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DOCTOR WHO

THE CURSE OF FATAL DEATH
JIM SANGSTER



I have some news that even my arch enemy needs to hear.

The Doctor meets his old enemy the Master for a final confrontation on the planet Terserus.

But while the Master reveals his latest scheme, the Doctor prepares to make a shocking announcement - he intends to retire from the business of saving the universe.

As he battles to unravel the Master's dastardly trap, the Doctor is mortally wounded and his friend Emma witnesses him regenerate.

When the Daleks arrive to complicate matters even further, the Doctor and Emma discover that this time, the challenge is too great for just one Doctor...

This is a brand new novelisation of the final Doctor Who serial of the 20th Century, broadcast in 1999 as part of the BBC's Comic Relief charity telethon.

DOCTOR WHO

THE CURSE OF FATAL DEATH

Based on the BBC television serial by Steven Moffat

JIM SANGSTER

THE CHANGING FACE OF DOCTOR WHO

The cover illustration of this book shows an alternative ninth DOCTOR WHO, who was wiped from existence by the arrival of the Time War.

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The producer of The Curse of Fatal Death was Sue Vertue

The executive producer was Richard Curtis

The director was John Henderson

The part of the Doctor was played by Rowan Atkinson, Richard E. Grant, Jim Broadbent, Hugh Grant and Joanna Lumley

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Prologue

Often on days like this, I feel a sense of ennui. There's that vague suspicion that I should have done better at school. Honestly it haunts me. I could have been out there, exploring the galaxy, saving worlds and overthrowing tyranny. Maybe there was an office in the Space Bureau of Diplomacy that would have looked just splendid with my name on the door. Something cushy with a sturdy desk with drawers and pen holders, an attractive secretary bringing in hot beverages with a reassuring smile, over in the corner a big green plant with leaves curving over a huge terracotta pot like a serf grabbing their forelock. All of that.

It's not that I didn't work hard at school but just that I worked too hard in the wrong direction. Nobody warned me that my skills - the skills I'd spent years honing and refining to perfection - were the sort that mean you end up here. Which is to say, nowhere. A grey, soulless cell with a design board, an overhead light and twin in-and-out trays that really should look more balanced than they currently do.

Just this morning a manager came into my cubicle, sniffing the air with suspicion. I tried to offer a welcoming smile in the vague hope it might make him focus on me rather than anything else in the room, but it didn't work. His eyes settled upon a single sheet of paper I'd stuck to the wall, upon which I'd sketched a rather attractive vista with rolling waves across a sandy shore. His gangly arm snapped over to the drawing and plucked at it until the adhesive putty relinquished its grip and the paper came away. He folded the drawing twice until it was small enough for him to slide it into a pocket, then he left shaking his head and muttering something that I wouldn't want my parents to hear.

At least I assumed he was a manager. He had that air of unflappable confidence that comes from having a corner office. He could have been from security though. Or the post room. He could have been anyone really. Anyone whose designation isn't a lowly processor in the Municipal Operations department. And as all bureaucracies love their

three-letter acronyms, that would mean anyone whose job title isn't 'MOP'.

Now, as I stare absently at the point on the wall where my window isn't, I take a clean sheet of paper from my drawer and contemplate whether it's worth the hassle to doodle something else instead - when I hear a sound. It's like a distant engine breathing in and out, rhythmically, its gears slowly getting louder and louder as it approaches. Except it isn't getting closer so much as becoming more... solid.

Just outside my work-cell is a box that hadn't been there this morning.

And from inside the box emerges a man who had also definitely not been there this morning. Or indeed any previous morning ever.

'Hello,' he says. I can tell straight away he's an alien. Ours is a particularly difficult and nuanced language and he's clearly not a native speaker. Plus his accent gives it away.

'H-h-hello,' I stammer. The presence of this stranger is making me tense for some reason. 'C-can I help you?'

'I do believe you can,' says the man. Here's trouble, I think. Big trouble.

Then the man begins to explain what he wants me to do. And I begin to feel afraid...

1

An Invitation

Of all the ancient races still kicking about this universe, the Time Lords of Gallifrey are thought to be the most insufferably smug people you might ever encounter. It's said that they have access to the greatest archive of knowledge ever collated. Memories, lived experiences, discoveries, myths, legends, dreams, faiths and prejudices, all pulled together in the form of The Matrix.

Which they keep in the Gallifreyan equivalent of an old rusty filing cabinet in a dank basement beneath somewhere that nobody can be bothered to remember.

But it's not this that makes them so unbearably smug.

They used to see themselves as gods. They'd treat the universe as their playground and use their impossible time-space machines to cross voids and dimensions, anywhere and everywhen. But when one of their number went a bit mad and declared himself the god of all gods, there was a war and... well, there was a change of policy.

They became benefactors, using their powers for good, exploring the time vortex to bring forth the advancement of lesser races. Such endeavours required careful monitoring as a change here could and often would result in an effect there. It might be benign, like the discovery of spiritual enlightenment, or catastrophic, like the invention of weapons of destruction before the invention of anything worth bombing.

And of course such lofty behaviour would inspire other races to have a go at time travel too and before you knew it, entire civilisations had triggered grandfather paradoxes tied up with bootstraps and shoved deep into pocket universes; soon the map of the universe was pock-marked with little icons like mobius strips denoting where planets will one day used to be.

So then there was another war and the surviving Time Lords decided that their privileged position might be best served if they just did nothing. They became isolationists with a strict policy of non-intervention. Which was great news for the rest of the universe but less great for members of the Time Lord Academy who had completed a

decent number of centuries on their Time and Relative Dimensions in Space theory and were rather looking forward to the practical.

None of this, by the way, is what made the Time Lords infinitely the smuggest people ever, which is something we'll have to come back to later. It does however go some way to explain the actions of two former Time Lord Academy graduates who escaped Gallifrey to explore the universe. At first they were friends, loving the shared experience of living in different times, tasting the air on alien worlds and spending life times immersed in long lost cultures.

Like many of the closest friendships, there was also just a hint of competition. A challenge to find the best sunset, the loudest volcano, the warmest embrace... the toughest puzzle... the deadliest trap!

Eventually, fate decided that the two fugitives should take separate paths. Best for everyone if they were just kept apart.

But that was easier said than done...

If you're familiar with the TT-series time-travel machine popularly known as a 'TARDIS', you'll no doubt recognise the general look of a TARDIS control room. There's usually a door or two to one side, which is the gateway between the interior dimensions of the capsule and whatever lies outside. There might be an additional door leading off to other rooms, like laboratories, bedrooms or walk-in wardrobes. There's usually a large scanner screen that dominates one wall and the walls themselves often boast an attractive design feature of indented circles that provide a reassuring glow. In the centre of the control room, there's usually a console made up of six panels of navigation aids and other handy controls, with a glass column in the centre that goes up and down while the capsule is in flight.

The Master stood alone in the control room of his TARDIS, chuckling to himself. All the usual features of a TARDIS were present, yet they reflected the general character of their owner in quite an unsettling way. The walls were black and the roundels were dimmed. Dull lights flickered across the central console, while the glass column rose and fell with a sinister solemnity. There were no trinkets or other items that might make the place look homely. Just a large scanner screen that lit the room with a green hue, which made the Master's pallid face

look rather unwell. His eyes widened as he focused the scanner to a specific point in space and time.

