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**TARDIS
ERUDITORUM**

An Unofficial Critical History of Doctor Who

**VOLUME 2:
PATRICK TROUGHTON**



**TARDIS Eruditorum: An Unauthorized Critical History of Doctor Who
Volume 2: Patrick Troughton**

By Philip Sandifer

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~~To Anna Wiggins, my dear friend and first fan. Since I gave you no warning I was dedicating a book to you, I imagine that you are blushing a lot while you read this.~~

[Acknowledgments](#)

[Introduction](#)

[Pop Between Realities, Home in Time for Tea 1 \(Batman, Adam Adamant Lives!, The Avengers\)](#)

[An Unknown Power \(The Power of the Daleks\)](#)

[Fry Something \(The Highlanders\)](#)

[Another Rotten, Gloomy Old Tunnel \(The Underwater Menace\)](#)

[Every Single One of Them, at Some Point in Their Lives, Will Look Back at This Man \(The Moonbase\)](#)

[Pop Between Realities, Home in Time for Tea 2: Cathy Come Home](#)

[The Scourge of This Galaxy \(The Macra Terror\)](#)

[Time Can Be Rewritten: The Roundheads \(Mark Gatiss, BBC Books, 1997\)](#)

[Smaller on the Inside \(The Faceless Ones\)](#)

[Everything You Were, Everything You Stood For \(The Evil of the Daleks\)](#)

[Pop Between Realities, Home in Time for Tea 3 \(The Summer of Love\)](#)

[What Do We Make of All These Mute Black Strongmen?](#)

[My Guru, If You Will \(The Abominable Snowmen\)](#)

[I Never Had a Life like That \(The Ice Warriors\)](#)

[Pop Between Realities, Home in Time for Tea 4 \(The Prisoner, You Only Live Twice\)](#)

[Look How Cool This Stuff Is \(The Enemy of the World\)](#)

[Help, Brigadier, Help! \(The Web of Fear\)](#)

[All Right, Fine, UNIT Dating](#)

[Time Can Be Rewritten 2: The Dark Path \(David McIntee, Virgin Books, 1997\)](#)

[When You're Living Your Life One Day After Another \(Fury from the Deep\)](#)

[That's Just Wizard \(The Wheel in Space\)](#)

[Pop Between Realities, Home in Time for Tea 5 \('68\)](#)

[Why Are Earth People So Parochial? \(The Dominators\)](#)

[We're All Stories in the End \(The Mind Robber\)](#)

[An Outrageous Amount of Running \(The Invasion\)](#)

[The Invasion Redux](#)

[A Mineral Slime \(The Krotons\)](#)

[Time Can Be Rewritten Extra 2: The Prison in Space](#)

[Pop Between Realities, Home in Time for Tea 6 \(2001: A Space Odyssey, Star Trek, Moon Landing\)](#)

[Skulking about the Galaxy in an Ancient Spaceship \(The Seeds of Death\)](#)

[Time Can Be Rewritten Extra 3 \(The Wheel of Ice\)](#)

[If We Don't Do Something Quickly \(The Space Pirates\)](#)

[What Ought Be Found?](#)

[You Were Expecting Someone Else: TV Comic](#)

[Tied to One Planet \(The War Games\)](#)

[Time Can Be Rewritten 3: World Game](#)

[Time Can Be Rewritten 4: The Two Doctors](#)

[Now My Doctor: Patrick Troughton](#)

[Errata to Volume 1: Not Always. I'm Sorry. \(The Massacre\)](#)

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More broadly, this book is a print collection of a blog of modest success. Its success comes from a fantastic community of readers whose lively discussions of my posts have motivated me through more than one day of not wanting to find another five hundred words to say about a given story. The Troughton era was where that community really started to form, and where I began to reliably get comments on every entry. I look back on many of the entries in this book with delighted fondness.

Introduction

Why hello there! It looks like you bought a copy of the second volume of TARDIS Eruditorum, which I, as the writer, thank you for, because that probably means you have given me money. (If you haven't given me money and downloaded this off the Internet, on the other hand, I'm kind of upset with you. Seriously, 80% of this book is already up for free on the web and you're stealing it? I'm an underemployed PhD in English. That was my Ramen money you pirated! On the other hand, I'm kind of pleased to be important enough to pirate. So that's cool. Oh, all right. I forgive you. Just buy the next volume, OK?)

In the event you have no idea what book you're holding, let me explain to you, generally speaking, how this book works. First of all, here's what it isn't: a standard issue guidebook to Doctor Who. Those looking for the nitty gritty facts of Doctor Who can probably get a decent sense of them by inference, but that's not what this book is for. There are no episode descriptions, cast lists, or lengthy discussions of the behind the scenes workings of the show. There are dozens of books that already do that, and a fair number of online sites. Nor is this a book of reviews. For those who want those things I personally recommend the Doctor Who Reference Guide, Doctor Who Ratings Guide, and A Brief History of Time (Travel) – three superlative websites that were consulted for basically every one of these essays.

What this book *is* is an attempt to tell the story of Doctor Who. Not the story of how it was made or the overall narrative of the Doctor's life, or anything like that, but the story of the idea that Doctor Who, in this book from Patrick Troughton's arrival in 1966 to his departure in 1969, but there's more to come. Doctor Who is a rarity in the world – an extremely long-running serialized narrative. Even rarer, it's an extremely long-running serialized narrative that is not in a niche like soap operas or superhero comics – both provinces almost exclusively of die-hard fans. Doctor Who certainly has its die-hard fans (or, as I like to think of you, my target audience), but notably, it's also been, for much of its existence, absolutely mainstream family entertainment for an entire country.

What this means is that the story of Doctor Who is, in one sense, the story of the world from 1966 on. Politics, music, technological and social development, and all manner of other things have crossed paths with Doctor Who over the nearly fifty years of its existence, and by using Doctor Who as a focus, one can tell a story with far wider implications.

The approach I use to do this is one that I've, rather pompously I suppose, dubbed psychochronography. It draws its name from the concept of psychogeography – an artistic movement created by Guy Debord in 1955 and described as “the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals.” More contemporarily, the term is associated with writers like Iain Sinclair, who writes books describing lengthy walking tours of London that fuse his experience with the history of the places he walks, weaving them into a narrative that tries to tell the entire story of a place, and Alan Moore, who does the same thing while worshiping a snake.

Psychochronography, then, attempts the same feat by walking through time. Where walking through space involves little more than picking a direction and moving your feet rhythmically, walking through time without the aid of a TARDIS is a dodgier proposition. The easiest way is to take a specific object and trace its development through time, looking, as the psychogeographers do, at history, lived experience, and the odd connections that spring up.

And so this book is part of a walk through Doctor Who. The essays within it wear a lot of hats, and switch them rapidly. All involve a measure of critical reading (in the literary theory sense, not in the complaining sense) of Doctor Who stories to figure out what they are about. This generally means trying to peel back the onion skins of fan history that cloud a story with things “everybody knows

But it also involves looking at the legacy of stories, which often means looking at that onion skin and trying to explain how it got there. No effort is made to disguise the fact that the first appearance of the Time Lords is massive for instance, but on the other hand, the book still looks carefully at what the initial impact might have been.

This approach also means looking at how a story would (and could) have been understood by a savvy viewer of the time, and at how the story can be read as responding to the concerns of its time. That means that the essays tend to be long on cultural context. And, in the end, it also means looking at how I personally interact with these stories. This book has no pretense of objectivity. It is about my walking tour of Doctor Who. I try to be accurate, but I also try to be me.

To fully grab the scope of the topic, in addition to the meat of the book – entries covering all of the Doctor Who stories produced with Patrick Troughton as the lead actor – there are four other types of entries. The first are the “Time Can Be Rewritten” entries. One peculiar feature of Doctor Who is that its past is continually revisited. The bulk of these came in the form of novels written in the 90s and early 00s, but there are other examples. At the time of writing, for instance, Big Finish puts out new stories every year featuring the first eight Doctors. These entries cover occasional highlights from these revisitations, using them as clues to how these earlier eras are widely understood.

