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The Mad One The Wife in Space Volume 4

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FOREWORD BY DAVID QUANTICK

It is mid-1974. My family is in the middle of moving house. Literally. On a late spring Saturday, our furniture is being moved into our new home in Exmouth by some fairly sluggish removal men. One of them is a big man, red-haired, and possessed of healthy 1970s big man odour. For some reason, perhaps because it's a Rediffusion TV set, plugged into an early form of cable, the telly works. Which is how, in the late afternoon of Saturday, May the 18th, 1974, I find myself sitting on a red kitchen chair in an empty front room, watching Part Three of *Planet of the Spiders*, and on a red kitchen chair next to me is a big, red-haired, slightly ripe ginger removal man.

This was a time of change in my life. I'd turned 13 a few days before – celebrating my birthday by going next door with my mum to say goodbye to our neighbours, Reg and Ethel-Anne Paddon. I'd said goodbye to my school friends at Plymouth College and had as yet no idea what the change from a 600 pupil minor public school to a 2000 pupil comprehensive might entail (clue: it didn't go well. It was the '70s.) But there was at least a constant in my life: the greatest television show of all time, *Doctor Who*. At least *Doctor Who* was going to remain the same.

I had been a *Doctor Who* fan as far back as I could remember. I had seen the first ever episode from my pram as a baby. The first film I saw at the cinema was *Doctor Who and the Daleks*. When we went to my dad's cricket club jumble sales, I would try and get my mum to buy me the half-busted, pieces-missing *Doctor Who* board games that always seemed to filling up the trestle tables. I'd taken the change from Hartnell to Troughton in my stride – what am I saying? The idea that the hero of the show could turn into a different person was the single most exciting thing I'd ever encountered in my life. Apart, possibly, from a time machine that was a police box, which was meant to be a shape-changer but was stuck, and was smaller on the outside... I had *The Making of Doctor Who*, which was brilliant and frustrating – brilliant in that it was and is a superb guide to how TV worked, and frustrating in that the episode it chose to

FOREWORD BY DAVID QUANTICK

demonstrate the whole *Who* production process was *The Daemons*, which for some reason I hadn't seen and had absolutely no chance of seeing again (I finally saw it last year on DVD. It's great).

So there we were, Ginger and me, watching *Doctor Who* together, and neither of us were aware that in a few short days, the final plank of my security was about to be pulled out. On the 8th of June, 1974, as I was just coming to terms with my new school nickname – Joe 90 – the Third Doctor suffered a fatal blow and, with the aid of Cho-Je, underwent regeneration from a somewhat bad-tempered action dandy into... the most energetic, eccentric, unpredictable and arguably barking mad incarnation of the Doctor ever.

Tom Baker was, and is, the longest-serving Doctor Who (shut up) of all time. This, and the fact that Americans were sold a lot of his episodes, means that for many people, Baker was the archetypal Doctor, and his weirdness, long scarf and mannerisms were the definitive *Doctor Who* signifiers. And he was, it has to be said, perfect right from the off. He seemed to combine aspects of all three previous Doctors in flawless balance – he was smart, he was active, he was eccentric – and he inhabited the role beautifully. Put any of the 47 actors who've played the Doctor into a room with an actual alien and then ask the alien which one is a real Time Lord, from Gallifrey, and the alien would pick Tom Baker straight away. No question.

Instead of shattering the final plank of security in my life, Tom Baker became that security. He was there from my first week at comprehensive right until I left school. He was there for the most sophisticated Doctor Who stories – *Genesis of the Daleks*, with its wires and its moral dilemma, and the one with John Cleese and Eleanor Bron, which made me both gasp at the daring and swank to myself for Getting The Joke. And, in a kind of *Puff The Magic Dragon* way, he was there for a last moment when I moved to London, grew out of *Doctor Who* and didn't even own a television for the arrival of Peter Davison and the colourful men of the 1980s.

All the Doctors were my Doctor, but Tom Baker was my core Doctor. And when he returned and met Matt Smith in *The Day of the Doctor* in 2013 it was wonderful. I couldn't understand what he was talking

about, but it didn't matter. I was in floods. It was Tom Baker. 40 years. Ridiculous. Brilliant.

Anyway, this is Sue and Neil Perryman's new *Wife in Space* book, it's all about Tom Baker and if it's anything like the other ones, it's hilarious. And that's about it. It just remains for me to say – because this is my only chance to say it – "Jelly baby?"

David Quantick

February 2016

INTRODUCTION

This is the point where my insane plan to make my wife watch every single episode of Tom Baker's *Doctor Who* finally hit pay dirt.

Sure, I'd had to spend more than a year writing 200,000 words about the preceding 381 episodes, exposing our private lives to scorn and ridicule in the process, but it had successfully done the trick. Sue was about to watch *Robot* to *Logopolis* with me. In broadcast order, no less. I should have been pleased, but instead I began to fret.

What if Sue loved Tom Baker too much? What if she gave *The Ark in Space* 10 out of 10 – where would that leave *Genesis of the Daleks*, *The Brain of Morbius* and *The Robots of Death*? She wouldn't have anywhere left to go! Would I have to introduce a new scoring system in order to keep things interesting? And what if she was so impressed by this era she was literally lost for words – how would I turn that into a blog? These were the sort of questions that kept me awake in the middle of *The Monster of Peladon*.

So I came up with a plan: we'd watch Tom Baker's episodes twice. The first screening would allow Sue to soak up the story without any pressure to talk over it. That way she could simply enjoy it, and she wouldn't be distracted from Tom's mercurial charm because she was trying to remember which episode of *Some Mothers Do 'Ave 'Em* Frederick Jaeger had appeared in. We'd save that for the second screening, which would be my opportunity to discover what she really thought about the episode's carpentry, curtains and co-stars. I didn't think she'd complain too much. Who wouldn't want to watch *Revenge of the Cybermen* twice in one night? And surely it was a price worth paying if it meant she could fall in love with Tom Baker's Doctor the same way I did – in revered silence.

Needless to say, we only had to watch the episodes once.

Neil Perryman April 2016

SEASON TWELVE CHEER UP! YOU'RE NOT JON PERTWEE ANY MORE!



This illustration funded by Steven Shaw



Part One

Sue: Ooh, scary face. Tom Baker looks very serious, doesn't he? It's a much better title sequence than the last one, though. You don't need to see the Doctor's legs.

And then...

Sue: They still haven't fixed the titles! That's just lazy. They've slapped the new titles over the old ones and hoped for the best. Do they ever sort that out, Neil?

She isn't impressed with Tom Baker, either.

Sue: Is Tom always this hammy? I hope he tones it down eventually. That was well over the top.

Elsewhere in the home counties, a robot is up to no good.

Sue: Did that thing just kick two dogs to death?

Me: Perhaps it just injured them. Pretend it stood on their tails or

something.

Sue: Like that's going to make me feel any better. That's two marks off already, and we're only five minutes in.

Back at UNIT HQ, Sarah Jane Smith flirts with the Brigadier so she can get her hands on a press pass to a new government Think Tank, which is clearly a lot more interesting than a recently regenerated Time Lord. On her way out, she calls the Brigadier a swinger.

Me: Confirmation at last.

Sue: It's his moustache that gives him away.

The new Doctor discharges himself from the infirmary but the medical officer, Harry Sullivan, manages to intervene before he can escape in his TARDIS. The Doctor believes that his nose is a definite improvement on the last one.

Sue: Your entire face is a definite improvement! Cheer up! You're not Jon Pertwee any more!

The Doctor bamboozles Harry during an exceedingly strange medical, but Sue seems to enjoy it.

Sue: He's definitely larger than life and very charismatic – you can't take your eyes off him. But he will tone it down eventually, won't he? He's a bit full on at the moment.

Doesn't stop her laughing though.

Sue: He's very funny, but I'm not sure the kids would have felt the same way. I think the Doctor's eyes popping out of his head would have frightened half of them to death. He's definitely the most alien Doctor so far. How did you take to him when you first saw him, Neil?

Me: I don't remember ever not liking him. I'm pretty sure I took to him like a duck to water. I was only five years old at the time; you can adjust to anything when you're that young. I certainly don't remember pining for Jon Pertwee, although I loved those chocolate bars with his face on the wrappers. Yeah, I definitely missed those.

The robot murders another hapless sod.

Sue: I bet the robot looks shit when we finally get to see it. I'm preparing myself for the worst.

Meanwhile the Doctor is searching for a new outfit to wear.

ROBOT

Sue: It's a shame the Brigadier wasn't around when Colin Baker chose his costume. Has anyone ever said that before, Neil? Actually, that clown outfit would have looked pretty good on Peter Davison...

Now that's he decked out in his iconic costume (Sue's words, not mine), the Doctor agrees to investigate the scene of the crime.

Sue: My word, his teeth are scary.

And then Sue gasps.

Sue: You'd never catch Jon Pertwee with his feet on Bessie's windscreen like that. His other self would knock his block off if he could see him now.

The Doctor dishes out advice to UNIT like he's Sherlock Holmes on Valium.

Sue: It's as if he can't be bothered. He's treating the whole thing as a joke. I'm not sure how I feel about that.

When we are introduced to Kettlewell, Sue points at the mad professor's hair.

Sue: Has he been playing with a Van de Graaff generator?

Me: I think he's more of a Hawkwind fan.

As the professor starts babbling on about alternative energy sources, Sue shifts her attention to Sarah's outfit.

Sue: This isn't a good look for Sarah Jane. It makes her look old and frumpy. I don't know what she was thinking when she got out of bed this morning. I'm sure that look was never fashionable.

Sarah is politely escorted away from Think Tank's premises, but she immediately sneaks back in again, and the episode concludes with her being menaced by the titular robot.

Sue: Oh, it's *that* robot! I was attacked by that thing at the *Doctor Who Experience*, wasn't I? Well, I say attacked – you told me to stick my head in its claws when no one was looking.

Me: Well, that was Tom Baker's first episode. Was it a good start?

Sue: It was all right, I suppose. It's too early to tell.

Part Two

I ask Sue to comment on the robot's unique design.

Sue: How long have you got? First of all, it's top-heavy. Secondly, it can't walk properly. And thirdly, I don't see how it can possibly pick anything up. Look at its wrists! I like its head, though. Especially the pink bits.

When Sarah is discovered on Think Tank's premises, Miss Winters tells her to keep her trap shut or they'll issue a formal complaint.

Sue: I bet Sarah Jane is quaking in her boots.

Later that night, Miss Winters is joined by a colleague named Jellicoe, and together they mess with the robot's brain.

Sue: I like his pink marigold gloves. Do you think he stole them from a cleaner or did he actually buy them himself?

Sue leans forward.

Sue: This story is very dark. Not in terms of its subject matter. It's more like, "What the hell am I looking at? I can't see a thing."

The K1 robot is programmed to murder a cabinet minister and steal a topsecret file, and Sue can't believe it when it manages to grasp the manila folder in its claw without dropping it.

Sue: I'd like to see it pick up a large hardback book. I bet it couldn't do

ROBOT

that. It's not exactly the Terminator, is it? Living metal, my arse.

The Brigadier wants answers.

Sue: His hair is very long. That's definitely a non-regulation haircut. They must be very lax about that sort of thing at the United Nations.

Sarah informs the Brigadier she's popping out to report on a meeting of the Scientific Reform Society.

Sue: Why is Sarah Jane still working as a journalist? Isn't she the Doctor's full-time companion now? I didn't realise the Doctor's companions were expected to hold down a job between adventures.

Sarah's attempts to interview the SRS fall on deaf ears, mainly because the bouncers on the door aren't impressed with her attire either.

Sue: It's that stupid thing you've got wrapped round your head, pet. There's only room for one scarf in this programme.

The SRS tell Sarah to piss off.

Sue: They should hire a PR company to deal with their front of house. You can't kick people out and still expect a decent review. Idiots.

But all is not lost, because Harry has successfully infiltrated the organisation by pretending to be a man from the ministry.

Sue: It's Steel from *The Avengers*. **Me**: I think you mean Steed.

Sue: Since when did the Navy work for UNIT? That's what I don't

understand.

The Doctor takes Bessie for a spin.

Sue: This doesn't look right to me. He needs a new car. He can't drive around in one of Ion Pertwee's cast-offs.

Me: So what kind of car should this Doctor drive?

Sue: I don't know. A white Triumph Spitfire wouldn't clash with his scarf.

And then, apropos of nothing, Benton brandishes his recent promotion in Sarah Jane's face.

Sue: UNIT don't have a budget to fight aliens, but they still gave Benton a raise? That's nice.

Me: I'm sure that scene was inserted into the episode because some pedant wrote an irate letter to the *Radio Times* complaining about UNIT's chain of command.

Sue: That sounds like the sort of thing a *Doctor Who* specialist would do. Wow. That means they had specialists in the 1970s as well. Is this what they did before the internet was invented?

The episode ends with a murderous robot towering over the Doctor, who's sprawled out on the floor.

Sue: Make your mind up, Tom. Where do you want to lie down? Get yourself nice and comfortable... That's it. Happy now? And cut!

Part Three

Sarah arrives in the nick of time and saves the Doctor's bacon.

Sue: They're messing with the cliffhangers again. We never saw Sarah Jane arrive in the last episode, so it's a cheat. I can't say I'm impressed with the direction in this story so far. It's very safe.

Sarah tries to reason with the K1 robot, but her pleas do not compute.

Sue: He's like a petulant version of Siri.

Me: Is there any other kind?

ROBOT

The robot makes a run for it. Actually, it ambles for it, but you get the general idea.

Me: This is the only bit I can remember seeing when I was five. Or maybe they showed this clip on another programme and I'm remembering that instead. My memories of this are very foggy.

Sue: Do you remember the robot's feet? I mean, look at them! He's going to trip over himself if he's not careful. Whoever designed that thing was insane. Oh wait, we've already met him. He *is* insane.

Benton showers the robot with bullets.

Sue: Look at Benton. He's loving this. He's in his element today; he can barely hide his smile.

Sue suddenly realises that she could be watching a Barry Letts story.

Me: This is a Barry Letts story, love.

Sue: What? I thought Barry had left? In all those Jon Pertwee documentaries you made me watch, he was always going on about leaving.

Me: This is Barry's last story. A new producer takes over next week. **Sue**: That's weird. That would be like Russell T Davies producing Matt Smith's first episode before he swanned off. So who cast Tom Baker as the Doctor, then?

Me: It was Barry who sealed the deal.

Sue: Unbelievable. Thank God he left the new producer with a decent actor. If Barry was a bad man he could have cast Arthur Mullard for a laugh.

Miss Winters addresses an SRS rally.

Sue: They look like a gathering of angry bus conductors.

Hilda reveals her secret weapon: a badly designed (and slightly unhinged)

robot.

Sue: So this is what will happen if the BNP ever join forces with Metal Mickey? Scary stuff.

The robot identifies Sarah as an outsider and targets her, but thankfully the Brigadier turns up to throw a spanner in its works.

Sue: Thank heavens for the Brig! He's turned the lights on and we can actually see what's going on for a change.

As the robot makes its way out of the hall, it's helped down some stairs by an SRS goon.

Sue: I'm not convinced that it could get down those steps without any help. Does the robot require a constant supply of care workers?

UNIT unleash hell.

Sue: Have UNIT ever shot and killed anything? Like, ever? They're hopeless.

Harry calls the Brigadier with an update on Think Tank's ambitions.

Sue: Who's this bloke again?

And then she puts her finger on something that's been bugging her for ages.

Sue: So this lot are going to hold the world to ransom, but they can barely fill a meeting at a local town hall?

Me: Yes, this story eerily prefigures contemporary American politics. [Not to mention UKIP - Me in 2016]

With the SRS holed up in their bunker, Benton assaults it the only way he knows how.

ROBOT

Sue: Wow! He just hit three things in a row! With one grenade! Maybe Benton deserved that promotion after all.

The Doctor uses his sonic screwdriver to detonate the mines surrounding the bunker's entrance.

Sue: It's a Dremel.

Me: I have no idea what that means.

Sue: Don't you know anything practical, Neil? Knowing how many episodes Terry fucking Nation wrote is never – I repeat never – going to help us. But knowing how to handle a Dremel might.

Miss Winters decides to arm the robot with a disintegrator gun, so Jellicoe hurries off to retrieve it from a cell that's currently occupied by Sarah and Harry.

Sue: They actually left the gun in the same room as their prisoners? That's a bit stupid. It's a good job Steed and Sarah didn't work out what it was. And how is the robot going to pick up that gun, exactly? It'll throw its balance right off.

When the robot aims the gun, Sue can't stop giggling.

Sue: Bless him. He can only point it at the ground. Look at his limp wrist! And his gun doesn't even flash when it fires. It's pathetic!

UNIT reinforcements arrive (care of Palitoy).

Sue: Oh dear...

Me: It's an Action Man tank. I had one of those when I was a boy.

Sue: And now you have a toy version of that robot instead. Nothing much

has changed, has it?

Me: It isn't a toy, dear. It's a collectible figurine.

Sue: It fell off your bookshelf when I was tidying up, once. Getting it to

stand up straight again was a fucking nightmare.

Part Four

Me: You remember how Tommy from *Planet of the Spiders* wrote several

episodes of Terry and June?

Sue: Only because Steve O'Brien told me.

Me: Yes, well, we can go one better with this story. How's this for some

trivia: Miss Winters wrote the theme tune to Minder.

Sue: Now you're just taking the piss.

Me: I'm serious. Patricia Maynard married Dennis Waterman and she wrote the theme to *Minder*. People assume that the Waterman identified

in the song's credits is Dennis, but it isn't him, it's her.

Sue: I could be so good to you?

Me: Yes.

Sue: Love me like you want me to?

Me: Yes, but we should probably finish Robot first.

Sue: So Dennis Waterman didn't write the theme tune and sing the theme

tune? He just sang the theme tune?

Me: That's right, which means Little Britain got it wrong, which brings us

seamlessly back to Tom Baker.

As Winters, Jellicoe and Kettlewell wait for the world to end, Sue spots a fatal flaw in their plan.

Sue: How are these three idiots going to repopulate the world after a nuclear war? No one will be happy in that triangle.

The Doctor saves the day with two seconds to spare (or about 15 minutes, given how long this episode still has left to run). And then, just as Benton is about to stick the kettle on, they notice that Sarah and the robot are missing.

Sue: How can you lose a bloody robot? How did it get back on its feet without the aid of a crane?

But it's not all had news.

ROBOT

Sue: Benton is acting his face off this week. Say what you like about Levene (whichever one it is, I don't really care), but he always gives it his all. Look at him concentrating like mad in the background...

The robot wants to create more machines like itself.

Sue: But with better wrists! And opposable thumbs!

The Doctor believes the robot is probably suffering from a suppressed Oedipus complex.

Sue: That's a bit heavy for a children's programme. I wonder how many children turned to their mothers and asked them what an Oedipus complex was. Did you, Neil?

Me: No.

Sue: You're probably suppressing it. You said your memories of this story were foggy.

The Brigadier is too busy shooting at the robot to care about its mental state. And then, in a plot twist nobody – and I mean nobody – saw coming, when the robot is shot with the disintegrator gun, it begins to grow in size...

Sue: What the hell? Since when did that gun make things bigger? Okay, now I'm *really* confused!

The robot reaches for Sarah with its massive claws.

Sue: It's turned into Godzilla, now. **Me**: Don't you mean King Kong?

Sue: That's the one. Look, it's carrying a Sarah Jane doll around with him.

Have you got a Sarah Jane doll?

Me: Not yet.

Sue: Actually, it looks like the doll from Play School. (Laughing) What was

her name again, Neil?

Me: Hamble.

Sue: It's a bit silly. Barry really is addicted to CSO, isn't he? He's got Sarah Jane pretending to hold on to a photograph of a drainpipe. How much would it have cost them to have provided her with a real drainpipe? In fact, they could have just doubled-up the big bazooka that UNIT are using. Just stand it up and Sarah Jane could cling to that instead. Who directed this rubbish?

The Doctor fills a plastic bucket with a metal-eating virus.

Sue: Why doesn't it eat through the bucket's handle?

Harry drives Bessie towards the giant robot so the Doctor can throw the contents of the bucket over its clodhopping feet.

Sue: I bet this is the closest the Doctor ever gets to a drive-by shooting.

The robot dies, which makes Sarah feel sad. Thankfully, the Doctor is on hand to offer her a quick spin in the TARDIS. But as they are about to leave, they're interrupted by some berk in a cravat.

Sue: I didn't know he was a companion. Who the hell is he?

Me: That's Harry.

Sue: Never heard of him. Is he always this wet?

The Score

Sue: The story was pants. It didn't make any sense! The villains disappeared five minutes into the final episode, and their plan was insane. Tom Baker was okay, but he's still finding his feet, so I don't want to judge him yet. He's very funny, I'll give him that. But it was just the same old, same old, only with a nicer Doctor. I was expecting a bigger change than that. It was distinctly average.

5/10

ROBOT

COMMENT: "It'll be fascinating to see what Sue makes of my all-time favourites, and kind of devastating if she thinks they're crap." – Paul Mudie

NOTES: Many years ago, I applied for a job at the now sadly defunct *BBC Cult* website. Part of the interview process involved me taking a general knowledge quiz about children's television, and when the time came to name all the toys from *Play School*, I inadvertently called one of them Hannibal. My answer amused the BBC so much, they told everybody about my error on their website. Needless to say, I didn't get the job.

* THE ARK IN SPACE BLOGGED: 22 March 2012

Part One

Sue: So what's gone wrong with the titles this time?

It's a good question. For some reason, the title sequence for Part One has been rendered in sepia tone. We both agree that it looks terrible. In fact the only good thing about the titles as far as Sue is concerned is Robert Holmes' name.

Sue: What's an inflatable toy doing floating in space like that? **Me**: Are you going to be like this all the way through, Sue?

Sue: Struck a nerve, have I? I can tell you like this story before we even

start.

Me: How can you tell?

Sue: Well, first of all, you suggested that we watch *Doctor Who* tonight, instead of it being me as usual. Secondly, I heard you trying to coax Nicol downstairs. "It's brilliant, honestly" you told her. And thirdly, you're being very defensive and we're only a minute in.

Me: I just thought we'd passed the point where a slightly dodgy special

effect would cloud your judgement, that's all.

Sue: We have. I just like winding you up.

Well it's definitely working, mainly because we've arrived at a story that I genuinely love, and having my wife mock it isn't a pleasant sensation. I have fond memories of the last two Pertwee seasons, but they are nothing more than fragmented vignettes. The Ark in Space is where I really became invested in this show, and having its magnificence called into question by your significant other isn't something I'd recommend.

Sue: (Sensing my agitation) Nice TARDIS materialisation.

Me: I could be wrong, but I think that's the first time we see the camera

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move when the TARDIS lands. That's because they didn't use the traditional roll back and mix technique. They just turned up the lights a bit.

We watch the materialisation again, just to be sure.

Sue: It works. Well done.

Me: I told you this was brilliant.

As the adventure gets underway, Sue wants to talk about Harry.

Sue: I'm not impressed with him so far. He's just a posh berk who looks like a young Michael Ball.

As our heroes explore the Ark, they suddenly realise they are running out of oxygen.

Sue: I think they've seen quite enough of this place now. If it's so uncomfortable, why don't they just sod off back to the TARDIS and try again? And when does the Doctor's TARDIS start working properly? They keep promising a working TARDIS, and yet they keep failing to deliver one.

Sarah ends up being hypnotised.

Sue: Sarah Jane is clearly off her head in this scene. On Ecstasy by the look it. They should be playing some Floyd instead of this pompous classical music. It'd be more relaxing.

While Sarah snoozes, Harry's shoes are obliterated by the Ark's security system.

Sue: Does Harry end up like Bruce Willis in Die Hard?

The Doctor disables the security system, but not without great personal cost

to his scarf.

Sue: Does the Doctor have burn marks on his scarf from now on? And do the fans who knit their own versions of it put the burn marks on there as well? I'm sure it's full purl, by the way.

Me: Yeah, thanks for that.

Sue: Oh look, Sarah Jane is having a sauna. Have they arrived at a

futuristic spa or something?

When the action shifts to the Ark's circular corridor, Sue perks up considerably.

Sue: Now *that* looks great. That's probably the best set design I've seen in this show so far. It's quite impressive for 1975.

About bloody time! But it doesn't last.

Sue: The problem with Harry is the last time I saw sideburns that big, Noddy Holder was attached to them. And I'm pretty sure he was taking the piss.

The Doctor and Harry enter a cryogenic storage facility.

Sue: These bodies look plastic to me. Are the Autons up to no good again?

I hush her as the Doctor launches into what can only be described as an indomitable monologue.

Sue: Nice speech.

Me: It's so good, David Tennant paraphrased it in the new series.

Sue: Really? I don't remember that.

Me: He probably burped in the middle of it. Anyway, could you imagine

Jon Pertwee delivering a speech like that?

Sue: Not a chance. He would have insulted the human race instead.

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The episode concludes with a Wirrn falling out of a cupboard, at which point Sue turns to me, smiles a slightly condescending smile, and slowly shakes her head.

Part Two

This particular Wirrn is already dead.

Sue: It looks like a giant poo with green bits sticking out of it.

A woman named Vira emerges from her cryogenic slumber.

Sue: The polystyrene's a bit squeaky when she steps on the set. They should have thought that through. Hang on... Is that Sue Lawley?

Vira wants to know what Harry and the Doctor are doing on the Ark.

Sue: I love the line about Harry only being qualified to work on sailors. Tom Baker is practically laughing his head off when he says it. He really seems to be enjoying himself.

Vira injects Sarah with antiprotonics, even though there's a 50 per cent chance they could kill her.

Sue: She could have told them the odds before she stuck that thing in Sarah Jane! Her bedside manner is appalling.

The next occupant to be revived is the Ark's commander, Noah (real name: Lazar).

Sue: So his real name is even sillier than his nickname? How does that work, exactly?

As Harry and the Doctor argue with Noah, a maggot-like creature is seen entering the inner-workings of the space station.

Sue: I'm not even going to comment on that. But I have noticed

something interesting: Tom Baker is a very odd shape.

Me: What?

Sue: I wouldn't call him fat, exactly, but he seems to be carrying a lot of

weight around his mid-section.

Me: That's all the crap in his pockets.

Noah is worried the Doctor and Harry will corrupt humanity's gene pool.

Sue: Do they really believe Harry will shag an unconscious woman in a plastic container? That's a bit of a leap.

Sarah is successfully revived.

Sue: The outfit she came out with is definitely better than the one she went in with. Actually, I'm sure the costumes in this story are influenced by the Osmonds.

Me: Are you mad?

Sue: The Osmonds were a very influential group, Neil. I'm sure they wore white uniforms like that.

Me: That's weird, even for you.

As the Doctor investigates the Ark's solar stack, he encounters a green organism bubbling away in a tank.

Sue: Giant tadpoles. That's quite unpleasant. Even Tom Baker was freaked out by that.

The Doctor tries to reason with Noah, who is now acting very strangely indeed. So strangely in fact, he shoots the Doctor in the middle of a sentence.

Sue: Has the Doctor been atomised? That was a very short run.

Me: Still longer than Paul McGann's.

When the Doctor regains consciousness, he picks up the sentence where he

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left off. I turn to Sue and notice that she's grinning from ear to ear. And then the Doctor describes the Wirrn's reproductive habits in gruesome detail.

Sue: So this is basically *Alien*?

Me: There are certain similarities, yes.

Sue: How did they sneak this idea into an afternoon tea-time slot? It's

horrific.

Me: This story gave me nightmares when I was a kid. I couldn't hide behind a sofa, though – ours was pushed up against the wall – so I had to use a cushion instead. In fact, I'm sure *The Ark in Space* gave me nightmares.

Sue: Yes, and you've been terrified of bubble wrap ever since.

The episode concludes with Noah definitely not feeling himself.

Sue: (*Pointing at Noah's infected hand*) Now *that's* going to fuck up the gene pool.

Part Three

Noah struggles against the Wirrn inside him.

Sue: I know I should be laughing at this, but the actor's performance is selling it to me. Even though it's just some bubble wrap that's been sprayed green – there's no getting around that fact.

Me: You have to remember bubble wrap was quite exotic in 1975, it wouldn't have been so familiar back then. Give them a break.

Sue: You never got this defensive when I criticised the monsters in Jon Pertwee's stories.

Me: Yes, but this is an incredible performance from Kenton Moore. Look at the anguish etched into his face! It's incredible!

Sue: He looks like Rod Hull practicing with Emu in his bedroom. It doesn't help that if you can make out a little face on the bubble wrap. Can you see its eyes and nose? But full marks to the actor. He managed to bang his hand on that desk without popping it.

As Noah succumbs to the Wirrn, Vira laments his passing.

Sue: Maybe they can pair-bond Harry with Sue Lawley. Does Harry stay

behind to revive the human race? That would be nice.

Me: You don't like Harry very much, do you?