Many moons ago, the Master had snuck a surveillance device inside the TARDIS of his oldest enemy, that blundering fool known as 'The Doctor'. Thanks to this device, the Master was able to snoop on the Doctor whenever he wanted to gain the advantage in their never-ending battle of wits. He smirked as he watched the Doctor standing in his own brightly lit and vastly inferior TARDIS. As usual, he was showing off to his latest companion, an Earth girl who the Master considered to be rather plain. The Master stroked his beard in contemplation as his old obsession began to take hold once more.

'You are doomed Doctor. Doomed! You are piloting your TARDIS into a deadly trap and even you will never suspect until it's too late.' Dizzy with anticipation, the Master guffawed and chuckled - only to be interrupted by a polite cough.

'You know, if you're going to spy on me you really should turn the speaker off,' said a warm, well-spoken voice from the scanner. The Doctor was somehow looking directly at the Master with a knowing grin on his face. The Master looked at his console to see a dull 'ON' light pulsing next to the microphone.

'My dear Doctor,' the Master blustered. 'After our many centuries of conflict, I wished you to know that your certain death is now... certain!' He flicked a switch and the Doctor's face disappeared from the screen.

'But even he will not suspect that his destruction awaits him on Planet Zaston Four,' said the Master to nobody in particular.

'You only turned the picture off, I'm afraid,' said the voice from the scanner. 'I can still hear you.'

'I know that!' said the Master, who had not in fact known that. 'Of course I know that.'

'... and now, you appear to have e-mailed me the plans for your death -trap. I see you've marked the "off" switch in red ink.' The Master's nostrils flared in fury. Was everything set to work against him?

The Master's scanner switched on again, this time with a high-pitched buzzing sound. The Doctor was pointing at the screen - or more accurately the spy device in his own TARDIS - with a thin metal cylinder. He handed the tool to his companion, who - much to the Master's disgust

- looked what one could only describe as 'plucky'. Then the Doctor stepped back from the screen and stood in his control room with an air of authority, his arms tucked neatly behind his back like a schoolteacher.

'I wanted to talk to you anyway,' the Doctor said. 'I have some news that even my arch enemy needs to hear. Meet me on the Planet Terserus in two hours, relative time. Try not to be late.'

Then the screen went blank.

The Master checked his console, just to be sure that the connection had been cut at both ends, as his mind began to race. His fingers darted lightly across the computer terminals and a small screen began to scroll with a display of the entire history of the planet Terserus. And a plan began to form.

'Mock me while you may, Doctor,' he said - to just himself at last. 'My revenge will be all the sweeter. And it will be a deadly... vengeance. It will be the deadly vengeance of... deadly... revenge!'

As the Master spun around his gloomy console in a reverie, it was indeed fortunate that the Doctor could no longer see his most persistent enemy. For if he had, he would only have concluded that the Master was completely and utterly bonkers.



'After our many centuries of conflict, I wished you to know that your certain death is now... certain!'

The Winds of Terserus

On the surface of the desolate planet Terserus stands what remains of a huge castle. Once, it was alive, a place for the Terserons to come together and share ideas, hopes and dreams. Now though, it is empty. It sits atop a mountain and waits for the end.

It was also empty on the day of the meeting between the two Time Lords. Deep within the citadel, in a long-abandoned chamber, the TARDIS arrived, materialising out of thin air and taking the comfortable shape of an old London police box with its usual fanfare of wheezing and groaning. One of its double doors swung open and a perky young woman stepped out and into the chamber. Emma had been traveling with the Doctor for long enough to know how to dress for all environments. Sensible shoes in case of a need to run, long sleeves to protect against the cold and a very short skirt, selected to provide a distraction in the event of murderous tyrants with an appreciation of the human female form. She was courageous, smart and charming - all the best attributes that a companion of the Doctor might need.

Behind her, the Doctor emerged from the TARDIS. Suave and impeccably dressed, the Doctor in this incarnation sported a neck-length bob-cut that made him look somewhere between Lord Byron and a singer in an early-90s band from Manchester. Emma knew every inch of that face and could tell he was worried.

'Where are we, Doctor?'

'The Planet Terserus, once home to the Terserons, the most kindly and peace-loving race I've ever encountered. And yet one of the most shunned and abhorred species of all history.'

'Why?'

'They could communicate only by precisely modulated gastric emission.' Emma realised instantly what he meant.

'Oh no. Planet of the bottom-burps? So what happened to them?'

'They discovered fire,' he said gravely.

Almost on cue, two balls of fire zapped across the room, sending Emma and the Doctor flying backwards and pinning them against a wall. Emma struggled to escape, but then noticed that the Doctor seemed completely unperturbed. In fact, was he trying not to smile?

From the darkness came the Master, cackling maniacally. The fizzing from the energy bolts highlighted the ornate gold embroidery on the huge curved collars of his otherwise jet-black ceremonial robes. In the gloom, the neat, black beard jutting from his chin gave his pale face the appearance of a skull. The Doctor was trapped and the Master had come to gloat.

'No doubt because no one has set foot on this planet for a hundred years, you thought you had escaped my traps of death. But you forget, Doctor, I too have a TARDIS. When you told me to meet you at Castle Terserus, I simply travelled back in time a hundred years and I bribed the architect. Say hello to the spikes of doom!'

Emma shrieked as the wall behind her gave way and she felt herself falling into blackness, the sound of the Master's mocking laugh echoing around her. Laughter that stopped abruptly when the Master saw to his utter dismay that the Doctor and Emma appeared to be safe and well, sitting on...

'Say hello to the sofa of reasonable comfort,' the Doctor said.

'Naturally I anticipated your journey back in time, and so I travelled slightly further back and bribed the architect first.'

'Or so you think!' the Master roared in triumph. 'Naturally I anticipated your travelling back in time, so I travelled back to an even further point. And I bribed the architect first.'

With a flourish, he pulled a small black rod from his sleeve and aimed at the sofa. The upholstery ripped open at the sides and thick, curved bars emerged to embrace Emma and the Doctor. The Master stepped backwards as a huge stone block plummeted from the ceiling and crushed the sofa and its occupants... only for a door to slide open to reveal the Doctor and his companion completely unscathed.

'Or so you would like to believe. Naturally I anticipated...' the Doctor began, but Emma was finally losing patience.

'Doctor, will you stop showing off? You've got something to tell the Master. So tell him.' The Doctor looked momentarily like a scolded child. Although that was nothing compared to the Master, who was simply dumbfounded to witness a human girl putting the Doctor in his place so effortlessly. And the way she was standing so close to him - and the way the Doctor was smiling at her, and now smiling at him - it was.... All rather unsettling.

'I recently calculated that I have saved every planet in the known universe a minimum of twenty seven times,' the Doctor began. 'But I have grown weary of all the evil in the cosmos. Of all the cruelty, all the suffering, the endless quarries... and so I've decided to retire, settle down... and get married.'

The Doctor placed his arm around Emma, who looked up at him with an expression of... love.

'... what?' the Master asked, appalled and truly disturbed. To make matters worse, the Doctor stroked his companion's face tenderly. As he continued, it was as if the Master had left the room. As if there was only the Doctor and Emma.