The second are the “Pop Between Realities, Home in Time for Tea” entries, which look at popular media and culture to build context for understanding Doctor Who. These entries usually crop up prior to the bits of Doctor Who they’re most relevant for, and provide background and points of comparison for the show as it wrestles with the issues of its many times.

Third, there are the “You Were Expecting Someone Else” entries, which deal with spinoff material produced concurrently with Doctor Who but that, inevitably, has some significant differences from the approach of the televised material. These exist to give a broader sense of Doctor Who as a cultural object and, perhaps more importantly, because they’re kind of fun.

Finally, there are some essays just thrown into the book version as bonuses. These mostly consist of me slogging my way through some established fan debate about Doctor Who and trying, no doubt fruitlessly, to provide the last word on the matter.

It’s probably clear by this point that all of these entries began as blog entries on my blog, also called TARDIS Eruditorum. This book version, however, revises and expands every entry, as well as adding several new ones – mostly Time Can Be Rewritten entries, but a few others.

To this end, I should thank the many readers of the blog for their gratifying and edifying comments, which have kept the project going through more than one frustrating stretch. I should also thank the giants upon whose shoulders I stand when analyzing Doctor Who – most obviously Paul Cornell, Martin Day, and Keith Topping for The Discontinuity Guide, David J. Howe, Mark Stammers, and Steven James Walker for the Doctor handbooks, Toby Hadoke and Rob Shearman for Running Through Corridors, and Lawrence Miles and Tat Wood for the sublimely brilliant About Time series, to which this book is a proud footnote. I’d also like to thank my tireless editor, Milica Hadziomerovic, who made this book better.

A final note – although I have expanded and revised the essays in this book from their original online versions, I have not attempted to smooth out the developing style of the entries. Much like the show it follows, this project has evolved and grown since its beginning, and I did not wish to alter that.

But most of all and most importantly, thank you, all of you. But most of all, thank you, dear readers. I hope you enjoy.

I feel obliged, first of all, to apologize for the somewhat odd way of starting a book on Patrick Troughton. In the original blog version I ran this between the entries on The Tenth Planet and The Power of the Daleks and, being a blog, it made total sense. But in splitting the blog into books we're left with the somewhat odd approach of starting a book about Patrick Troughton's tenure on Doctor Who with a discussion of Adam West.

Though the pairing of Patrick Troughton and Adam West is not unique to this blog. Sometimes occasionally cultural history throws up a juxtaposition that is so brain-breakingly weird that it perfectly encapsulates an entire moment of history. For instance, nothing has ever clarified the nature and tone of Japanese narrative structures for me quite like knowing that My Neighbor Totoro and Grave of the Fireflies were originally released as a double feature. (In the blog I noted that I wasn't sure which one was screened first. Apparently it was the theatre's choice. So now you know.)

I mention this because if you want to understand 1966 in Great Britain, it is possible that no fact is more immediately relevant than the fact that on Saturdays in 1966, at around 5:15 PM, the latter episodes of Season Three of Doctor Who were airing opposite imports of the 1966 Adam West Batman series. (If this does not sufficiently unsettle you, I highly recommend firing up, say, Part Four of The Celestial Toymaker or a random bit of The Ark and watching it back to back with a Season One episode of Batman.) What is unsettling about this is that, with only three channels in existence at the time, ITV viewed Batman as the natural competitor to Doctor Who in that media environment. Because other than being adventure stories there's not a lot of obvious similarities. And even that's a fairly new similarity. Up to this point, one of the major characteristics of Doctor Who has been the essential joke of the TARDIS crew being the completely wrong people for this sort of story. In its original form, this is clearest—two schoolteachers, a teenager, and an old Victorian inventor walk into an alien planet. But notably, that motley wasn't put together to appeal to a single "young boys" demographic of the sort normally associated with sci-fi adventure stories. This stock character arrangement belongs to an older view of science fiction as a serious genre with a broad audience, opposed to as a subset of adolescent action serials. It's really not until the third season, in which the dual roles of Barbara and the young female companion were collapsed into one role, that the show went from being about a bunch of people in terrifying circumstances to being about the adventures of a bunch of boys and their girl sidekick.

Even through Season Three and the start of Season Four there was still the Doctor, who was by and large the antithesis of a proper action hero. The whole concept still hinged on the incongruity of the old Victorian inventor and these harshly modern (and increasingly postmodern) settings. As far as the rest of the crew goes, there's nothing too unusual about Ben and Polly as action heroes. Unlike Ian (essentially a middle aged ex-soldier) and Barbara (the charmingly mumsy type) they are attractive young people of the sort who seem to belong in an action serial. But the heart of the show—the main character—was still a conscious and deliberate contrast with what the show had him face. He was a cantankerous old man, not a fun action hero.

In terms of everything we talked about in the first volume of the series, this was a huge contrast with Batman. Every element of Batman was keyed towards the goal of frenetic and over the top action. Whereas thus far in Doctor Who, the goal has been to explicitly contrast its action/adventure elements with the fact that the protagonist is completely the wrong character for this sort of thing.

It's important to highlight this, because it's the one thing that really separates Doctor Who from all the other action/adventure shows going on at the time. Doctor Who is about the gulf between its concepts and the juxtapositions created by them. Compare that to Batman. Even in the mo

sympathetic readings of Batman, where we accept that everyone involved understood that the show was ridiculous, it's hard to be that sympathetic to the show. To grab a random example from the series, there is a plotline in which the Joker uses a van equipped with mirrors on the outside (which can cause it to appear invisible) to kidnap the Maharajah of Nimpah who is actually just the Joker as part of a larger scheme to humiliate Batman into endorsing a ransom check ...

Yes, plotlines of this sort are completely mental and over the top. And this is something we're going to see a lot of in Doctor Who when, for instance, we get mad scientists trying to drain the ocean with a robotic Yeti in the London Underground, or, to start on the other end of the series, the Doctor and Richard Nixon teaming up to fight the Greys. But in Batman, the knowing nods about how ridiculous it all is are all there is. The central idea of Batman—really its only idea—is to dance around the screen shouting, “Look at me, I’m absolutely ridiculous!” There’s something painfully sterile about the entire affair. Whereas the central idea of Doctor Who has always been to put the ridiculous and the everyday on the same screen and have them both steadfastly refuse to acknowledge that the other doesn’t belong.

All the same, it’s hard to get around the sense that Batman just looks cooler. Some of that is a matter of presentation—nowadays we view Batman in color, but in 1966 on ITV, it would have been transmitted in the same fuzzy black-and-white as Doctor Who. But for all its facileness, Batman is trying to have more fun than Doctor Who is. There’s a giddy joy to it that Doctor Who’s comparative seriousness has never matched. Even when Doctor Who is in its comic mode (as in The Romans) it doesn’t have the sort of infectious mania displayed by Batman.

One might be tempted to use this as an argument for why Doctor Who made for better action-adventure television than Batman. But it’s not as though manic fun is in some way hostile to action-adventure television. For proof of that, even ignoring Doctor Who’s own future, we can pop over to Adam Adamant Lives!, aka “Oh Hey, It’s That Verity Lambert Gal Again.” Which is to say that while Adam Adamant Lives! is notable for a couple of things, including being the source of Adam Ant’s name and the most obvious inspiration for Austin Powers ever, one of the things it is most notable for is being the project Verity Lambert and Sydney Newman turned their attention to after Doctor Who (The show also had Donald Cotton, whom you may remember from one or two past Doctor Who stories.)

Adam Adamant Lives! differed from Batman in several key ways, in that it was British, intelligent, and largely a flop. This is in many ways a pity, as it’s actually quite good. Its premise is that a classic Victorian adventurer (Gerald Harper) (originally to have been Sexton Blake before everyone forgot about that pesky copyright thing) is frozen and thawed out in 1966 in a plotline that was in no way stolen from Marvel Comics’ The Avengers. (Look, they respected copyright on Sexton Blake, surely you don’t expect them to have original ideas twice in a row.) In other words, he gets the obligatory “swinging ’60s blonde” female sidekick, and, much as you’d expect, they fight crime.