Sue: I just don't see the point of him. Oh look, somebody's crawling around in a green sleeping bag. But what can you do? As long as the actors believe it, I can believe it. And Tom Baker looks like he really believes it.

Having said that, when the Doctor and Sarah are attacked by the same creature later, the story reaches a low point for Sue.

Sue: Run away from it! It's literally moving like a snail.

The crew keep the hungry caterpillar at bay so the Doctor can plug his mind into a dead Wirrn's brain. This isn't as daft as it sounds because he discovers that electricity could be the key to their salvation.

Sue: Why didn't the Doctor work that out after what happened to Harry's shoes? They should have guessed that *ages* ago. It's so obvious – they spent a whole episode trying to switch the bloody electricity off.

Noah reaches the final stages of Wirrnhood.

Sue: I could have done without the shaky dissolve, thanks. In fact I can't say I'm impressed with the direction in this story. It's okay, but it's nothing special.

Part Four

Sue: Okay, it's stopped being like *Alien*, now. I don't remember the crew chatting with the monster in that film. I'm sorry, Neil, but these monsters are rubbish. What were they thinking? How did they think this would work? I think part of the problem is the story is too brightly lit. Nothing's

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scary when it's filmed under strip lighting. And they should be hiding these monsters as much as possible.

The Doctor suddenly realises that the Ark's matter transporter works both ways.

Sue: You can reverse anything in this programme. Everybody knows that.

However, when a crew member named Rogin approaches the magic bed, Sue is forced to question the Ark's ergonomics.

Sue: They should have worked out a better way to access that bed. Maybe some tiny fold-a-way stairs. If they had to clean somebody's piss up, they'd have to trample over the expensive machinery to get to it. **Me:** What possessed you to think of such an eventuality? Jesus!

The Wirrn cause a massive power failure.

Sue: This is more like it. Why didn't they cut the power *ages* ago? This is actually scary now. They should have lit the whole thing like this.

Sarah tries to help the Doctor concoct another cunning plan, but the Time Lord dismisses her out of hand.

Sue: Here we go again. Nothing changes.

But then, a few seconds later, the Doctor is all sweetness and light as he asks Sarah for her input.

Sue: Okay, fair enough. That is a big difference, I suppose. Pertwee wouldn't have behaved like that. Still a bit rude, though. And does Tom Baker ever blink? I don't think I've seen him blink. He'd be good against the 'Weeping Statues' in the new series.

Meanwhile, in the Ark's shuttle...

Sue: I like the lilac lighting. Why didn't they shoot the whole thing like this? The lighting in the first three episodes was terrible, but this is really nice.

Sarah and Harry start bickering.

Sue: You can see how Amy and Rory's banter could have been influenced by Harry and Sarah Jane. They have a similar chemistry. I just hope they don't start shagging in the TARDIS.

Sarah makes her way through the Ark's ventilation shaft.

Sue: It's definitely turned into *Alien* again. So when was *Alien* released?

Me: 1979.

Sue: So Ridley Scott might have seen this before he made *Alien*?

Me: It's possible.

Sue: Maybe he showed it to his crew and said, "I want it to look like that,

but with decent lighting, sets, monsters and music".

When Sarah gets stuck in the narrow shaft, the Doctor uses reverse psychology to tease her out.

Sue: I knew he was only pretending to be angry with her. If that had been Jon Pertwee, I would have believed his insults. Maybe that's why Sarah believed him. She's used to it.

The Doctor and Sarah reach the control room, but a Wirrn intercedes.

Sue: Just step away from the grill! Sarah Jane is really beginning to irritate me now. Get a grip, girl!

The Wirrn are lured into the shuttle and Rogin nobly sacrifices himself to save humanity.

Sue: What a nice man. It's nice to know cockneys survive in the future.

THE ARK IN SPACE

At the beginning, I thought it was only the stuck-up pompous twats who were going to repopulate the planet, so there's still hope for us yet, love.

Noah's humanity reasserts itself and he blows up the shuttle, killing the remaining Wirrn in the process. But instead of returning to the TARDIS, the Doctor volunteers to fix the Ark's T-Mat instead.

Sue: I thought you said this story was only four episodes long? Why hasn't this ended yet?

Me: They've returned to the formula where the stories flow into each other

Sue: So, they come back to the Ark later, then?

Me: Of course they do.

Sue: So, The Ark in Space has an arc in space? Can you see what I did

there?

Me: Yes, very good, Sue.

As our heroes prepare to leave, Sue becomes very animated indeed.

Sue: Hang on a minute... I've seen this before! I recognise Sarah Jane's yellow coat and bobble hat.

Me: It's your first memory of watching *Doctor Who* with me – almost 19 years ago to the day. But we'll save that story for another time.

The Score

Sue: It was good, but it wasn't great. I admit that Tom Baker was brilliant, and the concept was all right, but the direction was a bit flat and the acting ranged from the very good to the completely bizarre. It could have been a lot scarier, too. I'm sorry, Neil, but the monsters looked ridiculous. Having said that, it flew by. It's a tough one to score so I'll give it the benefit of the doubt.

7/10

Me: That was the first story from producer Philip Hinchcliffe and script editor Robert Holmes. Could you tell?

Sue: It did feel a bit different. I couldn't imagine Jon Pertwee appearing in that story. I could imagine Patrick Troughton doing it, but not Pertwee. I'm glad Robert Holmes is a regular now – his scripts are always a cut above the rest. And the tone does seem to have shifted a bit. I can't quite put my finger on it, but it's definitely an easier programme to watch. And no CSO either, which is nice.

COMMENT: "So basically the same score as *Robot*, which had two points knocked off for dog snuffings?" – Wholahoop

THE SONTARAN EXPERIMENT

BLOGGED: 23 March 2012

Part One

Sue didn't even try to hide her excitement when she clapped eyes on the DVD's episode selection screen.

Sue: Only two episodes? I'm in heaven!

Me: I'll tell you what, Sue, if you can guess what makes this story interesting from a production point of view, I'll give you a foot rub.

You'll be pleased to know that I distracted her during the title sequence. "Could you pass me the lighter, love?" seems to work every time.

Sue: It's on location, so I like it already. Are we in the Lake District?

Me: Dartmoor.

Sue: Very nice. I wish they could all be like this. It makes all the

difference, you know.

Our heroes materialise in a circle of silver spheres.

Sue: Is it the Yeti?

Sue is once again drawn to our heroes' choice of outdoor clothing.

Sue: I love Harry's duffle coat. It's a classic. And believe it or not, I had an anorak like Sarah Jane's, but mine was bright orange.

Me: Lovely.

The Doctor repairs the Ark's faulty T-Mat terminal while Harry and Sarah explore what used to be London town.

Sue: They should have gone for a *Planet of the Apes* moment here. They could have bought a cheap model of Nelson's Column and they could have buried in some mud and filmed it with forced perspective. It would have looked great. They missed a trick. Barry would have CSO-ed it in, I'm sure of it.

Harry goes careering down a ravine.

Sue: I hope he doesn't ruin his coat.

A group of human astronauts are also wandering around the planet's surface.

Sue: Are they South African? If this was made in the 1970s, then they must be the bad guys.

One of them is being hunted by a robotic contraption.

Sue: What the hell is that supposed to be? Is this another replacement for the Daleks? They haven't got a clue, have they? It's not a very practical design for knocking about on the moors and zipping between rocks, is it?

Meanwhile Harry is still stuck in a hole.

Sue: Harry is useless. He could at least try to climb back up. That slope doesn't look very steep to me. Is he always this pathetic, Neil? And he's completely ruined his coat. He'll never get those grass stains out.

The astronauts capture and interrogate the Doctor, and an alien with stubby fingers monitors the situation from afar.

Sue: Am I supposed to recognise who that is from their hand? **Me**: Technically, that hand should be no help to you whatsoever.

Sue: What's this story called? **Me**: Er... *The Rocks of Doom*.

THE SONTARAN EXPERIMENT

Sue: It looks like a lovely place to go for a walk. Were there any *Doctor*

Who tours on the moors in the 1970s?

Me: No. And have you noticed anything remarkable about this story yet?

After a very long pause...

Sue: Is this shot entirely on location? On video?

Me: That's right! Well done. They shot it with an Outside Broadcast unit.

Sue: Did they really? That is interesting.

She isn't being sarcastic. Honest.

Sue: It looks great. All the episodes should be made like this. It feels very

Parked not too far away is a spaceship with a very familiar design.

Sue: Oh, yes! I know this! Don't tell me! I definitely know this.

Me: Oh, for God's sake, we only saw it a few weeks ago.

Sue: I know. Please don't tell me...

And then, after an even longer pause...

Sue: What does it begin with?

Me: 'S'.

Sue: Silurians? No, that's not right...

The ship's occupant removes his helmet.

Sue: That's it! Sontarans! I love the Sontarans.

Part Two

Sarah believes the Sontaran is none other than Linx from The Time Warrior. In fact she reckons they're identical.

Sue: They aren't identical. This one doesn't look half as good as the one we saw before. The mask is cheaper and less detailed.

Me: They don't even have the same number of fingers! You'd have thought that a script which included references to the Sontarans being identical clones would have resulted in costumes and masks that were identical. But, no.

Sue: I do like the Sontarans, though. They're a great idea, and very iconic. Some of them are capable of being good guys, you know.

And then Sue notices that there's a problem with the show's star.

Sue: Is it just me or does Tom Baker look a bit pale?

Me: He isn't feeling very well.

Sue: Is he hungover?

Me: He's probably in agony; he broke his collarbone when they were making this episode. The drugs probably haven't kicked in yet.

Sue: The poor thing.

Sue winces in sympathy every time Tom Baker moves from now on.

Sue: This must have been cheap to film. No sets at all, really. Just some found locations, a couple of props and a few costumes. It's the sort of thing fans could make during a spare weekend.

Me: Oh, believe me, Sue, they have.

This particular Sontaran, whose name is Styre, subjects Sarah to a series of horrific hallucinations.

Sue: Elizabeth Sladen is great when it comes to being terrified. I'm not sure what this does for Sarah Jane's feminist agenda, but she has that rabbit-caught-in-headlights look down to a fine art.

Harry rescues an astronaut who's been tied to a rock.

Sue: I'm beginning to like Harry. He's not as useless as I first thought. At

THE SONTARAN EXPERIMENT

least he's trying to be brave and resourceful. It's the stupid dialogue they keep giving him that lets him down.

We learn that Styre has been experimenting on humans in order to analyse their weaknesses, and one poor sod spent nine whole days chained to a rock without any water.

Sue: This is a bit grim, isn't it?

Me: If I remember correctly, the book is even more extreme. The actor who plays Harry – Ian Marter – novelised this story, and because the episode was so short, he padded it out with endless scenes of pain and torture. Perfect for young children.

Styre's latest wheeze involves seeing how long two men can hold a weight over a colleague's rib cage without dropping it, even though the colleague has betrayed them. It's very intense.

Sue: He's basically trying out new game show formats for Endemol.

Meanwhile the Doctor is forced to deal with the Sontaran's robot sentry.

Sue: I still don't like the Sontaran's sidekick. I guess it must have come flat-packed with the ship. I bet it took him ages to assemble it. It looks like a cross between the Martians from *The War of the Worlds* and the robots from the Smash potato adverts.

A Sontaran invasion fleet is waiting for Styre to file his report.

Sue: This is bit far-fetched. There's nobody to invade! Who cares if the humans are frightened of snakes if there's only five of them left? This makes no sense whatsoever.

After a bollocking from his superior, Styre returns to his fiendish experiments.

Sue: This isn't really an experiment at all – it's just torture for the sake of it. If he really wanted to know how resilient a human's ribcage was, he'd drop the bloody thing on him.

The Doctor challenges Styre to a fight.

Sue: That isn't Tom Baker, but they're making the best of a bad situation, I suppose. This would be an easy fight to recreate in the school playground as well – you just have to flail around a bit.

Completely exhausted, Styre returns to his ship to take care of some urgent business.

Sue: He desperately needs a poo.

Styre exits his ship, doubled-up in agony. And then he slumps against some rocks and slowly deflates.

Sue: We didn't need to see that. Not only did that look silly, I'll always think the Sontarans are made from balloons, now.

Incredibly, it was Harry who saved the day.

Sue: Okay, fair enough. He's definitely getting better.

The Doctor tells the Sontaran invasion fleet to sod off.

Sue: That was either a satire about red tape or a really stupid thing to do. What if they'd called the Doctor's bluff? Who's going to stop them? I don't buy it.

The Score

Sue: I can't believe I'm going to say this, but it was too short.

Me: You must be kidding.

THE SONTARAN EXPERIMENT

Sue: It was over before I could get into it. Don't get me wrong, there was a lot that I liked about it – the pace, the location, Tom Baker – but there were a lot of things that I didn't like as well. The plot was terrible, it was impossible for me to care about the guest characters, and it felt cheap. The set-up was good, but the second-half didn't deliver. I bet I won't remember it tomorrow.

5/10

Sue: Do they ever make *Doctor Who* stories in three episodes? Because that would be perfect.

COMMENT: "Just because (the Sontarans) are clones doesn't mean they're all cloned from the same template (indeed there would be good strategic reasons for having at least a few different batches in case of genetic disease, or for different skills). That said, it still doesn't defend the Sontaran design here. They really should have checked the fingers." – Ben Gilbert

NOTES: As 23 people were quick to point out, both on the blog and via email, Sue had already seen a three-part story. It was called *Planet of Giants* (see Volume 1) and she gave it a seven.

In 2006, when we still lived in a static caravan, I used to while away my weekends recording alternative *Doctor Who* episode commentaries with my friends for a weekly podcast (we were young and foolish). When we came to tackle *The Sontaran Experiment*, we inevitably ended up singing the *Spitting Image* song *I've Never Met A Nice South African* at the top of our lungs. There was only one problem: it was a hot, summer's day, which meant we'd opened all the windows in the caravan, and, unbeknownst to us, a group of builders were working within earshot of our cacophonous singing. This would have been embarrassing enough if the builders in question hadn't been South African, which, of course, they were.



Part One

When Sue glances at the DVD's episode selection screen, her heart sinks.

Sue: Oh no! Six episodes? This is not good.

And then, mid-way through the title sequence, she's buffeted by two conflicting emotions. Firstly, there's joy:

Sue: Genesis of the Daleks! Yes!

Followed swiftly by horror:

Sue: Terry fucking Nation!

This could take some time so I pause the DVD.

Me: We watched this story together almost 19 years ago to the day. It was during my first (and entirely unsuccessful) attempt at converting you to *Doctor Who*. It was back in the early days of our relationship. Do you remember anything about it?

Sue: Only that I thought it was good. Or maybe I just said it was good so you wouldn't finish with me.

Me: It'll be interesting to see how much of this you actually remember. **Sue**: I was probably too busy looking at you to take much notice, so don't get your hopes up, love. And given that I've already seen this story, does that mean we can skip it? I'll give it an eight.

Me: No.

Genesis of the Daleks not only begins with a massacre, it begins with a

GENESIS OF THE DALEKS

massacre in slow motion.

Sue: I can see why you decided to show me this one. This is definitely not for kids

Me: That was the reaction I was hoping for. I wanted you to believe that *Doctor Who* was gritty, complicated and action-packed.

Sue: In other words, you lied to me.

The Doctor is briefed by a man dressed in black.

Sue: Is it the Master?

I decide to ignore her.

Sue: His collar is a bit limp. He looks like a court jester.

The Doctor's mission is simple: stop the Daleks at the moment of their creation. Sue tells me to pause the DVD.

Sue: Are they allowed to do this? And if they are, why don't they do this sort of thing all the time? When does he stop the Cybermen from being born? Or the Ice Warriors? I mean, where do you stop?

Me: That's a good question. The Time Lords are clearly using the Doctor so it will give them deniability if they fuck it up. So, in short, no, they shouldn't be doing this. Some fans believe that this is the first shot fired in the Time War.

Sue: About bloody time. I was beginning to wonder when we'd get around to that.

The Doctor is reunited with Harry and Sarah, and together they set out across the wasteland, avoiding missile barrages as they go.

Sue: This is very good. The direction is excellent. Best use of a quarry in *Doctor Who* so far.

Our heroes end up in a minefield.

Sue: Just detonate the mines with your sonic screwdriver. You're always doing it. Or maybe he's worried about being hit in the face by a flying rock. That would make sense, actually.

The Doctor steps on a mine and Harry has to rescue him.

Sue: I like Harry now. He just risked his life to save the Doctor, and that means he's okay in my book.

Night falls on the trenches.

Sue: It's a shame we had to switch over to video, but at least they're trying to make it look as seamless as possible. The smoke and atmospheric lighting help. Someone must have sat down and really thought about this. It looks great.

The Doctor and his companions are caught up in a vicious fire-fight between the Thals and the Kaleds.

Sue: This is very adult. It feels like we're watching a documentary about Serbian war crimes.

The Doctor and Harry are taken inside the Kaled bunker and Sarah is left for dead outside. Sue is vexed that both the Doctor and Harry don't make a fuss about this, even if they are dazed and confused. And then Sue settles into what will become one of her regular silences as Tom Baker dominates the proceedings. In fact, the only thing I managed to get out of her for ages was "Ooh, Thals!", which made me smile.

Sue: Finally, some atmospheric indoor lighting for a change. It just goes to show what you can do if you put your mind to it. The direction is very nice, too. There's plenty of movement and some interesting angles, so it never feels stagey.

GENESIS OF THE DALEKS

Me: Do you remember anything about it so far?

Sue: Not a thing, although these Nazis do ring a bell. I remember it being very depressing. I actually believe that the bad guys will hurt Harry and the Doctor in this scene. They're scary because they seem so real.

When Davros is mentioned, the Doctor asks who he might be.

Sue: Surely the Doctor would know who Davros is if he comes from the future? That would be like travelling back in time to stop the Nazis from invading Poland without knowing who Hitler was. It doesn't make sense.

Sarah gets her first look at the mad scientist, but she's more shocked by the Dalek that emerges from the shadows.

Sue: Of course, Sarah's met the Daleks before. You'd have thought the Doctor would have warned her that she might bump into them. That was a bit of an oversight.

Part Two

Sue: What happened to the recap? There's no recap, Neil.

Me: We saw it two minutes ago! Besides, they aren't pissing around this week. There's too much to do.

Sarah is rescued by a mutant named Sevrin.

Sue: I bet the mutants are nice. Mutants are always nice.

Me: Do you recognise the actor who's playing this particular mutant?

Sue: Recognise him? It's so dark, I can hardly see him!

Davros demonstrates his new Mark 3 travel machine to some Kaled scientists.

Sue: I can't believe they've actually made the Daleks scary again. I never thought I'd see the day.

When a prototype Dalek is armed, it immediately identifies the Doctor as an outsider. But just as the Dalek is about to exterminate its first victim, a scientist named Ronson intercedes, which causes Davros to go ballistic.

Sue: You wouldn't want to get on the wrong side of Davros. I bet the kids

were terrified of him.

Me: I know I was. Actually, I still am.

Sarah is captured by the Thals and imprisoned with a Kaled officer whose face definitely rings a bell.

Sue: He looks like Rodney Bewes from *The Likely Lads*.

Me: Rodney Bewes in *Doctor Who*. That would be... interesting.

As Sarah is led to the Thal's rocket, Sue begins throwing out compliments like confetti at a wedding.

Sue: The set design is great. You can see where all the money has gone this year. This story has it all: massive sets, loads of extras, location work, Daleks. It's got the lot.

She's also impressed with the plot.

Sue: Both sides are as bad as each other, and that's quite unusual for *Doctor Who*. I'm used to seeing the Thals as the helpless good guys. This is bleak. Some of the performances are very intense, too.

Sarah decides that slowly being poisoned to death isn't really for her, so she plans a daring escape.

Sue: Sarah Jane is great in this story – she's actually taking charge of the men. Yes, I can definitely see why you chose this story to show me. If you'd chosen '*The Zarbi Planet*' you would have been out on your ear.

Sarah and Sevrin climb the rocket's scaffolding.

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Sue: She's doing really well in those heels.

Sarah falls to her death and the episode ends on a freeze frame.

Sue: Brilliant cliffhanger. Let's watch the next one. **Me**: We can't. Two episodes a night, remember?

Sue: Spoilsport. How many episodes did we watch 19 years ago?

Me: All of them.

I should point out that it wasn't the 1993 BBC2 repeat of this story we saw. It was my copy of the official VHS tape. Back when it was called The Genesis of the Daleks.

Sue: Six episodes in one night? Bloody hell, I must have been keen on you. I'll tell you what, let's do it again. Let's watch all of them tonight. **Me**: No fucking way.

Sue: Oh, come on! We could pretend that we're young and in love.

Me: You have got to be kidding me.

Sue: You've got no stamina any more, that's your problem. What does this say about our relationship, I wonder? I just offered to watch six episodes of *Doctor Who* with you, and you turned me down flat. Never say I don't offer, Neil.

Part Three

Me: You know someone who worked on *Genesis of the Daleks*, don't you, Sue?

Sue: That's right, I do. Rosemary Crowson. I noticed her name in the credits. I knew she'd done some Tom Baker *Doctor Whos*.

Me: She was the PA for two stories, and she was also the Production

Manager for three episodes of *Blake's 7*.

I looked that up in advance. I'm not Toby Hadoke, you know.

Me: How did you know her?

Sue: She taught production management at a media training school in the

mid-1990s.

Me: Did she ever talk about Doctor Who?

Sue: She did, actually. In fact I might have some gossip for you.

Me: Go on.

Sue: Well, apparently, and I don't know if this is common knowledge or not, but Tom Baker didn't suffer fools gladly. He could be funny and charming, but you wouldn't want to get on the wrong side of him, because if you did, he'd bite your head off.

Me: Is that it?

Sue: Oh, and he used to change his lines all the time. It would drive Rosie mad. I hope she's okay. If you Google yourself one day and you're reading this Rosie, please get in touch.

The story resumes with Sarah falling from the gantry again, although this time she miraculously lands on a platform below.

Sue: That was a stroke of luck.

Sarah's bravery is tested even further when she's forced to 'jump' from the gantry to the rocket cone.

Sue: She's making a mountain out of a molehill. She doesn't even need to jump, she just needs to step across that tiny gap. The way she's carrying on, you'd think she'd have to Parkour over there.

Aside from this, Sue is gripped.

Sue: Of all the stories for Rosie to work on, she didn't half pick a good one.

Me: The other one she worked on isn't too shabby, either.

Go look it up. Unless you're Toby Hadoke, of course.

Sue: Just think, Rosie was probably calling the shots in the gallery during

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this bit.

Me: Yeah, and if this was the 1960s, we might have heard her.

A Thal decides to hang Sarah off the top of the gantry for a laugh.

Me: It's sadistic, don't you think?

Sue: Yeah, but I do like Sarah Jane's jumper.

Harry and the Doctor stumble across some of Davros' genetic experiments that went awry. I sigh. A lot.

Sue: What's wrong with it, Neil? I don't see the problem. What else do you expect a giant clam to look like?

When Tom Georgeson turns up as a Kaled scientist, Sue almost recognises him.

Sue: It's whatshisname from Our Friends in the North.

Me: No it isn't.

Sue: Yes, it is. It's Geordie. **Me**: That is not Daniel Craig.

Sue: I'm sure I've seen him somewhere before.

Me: You're probably thinking of Between the Lines (which you used to

love), or GBH. He was superb in both of them, as he is in this.

The Doctor warns the Thals not to trust Davros.

Sue: He didn't blink again. Do you think it's okay for the leading man to

be the scariest thing in the episode?

Me: Scarier than Davros?

Sue: It's a close run thing. Davros has the opposite problem – corpse eyes. It's horrible, like flesh rotting over a skull. The make-up is brilliant. Do we

ever find out how Davros ended up like this? **Me**: Well, there's a Big Finish audio where...

Sue: Okay, forget I asked.

The episode concludes with the Doctor trying to stop the Thals' rocket from launching. However, he's pinned to an electric fence instead.

Me: I was eating egg and chips when that originally went out.

Part Four

The Doctor fails to stop the Thals, and the Kaleds are wiped off the face of Skaro.

Sue: This isn't the Doctor's finest hour, is it? How many people have just

been killed, do you think?

Me: Thousands, probably. Maybe tens of thousands.

Sue: No wonder the Doctor is pissed off. The Time Lords will be furious with him.

Davros uses the disaster to rally the Kaled survivors behind him.

Sue: The script is very good.

Me: I know. I don't believe that Terry Nation could have written this.

Sue: But his name is on the credits, so it must be Terry.

Me: I detect the hand of Robert Homes.

Sue: Maybe Terry pulled his finger out and delivered the goods for a change. It's not impossible. Maybe I've been wrong about Terry all this

time. And the foot rubs are very nice, I must say.

As Nyder plots and schemes on Davros' behalf, Sue finally decides to pass judgement on him.

Sue: He's very creepy. Why is he doing this? What's in it for him?

Me: I think he's in love with Davros.

Sue: I think you're reading too much into it, Neil.

Me: I love Nyder. I set up a fake *Facebook* page for him once. And Davros.

Sue: Neil!

Me: I stopped before I got to Ronson. That's when sanity took over.

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Sue: Thank God for that.

Me: Although I did pretend to be Nyder on *Twitter* for a while. I'd ask people what I should get Ronson for Christmas, and then I'd say, "Thank

you, that's what I wanted to know." **Sue**: I wonder about you sometimes.

The Kaleds conspire to bring Davros back under their control.

Sue: This reminds me of that Tom Cruise film.

Me: Oh, this doesn't sound good...

Sue: You know, the one where they try to kill Hitler; Valkyrie.

Me: Actually, that's not a bad call.

Davros ties the Doctor to a chair.

Sue: Nice tracking shot. You don't see many of those in *Doctor Who*. This is very nicely directed. It's almost as good as Douglas Camfield.

When Davros threatens to extract the complete history of the Daleks from the Doctor's mind, Tom Baker gives him both barrels.

Sue: See! He's bloody terrifying!

Me: Mary Whitehouse got a bee in her bonnet when she saw this. She

called it, "Tea-time brutality for tots".

Sue: You can see her point. This is fucking bleak.

Part Five

The Doctor is forced to recount the Daleks' past (or should that be future?) defeats. This takes some time.

Sue: Isn't the Doctor changing history by telling Davros this? The Time Lords aren't going to very happy with him, are they? They might bugger up his TARDIS again as punishment.

Sue even recognises one of the events he mentions.

Sue: Does this mean the one where the Daleks invade Earth is a few episodes shorter now?

And then Sue clams up (sorry) as the Doctor and Davros go head-to-head again.

Me: You aren't saying very much. love.

Sue: Just make something up and shut up. I'm trying to watch this.

She will, however, offer the odd compliment. For example, when Kavell attacks a guard with a cosh.

Sue: It was the correct decision to cut away before he actually hit him. It's much more horrific if you're left to imagine the violence instead of watching an extra pretending to fall unconscious.

Sue likes the fact that Harry and Sarah have had their own little adventure, but she's also overjoyed when our heroes finally reunite.

Sue: They make a good team. I even want Harry to stay.

The Doctor has to recover the recording Davros made of his interrogation.

Sue: Why? How is that going to help? Davros could write it down or dictate it to Nyder. You have to kill Davros if you believe that getting hold the tape will be the end of it. Unless Davros' memory is as bad as mine, of course.

The Doctor heads for the Dalek incubator room with an armful of explosives.

Sue: He won't do it. I know he won't do it. He doesn't have the right. I remember now. He doesn't press the big red button, just you wait and see.

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Maybe my memory isn't so bad, after all.

When the Doctor enters the incubator room, Sue decides to fixate on a very disturbing detail.

Sue: They sound like babies. The Doctor is going to kill little babies!

The Doctor stumbles out of the incubator room, covered in squealing mutants

Sue: It reminds me of that thing on Londo's neck in Babylon 5.

Me: It reminds me of not sleeping properly for a week.

Part Six

The final episode begins with one of Doctor Who's most iconic moments.

Sue: This is the clip they'll show on the news when Tom Baker dies.

Me: Thanks for that, love.

Sue: It's true. It's very powerful.

However, before the Doctor can make a decision, he's interrupted by some good news.

Me: Do you think he would have done it?

Sue: Never. There's no way the Doctor would have committed genocide.

He's the Doctor.

As Davros manipulates the Kaled rebels, Sue points at a large red destructor button.

Sue: Ah! There's the big red button I was talking about. See, I'm not going mad, after all. It's all coming back to me now.

And then it's basically wall-to-wall compliments from this point on.

Sue: I like the female Thal. She would have been a good companion. In fact all the roles have been cast really well, there isn't a weak performance in the whole thing, if I'm honest.

Davros offers the Kaled elite one last opportunity to join him.

Sue: I love the way the scientists decide to switch sides. I didn't expect that at all

The Doctor forces Nyder to take him to Davros' safe, which is decorated with a large iconic eye.

Sue: Davros is a fan of *Big Brother*, I see.

The Doctor deduces that Davros couldn't open the safe from his chair, so Nyder must have done it for him.

