would be slightly "timid" - despite the porn star name), athletic schoolmaster Cliff and, finally, Dr. Who, "a frail old man lost in space and time". According to Webber, "they give him this name because they don't know who he is". (Note the lack of a question mark, though: we might have expected better punctuation from two teachers,

but that's inner-city schools for you.)

Webber also had a curious notion about Dr. Who having "a hatred of scientists, inventors, improvers" and "malignantly" trying to stop progress wherever he finds it, while searching for some personal panacea in the past. Newman carefully annotated this suggestion by writing "NUTS!" next to it in great big letters. He also rejected the invisible spaceship idea, but numerous elements of Webber's proposed opening episode, *Nothing at the End of the Lane*, would eventually make it to the screen. (One of them, the idea that the Doctor's own people were concerned with him "monkeying around with time", would take years to come to fruition - and, disappointingly, even when it did, the charge of "monkeying" would never formally be laid.)

Newman approached Rex Tucker, one of BBC drama's six staff directors, to produce the show, which was now slated to be recorded in early July for broadcast later that month, with a budget of £2,300 per episode.

In discussion with Newman and Wilson, Webber created a further document with various ideas for future stories, including an adventure in Roman Britain and something, rather vaguely, set on "Mars or Venus". ("Which is the red one again?") By now, Bridget had become Sue, Dr. Who's age was given as 650 (though casting would probably need to look for someone younger) and his time ship originated in the year 5733. Webber also included a synopsis for a debut serial called *The Giants*, in which our heroes would be accidentally miniaturised in Cliff's lab, and suggested that the ship could be disguised as a police telephone box. Perhaps to Webber's surprise, Newman did not write NUTS! next to this latter, somewhat out-of-left-field idea.

Newman and Wilson made further revisions to the format for the show, which was now scheduled for an August launch. Meanwhile, Tucker approached Welsh actor Hugh David - then in his late 30s - about playing the lead, but he had recently starred in a Granada adventure series called *Knight Errant*, and wasn't interested in another potentially long-running TV role.

In May, Webber handed in his completed synopsis for *The Giants*. Newman wasn't happy: he said it was low on action, character and drama, and the visual effects were too ambitious. He also disliked the idea of a giant spider, as he was obsessed by the idea of the show not featuring what he called BEMs: Bug-Eyed Monsters. "Okay, but *apart* from that," asked Webber, "what did you think?"

Possibly alone at the BBC at that time, Newman was a science fiction fan, and knew exactly what he wanted from his new show. "*Doctor Who*

was really the culmination of almost all my interests in life," he recalled in later years. "I wanted to reflect contemporary society; I was curious about the outer-space stuff and, of course, being a children's programme, it had to have a high educational content.

"I wrote in my memo that the outer-space stories must be based on factual knowledge. Also, by going back in time, we could bring history alive for the young, having Dr. Who on the shores of Britain when Caesar landed - that sort of thing."<sup>43</sup>

Tucker and Newman had several meetings with another staff director, Richard Martin, who was in line to helm the first episodes. Martin recalls that Newman wrote "Dr who?" on a piece of paper, and the name of the show was arrived at when no-one in the room could think of a proper answer, but this is almost certainly more of a convention anecdote than an actual fact.

In June, Tucker was taken off the job - apparently much to his relief, as he wasn't really interested in the show (though he was still slated to direct some episodes) - and Newman offered it to another director, Don Taylor, who turned it down. ("Really though, Sydney, everyone at the BBC is very excited and totally behind this new show of yours. And of course, I'd *love* to do it, but I'm, erm, busy that month. Whichever month it is.")

When he received a phone call from a former ABC colleague - a "fiery" production assistant called Verity Lambert - Newman advised her to apply for the job of *Dr. Who* producer, deliberately goading her into giving it her best shot by saying she probably wouldn't get it. It worked. The Roedean-educated daughter of a Jewish London accountant, Lambert was just 27 when she arrived at the BBC, where no producer had previously had the audacity to be both a woman and below 30. Naturally, feathers were ruffled.

"There were rumblings because Verity was a girl," said Newman. "She was tough, good looking and stubborn. If she didn't like something, she came out honestly and said so."<sup>44</sup> To which BBC managers responded: "Calm down dear - let's not spoil that pretty face with a frown, shall we?"

*Space Helmet for a Cow: An Unlikely 50-Year History of Doctor Who*  
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43. *Doctor Who Magazine* #141.

44. *Doctor Who Magazine* #141.

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**Sigrid Ellis** is a writer of fiction, nonfiction, and comics; an editor; a parent of two homeschooled children; and an air traffic controller. She lives in Saint Paul, Minnesota, with her partner, their kids, her partner's other partner, and a host of pets both vertebrate and invertebrate. She is best known as the co-editor (with Lynne M. Thomas) of Mad Norwegian Press's Hugo Award-nominated *Chicks Dig Comics: A Celebration of Comic Books by the Women Who Love Them*. Her work can be found in the online speculative fiction magazine *Strange Horizons* and in Mad Norwegian Press's *Whedonistas: A Celebration of the Worlds of Joss Whedon by the Women Who Love Them*.

**Michael Damian Thomas** is a writer, editor, and the managing editor of the Hugo Award-nominated *Apex Magazine*. He has previously worked as an associate editor on numerous Mad Norwegian Press books, including the Hugo Award-winning *Chicks Dig Time Lords: A Celebration of Doctor Who by the Women Who Love It* (edited by Lynne M. Thomas and Tara O'Shea). Michael lives in DeKalb, Illinois, with his wife Lynne, their daughter Caitlin, and a cat named Marie. Caitlin has a rare congenital disorder called Aicardi syndrome, and Michael works as her primary caregiver.

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