The show is imperfect, to say the least, suffering somewhat badly from its inability to reconcile the ambitions of its premise with its underlying mandate to provide a generic adventure serial. Harper, its leading actor, did an odd job with the part. Not necessarily a bad job, but he played the part with an impassioned straight-lacedness that was markedly (and willfully) out of place in the larger series. The result on the one hand captures the man-out-of-time feeling perfectly, and on the other hand is at times stultifyingly dull. When, on occasion, he gets a scene with someone who can play off of his demeanor (the episode I watched opened with a lovely scene with an actor named Patrick Troughton who actually looks a bit like that horrid man who stole the Doctor’s face at the end of The Tenth Planet) this works. More often, it either makes the show feel wooden or makes it look like everyone was scrambling around desperately to find a show that could actually match up with Harper’s acting. (

the end, Sydney Newman ordered Harper to change how he played the part. Harper refused, and Newman cancelled the show.)

On the other hand, when he was on his game, Harper provided a genuinely magnetic leading man performance, often holding the entire show together with little more than charisma and some eye-boggling. (Eye boggling turns out to be a fairly fundamental job skill in the world of action-adventure television. See also Tom Baker under Graham Williams.) This gets at one of the key features of the genre which is preserved to the present day in shows like Bones, House, or Castle—charismatic funny leads. This is another area where Batman ultimately falls flat. Short of the endless entertaining drinking game of seeing how many times Burt Ward delivers a line in a tone that would not need to be altered at all—if he were seething with rage and plotting Adam West's demise—Robin is generally played totally flat. Because he is seemingly unaware of the absurdity of his world, the audience has no foothold from which to laugh with the show. (Adam West is better at this, but he generally prefers to play the joke with a complete straightness that is endearing in a sort of Brechtian sense if, nevertheless, questionable.)

Again, comparing to Adam Adamant Lives! is instructive. One thing Harper was unquestionably brilliant at in the show was using the wry smiles of his dandy character to provide an extra-diegetic meta-commentary on the absurdity of the situation. Or, to strip that of literary theory, Harper gives wry smiles that are on one level indicative of something Adam Adamant is actually doing in the story, and on another level commentaries on the story from Harper as an actor (which takes them from diegetic to extra-diegetic—that is, they go beyond merely being diegetic). The impact of this is massive—with one simple piece of gestural acting, Harper adds reams of intelligence to the show because we are suddenly left to constantly navigate the differing narrative levels and genres of the story instead of just getting to take them for granted à la Batman.

But for all of Harper's charisma, Adam Adamant Lives! fails to hold a candle in the pure charm department to its most obvious influence, Sydney Newman's hit creation for ITV before he headed over to the BBC and made Doctor Who, The Avengers. I could have put an entry on The Avengers any point in TARDIS Eruditorum, as it predates the show by nearly three years, but the fact of the matter is, when people talk about The Avengers, most of the time they're talking about Seasons Four and Five, and most specifically Season Five, which was produced in color and was the version that was actually a hit on US television as well. Series Four and Five, you see, are the Emma Peel years.

It may be necessary to define some key concepts here for those who are not intimately acquainted with the particulars of classic British television of the 1960s. Specifically, and it really is very important that you understand this, Emma Peel is quite literally the sexiest character ever to be put on a television screen. She is the physical embodiment of the ruthlessly classy sex symbol. Indeed, it is a little known fact that when homosexuality was finally legalized in Great Britain, the compromise was that it was legal to be gay just as long as you made an exception for Emma Peel. (Given that Emma Peel gives Lady Gaga a run for her money in the "obviously designed to be a gay icon" sweepstakes, this was not generally taken as an arduous requirement.)

If, for some reason, you are a horribly deluded person that does not recognize the transcendent eroticism of the character the moment you see Diana Rigg in character, well, shame on you. But even that doesn't matter, because it is transparently clear watching The Avengers that the show is absolutely convinced of the character's sexiness, and that this truth is held to be more fundamental than piddly details of the universe (such as gravity). Lest you think that I might be overselling the case slightly, I highly recommend sitting down with an episode of The Avengers. Because the debt that every other show with a charming double act as its lead characters owes to The Avengers cannot possibly be overstated.

As a premise, The Avengers is possibly the flabbiest thing we have yet talked about on the blog. I premise, and I hope you're hanging on tight, is that there's a guy named John Steed, who wears a bowler hat and is very dapper, and he teams up with a woman named Emma Peel, who wears sexy '60s fashions. And they fight crime. That's basically the whole of it. The show is the high-water mark of the subgenre known as spy-fi, in which light espionage and science fiction plotlines are melded to create episodes in which Steed and Peel defend an unending litany of civil servants from various outlandish and poorly explained technological menaces.

That, at least, describes the plot. Watch the opening credits, however, and you'll get a much clearer sense of what the show is about, namely the chemistry between Steed and Peel. Everything else is, at times explicitly, the frame upon which lightly flirtatious banter between a dapper Victorian and a sexy mod is hung. (Watching The Avengers for the plot requires a catastrophic lack of active brain cells.) However the show remains delightful because the fact of the matter is, Steed and Peel are absolutely brilliant to watch together. (A particular highlight is the episode "Who's Who," in which they get body-swapped with some thoroughly uninteresting Eastern European agents. The scenes of Patricia Hanes and Freddie Jones trying to emulate the chemistry of Diana Rigg and Patrick Macnee are frankly excruciating, but on the other hand, the scenes where Rigg and Macnee get to let loose and beat up villains who make out with each other frequently are every bit as wonderful as you would hope. In practice, the entire episode exists to put those scenes in, and everything else is just tiresome plot.)

So why go over all of this, particularly instead of talking about the ostensible topic of the book? Because in practice, one of the things that the Hartnell-Troughton transition was about was getting rid of Hartnell, who never played the part with magnetic charisma (and who by this point was having enough trouble getting through his lines, little yet infusing them with charm) and replacing him with a more charismatic actor. This coincided, admittedly, with a shift towards more straightforward adventure yarns, which we'll talk about as we go. Because, yes—Doctor Who starts being more about monsters, more about action, and more about flashy visual set pieces à la Batman. (Though honestly, given that nothing in all three seasons of Batman save for Cesar Romano's painted-white mustache comes anywhere close to the barmy spectacle of The Web Planet, the degree to which this marks an actual shift in the show is ambiguous.)

All the same, there's a clear attempt to make the Doctor more likable with Troughton. This does not involve going all the way towards the charismatic double act—it's not until the Jon Pertwee/Kate Manning team arrives in 1971 that Doctor Who goes for the full-on Steed/Peel dynamic. Troughton's Doctor instead represents a strange midpoint, combining the overt charisma of the leading men of other action-adventure shows of the time with the unsettling otherness that permeated the Hartnell era. But on the other hand, the shift towards trying to compete directly with Batman (which was seen as one of the main reasons for the show's rapidly declining ratings) is clearly a motivating factor in the development of Troughton's character and an almost necessary starting point for any discussion of the show in this era.

An Unknown Power (The Power of the Daleks)

It's November 5, 1966. The Four Tops are at number one with "Reach Out I'll Be There." In two weeks, The Beach Boys will take it with "Good Vibrations," and two weeks later it'll be Tom Jones with "Green Green Grass of Home." Lower in the charts are Herman's Hermits, The Troggs, and Bobby Darin.

Meanwhile, in the news, the Rhodesia situation goes worse and worse as thirty-eight African countries issue a demand that the UK use force in resolving it. John Lennon meets Yoko Ono and along with the rest of his bandmates, begins recording Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band (given that the Troughton era coincides sharply with the psychedelic/Summer of Love culture that this album is emblematic of, this coincidence of their beginnings is deeply apropos). Barbados declares independence from the UK, Ronald Reagan is elected governor of California, and the Binh Hoa Massacre is perpetuated in the rapidly heating up Vietnam War by South Korea, which is, of course, on the same side as the US. Four hundred and thirty unarmed civilians, mostly women, children, and the elderly, are killed.