'Yes. Without even knowing I was looking, I have found a woman to love. A woman more fascinating than all my travels through time and space. More exciting than any escape up a ventilation shaft. More captivating than an invading army of cybernetic slugs.'

As the two lovers kissed, passionately and noisily, the Master's stomach turned. Nonono, this had to stop. Now! An idea formed in his mind. A brilliant idea that for once the Doctor would never predict. An idea that he knew could only be made real by bending the laws of time to their limits. He began to chuckle.

'Sadly, Doctor, I am unable to wish you a long and happy marriage, because the moment I am done with this nauseating conversation, I shall travel back in time once more...' he continued as he

strode purposefully across the chamber. '... I shall buy the architect an expensive dinner and suggest that he fits a lever just here!'

The Master reached out a hand as a large metal lever folded neatly away from the wall.

'... and a trapdoor leading to the vast and disgusting sewers of Terserus, exactly there!'

He pointed at the exact spot where Emma and the Doctor stood. Emma was about to move, but the Doctor's gentle, restraining hand kept her in position. The Master was building to a climax.

'Prepare for five hundred miles of fear and faeces,' he snarled. 'Goodbye forever, Mister and Mrs Doctor!'

The Master pulled the lever and grinned as the Doctor and Emma disappeared. Except... shouldn't they have been falling down, not zooming... up? Up where the frame of the trap door was also zooming up. Which meant that the Master was falling towards...

Hearing the comforting splosh from far below, the Doctor shouted down into the trap door.

'Since you're obviously going to miss dinner, I'll suggest to the architect to move the trapdoor right over there, just where you were standing.' Wrinkling his nose at the pungent stink, the Doctor took Emma by the arm. 'Come along, my dear.'

The couple headed back towards the TARDIS, but a sound stopped them in their tracks. A dripping, squelching, plopping sound. Suddenly the doors to the chamber swung open to frame a desperate sight. The Master! He was visibly older, his matted hair and beard grown out and unkempt, his ceremonial gown smeared with something unpleasant.

'How can he be here?' Emma gasped. 'He just fell in the sewers. And why's he so much older?' The Master's eyes burned with insanity and fury.

'Because it's taken me three hundred and twelve years to climb out of those sewers!'

'And naturally you found your TARDIS,' the Doctor explained for Emma's benefit, with, it had to be said, a slightly mocking tone, '...and travelled back in time to the present day, no doubt to wreak one of your terrible revenge things.'

'Yes,' the Master said, failing to recover any sense of composure. 'But this time I did not come alone.'

Emma gasped as, through the open doors of the chamber came a squad of metallic creatures. Their rounded bases were dotted with hemispheres arranged in groups of four down each panel. At the midriff were a pair of rigid appendages probing the air, while at the top, which Emma assumed was some kind of head, was a dome from which projected a lens on a metal stalk. She recognised the creatures at once.

They were Daleks.

3

The Chase

The Master wiped his mouth, instantly regretting it as he realised too late that his sleeve was covered in effluence. He attempted to stand proudly, flanked by an arc of Daleks.

'After three centuries of having gone through those sewers, only the Daleks would accompany me', he crowed.

Emma frowned. 'Is that because the Daleks don't have noses?' A Dalek with black and gold livery moved forward and prodded the Doctor with its arm.

'So, Doctor, we meet again.'

'Yes. How are things?' Emma had often noted that the Doctor was often at his most confident when surrounded by enemies.

'Observe, Doctor,' said the Master. 'I am no longer merely a Time Lord. My body has been augmented by superior Dalek technology.' He pulled back his right sleeve. Where his hand should have been, instead a Dalek arm on a segmented shaft jutted out from his elbow. On a Dalek, it looked alien and menacing; looking at the Master, Emma could only think of a sink plunger.

'So... what can you do with that then?' she asked. The Master's face fell as he struggled to find the right words.

'You don't know, do you?' Emma countered. Realising their control of the situation was eroding, another Dalek moved forward.

'Exterminate!' it shouted in its grating electronic voice.

'Exterminate! Exterminate!' the others chanted in unison. The Master held them back, his arms outstretched as he unintentionally smeared their casings with remnants of the sewer.

'Stop! No!' he cried. 'After three hundred and twelve years of climbing through the biggest and most disgusting sewers in the cosmos, the Doctor is mine! And I shall kill him with my bare hands!'

The Master lunged forward with a momentum so powerful that he was unable to stop himself as the Doctor and Emma stepped aside to reveal the trap door - through which the Master fell once more. His

agonising scream was eventually brought to a sudden end by a distant 'splosh'. The Doctor gave the Daleks a comforting smile.

'Don't worry, I believe he knows the way out.'

The doors to the chamber erupted open as an ancient, hunched figure stood dripping on the floor, his matted hair merging with his equally tangled beard, which had somehow grown into his once-proud ceremonial gown, which was now tattered and sagging with centuries of steaming excreta.

'Six hundred and twenty four... sodding years... in a sewer!' spat the Master. Seizing the distraction, the Doctor grabbed Emma by the hand. The couple skipped over the trap door, ducked as the Daleks began firing their laser guns and escaped down a corridor.

'Exterminate! Exterminate!' cried the Daleks.

'After them, you fools! Get them!' the Master urged, just as a Dalek, attempting a three-point turn, nudged him in the back. His wet feet slipped on the stone floor... and down he went, through the trap door and down, down, down towards the inevitable and unavoidable 'splosh' at the bottom.

The Dalek convoy went off in pursuit of the Doctor and Emma, barely noticing as the doors to the chamber opened meekly and a decrepit sodden mess slowly squelched its way in, his hair and beard trailing along the floor.

'Nine hundred... and thirty six years in a sewer,' he said to himself, before attempting to give chase while clutching a home-made walking frame.

The castle was a maze of corridors, all virtually identical. Grateful for her sensible shoes, Emma was just about able to keep up with the Doctor as he darted down passageways and tributaries. The screams of the Daleks (and the wheezing of the Master) grew distant as they made their way through the citadel at breakneck speed.

At last, they found themselves at a large wooden door. Emma rattled the handle but it wouldn't budge.

'Stand aside, my love,' said the Doctor. Delving into his capacious pockets, the Doctor pulled out his ever-present sonic screwdriver - a

handy tool with a seemingly endless number of applications. The Doctor held out the sonic screwdriver and it began to buzz.

Emma heard the door unlock and she gave it a hefty push - and was suddenly on the edge of a precipice. The clouds swelled above her as the wind whipped around her hair. She tried to turn around but the Doctor was blocking her way. Her foot slipped and she overbalanced, falling to her certain death...



... Her foot slipped and she overbalanced, falling to her certain death...

An End and a Beginning

There's an old game that they used to play in corporations where a staff-member would be told to close their eyes and fall backwards. Ideally, a colleague would always be positioned to catch them. A 'Trust' exercise. Emma had once worked in an office where this had been a rite of passage. You'd fold your arms across your chest, close your eyes and fall backwards. Except nobody was there to catch her and she hit the floor with a thump. And of course, as the same thing had happened to all of them during their own onboarding, this inherited ritual of cruelty had provoked the other workers to laugh hysterically, which just added to the overall humiliation.