Sue: So Nyder is basically Davros' carer?

The Doctor destroys the incriminating tape and legs it.

Sue: He can't leave the job half-done! Isn't he going to check that everything's going to be okay before he leaves? It's not as if Davros hasn't pulled the rug out from under him before.

But they can't leave. The Doctor has lost the time ring that will return them to the TARDIS. And then Davros unleashes his Daleks and the rebels are murdered, including Gharman, who Sue had a soft spot for.

Sue: I bet Mary Whitehouse choked on a scone during that scene.

So the Doctor decides to commit genocide after all.

Sue: Eh? No! That can't be right.

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He returns to the incubator room to finish what he started.

Sue: Where the hell did his coat mysteriously appear from? Did he go back for it? He hasn't got his priorities straight, has he?

However, before the Doctor can complete the connection he was agonising over earlier, he's interrupted by a Dalek.

Sue: I can't believe he's actually going to do it...

The Dalek completes the connection for him and the incubator room explodes.

Sue: He didn't commit the act himself, but the intent was still there. I'm not sure how I feel about that. Basically, what the Doctor's saying here is that it's okay to go back in time and kill a small child.

The Thals blow up the entrance to the bunker, which should delay the Daleks for a thousand years.

Sue: Are you sure that's right? Don't they mean they'll be delayed by a thousand yards?

Back in the bunker, the Daleks turn on the Kaleds.

Sue: Who's going to tidy up once they've finished killing everyone?

And then they turn on Davros.

Sue: That's clever. If only he'd given them a dash of pity.

The episode concludes with the Doctor suggesting that some things might be better with the Daleks.

Sue: Yeah, Doctor Who's ratings for a start.

The Score

Sue: It was on for a 10 out of 10 at one point, but the last episode was a cop-out. That said, there's so much that's good: the script, the direction, the performances, the lighting, the production assistant – so I can't complain. What do you want me to say? It was excellent.

9/10

Me: Did you enjoy it more the second time?

Sue: I think I appreciated it more. Like I said, the first time I saw it, I was probably looking at you more than Davros. You are a slight improvement, after all.

COMMENT: "Makes you wonder what *Blake's 7* would've been like with Guy Siner instead of Paul Darrow." – solar penguin

NOTES: Nyder's twitter account still exists (www.twitter.com/nyder). Here's a sample tweet: 'After the blast, Davros insisted that I have a month's gardening leave. I loved tending my little garden. It's just what I wanted to hoe.' Unfortunately, a lengthy – not to mention costly – legal battle between myself and John Williams over custody of the account means the feed has remained silent since 2012 (Nyder was last seen making jokes about Google+).

REVENGE OF THE CYBERMEN

BLOGGED: 29 March 2012

Part One

Sue: Is there anything I should know before we start?

Me: Only that this story was the first one released on video.

Sue: Any particular reason for that?

Me: Well, fans who attended the official *Doctor Who* convention at Longleat in 1983 were asked to suggest which story they'd like to see released first. And this one won.

Sue: So it must be a good one, then.

Me: The video cost £30 quid in 1983. That's over £100 in today's money. **Sue**: It's a good job it isn't 1983 today, Neil, or our relationship would be in serious trouble.

I press 'play'.

Sue: So what are the Cybermen revenging against, exactly? Is it revenge for what the Doctor did to them the last time they met? I don't remember what happened then, so I hope it isn't important.

The episode begins with the Doctor, Harry and Sarah floating in space.

Sue: It's the inflatable beach toy again. At least they got their money's worth out of it.

Once he's safely back on the Nerva Beacon (aka the Ark), Harry tries to keep the Time Ring as a souvenir, but it disappears before he can pocket it.

Sue: Poor Harry. He collects antique bracelets, you know.

When the Doctor opens a door, a human corpse falls to the floor. Still,

makes a change from a Wirrn, I suppose.

Sue: Is this place cursed?

In the corridor there are piles of... Well, er...

Sue: Is it the Autons? Have the Autons joined forces with the Cybermen?

Me: Er...

Sue: Don't tell me they're supposed to be human bodies! Don't be

ridiculous!

I apologise profusely. Like it's my fault the director thought he could get away with littering the set with mannequins.

Sue: They must have run out of money. Either that or the Cybermen can turn people into shop window dummies now.

When we meet the surviving crew members, Sue is immediately drawn to William Marlowe as Lester. She vaguely recognises him from The Mind of Evil (or 'The One in the Prison', if you happen to be Sue). But she also recognises the Cybermats, too.

Sue: I love the Cybermats. Cybermats are cool. The cats would love a Cybermat to play with. The doors are very impressive in this story, too. They're swishing together very quickly, which makes for a nice change.

Meanwhile, on the planet Voga, two aliens are talking about the Cybermen.

Me: I love the way the Cybermen are dropped casually into the conversation like that. There's no attempt to hold them back as a surprise, or anything like that.

Sue: Er, the clue is in the title, Neil.

The Vogans are named Magrik and Vorus.

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Sue: Did he just call him "your arse"? I'm sure he just mentioned his arse. Then again, it's hard to hear anything under their stupid masks.

Back on Nerva, a crew member named Warner is attacked by a Cybermat.

Sue: Bloody hell! It's the size of a snake! They'd make wonderful draft excluders.

The Doctor calls the Cybermen "total machine creatures".

Sue: No they aren't.

That made me smile.

Sue: And where the hell are they, anyway?

Warner dies from his Cybermat bite. The Doctor wishes he could have reached the poor man sooner.

Sue: Then you should have spent less time on the episode's back story and more time looking for a bloody cure.

It's around this point Sue starts to rebel against the incidental (or is should that be accidental?) music.

Sue: This isn't Dudley. This is dreadful.

And talking of dreadful music, when the Doctor describes Voga as the planet of gold, Sue just can't help herself:

Sue: (*Singing*) 'Gold! Always believe in your soul! La-la-la-la-la. You're indestructible! La-la-la-la-la... Gold!'

The episode concludes as Sarah fends off a Cybermat.

Sue: Not bad. I've seen worse.

I try to stifle my giggles. It looks atrocious! But no one cares what I think, so I'll shut up.

Sue: I'm enjoying this. It's just the music that lets it down.

Part Two

Sue: I had a shirt like Sarah Jane's. It's a Ben Sherman, I think. She suits the combat look.

The Doctor tells Harry to take Sarah to the surface of Voga via a transmat beam, as this will cure her Cybermat bite. If only he'd thought of that before Warner expired.

Sue: I like this location. It would be a good base for a Bond villain. **Me**: It's Wookey Hole. You know, next door to Stumphole Cavern.

Back on Nerva, Lester takes Kellman from behind.

Sue: He's strong, isn't he? He's twisting his gun's nozzle out of shape.

That wasn't a euphemism by the way. Anyway, the Doctor explains that the Cybermen are only susceptible to one thing: gold.

Sue: Since when? That's the first I've heard of it. So how does gold suffocate them? Do you have to ram a bullion bar down its gob? And speaking of Cybermen – where the hell are they?

Right on cue, a spaceship appears.

Sue: It looks like a fat, happy seal.

And then – finally! – we meet the ship's occupants.

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Sue: Why has that Cyberman got black handles on his head?

Me: He's the one in charge.

Sue: Really? He looks unfinished to me.

The Doctor threatens Kellman with a Cybermat unless he tells him what's going on.

Sue: The Doctor's turned into Jack Bauer. And is that a sound effect or is that supposed to be music? It's never a good sign when I have to ask that question.

Sue doesn't recognise Kevin Stoney when he turns up as an elderly Vogan (I know, I can't believe it either!) so I have to tell her.

Sue: Why would they bury an actor as good as him under all that plastic crap?

As the Vogans bicker, Sue finally loses her patience.

Sue: I can't keep up with who's who, who wants what, when, why, where or how. I just don't give a shit any more. I hope the Cybermen do something soon.

And then Sue is actually impressed by something. It occurs when Sarah Jane flees from the Vogans and their bullets ricochet off the cave walls. I must admit, it does look spectacular.

Sue: It's all over the place, this.

A spaceship is still approaching Nerva. Who could it possibly be?

Sue: It's the fucking Cybermen, you idiots! You've been talking about them endlessly for hours, and now you're surrounded by fucking Cybermats. Who the fuck do you think it is? The fucking Master?

As the ship docks, the Doctor rushes off to the airlock shouting the word on everyone's lips: "Cybermen!"

Sue: They're laying the marimbas on a bit thick. It must be serious.

The Cybermen exit the airlock and kick arse.

Sue: Good cliffhanger. Terrible episode.

Part Three

Sue: They should be playing accordion music right now.

Me: That's cruel, Sue.

The Cyberleader takes control of Nerva.

Sue: He's very angry for a Cyberman. They're usually monotone, and unfeeling, aren't they? This is a bit of a departure, but I think I prefer it.

Me: Are you insane, woman?!

Sue: I can understand everything he's saying.

Me: I give up.

Sue: I admit they aren't as scary, but at least he makes sense. Nice arse,

too.

Me: Now I really do give up.

The bombs carried by the Doctor, Lester and Stevenson are supposed to crack Voga in half.

Sue: So they're basically suicide bombers?

Me: If suicide means being blown up by somebody else and you don't

want to die, then yes.

Meanwhile on Voga, the planet of gold...

Sue: I couldn't give a shit about the Vogans. I tune out when they appear.

REVENGE OF THE CYBERMEN

I don't know who's who, which ones are good, which ones are bad, what they're trying to achieve. And I don't care, either. And considering this planet is supposed to be made of gold, it's a bit of a shit hole, isn't it? It should look like Lady Ga Ga's apartment.

The Doctor accuses the Cybermen of being a pathetic bunch of tin soldiers skulking about the galaxy in an ancient spaceship.

Sue: See! Even the Doctor thinks they're crap.

We're told that the Cybermen were defeated by a glitter gun.

Sue: How very glam.

The Cybermen send the Doctor, Lester and Stevenson to Voga with bombs strapped to their backs.

Sue: When the Cybermen hang around in dark caves and don't say a word, they're pretty good. But shouldn't these Cybermen be dead already? They don't like gold because it kills them, and yet here they are standing in the middle of a planet that's made from the stuff. This should be like Superman visiting a planet made from Kryptonite, shouldn't it? Why haven't they keeled over yet?

Kellman admits he's working for the Vogans.

Sue: I don't get it. If he wanted to work against the Cybermen, why did he try to kill the Doctor?

Me: Maybe he's a good bad guy? Or a bad good guy. I don't know! Maybe he hates everyone.

And then another Cyberman decides to pipe up.

Sue: Now *this* guy is playing the part with no emotion. It makes the Cyberleader stick out like a sore thumb, though. Somebody didn't read

the memo.

When a rockfall renders the Doctor unconscious, Harry desperately tries to remove the bomb that's strapped to his back.

Sue: Another good cliffhanger. And that's the only good thing I can say about this.

Part Four

Harry Sullivan is an imbecile!

Sue: I could imagine Matt Smith saying that to Rory Pond.

Me: If he got Rory's name wrong.

Sue: You know what I mean. That jokey shouty thing he does.

Nicol joins us as the Doctor and Harry arm themselves with fistfuls of gold.

Nicol: It's *The Crystal Maze*. It even sounds like *The Crystal Maze*. But don't put that on the blog, Neil. I mentioned *The Crystal Maze* before and I don't want your readers to think I'm obsessed with it.

Sue: Do you know what annoys me the most about this episode?

Me: Go on.

Sue: Video – film – video – film – video – film. Make your bloody mind

up!

The Doctor and Harry ambush the Cybermen with gold dust while Lester watches on from afar.

Sue: He's showing less emotion than the Cybermen!

It turns out he was steeling himself to be the suicide bomber that Sue always suspected him to be.

Sue: Oh, fair enough. That was brave. Hang on a minute... The Cybermen

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are going to blow up a planet with three bombs, but that one barely took out a couple of Cybermen. I'm not convinced.

When the Doctor learns that the Vogans plan to blow Nerva out of the sky with a rocket, he demands 15 minutes to rescue his friend.

Sue: Another 15 minutes won't kill them, surely? **Nicol**: Oh, I don't know; I'm struggling a bit.

The Cybermen revert to Plan B, which basically involves them crashing Nerva into Voga.

Sue: Plan B should have been Plan A; I bet Plan C is a belter.

The Vogans launch their Sky Striker, which looks a lot like an Apollo Saturn V rocket, which makes Nicol laugh her head off. The Cyberleader is so annoyed by this, he gives the Doctor a vigorous neck massage.

Sue: Down a bit. Left a bit. Yes, that's it. Just there...

The Cyberleader struts around the place with his hands on his hips.

Sue: Either he's suffering from backache or he thinks he's it.

The Cybermen evacuate Nerva, leaving the Doctor and Sarah to face "the biggest bang in history".

Nicol: (Incredulous) Really? Are they absolutely sure about that?

The departing Cybermen are destroyed by the Sky Striker.

Sue: Idiots.

The Doctor wrestles with Nerva's controls.

Sue: It's a wood-turning lathe with shit smeared over it. I can see what they're trying to do, but it looks stupid.

Nicol is laughing too much to get any words out as the Doctor steers the space station to safety. And then the TARDIS turns up.

Sue: It was waiting for this bloody story to end.

The Brigadier has called the Doctor back to Earth.

Sue: Is he going to work for UNIT again?

Me: It certainly looks that way.

Sue: Thank fuck for that.

The Score

Sue: What a load of rubbish. It started off all right, but then it went downhill. The Cybermen were rubbish, the aliens were rubbish, the locations were completely wasted, the direction was terrible, and the plot was impossible to follow. Tom Baker had some nice moments, but basically it was a mess.

3/10

Me: That's the end of Tom Baker's first season.

Sue: Really? Wow. It flew by. That wasn't a great story to finish the season on, mind. I hope some decent stories come along soon.

COMMENT: "I have the dubious honour of being born the same day (the final episode) was broadcast. Still, at least it means I didn't have to watch it!" - Harry

SEASON THIRTEEN

THE DOCTOR IS SCARIER THAN THE VILLAIN!



This illustration funded by Joe McIntyre



Part One

Terror of the Zygons gets off to a cracking start.

Sue: That was a nice edit to kick things off. I'm not entirely sure what I was looking at, but it's a confident start.

An oil rig crumbles into the sea.

Sue: I still don't know what I'm looking at, but that was probably a nice explosion. It was a smart decision to shoot this at night because I can't see a bloody thing.

Unfortunately, my copy of this story is extremely dark, which means we'll end up squinting at the screen quite a lot. At least the next scene is in broad daylight, as the Doctor, Harry and Sarah traipse across a windswept moor.

Sue: (*Noticing the Doctor's tam o'shanter*) Are we in Scotland?

Me: Nothing escapes you, love.

Sue: Sarah is wearing the Doctor's hat and Harry is wearing his scarf. I like it. They come across as a big happy family. Or very close friends who

are comfortable swapping clothes.

Me: There are definitely forums for people like you, Sue.

And then Sue is swept off her feet.

Sue: Ooh, that's a nice 1970s Land Rover. Oh, this is *very* nice. A lovely location (although I'm not convinced it's actually Scotland), nice cars and a nice soundtrack. It's nice. I'm going to enjoy this.

And then it gets even better.

Sue: A Land Rover Defender. Now you're talking! And is that Benton driving it? Get in!

In the local pub, which has been turned into UNIT's temporary HQ, the Brigadier is discussing oil rig disasters with a man named Huckle.

Sue: The bagpipes are doing my head in. They're too loud. I can't hear a word anyone's saying. This isn't Dudley, is it?

Even the Brigadier is annoyed by the racket.

Sue: Thank heavens he's noticed it too.

But he carries on in spite of it.

Sue: Why didn't the Brig made it stop? It isn't even a real person playing those bagpipes – it's a fucking record. Otherwise, we'd see them.

And then

Sue: The bagpipes have driven our cats out of the room. Enough is

enough, Neil. This is giving me a headache.

Me: Get used to it, love. The soundtrack is like this for the next 90

minutes. **Sue**: *What?*

But when the Doctor walks up to the bar, the music stops abruptly.

Sue: Thank fuck for that.

Sarah decides to take the piss out of the Brigadier's kilt.

Sue: Let's have a look at your knees, then. This is too dark, Neil, I can't see

TERROR OF THE ZYGONS

his knees.

When the Doctor learns that the Brigadier has dragged him to Scotland to deal with an oil crisis, he scoffs at Earth's reliance on fossil fuel.

Sue: The Doctor is well ahead of his time. If we'd listened to him in 1975, we wouldn't be in such a mess now.

The Doctor's interest is piqued when he learns the rigs were attacked under mysterious circumstances.

Sue: My Dad made parts for oil rigs around this time. He would have enjoyed this story.

The Doctor rushes off to investigate, leaving Sarah to make small talk with Angus, the pub landlord.

Me: Look, Sue, it's Shughie McFee from Crossroads.

Sue: I have no idea who that is, but I bet he's the only gay in the village.

Me: You didn't watch Crossroads back in the day, did you?

Sue: Not really, no; I had a life. I remember this actor from another *Doctor Who*, though.

Me: Then there's hope for you yet. In an alternate universe you told me the name of the story, as well.

Sue: I just remember you banging on about Crossroads.

There are strange goings-on at Tulloch Moor.

Sue: It's *An American Werewolf in London*, isn't it? They're building the tension nicely. The acting's fine, it's on location, and there's a nice pace to it. So far so good.

Harry finds a survivor from another oil rig disaster washed up on the beach. But when he tries to help the poor man, a sniper in a sporran starts shooting at them.

Me: Harry's dead. **Sue**: No he isn't.

Me: Yes he is. He's been shot in the head.

Sue: That's just a flesh wound.

The bagpiper (care of EMI Records) plays a sorrowful lament for the dead.

Me: See, I told you. They're foreshadowing Harry's death with funeral

music.

Sue: Really? They actually killed Harry?

When Sarah takes an urgent phone call from the local infirmary, I somehow convince Sue that she's just seen a Doctor Who companion suffer a brutal, senseless death. It's one of life's small pleasures.

Sue: But that's awful!

Meanwhile a Zygon gently massages the controls to his ship.

Sue: That's horrible. Is this supposed to be organic technology?

Me: Well spotted.

Sue: It reminds me of something else.

Me: Babylon 5?

Sue: *Battlestar Galactica*. When they had to fly a stolen Cylon ship, it looked like someone's lower intestines when they got in the cockpit. Hey!

Cylon – Zygon... Coincidence?

Sarah arrives at the infirmary and we discover Harry is alive and well. I duck as a cushion sails over my head (we haven't had one of those in ages). And then, as the Doctor ruminates on what could be behind the attacks, we cut to his face on a screen in the Zygons' ship.

Sue: That was a lovely edit. The direction is first-rate this week. Who is it?

Me: Do you really have to ask?

Sue: Is it Camfield? Is it really? I thought he was dead.

TERROR OF THE ZYGONS

Me: No, he had a heart attack during *Inferno*, but he got better,

remember?

Sue: Thank fuck for that. I thought this was good. Having said that, this close-up of what I assume must be a Zygon reminds me of Bungle from

Rainbow. And that can't be good.

The episode concludes with Sarah being threatened by a Zygon.

Sue: Scary.

Me: That cliffhanger still scares the crap out of me today.

Part Two

Sue: It's good to see the gang back together again.

Me: What do you mean?

Sue: You know, the Brig, Benton, UNIT. It's just like old times. And

Douglas Camfield is back, too. What more could you ask?

Sue gets her first good look at a Zygon.

Sue: It's an interesting design. I'm struggling to make out what they're saying, but they look creepy and vaguely fishy. That one over there looks like a goldfish that's drowning on dry land.

The Zygons own a cyborg pet called the Skarasen.

Sue: That isn't so good. But it's a blink-and-you'll-miss-it effect, so I'll let it pass.

When the Doctor and Sarah are locked in the infirmary's decompression chamber without any oxygen, the Time Lord sends Sarah into a trance before howling like a banshee.

Sue: Is he trying to scream more air into the room?

The Brigadier confers with a UNIT corporal.

Sue: Is he Yates' replacement? He isn't very good. I can't believe I'm going to say this, but I think I actually miss Yates.

A UNIT soldier patrols the misty moors.

Sue: This looks great. It's very atmospheric. Good old Douglas. So who did the music? He wouldn't work with Dudley Simpson so it can't be him.

Me: A guy called Geoffrey Burgon.

Sue: I like it. It's delicate.

The soldier is attacked and killed by the Skarasen.

Sue: Oh dear. Is this the point where it all starts to go wrong?

The Doctor finds the Skarasen's signalling device at the scene of the crime.

Me: I used to have one of those, but I think one of the cats ate it.

Sue: What? You could have killed it!

Me: Don't worry, it was tiny – no bigger than a grain of rice. It came with my collectible Zygon action figure.

Sue: So that's where I recognise the Zygons from. And it wasn't the cats that ate it. I think I hoovered it up. Sorry.

The Zygons continue to plot and scheme.

Sue: The Zygons are very difficult to understand with their *Doctor Who* voices, don't you think? That half-whispering, half-wheezing thing all the monsters do: "Doc-TORRRRRR..." You know, like that.

The Zygons can also mimic humans.

Sue: I said this was like *Battlestar Galactica*.

TERROR OF THE ZYGONS

Harry's duplicate is sent to retrieve the Zygons' signalling device, and as soon as he has it in his possession, he rudely pushes Sarah out of the way.

Sue: They don't even pretend to blend in, do they? Why bother with a disguise if you're just going to draw attention to yourself like that?

Sarah follows Harry to a barn, and Douglas Camfield ladles on the tension with a hoe.

Sue: Can't they make Douglas direct them all?

Harry attacks Sarah with a pitchfork.

Sue: Fucking hell! How grim was that? What an amazing scene. That was very disturbing. And very, very dark.

Me: Yeah, it's a shame this copy is so poor.

Sue: Why isn't this story on DVD yet? It obviously isn't a duffer, so what

are they waiting for?

Me: Well, I can't corroborate this, but I remember someone telling me that *Terror of the Zygons* will be the last story they ever release on disc. I think it's because someone who works for the range knows someone who rates this story as their all-time favourite, so a decision was taken to release it at the end, just to spite him.

Sue: That would be really funny if the picture wasn't so dark.

The Doctor pockets the signalling device and draws the Skarasen away from his friends. Unfortunately, the Doctor's vehicle breaks down before he can get very far.

Sue: A Land Rover would never do that. No, I simply don't believe it. A Land Rover wouldn't develop a technical problem like that. Benton must have forgotten to fill it up. He should have taken a jerry can in case of emergencies. This is silly; the Doctor actually believes a Land Rover has simply broken down.

Me: So you can accept the Loch Ness Monster, but you can't accept a Land

Rover breaking down?

Sue: For no clear reason! There are limits, you know. And what do you mean, the Loch Ness Monster? Are you taking the piss?

Me: I'm deadly serious. In fact, the novelisation is called *Doctor Who and*

Me: I'm deadly serious. In fact, the novelisation is called *Doctor Who and the Loch Ness Monster*.

Sue: Since when did Nessie go traipsing around the moors? It stays in the water. Everybody knows that.

Me: I remember watching this story at school. I must have been eight or nine at the time. It was either the whole story or bits of it were included in a Schools and Colleges programme.

Sue: What on Earth were they trying to teach you during that class?

The Doctor tries to outrun the Skarasen.

Sue: I wish we didn't have to see the monster. Just hearing it is enough. This is definitely Camfield's lowest point. Then again, what could he possibly do differently? What a shame.

When I remind her that the Skarasen is a cyborg, and the Zygons have been hanging around Scotland for centuries, everything suddenly clicks into place.

Sue: Oh, I see! So the Zygons have built this robot Nessie thing (which explains why it moves in a completely unrealistic fashion) and they've used it to scare people away from Loch Ness, yes? That actually makes sense. Phew, I was worried there for a second.

Part Three

Sue: Doctor Who should be banned from using dinosaurs.

The Zygons believe the Doctor is dead and they order their pet home.

Sue: So they don't call it Nessie, then? That's disappointing.

TERROR OF THE ZYGONS

Angus becomes suspicious of the Zygons' transmitter, which has been hidden in the stag's head.

Sue: This guy always plays the token Scot. I'm sure I've seen him in loads of things.

Me: Yeah, he's the Scottish Talfryn Thomas.

And then Sue enjoys a rare treat.

Sue: Two Land Rover Defenders in the same scene. It doesn't get any better than this. If I won the lottery, I'd buy a Defender with the snorkel attachment so I could drive it underwater.

Me: That would be handy. Especially in this story.

The Doctor claims the Loch Ness Monster has been using a subterranean tunnel in order to commute to the North Sea.

Sue: Is that really possible, or are they just making it up? They didn't have *Wikipedia* in 1975, so I guess they could say anything they liked.

Angus is attacked by a Zygon who has disguised itself as a nurse, and UNIT are too late to save him.

Sue: He must have a canny pair of lungs if UNIT heard him in the next postcode.

UNIT track the Zygon to a nearby forest. They shoot to kill.

Sue: They won't hit it. Never in a month of Sundays.

Sue is forced to eat her words when the nurse emerges from the forest with a bloody bullet wound.

Sue: The bullet must have ricocheted off a tree.

The Zygon brains a UNIT soldier with a large rock.

Sue: Homicidal nurses! This is not for kids.

Meanwhile, Sarah stumbles across a secret passage in the Duke of Forgill's library.

Sue: Sarah's panty line is very visible in this story. God knows what it must look like on a decent copy. Nice jumper, though. Not too keen on the coat.

Sarah manages to avoid the aliens.

Sue: I like the Zygons. They're quite Octopussy. Do they come back again? **Me**: There's a fan film, which features Zygon porn. I could hunt down a copy down, if you like.

Sue: I'll pass, thanks.

As the Zygons prepare for take-off, UNIT decide to depth-charge the suckers.

Sue: Typical UNIT. The Brigadier's been dying to do this all day.

When the Zygons' ship emerges from the Loch, the onlookers are stunned by a noise that's even more debilitating than the bagpipes.

Sue: I've just noticed that Ian Levene (sic) has a very big mouth.

The Zygon ship takes off.

Sue: What a clunky piece of shit.

Part Four

Sue: The Zygons' spaceship looks like a depressed elephant.

TERROR OF THE ZYGONS

The Doctor tries to disarm his captors with humour.

Sue: I like it when the Doctor takes the piss out of the aliens. There's a nice mixture of comedy and drama in this story. It strikes just the right balance.

Tom does this a lot in Terror of the Zygons and there's plenty of appreciative laughter from Sue.

Sue: Why did Broton visit the Doctor in his cell? He didn't need anything from him, and he gave the Doctor loads of information. It's a bit lazy, this. Jon Pertwee would have worked that out on his own.

Me: Yeah, and it would have taken him six episodes to do it.

Sue: Good point.

The Brigadier receives an important phone call.

Sue: That's interesting. Was that supposed to be Margaret Thatcher?

Me: Or Shirley Williams. **Sue**: Or Edwina Currie?

Me: If you like.

Sue: So the UNIT stories have to be set in the future. Okay, then.

The Zygons' ship is spotted in a nearby quarry.

Sue: A quarry. How convenient.

The Zygon's ship explodes.

Sue: That was very impressive. One of the best explosions I've seen in this series so far. Douglas should have chucked sand over the cast's faces, but that wasn't bad at all.

Our heroes race to the Fourth International Energy Conference in London so they can stop Broton from turning the Skarasen into a weapon of mass

destruction. But when the Doctor interrupts Broton's plans, the Zygon massages the Doctor into submission.

Sue: Has the Doctor got an Achilles' neck? That's the second time someone has tried to shiatsu him to death.

After Broton is shot and killed by UNIT (he was standing two feet away from them at the time), the Doctor races to the terrace to face the Skarasen.

Sue: Oh dear.

The Doctor throws the signalling device at the monster as innocent bystanders scream off-screen.

Sue: Are you sure he's thrown it down Nessie's neck and not into a large crowd of people? It sounds like there's a massacre going on down there.

Nessie swallows the devices and buggers off back to Scotland.

Sue: I bet that made the evening news.

The episode concludes with the Doctor, Sarah, Harry, the Brigadier and the Duke of Forgill returning to Tulloch Moor to retrieve the TARDIS.

Sue: Why have they taken this bloke to see the TARDIS? What was the point of that?

The Brigadier politely refuses the Doctor's offer of a lift back to London, as does Harry.

Sue: I expect they'll pick Harry up later. I'm guessing that the Doctor and Sarah will take a detour first. And why did Harry go all the way to Scotland if he had no intention of going back in the TARDIS? That was a bit pointless.

TERROR OF THE ZYGONS

When the TARDIS dematerialises, the Duke tempers his astonishment with a self-deprecating jibe about how tight-fisted the Scots can be.

Sue: And a nice bit of casual racism to finish on. Lovely.