While on television ...

Sometimes Doctor Who is magical. I mean this on several levels, but one of them—and a significant one—is that the show is a clear formative influence on the sci-fi/fantasy culture that will eventually produce writers like Neil Gaiman, Grant Morrison, and, most important for the general philosophical leanings of this project, Alan Moore. As with most of the future, we'll get there in time. For now, the only thing you really need to know is that it's hardly unusual for the show to have something of a spiritual dimension. It reared its head in The Tenth Planet, and, as we'll see throughout this volume, it's particularly likely to show up whenever the name David Whitaker is attached to the program.

I mention this because, as The Power of the Daleks spins up, it's essential to understanding the only thing that's on anybody's mind—what the heck just happened to the Doctor. Again, this is something that's easy to forget in hindsight; the show has had eight post-regeneration stories in total. We know how these work. But The Power of the Daleks isn't written for us. It's written for an audience that has never seen the Doctor regenerate—an audience that has no idea what's going on. And it establishes all of this for the first time. There are no precedents and no basic format for this. It isn't "a regeneration story,"; it's the regeneration story—the first story about what happens when the Doctor changes who he is. Every other story about this topic—arguably everything about the series from now on—is a reaction to this complete re-conceptualization of the show's central character.

Which makes it infuriating that it's so hard to pin down what happens during this transition. The deliberately minimalist exposition of this story and the absence of The Tenth Planet Part Four (which begins the second-longest stretch of missing episodes in the series) conspire to make this a maddening thing to piece together. To be perfectly honest, anyone for whom The Power of the Daleks Part One is not the episode they'd most like to see recovered is a damn fool. So in the absence of the episode we have to go to the behind the scenes and look at what the people making this thought was going on. For me, the choice quote from Gerry Davis and Innes Lloyd's notes on what they call a "metaphysical change" is this: "It is as if he has had the LSD drug and instead of experiencing the kicks, he has the hell and dank horror which can be its effect."

What does this mean? I probably should have tossed Timothy Leary in back when we did our roundup of 1966 counterculture in Volume One, but suffice it to say that talking about LSD and metaphysical changes ties right in with the existing discussions of spiritual journeys that we've already had. But what, specifically, does the reference LSD evoke (given that it is far from the only

psychedelic substance)? Well, let's crack open our Timothy Leary—specifically The Psychedelic Experience—and look at his incantations to be used in case of massive acid trip:

That which is called ego-death is coming to you. Remember: this is now the hour of death and rebirth; take advantage of this temporary death to obtain the perfect state—Enlightenment.

So that's kind of familiar.

The other thing we need to take notice of is that this is a David Whitaker story, albeit one with Dennis Spooner doing an uncredited rewrite. Here I'm mostly just summarizing Wood and Miles' About Time (primarily Wood in this case, it seems), but it's worth noting. Wood and Miles make an extended argument that Whitaker's writing has a ton of themes from alchemy and classic occultic sources. They demure on the extent of Whitaker's knowledge of these themes, but make a compelling case that they're there. I'll go a bit further—Whitaker said in interviews that “the lure of alchemy was one of his favorite themes. So reading a sense of metaphysical weight and import into a David Whitaker story is hardly a massive leap. It's been a theme lurking about in his stories throughout Volume One, but in the Troughton era it becomes impossible to look at Whitaker's work, particularly in his two Dalek stories, without that lens playing in.

To recap, in this story we have the Doctor engaging in some sort of metaphysical change brought about by exposure to the rampaging energy of Mondas, which we recognize as a dark mirror of Earth and thus a daemonic power, though not necessarily one that does not lead to enlightenment (Remember, the Cybermen themselves took a spiritual journey—they just became horrifying monsters as a result of it. But this is the big theme of Grant's Work, and even to a lesser extent Leary's—the unenlightened are not qualified to judge the enlightened. The Cybermen are horrifying because they are enlightened and we are not.) The tension is simple to start—who is this man who replaced the Doctor? Is he still the Doctor? Is he still a good guy? Or has he been corrupted by Mondas? (And more distantly, but still utterly present given the opening credits, what are the Daleks doing amidst all of this?)

In practical terms, however, coming right off of a story about existential body horror and daemon shadows of humanity, we get Ben and Polly bickering. It's worth noting that we've seen Ben and Polly enough now to know how this works. When Ben and Polly disagree, Polly is right and Ben is wrong. In particular, think back to The Smugglers, where Ben systematically rubbishes every single premise of the series for comedic purposes while Polly provides the more moderate and credulous perspective. It's a subtle thing, but the fact that Polly believes this strange man to be the Doctor and Ben doesn't is actually a major reassurance that, in fact, he is. The show is still going to have to prove it to us, but we know, from the outset, where this is going.

On the other hand, the road to that proof is, to say the least, a bit rocky. The Doctor awakens from his change screaming, and seems exhausted and relieved to see that it's over. But noticeably, the first thing we see from this new Doctor is weakness—he screams, gurns, flails about, and when he finally laughs, saying that it's over, there is something deeply unsettling about it. It is not a happy laugh but a crazed one. The sense is that the Doctor is shrunken—diminished. (One thing that is not remarked upon nearly enough in reading the regeneration sequence is that Troughton's outfit was intended as a “degraded” version of Hartnell's. The character quite literally looks as though he has fallen apart.)

On the other hand, we do quickly get a reassurance that this is the Doctor. Ben accepts before long that this is the Doctor changed—though he wonders what's changed besides his face—and when Troughton looks in a mirror we see a last flash of Hartnell looking back at him. But this is contrasted with Troughton referring to the Doctor in the third person, and mercurially flitting about before starting to play his recorder madly and obsessively. The episode veers constantly between reassuring the audience that they are in the same show and alarming them with the degree to which the rules have been thrown out of the window.

So what we are left with when the Doctor sallies forth from the TARDIS towards the promised Daleks? Surprisingly little that is sensible. There is someone that might be the Doctor. But he acts wrongly, and seems shrunken and ill-suited to the task. And once he gets to the main action on the Vulcan colony, things get worse—he continues to sulk and play the recorder instead of answering fairly straightforward questions about what happened to him and what’s going on. This isn’t just a refusal to step into the proper role of the Doctor as investigator; it’s a refusal to play with the audience. The Doctor’s questions are supposed to be what advances the plot, and Troughton’s Doctor flatly refuses to ask them, actively stalling the plot.

Further, when the Doctor finds the Dalek ship, he seems positively giddy, singing “extermination” in an almost taunting voice and actively soliciting the colony to open it despite the fact that he knows full well what’s inside. All of this is unsettling. We’ve been given enough assurance that this man is now the Doctor. But by establishing that, the story brings something bigger into doubt. We know this is the Doctor. What we don’t know anymore is who the Doctor is. And we certainly don’t know if he’s up to the task in front of him.

And in the second episode, at least, he isn’t. He seems out of his depth, scared by one or two Daleks when he’s previously faced armies of them. He keeps implying that Hartnell’s Doctor is the real Doctor, and that he is just a poor impostor. Until finally we get what is, frankly, the key scene of the entire six-parter. The Doctor and Lesterton face off, and Lesterton unveils the Daleks. One glides past the Doctor and turns to look at him, clearly recognizing him and acknowledging who he is. This moment, finally, nearly two episodes into Troughton’s tenure, is the firmest assurance we have that the Doctor is the Doctor, and that he is a hero. He must be: the Daleks fear him. It’s a single visual moment that packs everything that the later “Oncoming Storm” image reaches for, and while “the Oncoming Storm” may be a better catchphrase, Whitaker’s image surpasses it in raw and chilling power.

And then the Daleks win. They get everybody on the colony to turn against the Doctor, shouting him down with their repeated cries of “I AM YOUR SERVANT” as he insists, louder and more pointlessly, that they are evil terrors. And this sets up what The Power of the Daleks is actually about. The Doctor, having confronted the ultimate cosmic darkness in Mondas and having engaged in a terrifying metaphysical battle with it, has to rebuild who he is in light of that revelation. He has to make his return to Earth and turn his enlightenment into a material being. And he has to do it in time to stop the Daleks, threats that can call into question the very nature of who he is and how heroic he is.