Emma had left that job the same day, although not before she'd stolen a nice mug and some tea bags from the kitchen.

All of this came into her mind as she inspected her sensible shoes that had safely landed on the floor about a foot below the open doorway, through which the Doctor was grinning.

'Darling! You haven't twisted your ankle!' Emma pulled out her tongue cheekily and laughed. 'Is it any wonder I'm going to marry you?' he said. The Doctor carefully lowered himself from the doorway onto Emma's level and they embraced.

As their lips parted, they both felt a chill in the already cool air. They were completely surrounded by Daleks.

'Exterminate!' the Daleks shouted. With a shrug, the Doctor and Emma raised their hands in surrender...

The walk to the Dalek battle saucer had been long and tedious. The Doctor's valiant attempts to brighten the journey by pointing out significant points of architecture were curtailed by the Daleks screaming orders to be silent. Which was not that great a loss. As Emma had already discovered, all of the corridors in the castle looked identical; wall after

wall of ruddy-coloured brickwork trailing off in all directions. Eventually, they reached the Great Door and made their way into the courtyard where the Daleks had parked their saucer. Emma tiptoed gingerly to avoid stepping in a suspicious brown trail that snaked its way to the saucer entrance. Once inside the Dalek Control room, the Daleks pushed them into chairs that had been placed back to back in the centre of the room. Cables emerged from the floor and snaked across them both, tying them up.

Then the Daleks turned away to busy themselves with preparations for their plans. Emma and the Doctor sat quietly, the only sound was a low electronic heartbeat emitting from a nearby computer bank.

And in one corner of the room was a familiar London police box. The TARDIS! The Daleks - or possibly the Master - had clearly brought it aboard so that they could collectively taunt their old enemy. Between them, they must have racked up a load of defeats. It seemed that being the Doctor was a never-ending game of point-scoring. But how long could he get away with playing so many games, with so many beings who just refuse to play by the rules?

Emma turned her head to whisper over her shoulder.

'So, given that exterminating you would be the most sensible thing to do, why do they always change their minds at the last moment?'

'I'll explain later,' the Doctor muttered in return.

The Master had clearly been aboard the Dalek ship for some time. Cleaned up and rejuvenated back to his original age and appearance, he had abandoned his grand ceremonial robes in preference for a neat collarless suit jacket. A vision in elegant black.

Except for two golden hemispheres that were just about visible under his jacket, almost exactly where his nipples presumably were.

'Behold!' the Master cried. 'Once again I have been augmented by superior Dalek technology, rejuvenating my physical form and granting me more power over the cosmos!'

'And, I notice, breasts...' the Doctor said.

'They're not breasts, okay?' the Master said, more than a little defensively. 'They're Dalek bumps. They can detect ion charged emissions and operate as aetheric beam locators at a distance of up to twenty thousand light years.' Emma snorted with derision, prompting the Master to loom close to her face with a waspish leer.

'They're also extremely firm...'

Emma's face darkened. 'What are you trying to say?'

'Oh, nothing...'

'Why are the Daleks helping you?' said the Doctor, bringing the catfight to an early finish. 'What are you giving them in return?' The Master swung himself to face the Doctor.

'I have granted them secrets of the Zectronic Energy Beam!'

The Doctor was appalled. 'Oh no, you fool. With the Zectronic Energy Beam the Daleks will be able to conquer the entire universe within minutes!'

'With just a beam? How?' asked Emma.

'I'll explain later,' the Doctor replied.

A Dalek scientist interrupted by prodding the Master with its arm. 'Prepare to operate the Zectronic Beam in five Dalek minutes.' The Master held the Doctor's stare for a moment, then took a deep breath and faced the Dalek.

'I obey.' He then took his position at a console on the far side of the control room.

With a free foot, the Doctor kicked at the Dalek. 'You may conquer the universe but you'll have to share it with the Master'.

The Dalek turned its eyestalk to look directly at the Doctor. Then, quieter than usual, it said: 'The Master will be exterminated when he has served his purpose.' Then the Dalek spun on the spot and moved away.

The Doctor's mind was racing. Even though they had been bitter enemies for centuries, the Master had once been his very best friend. Besides, he could never abide a cheat. His arms were too tightly bound for him to be able to reach into his jacket pocket for the sonic screwdriver,

but he had a better plan. Leaning his head back next to Emma's, he whispered:

'Psst. If the Master knew that the Daleks were intending to kill him, he might help us.'

Emma looked over to the Master diligently working away at his console.

'But how are you going to tell him without the Daleks hearing? They'll exterminate you on the spot if you say anything. I think we've really had it this time.' The Doctor gently stroked his head against hers.

'Don't cancel our wedding yet, my darling. There's just one thing you've forgotten.'

'What?'

'Daleks don't have noses.'

A beat. Another beat. Nope, Emma thought. The Doctor really has lost it this time.

'As bright sides go, Doctor, that one needs a little work.' But the Doctor continued.

'Think, my dear! Back on Terserus, the Master and I both bribed the castle architect. I speak perfect Terseran, and so does he!'

'You mean...!' Emma suddenly grasped the point.

'Yes. I can communicate with the Master by sophisticated gastric emissions!'

Emma wrinkled her nose and leaned over to a passing Dalek.

'Could I be tied to a different chair?'

'Silence,' shouted the Dalek. A thought suddenly struck Emma.

'Why do you have chairs on a Dalek spaceship anyway?'

The Dalek paused, as if to consider this. 'We will explain later,' it concluded and continued on its way.

All of the indignities he'd suffered. The hundreds of years spent wading through those vast steamy lakes, climbing those huge squelchy mountains... after a lifetime of only dung slugs for food and the occasional company on those long, lonely nights. After all that... the

Master had finally won. The Doctor was captured and all that stood in his way to total universal domination was the...

The Master sniffed.

Danger?

He came out from behind the console and looked over at the Doctor, who nodded solemnly. His face was tight with concentration. The girl was also looking over to him, her eyes large and hopeful. The Master sniffed again.

You are facing certain doob.

Doob?

Emma could see that the Doctor was becoming flustered. 'Try not to clench,' she suggested.

The Master continued to translate the Doctor's Terseran message.

The Daleks are planning to exterminate you as soon as you heeby heeby twango rollocks...

'Sorry,' Emma whispered, embarrassed. 'That one was me.' This was all very tense. But the Dalek scientist had by now realised that something was happening.

'Cease this communication!'

Another Dalek turned from its console. The sight of the Master's startled expression was all it needed.

'You have betrayed the Daleks! Exterminate! Exterminate!'

The first of the Dalek's shots missed the Master and hit the wall. A second shot whizzed past Emma's face and hit the Master's console before it ricocheted off - and struck the Doctor in his chest. As his restraining cables snapped and fell lifelessly to the floor... so did the Doctor.

'You fools!' the Master shrieked. 'This Zectronic Beam Controller will now not only explode, it will implode. We're doomed!'

'Repair the Zectronic Beam!' the Dalek scientist ordered. The Master sagged in defeat. All his dreams of victory - gone.

'It is beyond my ability,' he sighed. 'Only the Doctor can do it.'

Emma shrugged off the now-inert cables and instinctively crouched by the Doctor's side. She looked up at the Master, pleadingly.