The Score

Sue: Not bad. It had a lot going for it: the Zygons, the location, the direction, the music, Tom Baker, the Brigadier in a kilt, and the extensive Land Rover collection. But quite a few things let it down: the monster, the Zygons' diction, and, most importantly, the plot. Even the Doctor took the piss out of it.

7/10

COMMENT: "I think the Skarasen is a thing of beauty. It's just how Ray Harryhausen would have handled it, if Ray happened to have been working with \$80 instead of \$8million." – Simon Harries

NOTES: In September 2013, *Terror of the Zygons* became the last complete classic story to be released on DVD (not including *The Enemy of the World*). So the rumour was true.

Sue misidentified a Land Rover in this story. To quote Jazza1971: "The Defender title and badge was only introduced in 1991, a re-badging of the Land Rover Ninety and the Land Rover One Ten. The ones seen here are probably Series III Land Rovers, as they are very similar to the Ninety One/One Ten/Defender." Similar or not, Sue will never live this down.

Thanks to the esteemed *Blake's 7* historian Phil Ware, I can now tell you that my schoolroom Zygon memory wasn't a figment of my overwrought imagination, and a 1976 BBC School's programme called *Merry-Go-Round* featured several clips from this story (they used them to educate children about *The Odyssey*). Shame it wasn't included on the DVD. I mean, they had absolutely *ages* to clear the rights.

The next time the Zygons appeared in *Doctor Who*, Sue was liveblogging it for *The Guardian*. It's funny how things turn out.

** PLANET OF EVIL BLOGGED: 6 April 2012

Part One

Sue: Louis Marks. I hope this doesn't lose marks too quickly.

Me: That's a pun. We don't do puns, Sue.

Sue: But seriously, his name rings a bell. Should I know who Louis Marks

is?

Me: He ran a profitable sideline selling toy Daleks.

Sue: Did he really?

Me: No. And to answer your original question, he wrote Planet of Giants

and Day of the Daleks.

Sue: Oh dear. I actually recognise the names of people who have worked

on Doctor Who.

Me: When you can recite transmission dates off the top of your head,

that's when you should start worrying.

On the planet Zeta Minor, a Morestran is tending to his corpse garden.

Sue: (*Pointing at the grave marker*) Did he just bury a seven-year-old child? How grim is that?

Me: I don't think they brought any seven-year-olds with them on this expedition, but I could be wrong.

Sue: Is it the Thals? He looks like a Thal to me. And I'm sure I've seen that caravan before.

Professor Sorenson and a man named Baldwin are analysing some crystals they found on the planet's surface.

Sue: Are they intergalactic drug dealers? Are they cooking up some crystal meth? It's a futuristic *Breaking Bad*; they even have their own caravan.

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Meanwhile, back at the Morestran base/caravan, the corpse gardener is spooked by something lurking in the jungle.

Sue: Just go back inside your caravan and lock the door. It's probably safe in there. No! Don't walk further away from it! What the hell are you doing, man?!

But it's too late. The gardener is pinned by an unseen force and, screaming in agony, he simply disappears.

Sue: It's another monster that cleans up after itself. You get a lot of those in *Doctor Who*.

Baldwin hurries back to the base through an impressive jungle set.

Sue: Are we on film now? This looks excellent all of a sudden.

But when Baldwin reaches a clearing, Sue sighs.

Sue: And now we're back on video again. What a shame.

Baldwin disappears as well, but not before he pushes a very important button.

Sue: So the monster in this story is invisible. What would *Doctor Who* do without invisible monsters, eh? I'm surprised the BBC haven't tried to sell you some invisible toy monsters, Neil.

Me: Who says they haven't? I've got hundreds of them.

The Doctor and Sarah intercept Baldwin's distress call.

Sue: The Doctor is overjoyed that there could be some danger involved. He's a fucking lunatic.

Also heading to Zeta Minor is a Morestran military ship.

Sue: This is very *Star Trek* all of a sudden.

As Commander Salamar barks orders to his subordinates, Sue excitedly points at him.

Sue: It's him again!

Me: Prentis Hancock. He's my favourite bad actor ever.

Sue: He hasn't improved since we last saw him. Are you sure this lot aren't

Thals?

Sue casts a critical eye over the Morestrans' costumes.

Sue: They're probably very nice to wear if you happen to have a hairy chest. I'm surprised they aren't wearing gold medallions. That way the Thals could throw their chains at the Cybermen if they got into a fight with them.

Me: They aren't Thals!

Thankfully, not all the costumes are ridiculed by Sue.

Sue: Sarah Jane looks very nice this week. Practical but stylish.

The Sarah and the Doctor find the distress beacon in the Morestran caravan, next to Baldwin's skeleton.

Sue: Okay, I'm a little confused. I thought the victims vanished? So why have they come back again?

Sarah returns to the TARDIS to gather some equipment, but the Morestran military lock her inside.

Sue: Use the manual crank handle, love.

When the Morestrans try to summarise the situation, most of it sails over Sue's head, mainly thanks to Tom.

PLANET OF EVIL

Sue: What the fuck is Tom Baker staring at? Even when he doesn't say anything, he's still the most interesting thing in the room. I can't take my eyes off him. What is he looking at?

Me: He's probably giving the floor manager a hard time.

The Doctor and Sarah are sent to a detention cell, but Sarah quickly figures a way out.

Sue: Sarah is doing most of the heavy lifting in this story. I like it. But you have to ask yourself why the Doctor is having an off-day. He looks like he's wandering around in a daze.

The episode concludes with our heroes escaping to a clearing, where they immediately run into...

Sue: A fat Predator.

Part Two

The Morestrans tackle the monster with high-tech weaponry.

Sue: Their guns sound wimpy. They look good, but they sound like something you'd pick up at Toys R Us. And how is this monster killing everyone when it's just standing there doing absolutely nothing? It isn't even touching anyone.

The Doctor and Sarah leg it, and luckily for them, the Morestrans couldn't hit a barn door with their wimpy weapons if their lives depended on it.

Sue: Are they the UNIT of the future? Which one's supposed to be Benton?

The Doctor and Sarah hike through the jungle – on film no less.

Sue: I wish it could look like this all the time. I know it's a budgetary

thing, but doesn't it make you feel sad? It's so frustrating. Part of me wishes the whole thing was shot on video, that way I wouldn't be disappointed when we keep switching back to it.

The Morestrans use an Oculoid Tracker to find the Doctor and Sarah.

Sue: How big is that thing supposed to be, exactly? There's no sense of scale. It could be really tiny or there could be people sitting in it. So which one is it?

When the tracker hovers directly over the Doctor and Sarah's heads, Sue finally figures it out.

Sue: Okay, this is pretty good, actually. Technically, it's quite impressive. I'm not really into the plot yet, but it looks good. The direction isn't bad, either.

When the Morestrans' ship fails to get off the ground, the Doctor decides to tell them what they're up against.

Sue: Tom's great, isn't he? You could give him practically anything to say and he'd make it sound interesting. I like the way he stares right down the camera lens at the audience. He's practically daring us not to take this seriously.

Sorenson begs Salamar to let him take a few crystals home with him.

Sue: Sorenson looks like Eddie Izzard on a bad day. **Me**: It's Frank Spencer's flying instructor, remember?

Sue: Oh yes, so it is.

And Freddie Jaeger isn't the only actor she recognises.

Sue: His voice sounds very familiar.

Me: It's Davros.

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Sue: So it is! So is this where we find out what happened to his legs?Me: No, it's just the actor who plays Davros. His name is Michael Wisher.Sue: I thought he'd be a lot older than that. Are you sure they aren't Thals?

Me: I thought we'd already established that.

The Doctor places Sorenson's crystals in an empty toffee tin.

Sue: We've got a Harrogate toffee tin just like that.

Me: I know.

Pause.

Sue: Oh, so *that*'s why we have a Harrogate toffee tin exactly like that. It all makes sense now.

The Doctor volunteers to negotiate with the monster on the Morestrans' behalf. However, this doesn't go according to plan and the episode ends with him falling into a very deep hole.

Sue: Great cliffhanger. I haven't got a clue what the Doctor was hoping to achieve there, but it was very exciting.

Me: I definitely remember watching that when it was first broadcast, and freaking out.

Sue: Bless.

Me: I must have been obsessed with *Doctor Who* by then. That episode went out two days before my sixth birthday and the following Monday I was given a toy Dalek as my main present. It was the red one made by Palitoy (not Louis Marx).

Sue: Eh?

Me: It could talk and everything. I bloody loved that Dalek. I can see it now. I can even smell it now. It's like I'm back in the room with it, and not only can I remember the details of the room, I can still remember the feelings I had as I was playing with it. This feeling floats on the tip of my mind, but when I try to focus on it, it slips away. Being a *Doctor Who* fan really does allow you to time travel, you know.

Part Three

Me: This is our 300th episode of *Doctor Who* (not including the recons).

Sue: Is that all? It feels like it's a lot more.

Me: Fancy a dance? **Sue**: Not really.

We are joined by Nicol and I do what I can to get her up to speed.

Nicol: Not anti-matter again! Are they still obsessed with that?

Sue explains to Nicol the Doctor has fallen into a hole that exists between universes. This is illustrated by Tom Baker being flung towards the camera on a Kirby wire.

Nicol: Right... Well, that definitely wouldn't happen.

Sue: They're trying, bless them.

Nicol: If he fell into an anti-matter universe (which wouldn't technically exist), he'd cease to be as soon as he passed the event horizon. Everybody knows that.

The Doctor emerges from the hole unscathed.

Nicol: Right, that's enough bad science for one night. I'm off.

Back on the Morestran ship, Professor Sorenson is doubled over in pain.

Sue: He's suffering from irritable bowel syndrome by the look of it.

Sorenson's eyes turn bright red.

Sue: That's excellent; you could probably get away with that effect today.

Sorenson quaffs a steaming potion and returns to normal.

PLANET OF EVIL

Sue: So this is basically *Jekyll and Hyde* in reverse. Although if you saw this when you were five or six, you'd probably think it was the most original story you'd ever seen.

Sarah tends to the Doctor, who is still unconscious after his trip to the antimatter universe.

Sue: I still don't understand how he got out of that hole. Did he just float out? They'd better explain that.

The Doctor says he survived thanks to a tin of anti-matter he was carrying with him at the time.

Sue: And?

The Morestrans try to leave the planet a second time.

Sue: The front of their spaceship looks like a mobile disco.

Then Sue comes up with the perfect escape plan.

Sue: Why don't they go back to the TARDIS and fuck off? That's what I'd do. Just let the ship crash. Job's a good 'un.

By this point, Sorenson looks awful. Like Killer Bob from Twin Peaks crossed with werewolf-Benton from Inferno.

Sue: He's definitely on crystal meth. And I think he's due for his fix.

As Sorenson notches up a kill-streak, Sue decides to forgive Mark Lawson. There's a first time for everything, I suppose.

Sue: Now *this* feels like it's a horror film.

A couple of days ago, we watched Mark Lawson Talks to Mark Gatiss

on BBC4, and in it Mr Lawson referred to Doctor Who as a horror programme. Sue dismissed this out of hand at the time, believing it was more an action-adventure show than anything else. But now she's changed her mind.

Sue: This is pretty scary, actually. It looks like he's drinking blood, and he's obviously possessed by the devil. What time did this go out?

When the Doctor gets into an altercation with a Morestran, he punches him squarely on the jaw.

Sue: That was a canny punch. I take it this Doctor doesn't go in for the old finger to the chest routine. That's fine by me.

As Salamar discovers the Doctor and Sarah standing next to a corpse, he shoots the Doctor in the face.

Sue: You bastard!

The episode concludes with the Doctor and Sarah facing the unlikely prospect of being buried alive in space.

Sue: Nice cliffhanger. I can't complain about that at all.

Part Four

Salamar tells Vishinsky to pull the lever that will send the Doctor and Sarah to their doom.

Me: Why doesn't he pull the lever himself? Why get into a fight with an old man over it?

Sue: He's trying to make a point. He wants the old guy to have blood on his hands. Keep up, love.

The ship's pilot is killed and everybody rushes back to the bridge. On his way

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out, Vishinsky pushes the lever back the other way, saving the Doctor and Sarah in the process.

Sue: That was a nice touch. He didn't make a big deal out of it. I liked that.

Salamar finally loses his cool.

Sue: The problem with this guy is that he's been ranting and raving from the moment we met him. He hasn't got anywhere else to go. He'll end up shrieking like a little girl at this rate. He should have ramped it up gradually.

Vishinsky gives the order to close all the hatchways.

Sue: Oh look, it's the credits to *Mystery Science 3000 Thingy*.

The Doctor appeals to Sorenson's better nature.

Me: Great scene, don't you think?

Sue: If you say so.

Me: Do you have any idea what just happened?

Sue: Not really.

Me: The Doctor just convinced the bad guy to commit suicide.

Sue: Seriously? I thought he was giving him an opportunity to flush his

drugs down the toilet.

Sorenson prepares to eject himself into space, but before he can pull the lever, the anti-matter part of him takes over.

Sue: The Doctor should have tried assisted-suicide instead.

Salamar is killed by the anti-man, but not before he unleashes the neutron accelerator.

Sue: Okay, so is everybody dead now? Right, just take the old guy, jump

in the TARDIS, and leave.

The Doctor stuns the anti-man and drags him into the TARDIS.

Sue: The Doctor's being a bit overly-confident if he thinks he can land the TARDIS wherever he wants.

Me: According to Big Finish, Sorenson and the Doctor enjoy several adventures together in the gap between the next two scenes. Although Sorenson is tied-up in them, which limits his role quite a lot.

As multiple versions of the anti-man wander around the Morestrans' ship, Sue fails to see the point.

Sue: What do these things want, exactly? I don't get it. How did this even happen? Was I supposed to know the flask of light would do that? Should I get Nicol? Maybe she can explain this to me.

Me: I really wouldn't bother.

The Doctor lands the TARDIS next to the pool of anti-matter on Zeta Minor (which impresses Sue no end), and then Sorenson falls into it.

Me: You know, I have absolutely no memory of this episode at all. Either I missed it or...

Sue: It's shit. That's why you can't remember it. You blocked it out.

Sorenson miraculously returns to normal, and the crew fall over themselves to welcome him back.

Me: He killed loads of people and now they're queuing up to shake his hand. They should lock him up.

Sue: It's called 'diminished responsibility', Neil. For example, if I killed you now, I could use this experiment as an excuse. Yeah, I'd definitely get off with it

PLANET OF EVIL

The Score

Sue: That was average. It was on for a six or a seven at one point, but the last episode was a huge disappointment. I was bored by the end of it. The plot didn't really make sense, and I had no idea what was going on with the multiple-monsters. The guy who played the commander was hopeless, and I couldn't care less about the rest of them. Tom was pretty good, and the jungle was nice. In fact, if it hadn't been for the jungle, I might have scored it lower.

5/10

COMMENT: "There's something strangely elegiac about Sue musing on film and video, and saying that the good bits now get her down because she knows most of it won't live up to them. Surely that bizarre self-harming logic [means she's] becoming a real fan." – Alex Wilcock

NOTES: We took a short break after *Planet of Evil*, ostensibly to recharge our batteries, but mainly to get away from all the hate mail we were receiving for Sue's unforgivable seven out of 10 for *Terror of the Zygons*. Or as we put it at the time...

Sue: I'm happy to carry on. I think you're making too much fuss out of a few negative comments on the blog. I couldn't care less what people think about me. And if you dish it out, you have to be able to take it.

Me: But someone called you a 'sour-faced cunt'...

Sue: I've been called a lot worse. By you, mostly. It doesn't bother me.

Me: Well, I need a break even if you don't.

Sue: Actually, I'd like to say something: I never claimed to be an expert when it comes to Land Rovers. It's not like I'm going to appear on *Mastermind* with Land Rovers as my specialist subject (I'd probably pick the history of building regulations in the United Kingdom 2002-2012). I just like Land Rovers, and the UNIT Land Rovers looked like Defenders to me. I couldn't give a toss about what they were called in 1975 – it's still the basic Defender shape. Not that I give a shit, of course.

Me: That settles it. We're definitely taking a break.

* PYRAMIDS OF MARS

BLOGGED: 30 April 2012

Part One

Sue: Is there anything I should know about Stephen Harris? I don't remember seeing his name before.

Me: Only that he doesn't exist. It's a pseudonym for Robert Holmes. He had to rewrite another bloke's script at the last-minute. The only thing he kept was the title.

Sue: Well, if it's Robert Holmes, it's bound to be good. That's excellent news. Unless it's rubbish of course, and he took his name off because he was ashamed. Oh, why does it have to be so complicated?

Pyramids of Mars begins, naturally enough, in Egypt.

Sue: For a second there, I thought they'd gone abroad to film a *Doctor Who*, but that would be silly. Nice stock footage, though. They almost had me fooled.

A British archaeologist named Professor Marcus Scarman enters an ancient burial chamber.

Sue: It's a very clean tomb. I'd have expected a bit more dust than that.

The Professor is attacked by a mysterious green light and Sue agrees the story's off to cracking start. Meanwhile on the TARDIS...

Sue: Nice tracking shot. Very moody.

Sarah enters the console room in a white Victorian dress, and the Doctor calls her Vicky by mistake.

Sue: Victoria never wore a dress like that. And the other Vicki definitely

didn't wear a dress like that. Now, a mini-skirt on the other hand...

Not only is the Doctor very forgetful today, he's being a right moody arse as well.

Sue: Aww, the Doctor is having a mid-life crisis. Just like you, love.

Before I can argue with her, the TARDIS goes haywire and Sarah is forced to deal with a non-corporeal floating head.

Sue: Why does Sarah Jane always pick up on the weird shit before the Doctor does? What's that all about? Is she supposed to be psychic or something?

The TARDIS makes an emergency landing and the Doctor opens the door and rushes outside.

Sue: This Doctor is very cocky. He didn't check to see whether it was safe or not. William Hartnell wouldn't have done that; he'd have spent 15 minutes checking the oxygen levels were okay. One of these days, he'll open that door and be killed straight away. That'll teach him.

The Doctor and Sarah have arrived at UNIT's HQ in 1911, back when it used to be a priory. In another part of the house, someone is playing an organ with all the stops out.

Sue: Is it the Master in a fez?

Namin – for it is he – is interrupted by Dr Warlock. Meanwhile the Doctor and Sarah have escaped through a window so they can explore the premises.

Me: This is Mick Jagger's house.

Sue: Is it really? It needs a bit of work. It could do with a good

sandblasting for a start. **Me**: He hasn't moved in yet.

PYRAMIDS OF MARS

Sue: Well, he should get it sandblasted before he does. The window frames could use some work, too. And that fascia doesn't look very Victorian to me.

An argument between Namin and Warlock escalates to the point where Namin draws a gun. The Doctor tries to intervene but Warlock is shot.

Sue: That was a bit cack-handed. The Doctor must be having another off-day. If I were him, I'd go back to the TARDIS and start again.

The Doctor and Sarah carry the injured Warlock away from the priory.

Sue: Look at all that blood. You'd never see that much blood in the new series.

Namin opens an Egyptian sarcophagus and a Mummy steps out.

Sue: That's a nice design. I like the concave chest. They would have scared me as a kid

Namin and his Mummies pursue the Doctor, but Namin stops in his tracks when the priory's organ can suddenly be heard playing again.

Sue: Someone's playing with his organ without his permission. And he isn't very happy about it, either.

Me: Maybe Rick Wakeman has popped round for a cup of tea?

The Doctor and Sarah escape to a nearby lodge, where they meet Marcus' brother, Laurence. Even though he is clearly distressed, Sarah blithely tells him she's a time traveller from the year 1980. I pause the DVD. You can probably guess the rest.

Sue: I don't really care, Neil. Maybe she was rounding up or showing off. Does it matter?

As is becoming customary, Sue falls under Tom Baker's spell as soon as he launches into one of his speeches.

Sue: Tom really sells the threat when he's in a bad mood. He could make fairy cakes sound like the most terrifying thing on Earth if he really wanted to.

Back at the priory, Namin is worshipping an Egyptian sarcophagus.

Sue: He's set his organ to autopilot. Wouldn't it be funny if it slipped into the bossa nova setting by mistake?

A figure dressed in black steps out of the sarcophagus, leaving a trail of smoke behind him.

Sue: That's a great special effect. That can't have been easy. Hang on... Is that an Ice Warrior? They're from Mars, aren't they?

Namin abases himself like an ant, but it's too late.

Sue: What is it with *Doctor Who* villains and neck massages? They're obsessed!

Namin receives Sutekh's gift of death.

Sue: I hope he kept the receipt.

Part Two

The episode begins with a reprise of Namin's death.

Me: The only problem I have with this scene is that I can't watch it without thinking about underage boys having sex.

Sue spits out her tea.

PYRAMIDS OF MARS

Sue: WHAT?

Me: I'm talking about *Queer As Folk*. There's a scene in the first episode where Russell T Davies cuts from this cliffhanger to some red-hot rimming action. I have no idea why he chose this bit. It must be one of RTD's favourite moments, I suppose.

Sue: Yeah, I don't understand why a bloke in an S&M mask and a black latex suit would appeal to a gay man, either.

Meanwhile a poacher has stumbled across some Mummies out on patrol.

Sue: They are even scarier in the dark. I really like the Mummy's design; it's simple but effective. Just don't let them talk.

The poacher returns to the priory and shoots Marcus Scarman in the back. The bullet passes through him, but the process is mysteriously reversed and Scarman survives.

Sue: That was nicely done, but wasn't the poacher jumping to conclusions, there? He didn't actually see Scarman do anything evil, and yet he still tried to murder him. It's a bit of a leap, even if he is in the right.

But it's not all bad news...

Sue: Mick Jagger's parquet floor is very nice.

Me: This isn't Mick's house. This is BBC Television Centre. You only see the exterior of his house during the location scenes.

Sue: Really? I thought they took the cameras inside the house. Oh, in that case I'm really impressed with the sets. The carpentry is excellent.

Tom gravely spells out the threat posed by Sutekh.

Sue: Tom's really into this, isn't he? The Doctor is scarier than the villain!

When Laurence steps into the TARDIS, he's overcome with excitement.

Sue: Is he Harry's replacement? He'd be a great assistant; very enthusiastic. Although it would probably get on your tits after a while.

Sarah isn't worried about Sutekh. She's from 1980 and everything was perfectly fine when she left (which, if you ask me, just proves she can't be from 1980), so the Doctor takes her back.

Sue: Okay, okay, so the stories are definitely set in 1980. I get it. Let's move on. Actually, I like this scene. Sometimes you have to remind the audience the future can be changed. It would be boring if they did it every week, though.

Meanwhile, in 1911, a poacher is being chased by two Mummies.

Sue: They're pretty spry for a couple of dead guys.

The Mummies crush the poacher to death between their ribcages.

Me: One of my most vivid childhood memories involves me re-enacting scenes from this story in the school playground. I definitely remember being crushed between the chests of two girls pretending to be Mummies. Happy days.

Sue: You sick bastard.Me: I was seven years old!

The Mummies burst into the lodge to attack the Doctor and Sarah.

Sue: That was an intense cliffhanger. I'm really enjoying this.

Part Three

We are joined by Nicol, mainly because this story combines three of her favourite subjects: the Victorians, the Egyptians, and the French.

Nicol: (Pointing at the Osiran war missile on the lawn) It's the Louvre!

PYRAMIDS OF MARS

Me: You ain't seen nothing yet, Nic. Come back in a couple of weeks. **Sue**: Forget that, what's a cytronic particle accelerator when it's at home? **Nicol**: A completely made-up thing? How am I supposed to know?

An invisible force field has been placed around the estate.

Nicol: That's cheap.

Me: Don't knock it. Stephen King managed to squeeze a 1,000-page novel

out of the same idea.

The Doctor tries to disable the force field, and when Sarah breaks his concentration, he snaps at her.

Sue: Oh dear. He's turning back into Jon Pertwee. Why is he in such a bad mood today, and why is he taking it out on Sarah Jane?

Me: He's tense. He's worried about Sutekh.

Sue: But he was being an arse before they arrived. I hope he isn't like this from now on.

And then we glimpse a mysterious figure sitting on a chair.

Nicol: Is it the Master? **Me**: Don't you start, Nicol.

Sutekh wants to destroy all life.

Sue: So who will Sutekh talk to when everyone's dead? He definitely likes the sound of his own voice, but there won't be anyone left to gloat over. He hasn't thought this through.

Sue tries to bring Nicol up to speed.

Sue: That's Mick Jagger's house, Nic.

Nicol: So is that Mick Jagger's potting shed, then?

Sue: Yes. I wonder what he might end up growing in there – if you know

what I mean.

The Mummies turn out to be robots.

Sue: Oh, I like that. That's very *Doctor Who*, isn't it? **Nicol**: It looks like an Antony Gormley sculpture.

Laurence confronts Marcus. It doesn't end well for him.

Sue: That's grim.

Me: It's very poignant.

The Doctor casually pushes Laurence's body to one side.

Sue: No it isn't. It's needlessly bleak. There aren't many laughs in this one, are there? Maybe Robert Holmes was in a bad mood when he wrote it.

Sue admits she's struggling with this story.

Sue: I have a problem with the plot. It's too contrived for me. I don't enjoy it if I can't get a handle on it.

Sarah shoots some gelignite, which the Doctor has successfully secreted on an Osiran war missile.

Sue: I didn't know that Sarah was a crack shot. When did they cover that at journalism school? Still, fair play to her.

Sutekh uses sheer force of will to stop the explosion from going off, which provides the Doctor with the opportunity he needs to return to the priory and activate a transporter hidden in the sarcophagus.

Nicol: What the hell is that, and why do I have this sudden urge to eat a

bag of Skittles?

Sue: It's a time-space tunnel, love.

PYRAMIDS OF MARS

The Doctor steps into it.

Nicol: He'll end up soaked in Hawking radiation. So that's nice.

The Doctor enters Sutekh's lair.

Sue: Sutekh needs a better interior decorator. It looks like he's been paintballing in there.

Sutekh pins the Doctor to a wall, and the episode concludes with the Time Lord screaming in agony.

Sue: Robert Holmes always writes the best cliffhangers.

Part Four

Sutekh dominates the Doctor.

Sue: That isn't something you see every day.

Me: This scene completely fucked me up when I was seven. It fucking terrified me

I don't tell her that it still does. Anyway, Sutekh hypnotises the Doctor into doing his biding, although Sue remains adamant the Time Lord is bluffing.

Sue: He'll wink at Sarah Jane any minute now.

He doesn't.

Sue: Bloody hell. That's a bit scary.

A Mummy strangles the Doctor ("Technically, it's another neck rub") and Scarman leaves him for dead. But the Doctor was only pretending, and he rushes off to stop Scarman before he can free Sutekh.

Sue: What does tribophsyics mean, Nic?

Nicol: Something to do with friction, probably. This is *Doctor Who* so it

could mean practically anything.

The Doctor and Sarah are stopped in their tracks by a puzzle on a wall.

Sue: Hang on a minute... We've seen this episode before. And it was boring then!

Me: At least Robert Holmes draws attention to the fact this is a rip-off of the Exillon city from *Death to the Daleks*.

Sue: Oh yeah, the Exillon city. That was on the tip of my tongue, honest.

Nicol: What have you done with my mother, Neil?

Even Nicol thinks she's seen this before.

Nicol: It's The Crystal Maze. Again!

Me: You and The Crystal bloody Maze. You're obsessed with it. Let it go,

Nic, it's never coming back.

Nicol: It's not my fault. Every time I watch an old Doctor Who it has this

scene in it, or something very similar to it.

Sarah is trapped in a large perspex cylinder.

Nicol: The Doctor will have to give up one of his crystals if he wants to let her out. It all depends on how much time he wants in the Crystal Dome. **Sue**: Mars is a shit hole. I don't think much of their interior designers.

Me: It's supposed to be a prison, Sue, not a holiday camp.

Sutekh rises from his throne. Nicol laughs her head off.

Sue: Okay, what did I miss?

I suppose she has a right to see it so I rewind the DVD. (If you don't know what I'm talking about, I suggest you go back and watch it too.)

PYRAMIDS OF MARS

Sue: Oh dear. That's terrible. Why didn't they paint that out for the DVD

release?

Me: Because if they did, the DVD's producers would have been hunted

down and killed.

Sue: I know the feeling...

Me: Doctor Who fans like it warts and all.

Nicol: But it's ridiculous! I can't take this seriously any more.

And then Sutekh reveals his true form.

Sue: What the fuck is *that* supposed to be? It looks like a horse on hunger strike.

ourne.

The Doctor races back to 1911 to do something vitally important.

Sue: The solution sounds clever, but it's very confusing. And it's a bit of an anti-climax, too.

Nicol: I followed it. It's silly but it makes sense. Just about.

Sue: I'm not convinced.

The priory explodes.

Sue: Mick Jagger won't be very happy.