To be clear, this is not a narrative collapse story. This is something altogether stranger—a story in which the narrative has already collapsed by the time the Doctor enters it. The moment at which the Dalek recognizes the Doctor is also the point where it’s already far too late for the Doctor to stop the Daleks. The Doctor has been reduced to nothing and has to rebuild his entire character, and the Daleks, the usual engines of narrative collapse, have already taken over the story. This isn’t about the Doctor trying to maintain the integrity of what a Doctor Who story is against an onslaught of Daleks. It’s a story about the Doctor trying to create a Doctor Who story in a story where the Daleks have already won.

And so it’s striking that in the third episode all of the uncertainty over whether Troughton is the Doctor is gone. Instead, the uncertainty is whether he’s good enough at being the Doctor. And what we see over the next few episodes is a magnificent slow burn. Rather than continuing to heap on dramatic moments like the “I AM YOUR SERVANT” confrontation, Whitaker, with astonishing confidence, trusts that the cliffhanger in the second episode worked as intended and that its impact means that he can spend the next two weeks ratcheting up the tension with agonizing and meticulous slowness. The Daleks get closer and closer to the point where they are completely in charge while the Doctor continues to fail to get a toehold into the plot. This could be taken as a disappointment—certainly, rereading that paragraph, it sounds like I’m saying the story delays for three episodes. It doesn’t.

can't say that enough—this is grippingly plotted, and it is absolutely worth it to track down reconstruction. This is, simply put, the best Doctor Who story we've seen yet and one of the absolute high points of the series. The slow burn here is a beautiful and unceasing building of tension.

Until finally, in the fifth episode, it boils over magnificently. The fourth episode ends with the revelation of a massive assembly line of Daleks. One thing, in fact, that this story does extremely well is make the Daleks scary again. After their massive universe-threatening antics in The Daleks' Master Plan, Whitaker makes them an intimate threat and takes care to repeatedly stress the contrast between their robotic exterior and their fleshy interior, playing up the essential strangeness of the concept to make the Daleks seem unusual. This is brilliant work on Whitaker's part, and gives the Daleks a new lease on life—previously they had to be in bigger and bigger adventures to satisfy us. Now, having expanded them so far, Whitaker puts them in a story that is almost too small for them so that they can occupy an outsized and terrifying place in the narrative.

Following this sudden revelation that there are a vast number of Daleks in the story (as opposed to the three we'd seen to date) we also get Lesterton—previously the Daleks' stooge—having a complete nervous breakdown at the horror of what he's done. And it's like nothing we've ever seen, it's clearly an extended scene of mental agony. Lesterton rants, eventually declaring that humanity is doomed and the Daleks are now the supreme species. And again, what Whitaker is doing here is taking where the Daleks were in The Daleks' Master Plan and tweaking it—re-using battle-tested Dalek tricks and simply streamlining them. This is the exact same scene we have encountered when Mavic Chen went from top dog to extermination fodder at the end of that story. It's just done far better now because there's a second source of tension; if only Lesterton could pull himself together, he might save the day. But, of course, he can't pull himself together. And now there is an army of Daleks. The Doctor has failed. The Daleks have won.

There's a side point to make here about the fact that there are two revolutions going on in this episode. Firstly, the Daleks are trying to overthrow humanity. Secondly, a bunch of rebels attempt to use the Daleks to overthrow the colonial government. There's an intimate link between these two phenomena—one that is highlighted when a Dalek asks, in all seriousness, why humans kill humans. This is another brilliant touch—this line challenges the notion that humans are morally superior to Daleks because it is asked from one Dalek to another instead of to the Doctor or Lesterton. The Daleks, here, come to represent the same horrific darkness that Mondas does—a complete challenge to the very nature of humanity (a theme reinforced by Lesterton's mad rant). The same one that destroyed the Doctor. (Ironically, then, it's this story that actually establishes that the Cybermen are on the same level of villainy as the Daleks.) Seeing as the Daleks are running rampant and slaughtering everybody by this point, Ben and Polly believe it might be best to run for their lives. There appears to be no hope. Even the main characters have given up. And only here, after it's gotten apocalyptically bad, does the Doctor step up and intervene. What is most striking is how he intervenes. Throughout this story we see the great difference between Troughton and Hartnell. Troughton has the magnetic charisma of a leading man in the John Steed tradition—he's charming, witty, and energetic. So when he finally gets to work on the task, there's an electricity to it—especially given that the previous three episodes are all about him failing to get a toehold into the plot and being relegated to the sidelines to sulk on his recorder.

What he does, however, is far darker and more chilling than anything normally associated with the fun and charismatic leading man. First he sacrifices a ton of guards in order to distract the Daleks, seemingly unworried about the ethics of sending Bragens guards to certain death. The Doctor is going to play this his way, and woe befall those who get in the way. The Daleks declare that the law of the Daleks is in force—a fact terribly demonstrated when the Daleks, after Lesterton begs for them to spare him by saying that he gave them life, simply respond “Yes. You gave us life,” and then shoot

him dead.

In response, the Doctor demonstrates his own law. Except that this law is calamitous: the Daleks are destroyed in explosions of horrific viscera. And the Doctor is knocked out for it, coming to and reacting with glee when he's told the extent of the destruction he wrought. ("Did I do all of that?" he asks energetically as he finds out the extent of what's been done.) And then, when confronted by the colonists with how much damage he did, the Doctor laughs it off and sneaks away. And, more troublingly, when Ben asks him if he had a plan all along he returns to sulkily tooting on his recorder.

And so, even if this episode ends with Ben, Polly, and the audience putting their trust in the new Doctor, this trust is granted warily. The Doctor is dangerous in a way he wasn't before; Hartnell was an alien simply because he was a temperamental old man. Troughton, on the other hand, is scary because he is a force of pure chaos willing to bring the world down around people's ears. Even if we've been reassured of our initial concern—that the Doctor has somehow become possessed by Mondas—now we have a whole new one. This impish, chaotic Doctor, while he is clearly capable of stopping armies of monsters, might take the rest of us down with him. And while this was always a part of the Doctor and his identity—the anarchic spirit and slight revelry in chaos—those aspects of him now seem wholly unchecked. The fear at this point is not that this isn't the Doctor. It's that maybe we never really knew who the Doctor was.

Fry Something (The Highlanders)

It's December 16, 1966, and time for us to ring in 1967. Almost everything you need to know about music in 1966 can be explained by the fact that Tom Jones is at number one with "The Green Green Grass of Home," while The Kinks are at number seven with "Dead End Street," a song about inescapable economic despair with a chorus of "We are strictly second class / We don't understand why we should be on dead end street / People are living on dead end street / Gonna die on dead end street," while a background shout of "dead end!" repeats. To be fair, after two verses of maudlin sentimentality, "The Green Green Grass of Home" turns out to be about waiting on death row, but the degree to which this feels like a pale imitation of Simon and Garfunkel's "Silent Night/7 O'Clock News," (which does the smash fade from sentimentality to harsh materialism with far greater aplomb and was released in the US, at least, two months earlier) ultimately reminds us that this is still Tom Jones we are talking about. Jones will hold the number one spot for the entirety of this story, while The Supremes, Donovan, Elvis Presley, and The Who join The Kinks in the lower reaches.

In actual news, meanwhile, you've got a nice illustration of how '60s news works in hindsight. There's basically three categories of events. The first is of significance only to people who think that the '60s are about youth-cultural revolution. For instance, The Doors releasing their self-titled debut on January 4. The second is of significance only to people who think the '60s are about an obnoxious assault on traditional culture. For instance, the theft of millions of dollars of art from the Dulwich Art Gallery in England. And then there is the news that is significant to both groups, and thus reveals through the fault lines, what was actually going on at the time. For instance: Prime Minister Harold Wilson withdraws all offered settlements with Rhodesia and insists that the UK will only recognize a majority-black Rhodesian government.