'Help him, he's dying!' Then she felt the Doctor weakly grasp at her hand. She could tell he was trying to speak, but no words came from his mouth. 'Yes, my darling?' Emma said, all hope draining away. The Doctor's face contorted slightly and the Master suddenly realised he was trying to speak in Terseran.

'He, er, he says I love you,' the Master translated, with some discomfort.

'And you've killed him!' Emma roared. Strangely, the Master held out a hand and helped Emma to her feet.

'I think not, my child. This is only his ninth body. He has four left. Behold, the miracle of the Time Lords!'

With one reassuring arm around Emma's shoulder, the Master gently pulled her away from the Doctor. The Daleks followed his lead and glided back respectfully.

The Doctor lay dead on the floor. Emma's eyes were full of tears, which made his face look like it was sparkling.

No - his face was sparkling!

First a low orange glow, just beneath the surface of the skin, then an eruption of fiery energy blasted from his entire body. It was so bright, Emma had to shield her eyes. Eventually, she could feel that the light show had ended and she dared to look back at the Doctor.

... who was standing before her with a rakish grin on his face. Except... it wasn't his face at all. Standing in the same spot where he'd been lying dead - standing in the exact clothes he'd been wearing - was a completely new man.



'Cute, sexy, lick-the-mirror handsome!'

5

A New Doctor...s

This was why people from all over the universe consistently listed the Time Lords as the number one most annoyingly smug beings in the history of everything ever.

You can't *kill them*!

You can't poison them. You can't irradiate them. You can't drop them from a great height or bash their head really hard. And shooting them? Pah - never works. You can't even *old-age* them. They just find a way to cheat the inevitable by replacing every single cell in their bodies, shuffling off their old self and turning into somebody completely new. It's wholly unnatural and more than a little creepy. Imagine going to brush your teeth and suddenly thinking 'hold on, this is a completely new mouth!' And bathtime is another game entirely.

Admittedly, this wasn't the only thing that made them smug, but it was definitely in the *Top One*. All that knowledge, the ability to go anywhere in time and space and all the while, they can live forever. 'Barring accidents', they say. But you see if you can come up with an accident big enough to properly do them in once and for all.

Because you can't. Don't even try. Just accept that if you're entering into a game of 'Who dies first', you'd better hope they're the nice sort who'll visit your grave and bring flowers.

Of course, if you ask one of them - actually speak to one - they'll tell you how it *feels* like death. Like how they lose their old self never to be seen again. But even that's not true - they can travel in time! They can go back and visit themselves whenever they want. They'll talk about the Time Laws and all that stuff, but really that's all guff. That only counts when it's us they can't go back to. Because when it's themselves, you can bet - they'll find a loophole.

He was taller than the Doctor - her Doctor - and leaner too. Handsome in a swaggering kind of way. Cocky, like the head of a rugby team at one of those posh schools. The man made a great show of dusting himself down before running over to inspect himself in the reflective surface on the side of one of the computer terminals.

'Result!' he crowed. 'Cute, sexy, lick-the-mirror handsome!' And to prove the point, he licked his own reflection and sighed with what sounded worryingly like sexual satisfaction. Eventually, he pulled away from admiring himself and noticed Emma as if for the first time.

'Hello, sorry about that. Just had to slip into something a bit more comfortable.' He held her glance for a second before he was gone again, looking over her shoulder at something else. Someone familiar.

'I remember you, don't I?'

The Master smirked.

'Then you still fear me, Doctor!' But the Doctor shook his head as if he were trying to get the facts properly sorted.

'You're the camp one,' he said. The Master bristled.

'I'm not... camp.'

'Oh, yeah?' said the new Doctor. 'Nice tits.'

'Bumps,' the Master groaned, but the new Doctor had already turned to face the Daleks, many more of whom had come into the control room just to see what the noise was all about. More of the post-regeneration gaps were being fixed in his mind.

'I remember you lot, of course,' he said dismissively. Then he turned back to Emma.

'And, er, you're my fiancée?' A little more certain this time.

Which was more than Emma was. She'd loved the Doctor. Her Doctor. With his puppy-dog eyes and floppy hair and that way he'd over-pronounce plosives to make her laugh. But more to the point - he'd loved her too. This guy wasn't the Doctor. She wasn't sure if he had any capacity to love anyone but himself.

'You remember me then?'

'How could I possibly forget the only time-travelling companion I've ever had?'

'You've had lots of companions,' Emma snapped. The Doctor fixed her with a caddish grin.

'The only time-travelling companion I've ever... *had*.' Emma blushed deeply.

'Oh, right.' He cradled her face in his hands. Different hands. New hands. Smooth hands. Oh his hands were so soft and warm and...

'It's still me in here, Emma,' he purred. 'These old hearts are still yours. Can you still love me in my new body?' And he took her hands and held them to his chest.

You're so fickle, Emma thought to herself. A minute ago, you thought he was the most obnoxious man you'd ever met - which was actually some feat considering the other candidates in the room. His face was leaner, longer, more... well, differently handsome. Those big hazel eyes were gone now, replaced by blue ones that were more catlike than puppy-dog. Good job she liked dogs and cats equally.

'Actually,' she smiled, 'I don't think I'll have too much of a problem with that. Back to the TARDIS?' She nodded behind him. He turned to see his beloved time-space machine nestled to one side, waiting for them.

The Daleks edged forward nervously.

'The Zectronic Beam Controller is going to explode!' said one.

'Help us, Doctor - your life will be spared!'

They could just go. The pair of them. Leave the Master and the Daleks to the fate they brought upon themselves. Run away, get married and explore the universe as Doctor and wife. And even as she thought all of this, Emma knew what the man she still loved would do. And worse, he knew that she knew. He kissed her lightly on the forehead and turned to face his joint-best enemies with a winning smile.

'What better way to end my career than saving you metal gits? Ha! Emma - pop into the TARDIS, find my best champagne and by the

time you get back, we'll be able to celebrate the start of our new life together!'

'Great! Said Emma, fishing a key from her pocket as she scampered a little too enthusiastically towards the TARDIS.

The Doctor flexed his long fingers. 'I think in this new body I'm going to be particularly good at rewiring,' he said, before disappearing behind the Zectronic Beam console.

Emma saw the flash of light about a second before she heard the bang. She turned to see a thin cloud of smoke rise from behind the console. Through the fog stepped the Doctor.

And Emma blinked. This wasn't the Doctor. Not the puppy-dog nor the preening cat.

This Doctor was still tall, like his predecessor. But... would the correct word be 'plump'? Scruffy brown hair topped a ruddy, jowly face. His eyes never looked away from the floor and the entire ensemble was distinctly unprepossessing.

'Bugger,' he said flatly.

Emma's heart sank. After what felt like an age, the *new new* Doctor turned his head slightly just to catch a glimpse of her.

'Ah. You're my ladyfriend, aren't you? Oh, dear. Seem to be a bit shy of girls now. All the problems of changing personas. So unpredictable.' He couldn't even bear to look at her. In desperation, he looked over at the Master.

'Oh dear, another girl.'

'I'm not a girl, Doctor, I've told you before. These are Dalek bumps. They can locate etheric beam emissions and... everything.' But there was no point. The Master knew he had lost again. The shy Doctor finally managed to raise his head and look properly at Emma.