The Score

Sue: It was okay, I suppose. Tom Baker was very good, even if I don't like his attitude. But it fell apart in the last episode. Don't get me wrong – it looked amazing and the acting was great – but the plot was all over the place. The bits on Mars were boring, and they should have spent more time explaining what was going on at the end. Sutekh was completely wasted, although I did like the Mummies. There's definitely something missing that I can't quite put my finger on. I think I'd like a lot less gobbledygook and a lot more drama, please. I don't know what to give it. A six, maybe? A seven at a push.

I grab that seven with both hands.

7/10

It's official! Pyramids of Mars is as good as The Mutants! Hey, at least she didn't think it was racist. Anyway, to punish her (because it's clearly worth a fucking nine), I've published some clips of her on Bullseye circa 1989. Enjoy!

COMMENT: "Excuse my pedantry, but your introduction to Part Three would seem to place 1911 in the Victorian age, a good decade, and a whole extra monarch, after Victoria's death. Surely a more sizeable slip than Sarah's 1980 insinuations, as the extension of an era by 10 years would make William Hartnell the Doctor in this story (and leave him alive until 1985)." – Ben Goudie

NOTES: The *Bullseye* clips are still online (www.wifeinspace.com/extrassues-chapter). I am a very bad man.

THE ANDROID INVASION

BLOGGED: 2 May 2012

Part One

Sue: Oh no...

Me: Go on, then. Say your catchphrase.

Sue: Actually, I've decided to say "Terry cunting Nation" from now on.

A soldier is walking through a wood, nursing a twitching arm.

Sue: Either he's late for breakdancing practice or he's an android.

Me: I think the clue is probably in the title.

The TARDIS arrives in the same wood.

Sue: I like the Doctor's new coat.

Me: Oatmeal.

Sue: He's drinking oatmeal?

Me: No, that's the colour of his coat.

Sue: Why is the Doctor dressed for the middle of winter when Sarah is

dressed for a summer picnic?

Me: Everyone says that about this story. Try to be more original, love. **Sue**: I don't know why you just don't turn off the comments, Neil. They're

obviously getting to you.

Me: But if I did that, I'd be accused of not being able to take criticism.

Sue: But you can't take criticism, Neil. You're fucking terrible.

Four figures dressed in white protective suits and matching helmets open fire on the Doctor and Sarah – with their fingers.

Sue: So it's the Autons again. Why didn't they call it *The Auton Invasion*? Hang on... Autons aren't androids. What's Terry playing at?

In her haste to get away, Sarah almost topples over the edge of a cliff, and Sue isn't impressed with the direction of the scene to say the least.

Sue: That made Sarah Jane look really stupid. Who directed this rubbish?

Me: Barry Letts.

Sue: He just can't leave it alone, can he?

The twitching soldier throws himself over the same cliff.

Sue: I'm surprised we didn't see his brains splattered all over the rocks.

Me: He's an android, remember?

Sue: Yeah, but I'm not supposed to know that yet, am I? Do Autons even

have brains?

The soldier is a UNIT corporal, but what's really strange is his wallet only contains freshly minted coins with the same year stamped on them.

Me: If only they'd told us what the bloody date was! It's so frustrating!

The Doctor and Sarah explore a deserted village.

Sue: The location is very nice and it's a lovely, sunny day. It's nice and quiet, too. I could live there quite happily. What are the house prices like? I can imagine a big gang of *Doctor Who* fans retiring there someday. Actually, I've suddenly changed my mind.

She notices Tom Baker isn't feeling very well.

Sue: That's a nasty sore throat he has. It was probably all the screaming he did last week.

The Doctor and Sarah find a deserted pub. All the coins in the till have been newly minted with the same date.

Me: So what's the bloody date, then? Is it 1980 or is it 1975? ARGH!

THE ANDROID INVASION

We never find out.

Sue: It's beginning to annoy me now, and I don't even care.

Sarah suggests the village could have been evacuated thanks to a radiation leak, and if they're not careful, they'll end up looking like "a couple of 'nanas".

Sue: I haven't heard that expression in years. I'm going to start using it again.

The silence is broken when a van carrying some villagers turns up. The new arrivals take their places in the pub and remain as still as statues. And then, just before they move again...

Sue: Did I just hear the floor manager whispering in the background? I hope that wasn't Rosie.

When Sarah tries to make small talk with the barman, she receives a frosty reception.

Sue: They should have called this pub *The Stepford Arms*. The pub in *An American Werewolf in London* was friendlier than this.

Sarah returns to the TARDIS, but she's distracted by a coffin-shaped object before she can step inside.

Sue: The Doctor should put her on probation for leaving the key in the lock like that.

The TARDIS dematerialises without her.

Sue: See!

Sarah investigates the capsule, and even though I don't mention it at the

time, I'm transfixed by the damaged spare tyre the Kraals have replicated for that extra touch of verisimilitude. Talk about attention to detail. Anyway, the capsule opens and a hand grabs Sarah's leg.

Sue: That was creepy. That would have scared me as a kid.

Me: I didn't see this episode at the time. I had to go to a friend's sixth birthday party instead. I can't even remember his name now, but it might have been Paul. I remember playing pass the parcel when it was on, and feeling bloody miserable because I knew I was missing *Doctor Who*. Missing a Part One was almost as bad as missing a Part Four back in the days before VHS and Betamax.

Sue: Yes, but did you win pass the parcel?

The Doctor arrives at the local space defence station (every village should have one), where he finds an office belonging to Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart.

Sue: Excellent. I've missed the Brig.

But he's interrupted by an astronaut named Guy Crayford.

Sue: The direction in this story isn't great, but the plot isn't bad. I'm definitely intrigued and I want to find out what happens next.

The Doctor makes a run for it and UNIT give chase.

Sue: Are you sure this lot are really UNIT?

They shoot at the Doctor and miss.

Sue: Yep, they're definitely UNIT.

The Doctor is taken to a cell, and the episode concludes with someone – or something – spying on him.

THE ANDROID INVASION

Sue: It's the Sontarans!

Part Two

Sue: Have the Sontarans and the Autons teamed up? How exciting!

I don't have the heart to tell her otherwise.

Sue: So why are the Sontarans dressed in glam rock platform boots and pearly king jackets? If they hope to blend in with the 1970s...

Me: Or the 1980s...

Sue: ...then they aren't going about it the right way.

The Doctor and Sarah run into a familiar face.

Sue: Benton! Oh, how I've missed you, Benton. Actually, maybe it *isn't* Benton. He could be an Auton. Is this *Westworld* but with UNIT soldiers instead of cowboys? Is this an alien theme park?

Even Harry Sullivan turns up.

Sue: That's nice. So where's the Brigadier?

The Doctor and Sarah escape into the woods, but Sarah stumbles, injuring her ankle.

Sue: If I were Sarah Jane, I'd wear hiking boots every time I left the TARDIS, even if I was in a ball gown that week. She knows she's going to end up running around – she always ends up running around – so she should come prepared. And Tom sounds dreadfully ill. I'm beginning to worry about him.

Pursued by UNIT troops, the Doctor decides to hide in a pond.

Sue: Tom is not a happy chappy. It's written all over his face. Either he's

scared of water or he's in a really bad mood; it's difficult to tell.

Me: I think this is what made him ill.

Sue: Health and Safety at the BBC certainly left a lot to be desired in the 1970s. Poor Tom.

Sarah is captured and taken to the aliens' laboratory. She tries reasoning with Harry, but he's definitely not himself.

Sue: She probably thinks Harry's been hypnotised. That's what usually happens, isn't it? At least Terry is trying to do something a bit different.

Sarah stares into the face of a Kraal.

Sue: That isn't a Sontaran... What the hell is it? It's horrible.

Back at the pub, the Doctor orders a pint of ginger beer.

Sue: That isn't a pint! No wonder this place is empty. The Doctor should report him to Trading Standards.

Now that she can see the Kraals in all their glory, Sue tries to figure them out.

Sue: Shelly. Me: What?

Sue: Shelly. His face.

Me: He looks like Hywell Bennet?

Sue: No, shell-y. You know, as in the seaside. He has a face like a clam. A

clam crossed with a giant pig. Doctor Who loves giant pigs.

The Doctor examines the pub's fireplace.

Sue: Do you remember when everyone had brass ornaments hanging over their fireplaces? We were the only house in our street that didn't have any brass, thank God. My mother couldn't be arsed polishing it. Good for her.

THE ANDROID INVASION

The Doctor orders another drink.

Sue: Yeah, and this time make it a pint!

The Doctor is amazed to discover the calendar on the wall doesn't include a tomorrow.

Sue: It's Groundhog Day meets The Prisoner. I like it.

The Doctor arranges to meet Sarah in the local shop.

Sue: Is this Royston Vasey?

Sue guesses Sarah is an android straight away. I was hoping she'd pick up on the continuity error involving her scarf but, alas, the clue is definitely in the title.

Sue: (*Pointing at the Kraals*) Blimey, this lot are a bit boring, aren't they? It doesn't help that I can't tell them apart. I hate it when I can't do that. And I suppose the guards with the exploding fingers aren't Autons, either? I'm disappointed.

The android guards pursue the Doctor and Sarah into the woods.

Sue: It looks like they're being chased by the Stig.

The episode concludes with the Doctor confronting 'Sarah', who suddenly falls over (for no readily apparent reason). When her face falls off, Sue blames shoddy workmanship.

Sue: I've definitely seen this cliffhanger before. Did you try to make me watch this when we first met?

Me: Definitely not.

Sue: Hmm... Maybe they played this bit on the news when Elisabeth

Sladen died. Yes, that must be it.

Me: Thanks for that. I feel all sad now.

Part Three

A faceless Sarah starts shooting at the Doctor.

Sue: This is really disturbing.

Meanwhile Styggron and Chedaki are still bickering.

Sue: The one on the right sounds familiar.

And then the penny drops.

Sue: Oh, it's George from Rainbow. (Mimicking George) "That's a good

idea, Zippy!"

Me: That's uncanny, Sue. Much better than your Terrance Dicks.

More androids are unloaded from a van in the centre of the village.

Sue: It reminds me of the place where Amy Pond comes from. You know, the village where everything is slightly wrong. You can definitely see the influence. It reminds me of *The Prisoner* and *The Avengers*, too.

Me: Yes, there's definitely an ITC vibe to this.

Sue fixates on a red telephone box on the village green.

Sue: I saw one of those on eBay for two grand the other day. But you could probably buy a TARDIS for that kind of money, so I thought to myself, what's the point?

Styggron sneaks up on the Doctor and attacks him with an obligatory neck rub. And then the androids secure the Time Lord to a cross with the help of some artificial ivy.

THE ANDROID INVASION

Sue: Are you quite sure this isn't the Autons? It would make a lot more sense if it was the Autons.

Sarah rescues the Doctor and they return to the Kraal ship just before the village is wiped from the face of the planet with a CSO dissolve.

Sue: Eh?

Crayford visits the Doctor in his cell and cheerfully spill the beans.

Sue: He probably got fed up drinking his own piss.

But Crayford has been duped – the Kraals are going to destroy humanity with a deadly virus.

Sue: Terry and his viruses. He's obsessed! Terry must have been a very sickly child.

When the Doctor is led away to have his brain patterns stolen, Sarah incapacitates an android with an electrical cable.

Sue: (As George from Rainbow) That was a good idea!

The Doctor's head is about to explode when Sarah rescues him. Again.

Sue: Twice in two episodes. Is that a new record?

The Doctor and Sarah board Crayford's rocket before it takes off.

Sue: It's a very roomy rocket, I must say.

The Doctor places Sarah in one of the capsules, but he's crushed by the G-force before he can shut the lid. The episode concludes with Sarah struggling to survive against the mounting pressure.

Sue: Suck your cheeks in, pet.

Part Four

The rocket reaches escape velocity.

Sue: Right, so there wasn't a threat in the last cliffhanger, after all. Just some minor discomfort.

A capsule, which contains an android copy of the Doctor, begins to open.

Sue: Now *that* would have been a great cliffhanger. What a wasted opportunity.

When the Doctor comes up with an insane escape plan, Sarah lists all the ways they could end up dead.

Sue: There's some very witty banter in this story. The dialogue is very good. Yeah, this isn't bad at all.

Meanwhile on Earth...

Sue: Yay! It's the real Benton and Harry.

And then...

Sue: WHO THE FUCK IS THAT?!

It's Colonel Faraday.

Sue: They've recast the Brigadier. But they can't do that! **Me**: Calm down, it's a completely different character.

Sue: So why did they hire someone with a moustache, then? It's very confusing. They should have hired a woman, or someone who was clean-

shaven. This guy is basically Brig-lite.

THE ANDROID INVASION

The Kraals' capsules arrive on Earth, and the Doctor steps out.

Sue: So which Doctor is that?

He staggers around comically.

Sue: Ah, it must be the real one.

Crayford's rocket is guided back to Earth.

Sue: Isn't anyone going to ask him why he's suddenly got an eye patch?

Me: They're probably trying to be polite.

With android doubles running around the place, it doesn't take long for Sue to lose track.

Sue: Do both these Doctors have sore throats? Or is that how you can tell them apart?

Space Defence celebrate Crayford's safe return with a nice cup of tea.

Sue: If this was NASA, they would be yelling and hollering and giving each other high fives. This is very low-key.

Sue still won't give Colonel Faraday the time of day.

Sue: It's obvious they've hired somebody to say the Brig's lines for him. But this bloke makes the Brig sound like an idiot. It just proves how good an actor Nick Courtney was.

Confusion reigns.

Sue: Who's who?

Me: Is that supposed to be a joke?

Sue: No. And why is Benton letting the Doctor shoot at the other

Doctor?

Me: That isn't Benton. **Sue**: Since when?

Me: Wait, I've got a flowchart around here somewhere...

Even the Doctor doesn't have a clue any more.

Sue: Maybe it's supposed to be this confusing on purpose?

The android Benton shoots the wrong Doctor.

Sue: I like the way they programmed the android to be as stupid as the real Benton. You can't tell them apart. What a 'nana.

And then Crayford has an epiphany - he's got two eyes after all!

Sue: They can't be serious!

I stop her before she can throw a cushion at the television.

Sue: So he never took his patch off when he was in the shower, or when he went to bed? He never peeked at it the whole time? But that's just stupid! This was heading for a seven out of 10, but not any more.

The Doctor fights his android double (Sue's impressed with the choreography), but Styggron kills the android by mistake.

Sue: EH?

The Doctor explains he reprogrammed the android to do his dirty work for him.

Sue: When? How? Why? *Eh?* This was heading for a six out of 10 but not any more.

THE ANDROID INVASION

Sarah accepts a lift home in the TARDIS.

Sue: You'd have thought Benton and Harry would have turned up to see them off. And Sarah must be mad if she thinks she won't end up on another detour. But I guess that's the point.

The Score

Sue: I know I sound like a stuck record, Neil, but it fell apart at the end. It started out brilliantly – they should have spent a lot more time in the village building up the tension – all of that stuff was excellent. But the aliens' plan was insane. And why would the astronaut go along with it? Was he blind? No. He wasn't even half-blind. What a load of rubbish. But some of the ideas were okay, and there was some nice banter between the Doctor and Sarah Jane. The location was lovely, too. What a shame.

5/10

COMMENT: "Sue says everyone has to play nice or she'll turn the comments off (once she figures out how to do it)." – Neil Perryman

THE BRAIN OF MORBIUS

BLOGGED: 7 May 2012

Part One

Sue: Who's Robin Bland? **Me**: Robin Bland doesn't exist.

Sue: Not again! So what happened this time?

Me: Robert Holmes rewrote a Terrance Dicks script and Terry told him to take his name off it. He told him to replace his credit with a bland

pseudonym.

Sue: So this is a bad one, then? Was Terry ashamed of it? Is it really bland?

Me: Don't worry, this is anything but bland.

On the planet Karn, an alien creature is crawling through some spacecraft wreckage.

Me: Do you recognise that thing?

Sue: Yes, but don't ask me what it's called.Me: It's a mutant from *The Mutants*.Sue: Is this a sequel? I liked *The Mutants*.

The Mutt is intercepted by a man with a hook for a hand. He decapitates the creature and delivers its head to his master.

Sue: So, cannibals, decapitations and mad scientists, eh? It's not for kids,

is it? It sounds like the synopsis for a video nasty.

Me: Do you recognise the mad scientist?

Sue: His voice is very familiar. Was he in The Mutants?

Me: No, it's Philip Madoc.

Sue: Is he related to Ruth Madoc from Hi-de-Hi!?

Me: Ex-wife, actually. Now, can we please get back to *The Brain of*

Morbius? Or should I switch the DVD's production subtitles on? I'm sure

THE BRAIN OF MORBIUS

they'll cover it. They'll probably include details of the divorce settlement in Part Four.

Sue: No, it's all right. I'll live.

The Doctor is furious with the Time Lords for dragging him to Karn.

Sue: He's basically an arsey James Bond. He can be very petulant when he wants. I like the set, though. You can tell it's a set, but it's been nicely lit, so it's very atmospheric. And it means we won't be skipping between video and film all the time. I actually prefer it when they do it like this.

When it starts to rain, the Doctor and Sarah seek shelter at a nearby castle.

Sue: Have they turned on the studio's sprinkler system? **Me**: No, the rain has been superimposed over the image.

Sue: I knew that, really. I'm not stupid.

Meanwhile the Sisterhood of Karn are worshipping a sacred flame (sacred fire).

Sue: I love their costumes. This looks like a believable culture for a change. Like Peru crossed with Bulgaria.

Their leader, Maren, starts talking about silent gas dirigibles.

Sue: Oh! I thought she was a man. So is this a lesbian sect or what?

We learn that Solon cut Condo's arm off, and he won't sew it back on again until their work on Karn is finished.

Sue: Condo would work a hell of a lot faster if he had two arms. Solon didn't think this through. He should have cut off something else instead.

When the Doctor and Sarah arrive at Solon's castle, he's extremely pleased to see them.

Sue: Ha! "What a magnificent head!" That's brilliant. How did he say that line with a straight face? I bet that took a few takes.

Condo serves the refreshments.

Me: It's Mrs Overall from *Acorn Antiques*.

Solon was a famous surgeon who left Earth under a cloud. He claims his colleagues were jealous and drove him away.

Sue: Bloody academics.

The Doctor's drink has been poisoned and he slips into unconsciousness. Sarah, on the other hand, only pretends to be drugged.

Sue: Sarah Jane is great. She's the perfect companion. She's always rescuing the Doctor. Always. This is why the Doctor doesn't travel alone – he'd run out of regenerations within a week.

Solon inspects the Doctor's magnificent head.

Sue: Is he going to cut it off with a plastic knife? He'll be there all night.

The Doctor is spirited away by the Sisterhood, and the episode concludes with Sarah encountering a creature without a head.

Me: Didn't that do anything for you? Sue: Not really. It was all a bit...

Sue does a passable impression of a headless monster with its arms flailing around like an idiot.

Sue: Do you know what I mean?

Me: Not really, no.

Sue: I liked the episode, though. Frankenstein in Space. It's fine.

THE BRAIN OF MORBIUS

Part Two

Condo tells Solon that the Doctor has disappeared.

Sue: Condo looks like the lead singer of Showaddywaddy. If Showaddywaddy were in a zombie apocalypse, I mean. **Me**: You always think the bad guy looks like the leader singer of Showaddywaddy. What has Dave Bartram ever done to you?

Solon refers to Condo as a "chicken-brained biological disaster".

Sue: Never get into a slanging match with Robert Holmes. He'll wipe the floor with you. How does he come up with this stuff?

The Doctor wakes up to find himself surrounded by women.

Sue: The Doctor thinks he's woken in a brothel. No wonder he's got a big smile on his face.

The Sisterhood are convinced the Time Lords have sent him to steal their precious elixir of life, so Maren sentences him to death. They tie the Doctor to a stake and build a pyre around him.

Sue: He's going to be Joan of Arc in Space.

Me: Very funny.

Sue: Come on! I never would have made a joke like that a few months

ago. You should be happy, Neil.

The Sisterhood dance around the Doctor.

Sue: It's turned into *The Wicker Man*. You know, I bet Kate Bush loved this episode. I could imagine Kate Bush in one of the Sisterhood's costumes.

But Solon interrupts the ceremony.

Sue: He wants to borrow a cup of sugar.

Solon lets it slip he wants the Doctor's head.

Sue: Don't burn the head! Ha! Oh, it looks like the Sisterhood already know about Solon's head fetish and they've shrugged it off. How bizarre.

Solon leaves empty-handed and the Sisterhood set fire to the Doctor (Sue loves the special effect, which almost killed Tom Baker, if you can believe Cynthia Grenville).

Sue: Sometimes a lax attitude to Health and Safety can actually work in your favour.

Sarah disguises herself as one of the Sisterhood, so she can rescue the Doctor from the sacred flame (sacred fire).

Sue: How many times does the Doctor owe Sarah his life, now?

However, as they make their escape, the light from Maren's ring blinds Sarah. Sue reacts to this by singing Manfred Mann's Earth Band's 'Blinded by the Light' (which was a hit record in 1976, pop-pickers).

Sue: I feel sorry for Condo, even if he is a cannibal who goes around decapitating plane crash survivors. But I do have a problem with the idea that people with learning difficulties, or missing limbs, are automatically serial-killing psychopaths. It's not a good message for the kids.

Solon is taken aback when he finds the Doctor and Sarah waiting for him in his living room.

Sue: Awkward.

Solon tricks the Doctor into believing Sarah will only regain her sight if he returns to the Sisterhood and retrieves the elixir of life. And then the episode

THE BRAIN OF MORBIUS

concludes with Sarah blindly walking in on Morbius, who, it turns out, is just an excitable brain in a jar.

Sue: Great cliffhanger. That was fun.

Part Three

Sue: I like the way Morbius does a little brain fart when he stops talking.

Morbius is an enemy of the Time Lords.

Sue: Why do all the bad Time Lords have names that start with the letter

M? Is that significant?

Me: What?

Sue: You know, Master, Monk, Morbius. I'm naturally suspicious of anyone whose name begins with the letter M, now. Thanks for that.

And then Sue stumbles into a rather large plot hole.

Sue: Why doesn't Solon just stick the brain in Condo's head? Why would you want to walk around looking like a dog's dinner when you could be a hunchbacked version of the lead singer from Showaddywaddy? I know it's not ideal, but you have take what you can get.

Me: You're missing an even more obvious flaw. Why is Morbius obsessed with sticking the Doctor's head on that mess of a body when he could use the Doctor's body as well? Eh?

Sue: Oh yeah, that is a bit silly. Is this why Terry took his name off the credits?

Not only does Sarah successfully escape from Solon's laboratory, she even manages to lock the door behind her.

Sue: Even when she's blind, Sarah Jane is still better than Dodo.

However, Sarah is intercepted by Condo.

Sue: I don't like the rapist subtext very much. We haven't had much of that since the 1960s.

When Morbius discovers the Doctor is a Time Lord, he panics. In fact, he panics so much he agrees to wear a plastic helmet if it means he can leg it. Solon agrees, because if the Time Lords turn up, then all those years of isolation will have been for nothing.

Sue: All those years of isolation on a planet populated by hot women. Yeah, it must have been awful for you.

Solon drains the liquid from Morbius' tank.

Sue: He could have put it over a sink first!

Solon and Condo carry the brain to the lab. Solon yells at Condo, urging him to be more careful.

Sue: If you'd sown his bloody arm back on, you wouldn't be having this problem. Just saying.

Condo discovers the human arm that's been sown onto Morbius is actually his own. He doesn't take the news well and Solon has to shoot him in the stomach. Blood and guts fly everywhere, and Morbius' brain hits the floor with a sickening squelch.

Sue: Bloody hell! There was no need for that.

I pause the DVD.

Sue: I can't believe they got away with that.

Me: There were a few complaints.

Sue: I'm not surprised.

Me: So, Mary Whitehouse had a point, then?

Sue: Don't put words into my mouth.

THE BRAIN OF MORBIUS

Me: Would you let a six-year-old child watch that at 6pm?

Sue: Probably not. No.

And this is coming from a woman who let her daughter watch The Breakfast Club when she was five.

Sue: You can't win. If you don't make it realistic, people will criticise it, and if you make it *too* realistic people still complain. They probably went a bit too far this time, though.

Sue tries to identify Morbius' body parts.

Sue: Chewbacca must have swung through here, once. And he has the

hand of Manos, too.

Me: What?

Sue: You know, the hand of Manos.

Me: I think you'll find that it's the claw of a Macra. **Sue**: Yes, that's what it is. It's a complete mess.

Sarah staggers around blindly as Morbius creeps up behind her.

Sue: Nice cliffhanger. Scary.

As the credits roll, Sue notices something.

Sue: There are a lot of Barrys in *Doctor Who*. Barry Letts, Christopher Barry, Barry Newbery (very nice design by the way, Barry). Why are there so many Barrys?

Part Four

Sue: It's an unforgettable monster. The design is... unique.

She didn't notice the zipper. Phew.

Me: Morbius gave me nightmares.

Sue: I bet.

Me: I would wake up in the middle of the night screaming my head off. Mum threatened to ban *Doctor Who* if I didn't pull myself together. In fact I wasn't allowed to see the next story, which traumatised me even more. I had to move to New Zealand in 1979 to see that.

more. I had to move to New Zealand in 1979 to see that

Morbius goes apeshit, but Condo arrives to save the day.

Sue: How long does it take for this guy to die? He's already been shot in the stomach four times.

Condo and Morbius wrestle to the death.

Sue: He's still going!

Condo eventually drops dead.

Me: Poor Condo.

Sue: Yeah, he was nice, for a dim-witted, decapitating cannibal.

Solon pacifies Morbius with a tranquilliser dart...

Sue: Right in the arse!

The Doctor leaves Solon in peace so he can dismantle his creation.

Sue: What's he doing? You can't leave him! The Doctor's just done to Solon what the baddies always do to him. He really should know better.

Sue's right, of course, and Solon locks Sarah and the Doctor in the basement. If only the Doctor had his trusty sonic screwdriver with him.

Sue: Since when does the Doctor leave the TARDIS without his sonic? It's all gone a bit ridiculous now.

THE BRAIN OF MORBIUS

Me: You can hear the gears crunching a bit, but stick with it, love.

Ohica offers to help the Doctor.

Sue: Is that Josie Lawrence from *EastEnders*?

Me: No.

Sue: Her performance is a bit strange. It's her eyes, I think. Every time she widens them, she looks like she's being sarcastic.

The Doctor rustles up some cyanide gas and knocks Solon out cold.

Sue: Hang on a minute... How is this supposed to get them out of there? He just killed his only means of escape.

Morbius is unaffected by the cyanide (he has the lungs of a Birastrop, you see) and he challenges the Doctor to a mind-bending contest.

Sue: And they just happen to have a mind-bending machine. That's handy.

The contest begins.

Sue: Oh look, ex-Doctors. I like it when you see ex-Doctors.

Then...

Sue: Who the hell is that?

And then...

Sue: Is it Kenneth Branagh?

Morbius wins the contest and the Doctor collapses. I pause the DVD.

Me: So what just happened?

Sue: Well, if Morbius won the contest, they must have been the Doctor's faces. So does this mean William Hartnell wasn't the first Doctor?

Me: That was the intention, I believe. But it also contradicts everything

that comes later.

Sue: Yeah, but that hasn't happened yet, so this is correct *right now*, which means Matt Smith is the 17th Doctor, or something like that. So that's interesting.

Me: Only if you're completely insane.

Sue: Of course, they could be Morbius' faces, I suppose.

Me: Yes, let's go with that theory instead.

Sue: I'm not really bothered either way, to be honest. But someone should

probably get Kenneth Branagh on the phone to discuss a prequel.

The Sisterhood throw Morbius off a cliff. He falls straight into the camera, but Sue decides to ignore this.

Sue: The Doctor didn't save the day. In fact, he made a right pig's ear of it. He did persuade an old woman to die, though, so it wasn't a completely wasted journey. But it definitely wasn't his finest hour, and I'd be surprised if the Time Lords sent him on another mission after that. Maybe that was the Doctor's plan all along?

The Score

Sue: I liked that. Some of the dialogue was priceless. The performances were really strong, too, and I loved the sets. The plot was a bit mad in places, and the direction could have been a lot better, but it didn't outstay its welcome and I enjoyed the story's atmosphere.

8/10

Me: Go on, give it a nine.

Sue: No.

Me: Please? It's The Brain of Morbius.

Sue: It isn't worth a nine. I'm sorry, Neil. The plot let it down. Maybe

THE BRAIN OF MORBIUS

Terry was right to take his name off it. Now shut up before I change my mind and give it a seven.

COMMENT: "*The Hand of Manos* is an adventure that I want to see now! What a truly authentic *Doctor Who* story title!" – Chris Orton

NOTES: *The Brain of Morbius* must have made an impression on Sue because when she saw *The Night of the Doctor* in 2013 (see the final volume), she remembered the planet Karn like it was yesterday. In fact, in an attempt prove to me that she could hold her own with 'real' fans of *Doctor Who*, she actually turned to me and said: "KARNNNNNNNNNNNNNN"

THE SEEDS OF DOOM BLOGGED: 11 May 2012

Part One

Sue: Robert Banks Stewart. Does he exist? I recognise the name.