This paradigm is not entirely unhelpful in understanding Doctor Who in its fourth season. On the one hand, you have the stuff that's chum for fans of the more recent Doctor Who eras: The Doctor is funny! Lots of contemporary Earth stuff! On the other hand, you have the stuff that feeds the Troughton era—backlash over the loss of things that were around in the Hartnell era: No historical Endless bases under endless sieges! And on the third hand, because this is British science fiction and we have Zaphod Beeblebrox handy whenever we want him, you have stuff that turns to Marmite Monsters! And ... um ... more monsters, really.

The underlying issue is this. In its first season, Doctor Who flailed around in the attempt to figure out what it was. In its second season, though, Doctor Who was ruthlessly confident about its identity. This confidence was arguably misplaced at times, but it was unquestionably there. But just over the course of Season Three, that confidence progressively waned until Innes Lloyd decided to reboot the entire show. But the reboot is not entirely straightforward, and now, in Season Four, we're flailing about again trying to make a new show. As it happens, we're going to get there, and Doctor Who is going to turn out to be a massively influential and utterly fascinating television program.

But we're not there yet. So instead we get things like this—a story so weird that virtually nobody comes close to even describing it accurately. The spotter's guide version of The Highlanders is "largely a pure historical story and first appearance of Jamie," but neither of these statements are quite true.

The fact that so many fans understand this story so poorly is not actually surprising. After all, we're reeling about in territory that (as Doctor Who fans) we're spectacularly ill-suited to understand. I've been knocking on about this for a while now, but it really cannot be stressed enough: watching this stretch of the show from the viewpoint of someone who knows how Doctor Who changes its lead actors is the wrong way to go about it. The entire point of everything that is going on in these early Troughton stories is that the audience doesn't know what to make of them. The fact that the

purposeful disruption of audience comprehension was so memorable means that we now understand these episodes, or at least, we understand the many repetitions of them that have been made. But understanding the repetitions only takes us further and further away from understanding the main purpose of the stories themselves.

I mention this because the second story is normally the one where we get a preview of the new status quo. The Silurians tells us that the show is going to be about the Doctor butting heads with UNIT even as he helps them. The Ark in Space tells us that we're going to see a lot of gothic horror. Even Paradise Towers, for all its faults, shows us that we're going to return to a more materialist and grounded sense of the series. But if you try to apply that framework to The Highlanders, you will end up, more or less, on a completely different planet. The one thing this story is absolutely, and unequivocally not about is revealing the show's aspirations.

There are several reasons for this. First of all, it would be extremely difficult for the series to confidently step up and show us what it's going to be like with Troughton because nobody working on it actually has the foggiest idea. This story was slapped together in a desperate hurry, and the next one was initially deemed too bad to use (it was only brought back onto the schedule when it became obvious that every other story was even worse). It's not until The Moonbase that Doctor Who starts to look like it was written by people who had a clue what they were doing again. At this point, however, the sense that the audience doesn't know what's going on is fully and completely shared by the production team.

Beyond these issues, the show just can't do the confident switchover at this stage because what it's trying to do is too strange to just pull off and hope nobody notices. It would be like The Beatles releasing Sergeant Pepper immediately after Help! instead of going through Rubber Soul and Revolver first. So instead, the show hits on the frankly brilliant idea of having the Doctor go through a horrifying metaphysical change that destabilizes the basic core of his identity and forces him to rebuild who he is on the fly. Unable to take its next step decisively, it instead enters phase two of "what happens if we recast the Doctor," in which the show flails about for eight weeks uncertain of what to do after the main character attains enlightenment and becomes a trickster figure.

The result is The Highlanders, an episode that is considerably more about establishing the ways in which the show is not like what it was under Hartnell than it is about establishing what it is like under Troughton. At its core, this story is an unstructured romp across some famous historical events in which, in lieu of following any discernible plot, the Doctor runs around playing dress-up for four episodes. Taken on its own terms, it is easily the single most baffling Doctor Who story to date, making The Web Planet look perfectly normal and routine. Taken in context, it seems considerably stranger, in that it offers the bewildering spectacle of Doctor Who refusing visibly and loudly to be the show we've known it to be.

Let's first clear up the easy part of the spotter's guide fallacy. Yes, Jamie McCrimmon appears in all four episodes and departs with the TARDIS crew at the end. But he's a completely minor character with very little to do in this story, elevated to companion status out of nowhere except for the realization that Frazier Hines has some star power. His sticking around at the end of the story is only slightly more probable than Dodo sticking around at the end of The Massacre, and that's down purely to the fact that at least Jamie appears during all four episodes of his debut story. No, the story that introduces Jamie is actually The Underwater Menace.

But the real misconception is the idea that this is the last historical. It's not. And not in the sense that there are more historicals before Black Orchid gets attempted as a throwaway in the 1980s. No, the issue is that this isn't a historical in any sense that we've previously understood the term.

This is clear from the opening moments, really. The TARDIS arrives just after the Battle of

Culloden, and it looks like we're in for a standard historical in which we learn the basic shape of the battle. It also gives us the sense that Doctor Who is doing a genre pastiche—the BBC had done a very high profile docudrama on Culloden in 1964, and once the story starts up it gestures towards being a Robert Louis Stephenson imitation. However, upon arriving the Doctor does something very unusual. As soon as he sees that the TARDIS has landed in a battlefield with cannons, he tries to turn tail and run, responding to Polly's quite reasonable question "You don't want people to think you're afraid, do you?" with "Why not?" It's only Ben and Polly's insistence that they appear to be back in England that convinces him to stay.

From there, almost immediately, the story becomes a compilation of "stuff we couldn't get Hartnell to do." Prance about in a German accent and do intense and oddly violent comedy scenes while humorously torturing people? Check. Cross-dress? Check. Be abnormally obsessed with stealing people's hats? Check. Basically, liberated by his metaphysical change from the tedious requirements that he be remotely sane, the Doctor goes completely nuts here—hamming for the camera, firing off one-liners to nobody in particular, and generally having a good time, while, distantly in the background, some kidnappings and rescues go on.

This is where the spotter's guide approach falls short, then. Because nothing about this even faintly resembles the historicals we've seen before. This is only a historical if we define that genre as the absence of overt science fiction elements. To be fair, this is how fans in the post-historical eras of the show have defined the historical, but it's manifestly not how it was defined when they were actually making the things. In terms of televised Doctor Who, The Smugglers was the last historical, and this is just a parody of the genre. Just to reiterate for anyone who didn't get the memo from The Power of the Daleks that the entire rulebook has been chucked out the window. We'll deal with the issue of the historical being abandoned as a genre in the "Time Can Be Rewritten" essay on Mark Gatiss's The Roundheads, so for now, let's just look at how unlike a historical this sort of mad romp is.

To be fair, there are two distinct strands of historical that we could be talking about. These two styles split very sensibly on the lines of who wrote the first four historicals. The first two historicals—Marco Polo and The Aztecs—were written by John Lucarotti, and are essentially stories about being trapped in a hostile past. Marco Polo is a hugely extended epic of the TARDIS crew being trapped in the Himalayas. The Aztecs is a shorter epic of the TARDIS crew being trapped in ancient Mexico while Barbara tries and fails to make the most of it. In both cases, the main point is that history is a scary, chaotic place.

Compare to the second style—the Dennis Spooner approach—as displayed in The Reign of Terror and The Romans. Both of those stories can be fairly described as "romps" in which the major, iconic bits of history are thrown into a blender to produce a sort of highlight tour of the historical time period, or, more accurately, of modern views on the time periods. Where the Lucarotti historicals are about giving the past a richly detailed texture and forcing the TARDIS crew to survive it, the Spooner historicals are a sort of history tribute band, playing through a greatest hits album of "Roman stuff" "French Revolution stuff" where the primary pleasure is the recognition of the key elements. So Marco Polo, Kublai Khan's palace is a hard-earned resolution of six episodes of freezing death. When he shows up, there's a sense of relief and a sense that the danger of the past six episodes has partially passed as we head towards some sort of ending for the story. Whereas when Nero shows up in The Romans, it means we've finally gotten to the good bits that we've been teased with. It's not a sense of relief; it's a sense of delayed gratification.