'Don't worry, Emma. I still find you attractive.'

'Oh,' said Emma without much enthusiasm. '... great.'

The Doctor looked away, embarrassed. He put his hand in his pocket, then quickly pulled it out and tried in vain to shake off a piece of toffee that had become welded to his thumb. Then he put his thumb

in his mouth - and then spat out the rather fluffy toffee, which flew across the room to stick stubbornly onto the side of the Dalek scientist. Without making eye contact with anyone, but especially Emma, the Doctor swung awkwardly on one leg.

'Don't want to try again, do you?' Emma suggested and even as the words left her mouth, she couldn't be absolutely certain whether she meant try again with the Zectronic thingy or the... regeneration thingy. Because clearly neither of them were going well.

'Probably not a bad idea, actually. Shouldn't be too much of a problem. Actually, I think the problem's probably located in this area....'

The Doctor ducked down behind the console again. And this time, Emma didn't look away. Another flash, another bang, another cloud of smoke. Another Doctor... and... oh no.

This one was short. Not Emma's height but not far off - and certainly not as tall as the previous two. The next thing Emma noticed was the new new new Doctor's ears. Wow. His ears were like the handles on the FA Cup. Also, the blast had knocked him off his feet and he was hanging from a hole in the ceiling almost like a... chimp.

He loosened some cables around his legs and slowly he lowered himself to the floor. He stood up, caught sight of Emma - and immediately broke out into a nervous sweat.

'Er... oops!'

The Doctor grinned, then had to blink to avoid the sweat getting into his eyes. Seriously, this man was sweating bullets! Big fat bearings of sweat just rolling across his face like a manic pin-ball machine on a ramp.

'Get that champagne cooling, Emma. I'll be with you in just a moment.'

'Fantastic,' Emma replied coolly.

'I just need to grab these two cabl-'

... and as his sweat dripped onto the very dangerously live cables, he was engulfed in another small explosion. A flash of light, a bang - and a room once again filled with smoke.

It was a long time to hold her breath, but eventually the smoke cleared and Emma allowed herself to breathe out. Next to her, she heard the Master do the same. She had no idea if Daleks could hold their breaths too, but she'd lay evens that they did.

Leaning against the TARDIS, as casual and charming as a movie star... was the Doctor.

A seriously hot Doctor. Floppy hair like her original, but as if it had been put through a Merchant Ivory filter. Blue eyes like the second one, the gentle modesty of the third... and, so far as she could tell, absolutely no qualities whatsoever of the fourth.

This one was truly gorgeous.

'Result!' she gasped.



'Well... that seems to be that!'

6

Friends?

'Well... that seems to be that!'

The Doctor - THE Doctor - held out a hand and Emma rushed over to him. The Master raised his hands as if to applaud, but then thought better of it and hoped the Daleks hadn't noticed. As the Doctor and Emma embraced once again, Emma heard a strange fizzing noise. She knew she should probably find out what it was, but... she just needed to check this new Doctor's ability to kiss. Just for a little lifetime at least. And then she felt the Doctor push her away urgently.

There was a flash. And a bang. Multiple flashes and bangs as lasers zipped around the room before hitting the Doctor full on. He gasped, clutching his chest. An outline of electrical energy fizzed around him, before quickly fading away.

The Master was looking from one side to the other, from the Doctor to the Zectronic control console and back again.

The Daleks cautiously backed away.

And the Doctor grinned at her, such a truly beautiful smile. And then his eyes rolled back and he slumped to the ground right in front of the TARDIS. And Emma ran to him.

'Residual energy,' he gasped. 'I'm a stupid ass, I should have realised.'

None of this made any sense. His hand was trembling. He was scared.

Sure, it was shocking to keep losing Doctors, but he'd already cheated death four times in as many minutes. Emma should have been utterly terrified but she was honestly just... confused.

The black and gold Dalek moved forward.

'The Doctor has saved the Daleks,' it said in a muted electronic tone. 'His life will be spared.' The Master turned on the Dalek leader and growled.

'No... his life is already lost. That was a discharge of pure Zectronic Energy. Even a Time Lord cannot survive its terrible power.'

'But he can just change again,' Emma chimed. 'Can't you, Doctor?' But her love shook his head feebly.

'I'm sorry, my love. I've used up all my lives. I'm afraid this is... this is the end. Look after the universe for me. I've put a lot of work into it.' Emma's heart was pounding.

'But how can we look after it without you?' The Doctor smiled that beautiful smile.

'I'll explain l....'

His hand slipped from Emma's... and then he was gone. And time stopped.

The control room was full of Daleks of every rank and livery, fanned out in a respectful circle. The lights in the ceiling were dimmed. Stood under a spotlight, the Master looked crestfallen. Was that a tear?

'He was the best and bravest of all my enemies, he said. 'From this day forward I will renounce evil and follow the path of goodness to honour my fallen foe.' The Master stepped backwards into the darkness.

The Dalek leader spoke next: 'The Doctor saved the Daleks. The Daleks too will honour their mortal enemy.'

Then all eyes turned to Emma. It took all her strength to step into the light.

'He was never cruel and n-never cowardly... ' she stammered. '... it'll never be safe to be scared again.' But it was all too much. Just far too much.

She ran back to the Doctor's side.

'Doctor, listen to me... you can't die, you're too... you're too nice, too brave, too kind and far, far too silly. You're like Father Christmas...

the Wizard of Oz... Scooby Doo. And I love you very much. And we all need you, and you simply cannot die...'

As he'd done only moments earlier, the Master held out his hand and helped Emma to her feet. But this time there would be no Time Lord miracle. No second, third or fourth chance.

The Doctor was dead...

The Master was filled with guilt. Sorrow. Loss. What would be the point of being evil without a best friend to stop him going too far? What would even be the point of being 'The Master'? He'd have to change his name again. Maybe even going back to calling himself-

'Who are we going to call now?' Emma sniffed. That strong, perky young woman was utterly lost. 'I shall be alone now forever. No man could ever take his...'

Emma could see her own shadow cast across the Daleks. A shadow in a dark room? But you only get a shadow with...

The room was filled with light. The Daleks eye lenses contracted and the Master shielded himself with a gloved hand. But Emma soaked it in, her eyes welling with tears of sheer joy.

'It's impossible,' the Master cried. 'It's against all the laws of the universe!'

'Maybe even the universe can't bear to be without the Doctor,' said Emma.

The Doctor lives!

The Doctor was standing in a dark control room surrounded by the deadliest beings in the entire universe.

Plus Emma. Oh Emma, thought the Doctor. My one true love! Emma was clearly in shock. Her eyes were wide and her mouth was open. She looked almost as stunned as the Master, who admittedly did look extremely shocked.

Remembering the reflective surface that he'd used to admire himself a couple of regenerations back, the Doctor checked out his new

form. And was more than a little shocked himself. Had the Master been playing tricks while he was unconscious?

'Emma, look. I've got etheric beam locators!'

'No, Doctor,' said Emma patiently. 'I'm afraid those are actual breasts.' She sounded disappointed.

'Are you sure? I think I can see the on-switch.'

'No, Doctor, we have to face facts. You've come back to life and this time you're a woman.'