Me: Yes, he exists. He wrote *Terror of the Zygons*.

Sue: I liked Terror of the Zygons.

Me: I know, but you try telling some of our readers that.

Two men are gathering samples from a glacier in Antarctica when one of them proclaims, "This isn't ice!"

Sue: No, it's polystyrene, love, but nine out of 10 for trying. **Me**: You haven't knocked a mark off already, have you?

Sue: Don't be silly. If I knocked marks off for stuff like that, some of these

stories would be minus five. A bit like this place.

Me: Very funny.

Three scientists named Winlett, Moberley and Stevenson are examining a pod they've recovered from the permafrost.

Sue: I know this is going to be good because the guest actors are excellent. The one in the middle fancies himself a bit, the one on the left is quite dishy, and the one on the right could be played by Toby Jones if they made this today.

"The one on the right could be played by the short Nazi with the glasses from Captain America" is what she actually said. And then we cut to the Doctor larking about at the World Ecology Bureau.

Sue: He's wearing golf shoes with the studs taken out.

Me: Fascinating. I'd never noticed that before. What would I do without

you, Sue?

THE SEEDS OF DOOM

And then we meet Harrison Chase.

Sue: Didn't he used to work at the Crossroads Motel?

Me: I don't think so. You probably recognise him from *The Italian Job*.

Sue: Oh, who did he play?

Me: Camp Freddie. **Sue**: You don't say.

Back in Antarctica, not only has the pod opened, its tendrils have infected Winlett

Sue: So this is basically The Thing?

Me: Sort of.

Sue: So where's the dog, then?

Me: Where's the what?

Sue: The dog from The Thing?

A helicopter arrives at the base. And no, it isn't chasing a dog.

Sue: The models are impressive. They're pushing the boat out for this one.

When Moberley welcomes the Doctor to Antarctica, he tells him he was expecting someone older. The Doctor, who's a little put out by this, says he's 749 years old.

Sue: This Doctor is always banging on about his age, so 749 must be 39 in human years. He's definitely going through a midlife crisis.

As the Doctor enters the base, Sue asks me to pause the DVD.

Sue: Right, so where's the TARDIS? **Me**: He arrived in a helicopter.

Sue: Why? Me: Er...

Sue: His TARDIS doesn't work, does it? That's it, isn't it? It still doesn't

work!

I ignore her. She sighs.

Sue: Nice, dramatic close-ups, though. I'm liking this a lot.

Me: And?

Sue: Is it Douglas? **Me**: That's my girl.

Sue: I don't care if this is six parts any more.

And then, a few seconds later...

Sue: This can't be Dudley, then.

Me: Well done. You deserve some sort of badge for that.

The Doctor investigates the area where the pod was found and immediately finds another one.

Sue: He should put some gloves on. He'll catch his death out there.

Me: The Doctor doesn't feel the cold.

Sue: Since when? **Me**: Look at him!

Sue: I suppose the Doctor would have looked a right dick in a puffer jacket. Besides, Elisabeth Sladen is doing enough cold-acting for

everyone.

Winlett's infection is getting worse by the second.

Sue: Is he turning into a tree?

Me: Don't be silly.

Winlett is actually turning into a savage, meat-eating plant called a Krynoid.

Sue: Tom is on fire this week. I love it when he's angry. I didn't like

THE SEEDS OF DOOM

it when Jon Pertwee was in a foul mood, but this Doctor only snaps when the world's about to end, not because somebody has eaten all the sandwiches.

Chase's men, Scorby and Keeler, arrive at the base, pretending to be lost.

Sue: It's Boycie! **Me**: Lovely jubbly.

And then... Nothing. Sue doesn't say a word. She's far too busy biting her nails

Me: Nothing to say?

Sue: Shut up.

The episode concludes when a Krynoid attacks Moberley.

Sue: Is that it? Bloody hell, that flew by. Hurry up and stick the next one

on.

Part Two

Me: Are we still on for a 10?

Sue: It hasn't lost any marks yet. Why?

Me: No reason.

Harrison Chase pays Dunbar for tipping him off about the pod.

Sue: Has he got green fingers under those black gloves? Is that the twist?

The Doctor and Stevenson go hunting for the Krynoid.

Sue: When you consider that this was filmed in a television studio, it

looks amazing.

Me: We're outdoors.

Keeler and Scorby find the pod that infected Winlett.

Sue: It looks like a giant avocado. But I wouldn't want to eat the guacamole.

They are interrupted by a radio transmission from a nearby base. Scorby tries to bluff it out.

Me: Derek's fishing. He's just caught a couple of stripers. We'll bring 'em

home for dinner, we won't be long.

Sue: What? **Me**: Nothing.

The Doctor snaps at Sarah.

Sue: I'll let him get away with that because the stakes seem so high. He looks really worried.

But when the Doctor confronts Scorby, his demeanour is entirely different.

Sue: I like the way Tom can be deadly serious one minute, and flippant the next. That's his Doctor in a nutshell, I think.

She's also drawn to the actor playing Stevenson.

Sue: I'm sure I've seen him before. Wasn't he a pianist? **Me**: No, it isn't Richard Stilgoe, Sue, it's Hubert Rees.

When Scorby leads Sarah away to be shot, the Doctor erupts with anger.

Sue: Bloody hell! I've never seen the Doctor like that before. Boycie has sent him over the edge. Even the Daleks aren't yelled at like that.

Meanwhile a Krynoid prowls the arctic wastes...

THE SEEDS OF DOOM

Sue: You know, I'm sure I've seen this before.

Me: Well, there are four possibilities. Either you saw this when it

originally went out...

Sue: Unlikely.

Me: I made you watch it during our honeymoon period 20 years ago...

Sue: Possibly.

Me: You're confusing it with *The Claws of Axos...*

Sue: I can't remember anything about *The Claws of Axos*.

Me: Or you're thinking of the time John Williams came over to watch it

and we made you leave the room.

Sue: Yeah, that's probably it.

Scorby and Keeler make off with the pod as the base is consumed by a massive fireball.

Sue: Well, the Doctor and Sarah are completely fucked now.

Part Three

Sue: This story is way ahead of its time.

Me: In what way?

Sue: The ice caps are melting.

This is a sly dig at the sandpit that's currently doubling for Antarctica.

Sue: I bet the designer had a stroke when he read the script. Look, they've missed a bit...

The Doctor and Sarah take a car to the Botanical Institute, but their chauffeur drives them to a deserted sandpit instead. The Doctor reacts to this subterfuge by ramming the driver's head into the car door.

Sue: Why didn't the Doctor just scoop up his gun and finish it there and then? Why all the running around? Ooh! The Doctor just punched him in the face. And he enjoyed it, too. You don't see that very often. Jon Pertwee

would have been appalled at that. Not even a "Hai!"

The Doctor and Sarah discover a painting in the boot of the would-be assassin's car, and they trace it to Amelia Ducat.

Sue: She's wonderful. I could watch her all day.

When the Doctor informs Amelia that he found her painting in the boot of a Daimler, I just can't help myself...

Me: "The car is immaterial!"

Sue: Stop that, Neil.

Me: Sorry.

The Doctor disguises himself as a chauffeur and drives to Chase's mansion. Thankfully, the guard only gives him a cursory glance before letting him in.

Sue: I don't think much of their security. Nice guardhouse though.

When the Doctor and Sarah are eventually apprehended, Chase decides to execute them. But first, some music...

Sue: He's a megalomaniacal Jean Michel Jarre.

Me: Is there any other kind?

The Doctor is appalled by the music, too.

Me: It sounds like one of Tangerine Dream's atonal phases.

Sue: Is there any other kind?

When the Doctor and Sarah make a run for it, and Scorby gives chase, the Doctor breaks the henchman's neck and kills him.

Sue: No!

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It's okay, Scorby's fine. In fact, he's never felt better.

Me: It was a chiropractor move, not a death move. It probably cleared up

some sciatica that was nagging him.

Sue: I think I preferred it when the Doctor used his finger.

Keeler examines the pod.

Sue: Keeler looks like Robson Green. He's a great actor.

Me: (Appalled) Robson Green?

Sue: No, this bloke. **Me**: Thank fuck for that.

Sarah is captured by Scorby (he's really earning his money today) and the Doctor heads for higher ground.

Sue: Chase could do with a new roof. It's a mess. And if this roof fell in, it would fuck his plants right up.

Chase wants to use Sarah as a guinea pig in a horrific experiment. The pod begins to open and Sarah's arm is pinned to the table by the mad millionaire.

Sue: That was a great cliffhanger. It doesn't get any better than that.

Part Four

The Doctor jumps through the conservatory's skylight and saves the day.

Sue: Nice stunt double.

Me: That's Tom!

Sue: Is it really? In that case, they should have filmed him from the front.

It looked as if they were trying to hide his face.

Me: But you wouldn't knock any points...

Sue: Shut it.

Chase wants to know what the Doctor does for an encore.

Me: "I win!"
Sue: Neil!

Me: Sorry. I couldn't help it.

The Doctor and Sarah leg it.

Sue: Shoot the pod! Shoot the pod!

The opportunity is missed and Keeler is infected as a result.

Sue: Shit.

The Doctor and Sarah escape through the grounds.

Sue: Nice topiary. Very formal.

Keeler turns bright green.

Sue: We have a Hulk. He's a skinny Hulk, but we have a Hulk.

Scorby introduces the Doctor to Chase's favourite recycling machine.

Sue: I think I can see where this is going.

But Chase's murderous machinations are interrupted by Amelia Ducat.

Sue: Excellent. I'm glad she's back. Is she the new companion? Please tell me she's the new companion.

Me: I've never seen any ashtrays in the TARDIS, so don't hold your breath.

Amelia tells Chase that he owes her a thousand guineas – a significant increase on the 750 guineas it cost him when he originally bought it.

THE SEEDS OF DOOM

Me: Inflation was rampant in the mid-'70s. That was a nice in-joke for all the depressed adults in the audience.

Amelia bumps into Sarah on her way out. Luckily, the old lady arrived with Dunbar and Sir Colin Thackeray, and Sarah's report forces Dunbar to do the right thing for a change.

Sue: That's nice. He's going to turn over a new leaf.

I glower at her.

Sue: Sorry.

Sarah rescues the Doctor from Chase's crusher in the nick of time.

Sue: I'm surprised that wasn't the cliffhanger. That would have been a great cliffhanger.

Dunbar tells Chase their deal is off.

Me: "Scorby! Get Dunbar!" ... Sorry, that's the last time, I promise.

Dunbar is killed by the Krynoid, and the episode concludes with a rampaging monster making a bee-line for the Doctor and Sarah.

Sue: That wasn't the best cliffhanger in the world. It was a bit wibblywobbly. Like a fat Triffid. They should have gone with the crusher instead.

Part Five

For the first time since An Unearthly Child, Sue watched an episode in complete silence, although Nicol did walk in halfway through to yell, "Feed me, Seymour!"

Sue: That was excellent. What else do you want me to say?

And that, ladies and gentlemen, is why we won't be covering the David Tennant and Matt Smith eras on this blog, as every single update would end up like that.

Me: I vividly remember that cliffhanger, thanks to a cow.

Sue: Okay...

Me: I didn't see this story when it was originally broadcast in 1976. I think my bed-wetting had something to do with it. Anyway, it wasn't until the late 1970s, when I lived in New Zealand for a while, that I finally got to see it. In fact, thanks to the *New Zealand Fan Club Webpage*, I know I saw this episode on the 7th July, 1979 on channel SPTV at 4.05pm. And I'm pretty sure it was in black and white.

Sue: So how does the cow come into it?

Me: Well, we were living with my aunt and uncle in the rural South Island, somewhere between Queenstown and Arrowtown (where I went to school for a while), and it was getting dark outside. Then, just as the plants started to go mad, I noticed a big scary face at the window. Turns out it was a cow from a nearby farm. I screamed the place down.

Sue: Thanks for that.

Me: Do you want to say anything about this episode?

Sue: I'm not happy about the Brigadier being stuck in Geneva again. Are aliens attacking Switzerland? If not, where the hell is he? And Benton should have been there at the end with the weed killer. But apart from that, it was great. It's proper drama. There aren't many characters in this, but the ones we do have are brilliant. We get to spend lots of time with them, and the actors are playing it totally straight. I love their back-stories and quirky mannerisms; I really care about them. Even the Butler is great. It reminds me of a Hammer Horror film with loads of really good character actors in it. I can't fault the direction, the music, the lighting, the performances... Anything, really. You could repeat this on BBC1 tomorrow and I bet people would still enjoy it.

Part Six

Sue: I didn't mention this yesterday, but why are they stacking the pot

THE SEEDS OF DOOM

plants outside in a nice, neat row? Why don't they just chuck 'em through the doorway?

Me: The BBC must have hired the plants and they didn't want to lose their deposit.

With the Krynoid bearing down on the house, UNIT unleash their new-fangled laser gun. It's completely useless, naturally.

Sue: They'd be better off with one of Benton's rocket launchers. Or maybe some concentrated Roundup.

The tension is almost unbearable as the Doctor and Sarah search the house for Chase. Or is it?

Sue: That's a very nice cabinet. Elm, I think.

She finally stops admiring the furniture when Scorby starts freaking out.

Sue: It's a subtle performance. I almost feel sorry for him.

When Scorby is drowned by the Krynoid, Sue is both impressed and depressed.

Sue: Maybe he swam away? He could still come back again one day. He could...

The Krynoid almost brings the house down.

Sue: They are just about getting away with that special effect. And anything's better than CSO, I suppose.

Chase feeds Sarah to his recycling machine.

Sue: At least he's hanging around to watch her die. You have to give him credit for that.

The Doctor fights with Chase inside the hopper.

Sue: If his scarf gets caught up in that, it's all over.

The Doctor gets the upper hand and Harrison Chase is pumped into the garden.

Sue: That's easily the most horrific thing I've ever seen in *Doctor Who*.

The Doctor and Sarah make a run for it, but some pernicious foliage impedes their escape.

Sue: It's The Evil Dead, now.

Me: Don't worry, they don't go *that* far.

The air force bomb the Krynoid into next week.

Sue: I can't complain about that. Well done.

After a little light relief at the World Ecology Bureau, the Doctor and Sarah decide to take a short holiday on Cassiopeia. Unfortunately, the TARDIS takes them to Antarctica instead. It's especially unfortunate for Sarah as she must have ended up with third-degree frostbite.

The Score

Sue: Finally. A story that didn't fall apart at the end. I know the suspense is killing you, so...

10/10

Me: You're not giving it a 10 just to keep me happy, are you?

Sue: Trust me, I'd love to give it a nine just to piss you off, but I can't. It

can't get any better than that, surely?

THE SEEDS OF DOOM

COMMENT: "It's all downhill from here." – Ian Marchant

NOTES: This was Sue's second perfect score (*Spearhead From Space* was the first), although I suspect I may have swayed her opinion a tiny bit. Sometimes it was difficult to maintain the strenuous scientific standards we were justly famous for.

SEASON FOURTEEN THE ACID JUST KICKED IN



THE MASQUE OF MANDRAGORA

BLOGGED: 16 May 2012

Part One

Sue: New font. I don't like it. **Me**: It's Cantoria Bold. **Sue**: It's Cantoria Boring.

The Doctor and Sarah are exploring the TARDIS when they stumble across its boot cupboard.

Sue: So that's where the Doctor keeps his own chroma studio. Look at all that lovely CSO.

Sue isn't impressed with the Doctor's housekeeping, either.

Sue: He could do with a part-time cleaner. Look at all the dust on his

round things. **Me**: Roundels.

Sue: It bet he hasn't been down this corridor with a hoover in centuries.

The Doctor and Sarah stumble into the secondary console room, which Sue adores. But of course she does, it's made of WOOD!

Sue: It's very cosy. I love the stained glass. This suits Tom Baker down to the ground.

Sue picks up on the reference to Patrick Troughton when Sarah finds a recorder, and she's convinced that the dusty, pink shirt once belonged to Jon Pertwee, but before we get can into why we haven't seen this room before – especially if all the other Doctors have used it – the TARDIS is attacked by an unseen force.

Sue: Nice camera movement. Have the BBC actually splashed out on a jib?

The TARDIS hurtles down a crystalline tunnel.

Sue: It's Diamonique Hour on QVC.

Our heroes step into a black void, and when a ball of red light suddenly appears, they hide behind the TARDIS to escape its attention.

Sue: Shut the fucking door!

The Doctor warns his companion about the dangers of Helix energy.

Sue: Yes, and it just flew straight into your TARDIS, mate.

As the TARDIS leaves the Helix behind, the sound of demonic laughter rings out.

Sue: Is it the Master?

Meanwhile in 15th century Italy...

Sue: I'll probably like this one. Nice location. Period costumes. You know, Neil, *real things*. I like the historical ones.

When Count Federico enters the town of San Martino on horseback, Sue knows exactly where this story takes place: Wales.

Sue: Is this Portmerion?

Me: I am seriously impressed, Sue.

Sue: You've made me watch *The Prisoner* more times than I care to remember. The building with the green dome is what gave it away. I'm

surprised you haven't dragged me there for a holiday.

Me: I'll take you as soon as this is over. We can re-enact scenes from this

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story if you like.

Sue gives me one of her looks.

Sue: Yeah, it could be part of our ongoing counselling, along with you burning your *Doctor Who* DVDs on a bonfire. I'm looking forward to it.

Count Federico and the young Prince Giuliano are bickering over the body of a recently deceased Duke. The court astrologer, Hieronymous, insists their ruler's death was foretold in the stars.

Sue: Giuliano doesn't sound like a British name to me.

Me: Maybe that's because we're in Italy.

Sue: Oh, well in that case, why isn't anyone speaking with an

Italian accent? That's a bit lazy, isn't it?

Giuliano's best friend is a man named Marco.

Sue: The bloke with the ginger hair doesn't look very Italian, either. He looks Scottish to me. Who cast this?

Federico tells Hieronymous to foretell Giuliano's imminent death.

Sue: Hieronymous can't be the Master. The Master wouldn't be seen dead with a beard like that.

The TARDIS materialises in a nearby wood, and it takes all of 30 seconds for Sarah to be kidnapped.

Sue: That has to be a new record.

The Doctor intervenes, but he's rendered unconscious with a blow to the head.

Sue: That was a canny thump. I wouldn't be surprised if that gave him

brain damage.

With the Doctor out cold, the Helix energy emerges from the TARDIS.

Sue: I knew it! This is what happens when you don't shut the bloody door. I'm surprised it doesn't happen more often.

It doesn't take long for an innocent bystander to die horribly.

Sue: This is the Doctor's fault. What a berk.

The Doctor comes to his senses and runs into Captain Rossini and his horsemen. They threaten to arrest him, so he spooks their horses with a football rattle. Then he steals a horse and rides off.

Sue: That isn't Tom Baker. The wig isn't quite right. He looks more like Malcolm McLaren.

Sarah is brought before the cult of Demnos.

Sue: Hang on, is this a sequel? Isn't there a Jon Pertwee story called *The Demnos*? It really is the Master, isn't it?

Count Federico sentences the Doctor to death for spying.

Sue: Nice cliffhanger. I like the way the executioner moved his arm in time with the theme music. Who directed this one?

The appropriate credit appears.

Sue: Rodney Bennett. That name rings a bell.

Me: Well, aside from directing *The Ark in Space* and *The Sontaran Experiment*, he also shares his name with a rival school in *Grange Hill*, but since you never watched that, you're probably mistaking him for the composer Richard Rodney Bennett. Either way, this conversation is going

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nowhere.

Part Two

The Doctor escapes execution, mainly thanks to his scarf.

Sue: That was fun. A bit silly, but fun.

The Doctor flees through a market.

Sue: This looks great, but the white cladding on that wall isn't right for this period. They're trying to hide it behind some material, but the wind's blown it away. What a shame.

The Doctor follows a man dressed in a purple cloak and a gold mask through the catacombs.

Sue: Could this bloke walk any slower? Has he got sciatica or something?

Sarah is definitely going to be sacrificed. Honest.

Sue: She's been lying on that table for hours. They've been waving a knife above her head for so long now, she's actually bored. She should have been killed *ages* ago. And why do the bad guys always have to do a little dance first?

The Doctor drags Sarah away from the sacrificial altar.

Sue: They're trying to lighten the mood with comedy parp-parp music. Wow.

Me: Comedy parp-parp music? That's classic Dudley Simpson! **Sue**: (*Ignoring me*) Marco and Giuliano are definitely a couple. The first thing Giuliano should do when he's in charge is change the same-sex marriage laws.

Back in the catacombs, a booming voice gives everyone the willies.

Sue: The alien talks as slowly as this bloke walks. They are the perfect couple. If they did everything at normal speed, this episode would only be 10 minutes long.

Aside from that, I can tell Sue is enjoying The Masque of Mandragora.

Sue: It looks good, the performances are interesting, and the plot is reasonably straightforward – although I haven't got a clue what Helix energy is supposed to be, or what it wants. But that's okay.

The Doctor races back to the catacombs.

Sue: I keep expecting him to run into Patrick McGoohan coming the other way.

The episode ends with Sarah back in the cult's clutches.

Sue: I enjoyed that.Me: You didn't say a lot.

Sue: That's because I'm enjoying it too much. Sorry.

Part Three

The Doctor is attacked by a strange noise in the catacombs and it's up to Giuliano to keep four swordsmen at bay.

Sue: Come on! They could take him. Look at him. He looks like he's never picked up a sword before.

The Doctor lends Giuliano a helping hand.

Sue: Malcolm McLaren is back. This sword fight isn't very good. Either the stuntmen are rubbish or the guards are rubbish. Either way, their

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hearts aren't in it.

Sarah is bound and gagged and taken to Hieronymous' chambers, where the mad astrologer holds a vial under her nose.

Sue: Is he going to waterboard her?

Meanwhile Count Federico bollocks Captain Rossini for failing to apprehend the Doctor.

Sue: He needs to work on his management skills. Calling someone a "dung-head" isn't going to do him any favours in the long run. I bet he stabs him in the back at the end.

Once again, Sue falls under this episode's spell, and it takes something really special to provoke a reaction out of her. Like Dudley's obsession with vibraslaps, for instance.

Sue: Are these catacombs infested with rattlesnakes?

Federico tortures Marco, hoping he will betray Giuliano.

Sue: Marco will never lie about Giuliano. He loves him too much for that. This is quite touching, actually.

The Doctor is apprehended by Rossini's men, despite putting up quite a fight.

Sue: Jon Pertwee would have been proud of that kick to the face.

The Doctor is chained to a wall next to Sarah. He says he knew Sarah was under Hieronymous' hypnotic control because she asked him how she could understand Italian when she knows full well that it's a Time Lord gift he shares with her.

Sue: I thought the TARDIS did that? That's a bit vague.

Federico unmasks Hieronymous, who turns out to be a monster with a burning sun for a face.

Sue: Very good.

Me: Really? I'm surprised.

Sue: It's pure energy, isn't it? What do you want it to look like? It makes sense to me, and it doesn't look too silly. It's quite unsettling, actually. I'm

enjoying this.

Me: I know. You hardly said a word again.

Sue: It's good! What more do you want me to say?

Part Four

Nicol is pestering us to watch the latest Game of Thrones.

Me: You'll have to wait. We have to watch this episode of *Doctor Who*

first.

Sue: You'll like it, Nicol. It's a bit like Game of Thrones.

Nicol: Yeah, of course it is. **Me**: Although with less incest.

Sue: Yeah, but just as much homoeroticism.

Nicol wants to know why Sarah is auditioning for a role in The Sound of Music. And then she starts rambling on about Sarah's clothes, but this was so mind-numbingly boring, I couldn't bring myself to take notes.

Sue: It's a lot scarier when the villains are real people. I'll take a mad monk in a mask over a plastic monster any day of the week.

Nicol wants to know if Tim Pigott-Smith is Benedict Cumberbatch's dad.

Me: No. But his mum will be along in a couple of weeks.

Hieronymous fires Helix energy out of his fingers.

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Sue: George Lucas must have seen this. The villain even wears a mask.

The Masque's attendees are struck down by energy bolts.

Sue: Have all the best minds in Italy just been killed? That can't be good, can it?

It turns out the Doctor was impersonating Hieronymous the whole time.

Sue: Since when has he been able to do that? Is he an intergalactic Mike Yarwood, now?

Me: You should hear his Davros, it's hilarious.

The Doctor leaves the planet with a grin on his face and some salami in his pocket (a reward for saving the world).

Sue: It's more than he usually gets, I suppose.

The Doctor tells Sarah that the Mandragora Helix will attempt to conquer the Earth again at the end of the 20th century.

Sue: They've set it up nicely for a sequel.

The Score

Sue: That was very nearly the second 10 out of 10 in a row, but the ending let it down. It was a bit rushed and anticlimactic, although I'm getting used to that. I can't fault the rest: great location, sets, costumes, performances, script. And the lighting was excellent, too. Yeah, I liked it a lot. It was very accessible, too. If only it had the same pace as *The Seeds of Doom*.

9/10

COMMENT: "The name of the typeface used on Seasons 14-17 is actually

Della Robbia, not Cantoria, and I adore it. - John S Hall

NOTES: Fans of Della Robbia are in for a treat if they buy *Volume 5*. I've pencilled you in for 10 copies, John.

THE HAND OF FEAR BLOGGED: 19 May 2012

015. 17 May 2012

Part One

On the frozen wastes of Kastria...

Sue: Is this planet of the anoraks?

A humanoid figure is tracking a spaceship on a computer screen.

Sue: He's playing the slowest game of *Pong* ever.

This cold opening (sorry), which mainly features an asthmatic alien freezing its bollocks off, doesn't do anything for Sue.

Sue: Neil? Me: Yes, love?

Sue: What the fuck is going on?

A spaceship explodes and the galaxy goes for a quick spin.

Sue: Okay, I think the acid just kicked in.

So, to sum up...

Sue: A terrible start. I didn't understand a single word of that. What just happened?

The TARDIS lands in a quarry, which this week is doubling for a... wait for it... quarry. This throws Sue completely (she thinks we're still on Kastria after the thaw).

Sue: Sarah Jane looks like Andy Pandy this week. I had a pair of

dungarees like hers, but mine were blue denim with cream stripes, and they were less flared at the bottom. It's a cute look, mind.

The Doctor, unperturbed by the sound of distant sirens, decides to hone his cricketing skills.

Sue: Well, that's just bollocks, isn't it? That rock wouldn't have fallen over like that. It breaks the laws of physics. They must have used some fishing wire to pull that over.

The Doctor and Sarah are distracted by a man in a hard hat who's waving at them from afar.

Sue: This reminds me of a 1970s Public Information Film.

But it's too late – the quarry explodes.

Sue: (Sitting up in her chair) Now that was good.

When the Doctor digs his unconscious companion out of the rubble, she's clinging to a petrified hand and won't let go.

Sue: It's a helping hand.

Me: Right, I'm banning the hand jokes. The next person who makes a joke about hands, arms, or appendages of any kind, has to empty the cats' litter

trays for the rest of the week.

Sue: What about fingers? Do they count?

Sarah is taken to hospital.

Sue: This could so easily have been a crossover with Casualty. Where's

Charlie when you need him?

Me: Ah, Derek Thompson, the only actor to rub the back of his neck more than Jon Pertwee.

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The Doctor has his injuries seen to as well, but, thanks to NHS bureaucracy, he has to tell them where he comes from.

Sue: "Gallifree"? Where the hell is Gallifree?

Sarah wakes up, attacks a kindly doctor and runs away with the hand.

Me: I love this. I can remember playing *Doctor Who* in the school playground the Monday after this went out, and all the girls took it in turns to be Sarah, which meant it was their job to kill me. Evil Sarah was easy to mimic – the girl just had to walk around with a glazed look on her face, a sandwich box under her arm, and a gaudy ring on her finger. I was killed hundreds of times that week. One day, we found some white fossilised dog poo and pretended it was one of Eldrad's missing fingers.

Carter regains consciousness.

Sue: I'm glad he isn't dead. I wouldn't have wanted Sarah Jane to have that on her conscience. I know it's not her fault, but think of the guilt.

Sarah strides into a nearby nuclear power station.

Sue: This is eerie. I really like the direction – there are some really interesting camera angles. It's completely different to what we usually get. The location is quite interesting, too. Jon Pertwee would have loved this place.

The cliffhanger, where the hand slowly returns to life, still looks impressive today.

Sue: It's The Addams Family meets Torchwood.

Me: Torchwood?

Sue: Doesn't this hand end up in Torchwood?

It takes me a while to work out what she's talking about.

Me: No, that's not the right hand.

Sue: It's definitely a right hand, Neil. You can tell by the thumb.

I reach for a cushion.

Sue: That was a great cliffhanger. We're off to a good start. Apart from that scene at the beginning. What the hell was that all about?