From those first four historicals (or, really, four of the first five, with 100,000 BC basically being a Lucarotti-style historical), we get pretty much all of the rest. The Crusade, The Myth Makers, and The Gunfighters all belong to the Spooner tradition (though The Crusade, as one would expect from

Whitaker, is in many ways its own thing). The Massacre, on the other hand, belongs to the Lucarotti tradition. (It is perhaps worth remarking, albeit somewhat sadly, that the Lucarotti tradition maddeningly restricted to stories written by Lucarotti, although Steve Lyons' novel The Witches and the Hunters, covered in the Hartnell volume, is firmly a Lucarotti-style historical, and many though not all of the modern efforts to restore the genre, mostly in audio form from Big Finish, have gone for the Lucarotti approach. That said, the Spooner approach is closest to how the pseudo-historicals of the new series are done—The Unquiet Dead or The Unicorn and the Wasp, for instance.)

That's not to say that the genre didn't evolve—The Gunfighters is far smarter, more complex, and better than Spooner's amateurish go at The Reign of Terror (indeed, Donald Cotton went and spruced up The Romans hilariously when he did the novelization), and The Massacre works in ways that The Aztecs and Marco Polo never did. But for the most part, these are the two approaches to historical fiction in the first three years of the series.

With The Smugglers, however, things started to break down a bit. On the one hand, it's clearly a Spooner-style romp through the highlights of the pirate genre. But all of the previous Spooner-style stories had basically been comedies, with the possible exception of The Crusade, and even that spent an awful lot of time on Shakespeare parodies. In terms of its plot, it feels Lucarotti-style—the characters are stuck in a hostile past. The key clue that it's not a historical? Not since The Aztecs has the Doctor Who done a historical without famous people in it. Seen in hindsight, though, The Smugglers seems like a natural evolution of what came before simply because it meets the modern definition of "no aliens." Put in context, The Smugglers establishes a third sort of historical and looks like a model for how historical stories could have worked under Troughton, with the leading man providing the comedy instead of the situations. This freed the writers up to explore non-comedic bits of history.

Put simply, there's absolutely a way to do a historical with Patrick Troughton in it. That is not the reason the historicals died. But what is striking, then, is that this is nothing like either the Spooner or Lucarotti traditions. Figuring out why The Highlanders isn't a Lucarotti historical should just be a matter of watching a few minutes while Troughton is in drag. But why isn't it a Spooner-style historical? Well, fundamentally, the Spooner-style historical is about the regulars playing stock roles in a defined type of adventure and laughing about their being cast in those roles. This is part of why The Crusade is a Spooner-style historical despite the many interesting things Whitaker does with it—because the sections where Ian is Sir Ian of Jaffa are ultimately about the idea of a 1960s science teacher having to be a knight in the Crusades, not about Ian's terror at being put in the situation.

So what's wrong with watching the Doctor be cast as Doctor Von Wer, the Hannoverian Doctor? The thing is, the entire point of this casting is that the Doctor can put on a funny voice and play being someone else. The Spooner-style historical is about the TARDIS crew being miscast but having to play their roles anyway. The Highlanders is about the way in which the Doctor can put on a disguise and, most importantly, parody the very role he's supposed to be playing. The Doctor, when he's playing at being Doctor Von Wer, acts neither like himself nor like a Hannoverian physician in 1746. Instead, he acts like the Doctor parodying a Hannoverian physician.

In this sense The Highlanders is a complete mockery of the Spooner historical. The TARDIS crew puts on costumes and romps about laughing at the genre they're ostensibly in. This is not just "a bit different" from Hartnell historicals—this is an overt mockery of the entire Hartnell era, with Troughton's Doctor repeatedly refusing to play the role of the Doctor (and in fact spending the bulk of the story playing any other role he can find). "I should like a hat like that," indeed.

This is actually quite a high-wire act, because it's an absolute assault on the good will of the audience. If The Highlanders at any point tips into a mean-spirited dig at the stupidity of historicals, the entire thing comes crashing down. Remember, most of the audience at this point has not made up

their mind on this whole “new Doctor” thing, and if they’ve been watching Doctor Who thus far it’s safe to assume that they like Hartnell-style adventures, historicals and all. In hindsight we all love Troughton and so automatically forgive his excesses here, but that was in no way a sure bet in 1966/1967. So putting on a mockery of the previous three years of the show is not the safest move.

Thankfully for the show, Troughton is up to the task, and even though this is miles from where his characterization of the Doctor is going to settle, he is a good enough actor to charmingly hold the pieces together. But watching The Highlanders, by far the most important thing to remember is that there is absolutely no reason why this had to work. The Doctor enters and exits this story as an unrestrained force of anarchy (as he was at the end of The Power of the Daleks). No effort has been made to establish to the audience what Doctor Who is like now that Hartnell has left.

But on the other hand, we have gotten four weeks that are essentially about how much fun Patrick Troughton is. And they worked. The Highlanders, in the end, is a story about convincing Doctor Who fans that they didn’t really like Hartnell all that much and that Troughton is going to be much more fun. And, astonishingly, given that Hartnell’s Doctor Who was really quite good, the show more or less pulls it off.

But the consequence is a story that is by necessity nobody’s favorite. Troughton fans don’t get the version of Troughton in it, and Hartnell fans get a slap in the face. Taken as a story, this is an abject failure. Taken as a step in making the transition from one era to the other, it’s a success, made all the more satisfying by how improbable it is that it worked in the first place.

Another Rotten, Gloomy Old Tunnel (The Underwater Menace)

Note: This entry was written and revised prior to the public release of the recovered second episode of this story. I did not want to delay publication of the book just for one entry. When the episodes are released, updated versions of both this chapter and the Galaxy Four will be posted to the blog, and those versions will be included in whatever the next print edition is.

It's January 14, 1967. Tom Jones has yet to give up number one, though he will in a week when The Monkees take number one with "I'm a Believer." It is worth remarking on the nature of The Monkees as a band—an American band manufactured for popular success in an attempt to reverse-engineer The Beatles at the exact same time that The Beatles were busy exploding their own formula recording Sergeant Pepper. In fact, the top three singles when the second episode of The Underwater Menace aired are an instruction manual to 1967—corporate pseudo-mods, Tom Jones, and The Who with "Happy Jack," (complete with psychedelic cover). The Monkees retain number one for the duration of The Underwater Menace, with numbers two and three switching to Cat Stevens in his first really big single and The Move, a Birmingham rock band, with "Night of Fear," a song that is very obvious about a bad acid trip.

Meanwhile, in news that does not sing, the US is found out for experimenting with germ warfare, the opening strains of the Summer of Love happen in San Francisco with the Human Be-In, which also introduces psychedelic culture to the masses (never mind that Doctor Who did it two months earlier). In a few chapters we'll watch, astonished, as Doctor Who invents steampunk in 1967 and gets no credit for that either). The UK begins negotiating to enter the European Economic Community, prehistoric human fossils are discovered in Kenya ... So far we're two days into the four weeks this story ran. Thankfully things slow down, and over the rest of it the major news consists of the UK nationalizing ninety percent of the steel industry, the Apollo 1 disaster, and the US, USSR, and UK (who were apparently still expected to make it to space in 1967—a fact that may be relevant in 1970 for other purposes) signing the Outer Space Treaty to demilitarize space.

If you have the sense that the 1960s are kicking into high gear very suddenly, you're not far off. So I am deeply amused to bring you The Underwater Menace, which, according to Doctor Who Magazine's definitive "Mighty 200" fan poll, is the worst story we've yet covered—one of the ten worst Doctor Who stories of all time, in fact. And so, even though its quality is by miles the least interesting thing about The Underwater Menace, I suppose we should start there.