'Really?' said the Doctor. 'I've always wanted to get my hands on one of these.' But Emma sighed.

'Unfortunately, I haven't.'

The Doctor was amazed. Still got great hair. Oh and an amazing smile - sexiest yet! And was he - sorry, she imagining it, or had her suit actually tailored itself to create a cinched waist? This was definitely a result!

'Your mother's going to get a bit of a surprise at the wedding, isn't she? Do you think we'll both wear white?'

Emma shook her head. Ah well. She should have known a hot Doctor was too much for the universe to bear.

'I'm afraid, Doctor - and I'm not sure if this sentence has ever been used so completely accurately before but - you're just not the man I fell in love with.'

'Oh you humans, the Doctor scolded. 'You're so terribly narrow minded!' But then she stopped herself. Emma looked utterly dejected. The Doctor reached out and took Emma by the hand.

'I hope we can still be friends.' And Emma looked up at the woman before her. That smile really was a winner. And damn it but her hair looked amazing. The Doctor had literally just woken up and she looked... really good. Sod it. Emma smiled and rested her head on her friend's shoulder.

'Well, never mind,' the Doctor continued. 'The wedding might be off, but we can still rattle around the universe, fighting monsters and saving planets. What could be more fun? My best friend by my side, my trusty old TARDIS and, of course, my sonic screwdriver.'

She slid a hand into her jacket to reveal her favourite gadget. She switched it on and it began to vibrate.

'Ooo look, it's got three settings.'

Emma grabbed the screwdriver and threw it across the room churlishly. She noticed the Master lurking by the doorway.

'Doctor, I have to say...' he cleared his throat. '... you are rather gorgeous.' Was this flirting? The Master had no idea. He only knew that he was being truly honest for possibly the first time in centuries. The Doctor threw her head back with glee.

'I'm not bad, am I? And come to think of it, you're a great deal more attractive than I remember.'

'Why, thank you,' he said, a little colour returning to his pallid cheeks.

'Tell me, why do they call you "The Master"?' the Doctor asked. The Master gave her a lecherous grin.

'... I'll explain later.'

The Master and the Doctor walked away, arms round each other's waists, to enjoy one last sunset on the planet Terserus, leaving Emma to return to the TARDIS alone. It wasn't all bad though. Emma remembered with a smile that the Doctor had left one of his very best bottles of champagne on ice...

Epilogue

It's been a long night. Lots of comings and goings. Two human-like men trying to get the better of each other. I was afraid at first but actually it was all a bit of a laugh. The first guy arrived and said that he'd had another idea and that he'd need a sofa put behind the wall. I had to explain to him that we'd not met before - and ask what a 'soh-fah' is. As he left, he presented me with a potted plant. The most beautiful thing I've ever seen and its pollen sang to me. Such a beautiful sound.

No sooner had he disappeared then another fella turned up absolutely honking as if he'd been dragged through a sewer. It was almost as if I could hear the screams of a thousand people coming from the odorants in his hair, his clothes - everything. I don't think I've ever encountered anyone who gave off so much noise just by entering a room. Anyway, he had some other instructions and clearly thought I knew what he was on about. He pulled a painting from under his robe and stuck it on my wall, then he left, then the other man returned. And so it went on, all night. They insisted I made notes of their requirements - and each time they brought me something to brighten up my cubicle. In the end, I had to put some of the objects outside in the corridor. Oh the other funny thing was that Man #2 kept getting younger and less smelly with each visit, which was a relief in some ways because the sound of the smells was so upsetting.

It was the fact that he was getting younger that made me realise what was going on - the time travel bit. Because of course they were time travellers. Somehow, the two of them were coming backwards from some future time when my municipal building was completed, which was how they knew which additions they wanted to trick each other with. That was where they were playing their game. In the future. Or at least in a possible future where I finished a design that actually got built.

So I got to work.

And all those requisitions that had been in my in-tray slowly made sense when I started to add them to the requests from the time travellers. It was as if their stuff, coming backwards, somehow made a complete picture with the tasks I was supposed to be doing. Because if they asked for a wall with spikes on one side and a soh-fah on the other, it meant

that I had to build that wall in a specific part of the building. The trap door on that floor had to be a given number of storeys up because that's how high above the sewage works it would be in their time.

And somehow, I got it all done. The entire multi-storey municipal ziggurat designed and laid out on paper in one night. Amazing!

Just as I was about to turn off my light and go home, I heard that weird engine again. And there was the blue box. And there was another human - except he wasn't the same human as the first one. He looked totally different, with blonde hair and like a - well, like a lady. But they smelled the same. And they had the same look in their eyes. Kind. Kind and clever. And somehow I knew that this woman and the first man were the same alien. Because aliens are weird, so why not?

'Thank you for everything,' she said in *perfect* Terseran. 'You did a smashing job.'

'I should say thank *you*, Miss, I said. 'You and the other fella helped me get through all my work in record time.'

'Miss?' she said. 'Oh yes! Of course - wow, I'm going to have to get used to this.'

I had questions. So many questions. And before I even asked the first, I knew that she wouldn't be allowed to answer them. As if it was somehow forbidden. Or maybe it was just beyond her grasp of our language. So I asked just one.

'So, does my work last? This building you got me to muck about with. Is it there in the future?'

'Oh sweetie, yes! It lasts for a thousand years or more. Long after you're dead and gone.' And then something flickered behind her eyes and she looked so very sad.

'Me and... everyone else?'

She smiled and tried to look like she didn't know the answer. But she did. And so did I.

Then it was all 'must dash' and 'so nice to meet you' and 'let's keep in touch' until she and her blue box were gone and I was left alone with all those gifts the two of them had brought me.

And now, as I look around at all the stuff in my cell - properly look at it all for the first time - I realise that the plant in the pot is already a bit dry.

And the painting is of some alien who looks like them, not like a Terseran. And all the other stuff was... worthless. Utter trash, every bit.

And okay, they helped me get through my workload and clear my in-tray and probably create the most amazing building I'll ever design. But all those gifts were all about *them* and what they could get out of me. And for what? Some game that's going to be played out in the ruins of my building long after we're all gone, that's what!

In a fury, I pick up the plans for my building and slowly tear them up. Every last bit. All the floors, the traps, the walls with soh-fahs and spikes coming down from the ceiling and the big open sewer - who wants that under their building? Then I get all of the stuff they brought and chuck it down the garbage chute. It makes an amazing sound as it collides and bounces off the metal sides of the chute.

I don't know what the future will bring, but it won't be what *they* want. It won't be one where a municipal building is turned into one big game for the entertainment of time travellers. Where the traps might be in place for centuries and any one of them could accidentally spring and hurt someone. Not a time traveller, but a *real* person - a Terseran!

As far as I'm concerned, *their* future will never happen. Not on my watch. Bribing me with tatt and baubles. And a dinner with completely inedible alien food! As if I could be bought just like that.

Urgh, I think to myself. They're so... so *smug*!

The End.



Author's Note

The Target *Doctor Who* range is a magical thing. Beginning in 1973 with reprints of three adaptations, first published in the mid-1960s, the aim of the range was simply to cherry-pick some of the most notable TV adventures and repurpose them as books for children that would sit comfortably alongside similar volumes in their existing Target-branded library.