Part Two

Sarah communicates with Eldrad's spirit.

Sue: She's talking to the hand 'cos the face ain't listening.

Professor Watson (who's played by Glyn "He's been in loads of stuff" Houston) enters the story.

Sue: He's worried about how this will look when they have the inevitable public inquiry. I bet he was a few days away from retirement, as well.

Despite the emergency, the Doctor is still allowed to waltz around like he owns the place.

Sue: So a complete stranger can fiddle with the controls to a nuclear reactor? The security in this place is a disgrace.

Aside from that, Sue really likes this episode. She's impressed with the hand effect ("For its time"), the unusual camera angles are right up her street, and Carter's death, which involves him plummeting from a very tall height, is praised, too. Although for Sue the best moment definitely occurs when Watson telephones his family to say goodbye.

Sue: That was really sad. I didn't expect that. I actually give a shit about his character, now.

THE HAND OF FEAR

The Doctor concludes that the hand must feed on radiation, at which point Sarah suggests that it isn't as 'armless as it looks.

Sue: Hey! Sarah is doing hand jokes, now. That isn't fair!

The Doctor probes Sarah's mind for information about Eldrad.

Sue: It's a great performance from Elisabeth Sladen. She looks like she's really enjoying this story. And so am I.

Meanwhile a technician named Driscoll is possessed by Eldrad's mighty ring of power.

Sue: Okay, forget *Torchwood*, this is *The Addams Family* meets *Lord of the Rings*.

Me: You're mad, love.

Sue: The hand hasn't grown very much. We'll be here all day waiting for it

to sprout a forearm.

Driscoll steps into the reactor core, which starts a chain reaction.

Sue: This is really good. I have no idea what that scene at the beginning has to do with anything, but that wasn't bad at all. Oh, and Neil?

Me: What?

Sue: Eldrad must live.

Part Three

Sue: It's all gone a bit Chernobyl. If the explosion doesn't kill them, the radiation will. Unless they come up with a sci-fi explanation.

Of course they do.

Sue: Okay, fair enough, but Watson should phone his wife before she books a luxury cruise with his life insurance.

Eldrad is trapped in the reactor core.

Sue: The hand is going to turn into a crap monster, isn't it?

Watson requests a nuclear strike on the reactor and the RAF are only too happy to oblige.

Me: That must have been some phone call.

Sue: This can't be a good idea. If Eldrad eats radiation, this attack will be a takeaway snack. Blimey, it really has turned into a 1970s Public Information Film. In the event of a nuclear blast, please hide behind your nearest car. No wonder the Doctor is taking the piss. This is ridiculous.

The reactor opens...

Sue: Please, don't let the monster be shit...

And Eldrad emerges.

Sue: Oh, I wasn't expecting that. Is it a lady alien? You don't see many of those.

Sue checks her out.

Sue: Chipped mirrored tiles were all the rage in the 1970s. And don't you think she looks like one of the *X-Men*? Don't ask me which one. But yeah, it works for me.

The Doctor brings Eldrad up to speed: 150 million years have passed since her ship crashed on Earth.

Sue: I think they should help her out.

Me: Are you sure about that?

Sue: Yeah. She's having a bad time, the poor thing.

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Watson has the opposite reaction and tries to kill her.

Sue: Two nukes didn't kill her... I know! I'll try these bullets instead! You idiot

Eldrad retaliates and Watson writhes in pain.

Me: Do you still want to help her?

Sue: He just shot her six times. I'd be pissed off if I were her. And she

didn't kill him, so chill, Neil.

Watson is left to deal with the metaphorical fallout.

Sue: Somebody should take that gun off him before he shoots himself in the head. His wife could still get that luxury cruise, after all.

The TARDIS arrives on Kastria.

Sue: Finally. The scene at the beginning might make sense now.

When Eldrad sets off a booby trap, she's speared through the chest. It's one of those rare occasions where a cliffhanger actually made Sue gasp.

Sue: Bloody hell, I didn't see that coming. I told you she was the goodie. You wouldn't have a cliffhanger where the villain was in danger, would you? That would be silly.

Part Four

Sue: This is a bit stupid.

What's annoying Sue is the way in which the Doctor and Sarah take time out to spout exposition at each other, or admire the Kastrian scenery (which Sue hates), even though they should be rushing to save Eldrad's life. After all, Eldrad must live.

Sue: Stop blathering! Can't you walk and talk at the same time?

Me: If they did that, they'd run out of set.

Sue: Well, the writers should know better. And there are two writers. One

of them should have spotted that.

She doesn't like the way they've written Sarah, either.

Sue: She's screaming a lot this week. This isn't like Sarah Jane at all.

The Doctor and Sarah stare into a yawning abyss. We know exactly how it feels.

Sue: Are you sure this isn't a Terry Nation script? Did he hide behind two pseudonyms because one wasn't enough?

Sarah crosses the chasm via a makeshift bridge, although she doesn't half make a meal of it.

Sue: You could drive a bloody truck over that bridge!

When the Doctor carries Eldrad into the regeneration room, Sue is impressed with Judith Paris' ability to mimic a plank of wood.

Sue: You have to be really fit to stay as rigid as that. Or you could just watch this episode, I suppose; it will bore you rigid. It's a shame because I enjoyed the first three. It was on for a seven or an eight yesterday.

The Doctor and Sarah accidentally flatten Eldrad.

Sue: *Is that it?* They're just going to shrug their shoulders and leave?

And then the real Eldrad turns up.

Sue: I like his purple hat.

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Eldrad rants and raves. A lot. So Sue sighs. A lot.

Sue: Okay, this is officially rubbish now. It's heading for a four.

Sarah exclaims they've all been taken for a ride.

Sue: Tell me about it, love!

When Eldrad discovers the Kastrian race banks are empty, he has what Sue calls a "dicky fit".

Sue: He's pathetic. This is what you were like the last time our internet went down, Neil.

The villain activates a video message that's been left for him by the Last King of Kastria. Its condescending tone sends Eldrad over the edge.

Sue: Stop talking to it, then! You're trying to have a conversation with an answer machine, you moron!

Eldrad turns his attention to Earth

Sue: Eldrad definitely has a chip on his shoulder. Well, he's got several chips, actually, but you know what I mean.

The Doctor and Sarah make a run for it. Eldrad gives chase, but he trips over the Doctor's scarf and falls into the abyss.

Sue: This is embarrassing. It's a bloody pantomime, now.

The Doctor believes Eldrad could have survived the fall.

Sue: So why throw his fucking ring down after him, then? Which writer would be stupid enough to bring him back, anyway? What a load of rubbish. Worst. Monster. Ever.

But it isn't over yet.

Sue: Oh, the Doctor's been called to "Gallifree". That's almost as exciting as being called to Gallifrey.

And then the joking stops.

Sue: I'm genuinely shocked by this. I thought Sarah would be around a lot longer than that.

However, when Sarah is deposited on a suburban street, my wife is delighted.

Sue: Aww, what a gorgeous Labrador. She looks like Buffy when Buffy was young. That's nice.

Once the credits have faded to black, and I'm satisfied that my voice won't crack, I ask Sue to sum up.

Sue: That was a brilliant scene at the end, but I know she's coming back, so it's fine. If I didn't know she'd get her own series, I think I'd be more upset. It's only upsetting now because Elisabeth Sladen is no longer with us. There are different layers of poignancy to that scene now, especially for you, I expect. But look at her at the end, Neil. She's happy.

The Score

Sue: It's a difficult story to score. It was good, then very good, then good, then shit, then really shit, then excellent. I don't know what to do... Oh sod it, it's Sarah Jane's last story so I'll have to give it...

6/10

COMMENT: "Does Sue realise that uttering the phrase, 'For its time' completes her descent into *Doctor Who* fandom?" – Dominic Francis

* THE DEADLY ASSASSIN

BLOGGED: 24 May 2012

Part One

Sue: I'm not thrilled with the cheesy narration, but I can live with it.

The Doctor is travelling to Gallifrey when he's overcome by a prophetic vision.

Sue: Okay, pause this for a second, please. What just happened?

Me: The Doctor has had a premonition. He saw himself assassinating the

Time Lord President in the future.

Sue: I didn't know he was clairvoyant. He kept that quiet.

Gallifrey's security service identifies the Doctor's TARDIS as the property of a convicted criminal.

Sue: I thought the Doctor had been forgiven? You know, when he saved everyone from being eaten by a black hole a few weeks back. And he's been working for the Time Lords, on-and-off, for *years*. They have very short memories.

The Doctor ponders his next move.

Sue: It doesn't seem right to me having the Doctor on his own like this. I'm guessing the new companion will turn up soon. They're usually easy to spot. Hang on, is that a bong? There's no time for that! People usually hide their bongs when the police turn up...

The Doctor escapes to the Capitol.

Sue: I expected better. I thought security on Gallifrey would be a lot more formidable than that.

The Master, for it is he (not that Sue suspects a thing), is skulking in the darkness.

Sue: Gallifrey looks like an '80s disco. I haven't seen this much dry ice since I saw Gary Numan in concert.

Castellan Spandrell and Coordinator Engin learn the Doctor has undertaken missions for the Celestial Intervention Agency.

Sue: So the CIA are like...

Me: The CIA? Yes.

Sue: Right. That actually makes sense.

It doesn't take Sue long to warm to Spandrell.

Sue: He's an odd actor, but I think I like him. There's something loveable about him, even if he is a bit bizarre.

When Spandrell and Engin discuss the significance of the Doctor's Prydonian seal, Sue asks me to pause the DVD again.

Sue: Okay, so what does that mean? **Me**: Well, it's a bit like Harry Potter.

Sue: That doesn't help. I'm a grown woman, remember?

Me: It's a chapter house.

Sue: Like a posh boarding school?

Me: If you like.

Sue: So Gallifrey is basically Oxbridge? This is a lot for me to take in. I

feel like I'm drowning in information.

We see the Master again and SHE STILL DOESN'T SAY IT. Later, when I ask her why it never crossed her mind, she'll tell me it's because she thought he looked like a completely different alien species. Which makes sense, I suppose.

THE DEADLY ASSASSIN

Sue: So this is a Gallifreyan jubilee?

Me: More like an abdication.

Sue: I'm surprised the Time Lords have television. What do Time Lords

watch when this isn't on? Do they have Gallifreyan game shows?

Me: If you say The Regeneration Game, I'll have to kill you.

Gallifrey's top broadcaster was one of Cardinal Borusa's pupils at the Prydon Academy.

Sue: So Runcible was a media student?

Oh dear. She's beginning to channel Jan Vincent-Rudzki.

Sue: Ooh, silver eye shadow and lip balm combo. Nice.

And then the Doctor shoots the president, but Sue isn't fooled for a second.

Sue: They cloned a double from the Doctor's bio-data thingy.

She's awfully smug about this.

Sue: It's pretty obvious, really.

Don't worry, I stopped the episode as soon as the credits kicked in (Philip Hinchcliffe wasn't that keen on anagrams) so Sue is none the wiser, which is just the way I like it.

Part Two

Sue doesn't like it when a cliffhanger is resolved unfairly, which means she's furious when she spots a second gunman in the reprise.

Sue: How am I supposed to get it right when I don't have all the evidence?

And then...

Sue: So, if the Doctor was shooting at the other assassin, was he a terrible shot, or did the assassin in the crowd kill the president and the Doctor was firing blanks? Or did the Doctor really kill the president? Is the Doctor the deadly assassin *or what*?

The Doctor is tortured, placed on trial and sentenced to death, which leaves him no choice but to invoke Article 17.

Sue: That's a bit far-fetched. How can a convicted criminal run for office?

That's silly.

Me: Bobby Sands, 1981. **Sue**: Oh yeah. Good point.

Goth conspires with the Master. He tries to hide it by putting on a raspy voice (for whose benefit, exactly?) but Sue isn't stupid. His enthusiasm for the Doctor's execution gave him away, apparently. Incidentally, Goth calls the Master "master" at one point, but she still doesn't bite.

Sue: He looks like Darth Vader without his mask on.

The Doctor scours the scene of the crime for any evidence that will exonerate him.

Sue: The set is very creaky. It looks great, but it sounds bloody terrible.

When the Doctor discovers the shrunken body of a camera operator, Sue understands its significance straight away.

Sue: It can't be the Master. It doesn't look anything like him.

I don't think she gets it.

Sue: What a terrible thing to regenerate into. He pulled the short straw, there. If I were him, I'd kill myself and start again.

THE DEADLY ASSASSIN

The Master has tampered with the Matrix – a living mind that stores the cells of every deceased Time Lord.

Sue: So is the Matrix like...

Me: The Matrix? Yes.

Sue: Is that a coincidence? If it is, it's a big one. Even the colour scheme is the same. All those greens... If you bought 100 *Matrix* DVD box sets and

you stacked them up, you'd have a Gallifreyan pillar.

Me: That would cost you at least £100.

When the Doctor enters the Matrix, he's attacked by a crocodile/alligator (we honestly don't know – please don't write in).

Sue: Time Lord heaven is a bit shit, isn't it? I mean, if this is where Time Lords go when they die, no wonder they try to put it off as long as possible.

The Doctor ends up on a surgeon's table in the middle of nowhere.

Sue: Not. For. Kids.

And then the episode concludes with the Doctor facing an oncoming train.

Sue: That was great. Let's watch the next one.

Me: We can't. You know the rules. Trust me, it's a lot better if the

cliffhanger stays in your mind's eye. For a whole day.

Part Three

As luck would have it, we're celebrating World Goth Day (yes, it really is a thing) on Goth World. Even Nicol dropped by, which means Sue has to tell her what she'd missed so far.

Sue: He's in a virtual reality called the Matrix. What do you think of that? **Nicol**: It's like *Inception*.

Me: It's more like *The Matrix*. **Nicol**: I was being sarcastic.

Me: Right, well you might want to work on that.

Sue: It's a brave thing to do, for its time. It's unnerving because you don't

know what will happen next.

The Doctor is haunted by a laughing clown in a desert.

Me: That terrified me when I was seven.

Sue: You don't like clowns very much, do you, Neil? **Nicol**: So is this where you get your fear of clowns from? **Me**: No, it's clowns that give me my fear of clowns.

It becomes abundantly clear that Goth controls this reality.

Nicol: So it really is like *Inception*. His mind is creating this world, and the other mind has to deal with it. So there.

The Doctor is strafed by a biplane.

Sue: I like the *North by Northwest* reference. They're definitely pushing the boat out, here. But the machine gun on the plane is pointing up at the sky, so that's bad direction, I'm afraid.

Meanwhile, back in the real world, the Master dispatches a hypnotised slave to sabotage the Doctor's connection to the Matrix.

Sue: Is that Rodney Bewes?

Neil: You and your Rodney Bewes fixation. No, it isn't Rodney Bewes.

Never ask me that again.

Sue points at the new Master.

Sue: What do you make of that, Nic?

THE DEADLY ASSASSIN

Nicol rolls her eyes, but what do you expect from someone who thought The Texas Chainsaw Massacre was a comedy. Yes, I know she's right, but for her to work that out at the age of 14 still worries me.

Sue: I really like this fight scene. It's realistic because it's so clumsy.

The episode ends with one of Doctor Who's most notorious cliffhangers, as Goth holds the Doctor's head under the water.

Sue: Blimey.
Me: Too strong?
Sue: No, I love it.
Me: For kids?

Sue: Definitely not for kids.

Part Four

Sue: This is exciting.

That's all I get out of Sue for a while. But then the problems start...

Sue: I can't understand a word the Master says. I bet he has a hard time hypnotising anyone with that voice. "You will &*^&% me." Eh? Sorry? *What?*

The Master leaves Goth to die an agonising death.

Sue: Well, he certainly made the most of his death scene. Good actor, though.

Me: Bernard Horsfall played a Time Lord in *The War Games*. He exiled Patrick Troughton to Earth.

Sue: Did he really? I thought he looked familiar. That's nice continuity, too.

Interestingly, Sue despises Borusa.

Sue: What a slimy git.

And then she asks the question I've been expecting for some time...

Sue: Are these two old men the new companions?

Me: I'd love to say yes.

Sue: They're very sweet. I couldn't see them running up and down any

corridors, though.

The Master is dead, but Sue doesn't buy it for a second.

Sue: Right, so is this the same Master as the one we saw before? Or is it supposed to be the same one? And yes, I know it can't be the same one, but do you know what I mean?

Me: No one knows for sure. The Master could have regenerated several times before he ended up like this.

Sue: Okay, that makes sense, because he sounds nothing like Roger Delgado. So has the Master been injured? He didn't regenerate into this, then?

Me: I believe so. And because he's on his 13th life, he can't regenerate any more.

Sue: So how was he injured?

Me: I don't know.

Sue: I bet he made a deal with some aliens and they betrayed him. That's how he's raced through his regenerations while the Doctor is still on his fourth.

The Master and the Doctor fight over the Eye of Harmony.

Sue: I'm losing interest. I'm not sure what the hell I'm supposed to be looking at. I just know it's bad. It's a shame, but what else can you do in a TV studio? They should have done this in the Matrix.

The Master falls into a black hole and the Doctor bids Spandrell and Engin farewell. But the Master isn't dead and he escapes in a TARDIS disguised as

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a grandfather clock.

Sue: I think the Doctor knew the Master was still alive. He gave that clock a long, hard stare before he left. I think he likes having the Master around. I don't know why, but he does.

When the Master's TARDIS dematerialises, his face is superimposed over the clock face.

Sue: There was no need for that. It makes it look like the Master's TARDIS is really cramped.

The Score

Sue: The ending let it down. The first three episodes were perfect – it was heading for a nine or a 10 when they were in the Matrix – but the last episode felt like it had been directed by a completely different person. I wasn't sure what was going on at the end. I don't know how I feel about the Master coming back like that, either. The whole thing seemed a bit off. And the ending was contrived – they should have battled it out in the Matrix, that would have been more interesting. Having said that, the first three episodes were as good as it gets.

8/10

I make Sue read an interview with Jan Vincent-Rudzki, who famously slagged off The Deadly Assassin in 1976, while he was president of the Doctor Who Appreciation Society.

Me: Do you agree that the Time Lords in this story bear no resemblance to all the Time Lords we've seen previously?

Sue: No. The bad guy was the same Time Lord who exiled Patrick Troughton to Earth. Of course it's the same Time Lords.

Me: What about his criticism that Time Lords wouldn't have bad hips? **Sue**: Well, if you regenerated every time you had a twinge in your hip,

you'd get through your 12 lives pretty sharpish, wouldn't you? And if they had unlimited regenerations, they'd all look like the Chippendales.

COMMENT: "WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO THE MAGIC OF THE WIFE IN SPACE?" – Simon Harries

NOTES: According to the Target novelisation, it's a crocodile.

THE FACE OF EVIL

BLOGGED: 30 May 2012

Part One

Sue: Is there anything I should know before we start?

Me: Well, the first episode was broadcast on New Year's Day 1977.

Sue: So any adults watching this would have been hungover. Fair enough. **Me**: Oh, and there was a six-week gap between this story and the last

story.

Sue: I didn't even get six days off. Thanks.

Me: In fact, the BBC promoted this story as a season opener. But it isn't.

Not really.

Sue: Okay, I'm bored now. Press play.

The episode begins with a close-up of Louise Jameson.

Sue: Oh, it's her! Don't tell me! It's on the tip of my tongue. I know this...

It's... It's Leia.

Me: Close. Sue: Lyta? Me: Try Leela.

Sue: Yes, that's it. She's a companion. She's hard to miss, dressed like that.

I've been expecting her.

Leela is on trial for being a heretic.

Sue: This is a rough tribal council. And Jeff Probst has really let himself

go.

Me: No one in the UK gets your *Survivor* references, love, but don't let

that stop you.

I ask her to comment on the set design in the Sevateems' throne room.

Sue: It's a yurt. **Me**: It's a what?

Sue: A yurt. It's a type of tent. **Me**: Okay, apart from that.

Sue: Is the king sitting on Captain Kirk's chair?

When the TARDIS materialises in a jungle clearing, the Doctor realises he hasn't landed in Hyde Park. I pause the DVD.

Me: Do you want to say anything about that?

Sue: Not really. The TARDIS isn't working properly. It's old news.

Me: What about Tom Baker breaking the fourth wall?

Sue: No he didn't. He was talking to himself. **Me**: Yes, straight down the camera lens!

Sue: You can look anywhere you want when you're talking to yourself. And the kids would have loved it. But I know what you mean, it was a bit awkward. He needs to meet Leia...

Me: Leela.

Sue: He needs to meet her as soon as possible so he can talk to another human being. Assuming she's human of course. You know what I mean. **Me**: If Tom Baker had his way, he'd be talking to a cabbage perched on his shoulder right now.

Sue: That must be a Doctor Who joke because I don't get it.

When Leela is hunted by the Sevateem, she retaliates with her trusty crossbow.

Sue: She doesn't fuck about, does she? I thought she was going to be a screamer – I didn't expect her to be like Xena.

Leela slinks around the jungle in skimpy leather underwear.

Sue: This is definitely one for the dads. Although there's plenty for the mums to get excited about as well.

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I think she's referring to Tomas' chest hair, although I could be mistaken (I was distracted at the time). And then Leela runs into the Doctor, who offers her a jelly baby.

Sue: You should never take sweets from a stranger. Everybody knows that.

Mary Whitehouse must have been livid.

Me: Not to mention Charley the cat.

The Doctor and Leela are surrounded by invisible monsters.

Sue: Where would *Doctor Who* be without invisible monsters? We should put a counter on the blog's homepage for all the invisible monsters.

Me: I already have. You just can't see it.

Neeva, the Sevateems' priest, is praying to the mighty Xoanon.

Sue: God sounds like Tom Baker. That's a bit cheap, isn't it? Couldn't they

have hired another person to play the part of the computer?

Me: Who said Xoanon was a computer? **Sue**: I'm not completely stupid, love.

The Doctor threatens to kill one of the Sevateem with a jelly baby.

Sue: That was too flippant to be believable. It's a very fine line, and they just stepped over it.

A priest named Neeva performs a complicated ritual that's supposed to banish evil spirits.

Sue: Why is he waving a cylinder head gasket above his head?

Me: That's a very good question.

Sue: You mean it really is a cylinder head gasket?

Me: It's an ultrabeam accelerator, actually.

Sue: Right. I think I know where this is going now.

Leela rescues the Doctor, although she has to kill a member of the Sevateem with a Janis thorn in the process. Both Sue and the Doctor are horrified.

Sue: I don't know how I feel about Leela being a mass murderer. I'm glad the Doctor gave her a good dressing down for that.

The episode concludes with the Doctor coming face to face with his, er... face.

Sue: Nice cliffhanger. I was beginning to lose interest, but I'm definitely intrigued now. Stick Part Two on.

Part Two

Sue: That's ridiculous. He must know that gloves go on your hand. I know he's supposed to be primitive, but that's daft.

Leela calls Neeva's hat the Hand of Xoanon.

Sue: See! They even named it after a hand! So why is he wearing it on his fucking head? However, I do like the way these people recycle everything. They remind me of the Wombles.

The costumes in this story are a constant source of fascination for Sue.

Sue: At least I know why Leela dresses like this, now. I always thought it was a bit strange that she ran around the universe in that tiny, little thing, but it all makes sense now. And the dads must have loved it.

Me: You already said that.

Sue: It's worth repeating. And she's not just a pretty face, either. She's a very good actress. She's not as charismatic as Sarah Jane – she has a much harder exterior – but it's early days.

When Calib stabs Leela with a Janis thorn, the Doctor loses his cool and breaks Calib's leg.

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Sue: If his leg is broken, I haven't got a head. *Look at him!* How can he bend over to pick up another man if his leg is broken? Either he's lying about his leg or this is fucking mental.

The Doctor is introduced to the dreaded Horda.

Sue: It's a Cybermat. A resprayed Cybermat.

The Doctor survives the Horda test with a single bolt fired from a crossbow.

Sue: The Golden Shot was massive in the Seventies.

And then Nicol enters the living room.

Nicol: Oh look, it's the Aztec Zone.

Me: Go away, Nicol.

Nicol: I'm here to watch Monday night's *Game of Thrones*. **Sue**: Sit down, Nic. This is very similar to *Game of Thrones*.

Nicol: You always say that.

Sue: It's got a mysterious wall, and monsters, and prophecies, and

bickering that goes on for ages. Oh, and the leader sits on a chair that he's

salvaged from a spaceship.

Me: It's Game of Comfortable Chairs.

The Doctor and Leela infiltrate the face of evil.

Sue: It's imaginative, I'll give it that. There aren't that many TV shows where the hero climbs over his own teeth.

Tomas is attacked by an apparition, which also sports the Time Lord's face.

Sue: Lame cliffhanger. I'm starting to lose interest in this story. It's not really doing anything for me.

Part Three

Sue decides to focus on Calib's nonexistent limp.

Sue: He's doing remarkably well for a man with a broken leg. I bet he didn't even sprain it. He's just like you, Neil. A hypochondriac.

Sue doesn't pipe up again until the Tesh turn up.

Sue: Hungarian folk dancers. I definitely didn't expect that.

Sue stifles a yawn.

Sue: It's gone a bit weird. I'm struggling with this one. Who are this lot again?

Jabel, captain of the Tesh, tries to shed some light on the situation.

Sue: He looks like Penn or Teller. I don't know which one. The one who doesn't say very much.

The Doctor and Leela are strapped to a pair of matching particle analysers. Trust me, this is much worse than it sounds.

Sue: Good cliffhanger.

Me: We aren't even halfway through this episode yet.

Sue: Oh, bugger.

The Doctor tells Leela that he may have accidentally given birth to a schizophrenic monster.

Sue: I don't think Leela knows what schizophrenic means. Not if her tribe walk around with gloves on their heads.

The Doctor's reckless actions were driven by his ego.

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Sue: So the Doctor wanted to be a god? That's interesting. When did this happen? And how did he forget about it?

Me: The novelisation says it happened at the end of *Robot*, Tom's first story. You've probably forgotten this, but at the end of that story, the Doctor leaves in his TARDIS but returns a few seconds later to ask Sarah and Harry to join him. The initial visit to this planet happened during that gap. The Doctor was still unstable after his regeneration, and that's why he forgot about it.

Sue: You lot have an answer for bloody everything.

The monsters in the jungle are psi-tri projections from the dark side of Xoanon's id.

Sue: I don't think the kids would have liked this story very much. The monsters are invisible, the aliens look like they are taking part in Eurovision, and the Doctor is banging on about Freud. I would have been bored... What am I saying? I *am* bored.

Xoanon sends some Tesh to kill the Doctor and Leela.

Sue: I can't take the Tesh seriously. They should be wearing ice skates, or appearing in a ballet. Something theatrical like that.

Leela knocks one of the Tesh out cold. The Doctor is appalled.

Sue: It's not as if she's killed him. The Doctor is always punching people's lights out. That's double standards, that is.

The Doctor enters Xoanon's chamber and methodically explains the plot to everybody. It still doesn't make any sense.

Sue: I like some of the ideas in this story, but it isn't very coherent. I can't follow its logic.

The episode concludes with Xoanon questioning his own identity, and

we are left with the computer's electronic representation of the Doctor communicating with the voice of a child. This is even stranger than it sounds.

Sue: Great cliffhanger. I haven't got a clue what's going on any more, but that was brilliant.

Me: That scared the shit out of me when I was seven.

Sue: Maybe the computer is really saying "Who comma am I." Have you

thought about that?

Me: You and your bloody commas.

Part Four

The computer bathes the room in red emergency lighting.

Sue: They should have lit the whole thing like this. It would have stopped this place from looking like a tile shop. Having said that, the only lighting that would make the Tesh look good would be no lighting at all.

A Tesh tries to push the Doctor into an electrified wall.

Sue: He's being attacked by a rabid Data from Star Trek.

When that doesn't work, Xoanon forces Leela to do his dirty work for him.

Sue: It's a rite of passage for a companion to be hypnotised. She should be pleased.

The Doctor and Leela head for the communications room.

Sue: There are too many corridors in this. I'm losing the will to live. **Me**: Funnily enough, this is what I remember the most about this story. It wasn't the scary Tom Baker face that stayed with me, it was the Doctor and Leela running up and down these corridors.

Sue: That's because the giant heads are in it for 10 seconds and these

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corridors are in it for several hours. It isn't rocket science.

Neeva turns up with a very large gun, which he turns on Xoanon.

Sue: I haven't got a clue what's going on any more.

Xoanon screams the place down.

Sue: Tom Baker never does anything by halves, does he?

And then it's over, and the Doctor wakes up two days later to find Xoanon in a more user-friendly mood.

Sue: What a bizarre ending. Can you imagine the Doctor sitting down for tea and biscuits with the Cybermen after he's defeated them? Didn't this computer murder loads of people? *Is that it?*

The Tesh and the Sevateem fight over who should govern the planet. The Doctor leaves them to it.

Sue: This lot will probably kill each other by the end of the week.

Leela runs after the Doctor.