To start (and this is an awkward observation given that it's made between the recovery of the story's second episode and anyone seeing it) the recovery of the second episode seems initially to have rehabilitated the story tremendously. This is largely on the basis of one clip that people listening to the audio already knew was great, and we'll talk about it later, but there's reason to believe that this story is about to undergo a Gunfighters-style rehabilitation in the larger fan community.

That said, its reputation was previously so bad that, much like The Gunfighters, there's no way the stink of it will ever be completely erased. The case for the prosecution is that the script makes no sense, the villain is ludicrous, and the whole thing is an effects-driven wreck of a story assembled under pressure. Wood and Miles take it to task in About Time for the fact that "it displays utter contempt for the audience. It's not so much that it isn't trying, it's that it doesn't think we care that it isn't trying." Shearman and Hadoke are kinder in Running Through Corridors, both admitting that they love the story's barminess.

It's certainly the case that few of the usual reasons for writing off this story seem to hold up und

scrutiny. Yes, the plot revolves around drilling a hole in the bottom of the ocean to drain it into the Earth's core and explode the planet. Need I remind you that one of the most acclaimed and "classic" Doctor Who stories of all time features hollowing out the Earth's core to drive the planet around as a spaceship? Yes, the madman wants to blow up the planet because he can. But how can we, as a fandom, praise the scene of Davros contemplating unleashing a deadly plague on the universe and then complain about Zaroff? (That would be in Genesis of the Daleks, not yet blogged, but on DVD if for some reason you've never seen it.) They are, after all, the same scene, complete with a scenery-chewing villain.

So we're left with the fact that the third episode ends with the mad-scientist villain shouting "Nothing in ze world can stop me now!" Which actually comes very close to identifying the main problem with this story—its third episode actually exists. As an orphan episode, its airings would have been at fan conventions for a long time. Nothing with so absurd a cliffhanger would have a chance of being anything other than a "so bad it's good" experience in such a setting. But crucially, that happens in episode three of the story. Zaroff has been scenery-chewing for three episodes by that point, building towards his moment of mad triumph. And Joseph Furst is not a bad actor. He's playing over the top every bit as deliberately as Michael Wisher was with Davros.

I'm tipping my hand here, but ultimately I side pretty strongly with Shearman and Hadoke. To quote Shearman, "Is it entertaining? Just about, if you hold on tight, and don't resist where it takes you." This is to say, I think anyone failing to have a good time watching The Underwater Menace has made a conscious choice not to enjoy it. It's a ridiculous story, but it's fun.

Certainly I'm more sympathetic to the "just go with it and it's fun" position than Miles and Wood's frankly bizarre assertion that the story isn't trying. Although the behind-the-scenes information lets us know that this was not a story beloved by parts of the production team, the flipside is that they had a hole in their schedule and opted to fill it with this over the other bad choices. They viewed this story, despite the fact that it was obviously going to shatter their budget, as the best choice they had. Which suggests that someone saw some merit in it. All of this is Miles and Wood's argument, and it's true. But from this they conclude that "Lloyd seriously thought this was all Doctor Who was capable of being, all the license payers were entitled to expect from the series." And then we run aground. (It is perhaps worth noting that Lawrence Miles apparently considers The Underwater Menace his least favorite story, and the accusation of "contempt" rings strikingly close to his assessments of Steven Moffat's Doctor Who, making this one of the moments in About Time where we can fairly clearly tell which writer's viewpoints are most on display.)

The thing is, of the myriad of things that are wrong with this story, a lack of effort is not one of them. I'll defer to Toby Hadoke for a brilliant and incisive analysis of the genius of Joseph Furst acting as Zaroff, but suffice it to say that he makes a compelling argument that Furst made a deliberate choice to play the role as a pastiche, and hit his target with magnificent skill. Any time Zaroff appears to be a hilariously bad villain to you, you are laughing with the actor, not at him. For all the reports that Troughton (and the rest of the cast) were at war with the director throughout the story, his performance is fantastic, and you can see him rapidly learning to rein in the more overtly comedic elements of his performance and to play scenes through understatement.

In particular, he has a scene with Zaroff where he clearly recognizes that Furst is going to completely blow him off the screen in terms of charisma and over-the-top antics, and so instead rein it in massively, asking in a very hushed, polite tone why Zaroff wants to destroy the Earth. It's a fantastic scene—the one that I mentioned that anyone who had listened to the audio already knew was good—and the start of something Troughton will make much of for the next three years—his skill at dialing back his performance to emphasize things. It being the one segment of Part Two that's already surfaced, seeing it in video only confirms this—both Troughton and Furst are playing that scene with

careful deliberateness, and the result is the first moment where Troughton finally and firmly becomes the Doctor that fans of this era remember. (I'll also say that the sequence at the start, where we get to hear what each character hopes they'll find when they open the doors and Troughton giddily says "Prehistoric monsters!" is, in many ways, the moment when he becomes the Doctor that more casual fans of his era remember.)

Beyond that, we get a strong effort from everyone working on the visuals to make Atlantis look strange and alien. There's an effort put in to building a fascinating setting that we do not always see the show make—one that evokes The Web Planet as much as anything. The Web Planet is one of the great Marmite stories, but as I insisted when I wrote about it, almost everybody who dislikes it does so for the wrong reasons. The entire point of The Web Planet was to put something on the television screen that was unlike anything viewers had ever seen before. Not that this was realistic or even entirely sensible—as I argued in Volume One, The Web Planet is shooting for a Georges Méliès look—but rather that had a texture unlike anything the viewer had seen on television. It was a theater spectacle—something that is interesting because it is so unlike everything else. In this regard, The Web Planet succeeded, providing us with four beloved characters stumbling around a strange and terrifying landscape.

Since taking over the program, Lloyd has mostly tried to do two things. First, he's focused heavily on making the series more exciting. Second, he's worked on making the TARDIS land in more accessible places. The latter may well be grounds for criticism, although doing so means that you're also offering an indictment of Russell T Davies's oft-stated distaste for stories without a human element. (This is fine, but as with the difficulties in identifying any difference between Zaroff and Davros, if you complain about Lloyd here, you have to extend the criticism to the more beloved figure.) The former, on the other hand, seems difficult to complain about unless you want to dismiss virtually every post-Hartnell era of Doctor Who. (And again, there is nothing wrong with doing so. The fact of the matter is, the Hartnell era was different from what we're looking at now, and the show never went back to most of what was lost in the Hartnell transition. If nothing else, Alan Moore, a brilliant a man as ever watched an episode of television, apparently hates all post-Hartnell Doctor Who, and who am I to begrudge Alan Moore his viewpoints of anything?)

We should also remember that Troughton is still in the trial phase. This is the first time we've seen him have a "normal" story, inasmuch as Doctor Who's norm is science fiction. (And I would argue that the historicals were, in fact, science fiction through and through and that there has never been a point where Doctor Who's primary mode was not science fiction. After all, the historicals were introduced with a screaming and hyper-modern Delia Derbyshire theme, while The Daleks was not introduced with Elizabethan chamber music.) Yes, this story basically serves as the real introduction to Jamie, who was a minor character in his actual debut. But it's still a very business-as-usual sort of episode. The thing is, we've had fourteen consecutive episodes of business-as-unusual. The last time we had a story that felt "normal" was The Smugglers. So business-as-usual is in its own way quite radical—the completion of a process of upheaval and change.

Which is much of why the story takes pains to start off normally. Its opening—the TARDIS crew wanders around trying to figure out where they are—has been all but abandoned in the new series, and that abandonment is the culmination of a long process. But it's still recognizable as the standard Hartnell-style opening. The arrival in a strange city and exploration of its culture is, in many ways, what Doctor Who has been doing for most of its run, so the return to that is welcome. And unlike, say, The Tenth Planet, where the nature of Snowcap Base is squared away in minutes and we just do a runaround for the rest of the stories, here we keep learning new things about Atlantean culture for three of the four episodes. Effort is made to show us how strange Atlantis is throughout the story.

But unlike The Web Planet, here the story is stripped down to four episodes and given a prop

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