Doctor Who was hugely popular in the 1970s and ever-present thanks to the availability of these books in shops and libraries, so that even when the TV show wasn't on our screens, eager readers could still enjoy older stories. While it was likely that recent stories might still be fresh in the mind of the reader, this was before such joys as home videotapes were commonly available: if you missed an episode, that was that. So not only did Target books give us a chance to experience stories we'd missed, we could go back to them and enjoy them all over again whenever we wanted. Even more importantly, many of the TV episodes had been lost along the way, so the novels were literally the only way to find out what had happened.

By the 1980s, with fewer new stories being made each year, the Target range was expanded with the hope to novelise every story - something that would eventually be achieved by 2021, thanks to a revival of the brand by BBC Books ¹.

So we jump to the 1990s. *Doctor Who* was no longer being made on a regular basis. Indeed, there were just three individual stories that, together, amounted to less than two hours of screen time. Of these three stories, only one of them - the 1996 TV movie - is considered 'canonical'. The other two, being light-hearted sketches presented as part of charity telethons, play fast and loose with accepted lore. Only one of these charity adventures was ever released on home video. The other has never had an official release due to complicated rights issues. As of 2025, neither of these stories is available to stream or otherwise view officially.

¹ The Target range continues today with limited adaptations of cherry-picked adventures. Just like the old days.

So right at the tail end of *Doctor Who*'s official run, we have two 'missing' stories!

In 2022, to mark *Doctor Who*'s 59th birthday (!), I published a novelisation of the first of those charity skits, 'Dimensions in Time', via my blog. While the original story could be described as 'tongue in cheek', I tried to treat it like any other TV story. There were jokes of course, but I tried to imagine what a 'real' Target book might have looked like. To that end, I 'borrowed' descriptions of some of the characters from the maestro of Target, Terrance Dicks. Wholly unofficial and very much with promoting the associated charity in mind, it nevertheless helped plug a gap for those fans who want everything to join up.

The thing about 'Dimensions in Time' is that it starred actors from the original show. Our five Doctors and their assembled companions and lead villain were 'real'. So even though they were interacting with characters from *EastEnders*, it was just about possible to see the story as a continuation of the show as it had last been seen, with Sylvester McCoy and Sophie Aldred as the leads.

Which is something we can not claim for 'The Curse of Fatal Death'.

Conceived as a highlight for the BBC's 1999 *Comic Relief* appeal, 'The Curse of Fatal Death' was the brainchild of Richard Curtis, creator of *Blackadder* and long-time *Comic Relief* collaborator. To produce the segment, he approached Sue Vertue, the celebrated producer of hit shows like *Mr Bean* and *The Vicar of Dibley*. Her husband was writer Steven Moffat, whose hits included the groundbreaking children's drama *Press Gang* and the sitcom *Joking Apart*. Steven was also a massive fan of *Doctor Who*, so was pretty much a shoe-in to script this particular segment of *Comic Relief*.

The important thing to remember here is that Steven might well have been fulfilling a childhood dream in writing TV *Doctor Who*, but that was not the point; this was a comedy, produced to capture viewers so that they would see the charity appeals and donate money. As a consequence, there was no essential continuity with *Doctor Who*'s past when it came to the casting. This was 'who's famous right now and

available and willing to do it?' This wasn't a continuation of old *Doctor Who* any more than, say, the *Lenny Henry Show* sketch was in 1985.

But what if it was?

As fans, many of us love the way *Doctor Who* all joins together, even when it doesn't. Knowing that the two Peter Cushing-starring Dalek movies from the 1960s 'don't count' doesn't stop us loving them. So no, Rowan Atkinson's Ninth Doctor isn't supposed to be the same man as Christopher Eccleston's Ninth Doctor.

And yet...

In a 2024 episode of *Doctor Who*, Ncuti Gatwa's Doctor tries to persuade the eponymous bounty hunter Rogue of his innocence. Trapped in a force field, the Doctor shows Rogue all of his past faces, from William Hartnell to David Tennant (twice!). And there's the Fugitive Doctor played sporadically by Jo Martin... and just over there was.... Richard E Grant!

This is especially lovely because - and sorry, you know all this anyway, but just so you know that I know it too - Richard E Grant played The Great Intelligence in proper TV *Doctor Who* in episodes broadcast across 2012-13. In his final appearance, the Great Intelligence spread himself across the Doctor's entire timeline. So that's why he's in that montage as a Doctor in 'Rogue'.

Except... in 2003, an animated serial of *Doctor Who* starring Richard E Grant made its debut as a streamed exclusive for BBC Online. Unfortunately it launched just as news of the show's impending TV return was announced, which pushed Grant's Ninth Doctor into what we might politely call the 'Multiverse' (or Whoniverse) - which broadly speaking means 'it doesn't count'.

Which brings us back to 'The Curse of Fatal Death', in which the new 'lick-the-mirror handsome' Tenth Doctor was played by... Richard E Grant. Who still doesn't count.

Approaching an adaptation of 'The Curse of Fatal Death' in the style of a Target book requires a lot of good will. Especially because, as it's often better to apologise afterwards than ask for permission in advance, I've not actually got any legal right to do this. It's literally just filling a gap for those who care enough to see the gap in the first place. So while the epilogue gives us an excuse to say (clap!) 'Multiverse!',

everything that precedes it tries to imagine that this story is as 'real' as all the others.

If for no other reason than the original is really bloody good.

In conversation with Steven, I once suggested, only half-jokingly, that 'The Curse of Fatal Death' would be a great way to evolve *Doctor Who* and bring it back. 'It's so easy to bring it back for one night and make it a success,' he said. 'It's near impossible to bring it back night after night and succeed every time.'

Neither of us knew at the time that *Doctor Who* would indeed come back and win like never before, especially during the time Steven himself was in charge. I know it caused him literal sleepless nights and no doubt gave him genuine health issues trying to make it a success every time, but *Doctor Who* was its biggest ever international success on his watch... so what does *he* know?

In writing this adaptation, I once again tried to imagine how this might have been done as a 'real' Target book. To that end, with a few exceptions, I've stuck to the original script. If a favourite line from the TV version is missing from here, take comfort in the fact that this was probably something that Steven Moffat came up with on the day, but it wasn't necessarily what he'd been planning when he woke up that morning.

And with that in mind, I'll just draw your attention to one extra detail. In the script, there were SIX Doctors, the suggestion being that the old Doctor used up all of his lives, but renewal came in the form of the incomparable Joanna Lumley. As scripted, the Quite Handsome Doctor was followed by The Plump Doctor, then the Geeky Doctor before finally reaching the Handsome Doctor. However, when the actor cast as the Geeky Doctor failed to materialise, the two parts were combined as Jim Broadbent's Shy Doctor - and consequently Joanna Lumley's Doctor becomes the Thirteenth.

I'm still not sure if this lost Doctor is common knowledge. I've left a few clues in the description as to who this would have been, but just to say there were no hard feelings on *Doctor Who*'s side as the actor was

later cast in a prominent guest role as a scientific advisor to UNIT. So there.

Anyway, I hope you enjoyed this little sidestep and that it helps fill a gap for you. If you didn't, then don't worry - it doesn't count.

Jim Sangster, Manchester, 2025