Sue: Yeah, I'd make a run for it too, if I were you, pet.

Leela asks the Doctor to take her with him, but he needs some persuading.

Sue: That's interesting. He hasn't forgiven her for being a mass murderer yet. He didn't have a problem when it came to forgiving a computer with a much worse track record than hers though, which doesn't seem fair. I'm guessing they'll explore this later on. That scene was the best thing about the whole bloody story.

The Score

Sue: I didn't enjoy that one very much. It was definitely below average. I liked some of the ideas, but it didn't add up to anything. Something was missing. Leela was okay, but she's difficult to warm to. I think I miss Sarah Jane.

4/10

COMMENT: "I always like to imagine Tom nipping off from the events in *Robot* somewhere during that interminable reprise at the start of episode three." – Rob Shearman

NOTES: The Doctor breaks the fourth wall and talks to the audience in this story. You'd never get nonsense like that in modern *Doctor Who*.

Speaking of which, Sue bumped into Steven Moffat during this phase of the experiment. Her students had been nominated for a National Royal Television Society award at a ceremony at the Barbican in London, and the day's events included a series of master classes from leading industry professionals, including Steven 'Sherlock' Moffat. Anyway, as luck would have it, they both arrived at the venue late and ended up in the same lift together. Well, that's Sue's story and she's still sticking to it.

Me: So what did you do?

Sue: I whipped out my copy of *The Ark in Space*.

No, she wasn't carrying the Target novelisation around with her so she could read it on the train – I gave it to her just in case (the Moff wrote the reprint's foreword).

Me: Oh my God. So what happened next?

Sue: I said, "I don't mean to press gang you, but..."

Me: Please tell me you didn't say that.

Sue: I thought he'd laugh.

Me: Did he?

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Sue: He said it was an interesting choice of words.

Me: Right, so what happened next?

Sue: I said, "If you don't agree to sign my husband's Target novel, he'll

divorce me."

Me: Did you tell him who you were at any point during this exchange?

Sue: I think so. **Me**: You think so?

Sue: Everything happened so fast. He was in a rush.

Me: Right. So he probably thinks you were a random stalker. Great.

He must have worked it out eventually because he sent Sue a nice tweet a couple of hours later. I bet he regretted following her, though; she'd DM him twice a day to suggest Benedict Cumberbatch as a possible

Master. In fact, it's probably why he decided to leave *Twitter*.

THE ROBOTS OF DEATH

BLOGGED: 1 June 2012

Part One

Sue: Oh no. Not Chris Boucher again. **Me**: It's pronounced *Boucher*, actually.

Sue: Whatever.

A sandminer is churning up the landscape on a desolate and dusty planet.

Sue: This looks good. They're really selling it to me. The camera

movement certainly helps.

The sandminer is run by robots.

Sue: These robots look like walking BAFTAs. Were the BBC trying to be subliminal, hoping they'd win something?

The human crewmembers relax elsewhere in a comfortable room.

Sue: So this is a luxury cruise ship.

Me: Not quite.

Sue: Well what is it then?

Me: It's a sandminer. They mine sand.

Sue: They're miners?

Me: Yes.

Sue: They don't look like miners to me. They're too middle class to be

miners. Have they never seen *Alien*? **Me**: Unlikely. It hasn't been made yet.

Sue: Imagine Alien with the crew dressed like that... I dare you.

Meanwhile, in the space-time vortex, the Doctor is explaining transdimensional engineering to Leela.

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Sue: That was nice. I appreciated that. And I'm glad Leela is questioning everything. Because you would, wouldn't you?

Me: I'm just relieved Nicol wasn't around to witness that.

When the TARDIS materialises in the sandminer, the Doctor can't wait to explore.

Me: I thought you'd have something to say about Leela not changing into something a little less comfortable.

Sue: I'm not surprised. This Doctor is still a bloke. He isn't going to tell her that the TARDIS has a massive wardrobe so she can cover herself up. He's not stupid.

As the Doctor and Leela explore the sandminer, its crew prepare for an oncoming storm.

Sue: Oh. My. God. They've dressed up to go to work. Look at their hats! They can't be miners. This is more like *Abigail's Party* than the Labour Party. Come on, what are they doing, really?

Me: They actually are miners. Honest.

Sue: Well, it isn't very practical. I bet that woman's hat keeps banging into her computer screen when she leans in to read her email. It must drive her mad.

In an isolated storage room, a robot strangles one of the crew to death.

Sue: That was scary. The POV shots are great; a bit like *The Terminator*. There's something really creepy about the robots' faces, too.

When Commander Uvanov and Chief Mover Poul investigate the crime scene, they find a red disc on the victim's hand.

Sue: It's a bicycle reflector.

Uvanov assembles his crew together and suggests that one of them is a

murderer.

Sue: So this is Agatha Christie in space. I'm surprised *Doctor Who* doesn't do this sort of thing more often.

Uvanov asks his crew if they know what the red disc is.

Sue: It's a bicycle reflector! We've been through this already.

As the crew bicker among themselves, Sue's EastEnders Detector goes into overdrive.

Sue: I know him. He lived in Albert Square for years.

Me: Ted Hills.

Sue: Yes, but which character did he play?

Me: Ted Hills! The actor's name is Brian Croucher.

Sue: Isn't it pronounced *Croucher*?

Me: Very funny. What about the woman playing Toos? She was in

EastEnders as well.

Sue: Maybe if she took her hat off.

Me: She had Dirty Den killed. You know, the first time he was killed.

The Doctor and Leela are apprehended by some robots.

Sue: These robots are very creepy. It's their fat lips that do it.

Me: Do you like their design?

Sue: I do. It's very Charles Rennie Mackintosh.

The Doctor and Leela are taken to a cabin and told to wait.

Sue: This is very plush. They should convert this mining business into luxury timeshare cruises. It's lovely.

Uvanov orders his crew back to work.

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Sue: If they spent less time applying their make-up and choosing the right hat to match their outfits, they'd get a lot more done. God knows what they wear when they go out for dinner.

Sue is much happier with the set design.

Sue: A lot of thought has gone into this. There's a sense of scale that you don't usually get in the studio-based stories. I can't fault the design at all.

But something unnerves her.

Sue: Do you want to know what scares me the most about this period of

Doctor Who?

Me: Go on.

Suc You'll love

Sue: You'll laugh.

Me: Probably, but tell me anyway.

Sue: I'm worried that Tom Baker will trip over his scarf and do himself a

serious injury.

She's deadly serious.

Sue: Whenever he's in a long-shot, I can't stop looking at his feet. I can't relax when he's near a balcony or some stairs.

The Doctor is locked in a hopper and it isn't long before he's drowning in sand.

Sue: Leela will save him. It's what the companions do now.

As the credits roll, I ask Sue to sum up.

Sue: It's a good start. The costumes take a bit of getting used to, but they're still miles better than the Tesh.

Part Two

Sue: The sets are great, but they could have looked even better if they'd dressed the crew in plain overalls. Just think of all the money they could have saved.

Sue is suspicious of Dask already.

Sue: Why doesn't he wear a silly hat? What makes him so special?

Leela meets a robot called D84. The robot shows her the corpse of a crewmember – a red disc has been placed on the back of their hand. D84 wants to know what it is.

Sue: I'm not going to tell them again.

Uvanov interrupts D84's interrogation and slaps Leela across her face.

Sue: Hey!

Leela retaliates with a swift kick to Uvanov's balls.

Sue: You go, girl! I'm really starting to warm to Leela.

Uvanov believes that Leela killed Cass.

Sue: Cass was played by a terrible actor. He won't be missed. I hope they kill the characters off in order of acting ability. If I'm right, Zelda (*sic*) is next in line for the bicycle reflector of doom. Did you run around your school putting bicycle reflectors on your hands?

Me: Don't be silly. A bicycle reflector won't stick to flesh without superglue. By the way, if Gregory from Form 6B is reading this, I'm really sorry, mate. Can you still see the scar?

Uvanov and the Doctor lock horns.

THE ROBOTS OF DEATH

Sue: Tom is on form today. The other guy playing the commander is very good, too. They are definitely egging each other on.

Before you ask, she only vaguely remembers Callan, and she's never read Dune (although she has seen the film). Anyway, the Doctor accuses Ted Hills of being a classic example of the inverse ratio between the size of the mouth and the size of the brain.

Me: I used that line in a real life, once.

Sue: Seriously?

Me: I'd just started teaching, and I had to deal with an obnoxious loudmouth student. He probably sensed that I was new to the job and tried to exploit my inexperience. He really wound me up. So I used the inverse ratio line on him. I thought it sounded like the sort of thing a teacher might say.

Sue: What was his reaction?

Me: He shut his mouth and he was as good as gold. He even gave me an apple the following week. What do you think he did? He called me a fucking twat.

As luck would have it, I taught my last class today. After 18 years of lecturing, I finally threw in the towel. I just don't have the energy to hurl Doctor Who quotes at my students anymore. As I said to them today, if you stop enjoying something, you should give it up. But enough about me – the Doctor and Leela have been taken to a storage area and restrained with metal straps.

Sue: Just whip your sonic out.

The thought doesn't even cross the Doctor's mind.

Me: I'm sure he had the sonic with him earlier. What's that all about?

The Doctor suggests a robot could have been responsible for the mysterious deaths. Poul finds this impossible to contemplate, until the Doctor reminds

him it's aerodynamically impossible for bumblebees to fly, but they do it anyway.

Me: That's a myth.

Sue: Did the Doctor just get a fact wrong? We should write a letter of complaint. Or maybe we could start an online campaign to have it

removed from future DVDs. I know, let's burn him!

Zilda retires to her cabin for a nap (her incessant whining must have worn her out), but before her head can hit the pillow, she's confronted by a revelation so shocking, she's reduced to tears.

Sue: She's a strong candidate for the worst actor in *Doctor Who* so far. Rule number one: never give your weakest actor the hardest scene.

Leela senses danger, and a few seconds later the sandminer ends up tilting dangerously over the edge of a cliff.

Sue: Is Leela psychic? Did that computer mess with her head in the last story? I bet that skill will come in handy later.

The sandminer threatens to blow itself apart. The Doctor implores Toos to cut to the power but it's too(s) little, too(s) late – she's gonna blow!

Sue: Not bad.

Part Three

Dask cuts the power and the sandminer begins to sink.

Sue: He has the look of Gary Glitter. **Me**: If Gary Glitter had Wolverine's hair.

It's at this point Sue decides to pick a fight with David Collings.

THE ROBOTS OF DEATH

Sue: I don't like him very much. He's too theatrical. And that's really saying something in this story. He should be on the stage instead of the telly.

Me: You're wrong, but I forgive you.

Poul freaks out when he discovers a robot with blood on its hands.

Sue: See! Tell me that wasn't hammy, Neil. Anyone would think he'd never seen brains smeared all over a robot before.

A Super Voc robot has been reprogrammed by a sinister individual who broadcasts his commands on a scrambled frequency (either that or he has a really bad cold).

Sue: Are we supposed to know who that is?

Me: No. Sue: Good.

How can she not tell? Anyway...

Sue: Is that a Marigold icon I can see on that robot's hand? Oh my, they *are* Marigolds! I thought they were, but I didn't want to say.

The Doctor and D84 discuss the whereabouts of Taren Capel (a mad scientist who has a thing for robots).

Sue: D84 is very sweet. I bet the kids loved this story. I can see why people

might like this. I wish I did.

Me: That makes two of us. I wish you liked it, too.

Unfortunately, D84 didn't entertain the possibility an evil mastermind who would try to impersonate a member of the crew.

Sue: Can we have a D84, please? He's so cute.

A corrupted Super Voc transforms a group of robots into a bunch of killers with impeccable manners.

Sue: They're so polite. That's the scariest thing about this.

Leela is attacked by a robot, but thankfully she manages to run away.

Sue: The robots need a weapon of some sort. Brute strength only works if you can run after your intended victims.

The Doctor and D84 find a Laserson probe.

Sue: The machine has 'Laserson' emblazoned all over it. That's futuristic product placement. I like it, it fleshes out the world. Maybe the marigold thing wasn't a mistake, after all. Perhaps in the future, the company branches out into fetish wear for robots in the future?

Toos tries to leave her cabin, but a robot blocks her exit.

Sue: They should have cut to a close up of the robot's face when that door opened. The director missed a trick.

Toos barricades herself in her room and calls the Doctor for help. D84 volunteers to assist her because he's the fastest.

Sue: I doubt that. You're wearing carpet slippers for a start.

The Doctor tells Toos that help is on its way.

Sue: Isn't he going to tell her that he's sent a robot? It's going to be very awkward if he doesn't.

Poul cowers under a table.

Sue: Is he working with the robots?

THE ROBOTS OF DEATH

Me: No.

Sue: So why is he behaving like this? **Me**: He's having a nervous breakdown.

Sue: Did Chris Boucher want to be a psychiatrist when he grew up?

The episode concludes with the Doctor fending off a robot who wants to massage him to death.

Sue: Not bad. At least the cliffhangers are good.

Part Four

Sue doesn't say anything for a long time, and I manage to convince myself that her protracted silence is the result of her being gripped by the story. Oh boy, was I wrong...

Sue: How long until this ends, Neil? I can't keep up with this nonsense. Why is the robot with the blue eyes bad? I thought it was the robots with the red eyes who were evil. There's no consistency to this. And where's the bloke in the Ku Klux Klan gear? What's he waiting for? Whoever the hell he is.

The only thing that piques her interest is Toos' interest in Leela.

Sue: There's a strong lesbian subtext in her performance. Look at the way she's touching Leela's knee. Oh, and now she's managed to sneak in a cuddle. Leela has definitely scored.

It turns out that Dask was Taren Capel all along.

Sue: It's Gary Glitter meets the Hulk. Actually, that look probably passes for normal in this society.

The Doctor suspects that Poul is suffering from robophobia.

Sue: I don't buy that. Maybe if the actor wasn't hamming it up so much, I could believe it, but he might as well be scared of a fridge. And whose bright idea was it to pair a robot with a man who's terrified of robots?

D84 is stabbed in the head with a Laserson probe, but instead of turning bad, he disables several evil robots, bravely sacrificing himself in the process.

Sue: That's a shame. I liked D84. He would have been an interesting companion.

The Super Voc turns on Taren Capel because, thanks to the Doctor, his voice suddenly sounds a bit funny.

Sue: I can't tell if that solution was silly or inspired. And I'm not thrilled to see Leela sitting this out in a cupboard.

The Doctor and Leela leg it back to the TARDIS.

Sue: I hate it when no one sees them off. How ungrateful can you get?

The Score

Sue: That was average.

Me: Average? Are you mad?

Sue: It didn't make any sense. The villain's plan was very vague. Why was he pretending to be a miner? What was that all about? If you were going to take over the world, would you really start there? Yes, the robots looked nice, and there are some interesting ideas fighting to get out, but it was too hysterical for my taste. I don't see what the big deal is.

5/10

COMMENT: "I respect Sue's right to rate any story as she sees fit, and I would never berate her if her opinions diverged from my own, but a 5/10 for this seems cruel." – Harry

THE ROBOTS OF DEATH

NOTES: As luck would have it, I'm editing this entry in the week that I returned to work. Yes, after three and a half years they pulled me back in. That, and the realisation selling niche books about *Doctor Who* wasn't going to keep Sue in the lifestyle she had become accustomed to. So, yes, I'm back. I haven't mentioned *Doctor Who* to the students yet (they don't watch television) although this exchange during my first lesson did make me chuckle:

Me: Do any of you have a website right now?

Him: (*Hand in the air*) I do. **Me**: Okay. What's it about?

Him: You wouldn't understand. It's about cosplaying.

THE TALONS OF WENG-CHIANG

BLOGGED: 5 June 2012

Part One

Sue: Six parts. Oh joy. This had better be fucking good, Neil.

Sue wants to know when Talons was originally broadcast.

Sue: I would have been 15 years old, so I was out playing badminton when this was on. And during the last part, I was probably playing golf.

Backstage at a Victorian Music Hall, a Chinese magician and his dummy are discussing their latest performance with Gordon Henry Jago, the theatre's owner and MC.

Sue: He's not a real ventriloquist. They dubbed the dummy in later.

Jago adores Chang's act.

Sue: "I am Chang and I can't be killed!"

And then, a few seconds later...

Sue: He's not really Chinese, is he? Oh dear... Why didn't they give his part to the bloke standing next to him? He's definitely Chinese.

But before she can climb onto her high horse, Sue is distracted by something magical.

Sue: That was a beautiful shot of the TARDIS arriving in the fog. Very subtle. I think I'm going to like this one. It looks great.

THE TALONS OF WENG-CHIANG

Leela and the Doctor are attacked by a gang of Chinese men.

Sue: Enter the Dragon was massive in the 1970s.

Me: *Enter the Dragon* was an X-certificate film. *The Talons of Weng-Chiang* went out at 6.30pm. With nunchakus and everything!

Sue: It's violent, but we've definitely seen worse.

The police turn up and the Doctor tells them he was set upon by "four little men".

Sue: That is technically accurate, I suppose, but it sounds racist. I have a bad feeling about this.

On stage, Li H'sen Chang prepares to levitate a woman.

Sue: She's planking.

She's impressed with Chang's trick, albeit with one caveat...

Sue: We've wandered into *The Good Old Days*. I always hated that show. It bored me to tears.

The Doctor and Leela are taken to a police station. He tells the desk sergeant his abode isn't fixed.

Sue: Yes, his abode is almost always broken.

Meanwhile, an old woman is watching the police fish a corpse out of the Thames.

Sue: She's the scariest thing I've ever seen in *Doctor Who*.

The old woman declares that it's enough "to make an 'orse sick".

Sue: Yeah, and the dead body in the river is upsetting as well.

Chang arrives at the police station to act as an interpreter for the suspect they arrested at the scene. When the Doctor is certain he recognises him, Chang suggests they probably all look the same to him

Sue: Okay, this is a lot more complicated than I thought. Now we have anti-racist jibes delivered by an actor who's yellowed-up. This is going to be tricky.

And then Sue has a brainwave.

Sue: The Moff should do a *Sherlock/Doctor Who* crossover for the 50th anniversary.

Me: As a Children in Need sketch?

Sue: No. As a proper story. It would be great. The Doctor could take the modern Sherlock to Victorian London to solve the case of Jack the Ripper. Only he couldn't tell anyone about it because time would go wibblywobbly and explode, or something like that. How cool would that be?

She'll be writing fan fiction next... And then we discover Chang and Mr Sin have been harvesting victims for quite some time.

Sue: They're a sick and twisted version of The Krankies.

Me: Otherwise known as The Krankies.

The Doctor and Leela visit the local mortuary, where they assist Professor Litefoot as he carries out an autopsy on the body recovered from the river.

Sue: This isn't for kids. Even when you can't see anything, your mind fills in all the blanks.

Me: This was no boating accident!

The Doctor and Leela enter the sewers in search of answers.

Sue: It's very dark. Is it supposed to be this dark?

THE TALONS OF WENG-CHIANG

She's right. It's probably our television that's at fault – we lost the remote control several months ago, and there aren't any manual controls on the actual set itself – because I don't remember Talons being this dark before. When the giant rat makes its first appearance, Sue can barely see it.

Sue: I can't see a damn thing. It sounds good, though.

Actually, perhaps our settings are just fine.

Sue: That was a good start. I don't care if it's a six-parter if it stays like this.

Part Two

Casey, an Irish stagehand, has been complaining about ghosts, and Jago calls him a "pixillated leprechaun".

Sue: Pixellated? Pixellated? That's a funny word to use in Victorian times, isn't it? Is he a time traveller? A time-travelling graphic designer from the future?

Me: Pixillated, not pixellated. It means eccentric, or to be led by pixies. I thought this would come up so I did some research for a change.

Despite the racist overtones, Sue loves Jago's turn of phrase.

Sue: He'd be excellent on *Countdown*.

And then my wife drops a bombshell...

Sue: They used to call me Susie Wong.

Me: What?

Sue: At school. They called me Susie Wong.

Me: What?

Sue: I looked Chinese. Well, that's what they said. I didn't understand it

either. You'll have to ask Gary about it.

Me: You do realise that they'll call you Susie Wrong when they don't agree

with one of your scores from now on, don't you?

Sue: Only if you include it on the blog.

Chang hypnotises Jago into forgetting anything that will lead the police to his doorstep.

Sue: They should remake this story with Derren Brown. And Sherlock. And Matt Smith. Somebody get the Moff on the phone.

Chang opens a secret passageway in the theatre floor.

Sue: That looked and sounded great. That's the first time something like that didn't sound like it was made from polystyrene. The sets are wonderful.

Chang confers with his master.

Sue: It isn't, is it?

Me: No.

Sue: Just checking.

And then...

Sue: He looks like Rorschach.

We watched Watchmen again last night. Don't get me started.

Me: He looks nothing like Rorschach.

Sue: He has the same hat.

Me: You might as well say Tom Baker looks like Rorschach, then.

Sue: But it's definitely not you-know-who?

Me: I'm still counting them, even when you don't say his name out loud.

But no, it isn't him. I promise.

When Time Agents are mentioned, Sue's ears prick up.

THE TALONS OF WENG-CHIANG

Sue: That rings a bell.

Me: Captain Jack was a Time Agent.

Sue: So there's a connection to *Torchwood*? That's interesting. Okay, so the anniversary special has Derren Brown, Matt Smith, Benedict

Cumberbatch and John Barrowman in it. I'd watch it.

Litefoot, Leela and the Doctor share a cab.

Sue: Leela's great in this. The story really suits her. Her innocence could be annoying, but it's funny because she's anything but innocent. The actress who plays her is excellent.

The Doctor jumps out of the cab and disappears into the fog.

Sue: This era really lends itself to *Doctor Who*. The BBC are experts when it comes to this sort of thing. They should have exiled him to Earth in the 1880s. That would have been great.

And then she has an even better idea.

Sue: Tom Baker would have been an excellent Sherlock Holmes.

I won't tell her if you don't.

Sue: He's really enjoying himself; he's beaming from ear to ear. The script is excellent. Did Robert Holmes swallow a thesaurus when he wrote this?

Professor Litefoot's housekeeper is called Mrs Hudson.

Sue: Does she leave this much food out for him every night? There's enough on that table to feed the 5,000!

Sue chuckles to herself as Leela devours a whole side of meat, and she's chuffed to bits when Litefoot decides to join her sans cutlery. Meanwhile, the Doctor is pursuing Weng-Chiang through the theatre...

Sue: Okay, so you've got Derren Brown, Matt Smith, Benedict

Cumberbatch, John Barrowman and Michael Ball as the Phantom of the

Opera. The anniversary special practically writes itself.

Weng-Chiang swings across the stage on a rope.

Sue: The direction is very good. Who is it?

Me: It's David Maloney.

Sue: Oh yes, we like Mr Maloney. He's almost as good as Douglas

Camfield.

The episode climaxes with Mr Sin advancing on Leela with a knife.

Sue: Why is that dummy honking like a pig? Have I missed something?

Part Three

We decide to break our two-episode-a-day rule – it's a Bank Holiday, the weather is horrendous and there's nothing on the television except boats.

Sue: I love Leela. She doesn't mess about. Any other companion would have screamed the place down. I know I would.

Leela throws herself out of a window.

Sue: I couldn't imagine another companion even considering that. You go, girl!

Chang wants his dummy.

Sue: Did he just call him Sid?

Me: Sin. Sue: Oh.

The Doctor suggests the ruffians who attacked Litefoot were especially bad

THE TALONS OF WENG-CHIANG

because they were Chinese.

Sue: Is that racist or is the Doctor taking the piss? It's not entirely clear... Oh, it's complicated, isn't it? Why don't we just assume that I've already taken a mark off this story for its questionable racism, and we'll leave it at that?

The Doctor examines a cabinet that belongs to Litefoot.

Sue: Is that a TARDIS? Are you double-bluffing me? The Master doesn't have a face any more, so he'd probably wear a mask. It all makes sense.Me: That's three, "Is it the Master?"s in one story, which makes you sound

like a rather repetitive old lady.

Sue: Fuck off.

It's time for Weng-Chiang to feed his pets.

Sue: Are you sure it's a giant rat? It looks like a seal to me.

Weng-Chiang sends Chang out for some fresh meat, which he finds coming off the night shift.

Sue: Is she supposed to be, er...

Me: A prostitute? Yes.

Sue: Bloody hell. And he wants two of them! He must be a middle-aged

bad guy.

Leela substitutes herself for one of Chang's intended victims.

Sue: Leela is so brave. This is even worse than the window.

The Doctor tracks the monster to its lair in a small boat.

Sue: They're making an effort. They could have cut to the sewers without this, but I'm glad they didn't, because it looks great.

When we return to Weng-Chiang's lair, Leela looks a little different.

Sue: Has he taken her clothes off?

Me: Yes.

Sue: Bloody hell.

Weng-Chiang sacks his faithful manservant in a fit of pique.

Sue: How will he find another henchman? Will he put an ad in the paper?

The episode climaxes with Leela being nibbled to death by Fingerbobs.

Sue: It's a shame about the giant mouse. Oh well, you can't win 'em all.

Part Four

Me: Rats were massive in the 1970s. Literally, in this case.

Sue: I know. I walked in on one of your lectures once where you went on

about them for ages. Didn't you show this clip to your students?

Me: I did. Along with bits from Doomwatch, The New Avengers, Survivors

and During Barty's Party. You couldn't move for rats in the 1970s.

Sue: I remember the students were laughing their heads off.

Me: That wasn't the reaction I was going for.

The Doctor shoots the rat, and when Leela returns to Litefoot's house, she's given a fresh set of clothes to wear. Leela proceeds to undress in front of her host until Litefoot sends her upstairs to change.

Sue: And a million dads all sigh at once.

When she returns, the Doctor is momentarily lost for words.

Sue: That's the first time I've seen the Doctor look at a companion in a sexual way. And you can't even see her knees.

THE TALONS OF WENG-CHIANG

Chang returns to Chiang (oh how this used to confuse me when I was a child) to beg for his forgiveness.

Sue: It's a lover's tiff, this. If they had *Facebook* back then, their relationship would definitely be 'complicated'.

I tell her Dudley Simpson is conducting the orchestra on-screen this week, but she's far more interested in the audience's enthusiastic reaction to a rather weak rendition of 'Daisy Daisy' to care.

Sue: People were very easily pleased back then.

The Doctor becomes part of Chang's act.

Sue: It's really good, this.

Back at Litefoot's house, a policeman suffers an axe between the shoulder blades.

Sue: Not. For. Kids.

While Mr Sin stirs in Litefoot's laundry basket.

Sue: Ooh, I thought he was dead... Is he a robot?

When Chang opens his magical box, Casey falls out of it, as dead as a dodo.

Sue: They killed the Irish Billy Mitchell!

The Doctor and Leela find Chang moping about in Weng-Chiang's laboratory, his master having already done a runner. Chang heads to the sewers to meet his ancestors.

Sue: I didn't know Chang was related to the mouse.

Chang's screams echo down the tunnels.

Sue: I'll miss Chang. The person who played him was a great actor, even if casting him was a bit dodgy.

Jago spots a business opportunity – he'll charge the punters to take guided tours of the phantom's lair.

Sue: A bob a nob. Like I said, this definitely isn't for kids.

The episode concludes with Weng-Chiang and Mr Sin successfully stealing the time cabinet from Litefoot's home.

Sue: That's an interesting cliffhanger. The bad guys won. And why is the dummy howling like a wolf? Have I missed something?

Part Five

The Doctor instructs Leela to get Litefoot a stiff drink. In a glass.

Sue: I love the My Fair Lady references. It's funny and sweet.

It turns out the Peking Homunculus was a plaything made for the Commissioner of the Icelandic Alliance in the 51st century.

Sue: So Iceland is a major player in world affairs in the future?

Me: Yes.

Sue: They sorted out the banks, then?

Weng-Chiang installs the time cabinet in his new secret base.

Sue: Do we ever see what's behind his mask? I looked at the toy version you have on your shelf but it doesn't come off.

What she doesn't realise is that my collectible figurine of Weng-Chiang

THE TALONS OF WENG-CHIANG

comes with a detachable head which features his real face. I think one of our cats ate it. Anyway, it turns out Weng-Chiang left the key to the time cabinet behind when he moved to his new base. This plot point is so preposterous, Sue makes me rewind the DVD so she can make sure it really happened.

Sue: That's just silly. Robert deserves a smack for that.

Weng-Chiang is apoplectic with rage. We think. It's hard to tell because he's always like this. Anyway, he must be angry because he orders one of his minions to kill himself.

Sue: Ooh, he's cracked a filling *and* he's been poisoned at the same time. Poor thing.

Litefoot and Jago meet for the first time. Sparks fly.

Sue: This could be interesting.

Me: Would it surprise you to learn the BBC almost made a Jago and

Litefoot spin-off series?

Sue: No, I could definitely see that working. Sunday nights in *The Onedin Line* slot. Yeah, I can see it.

Me: It didn't happen, sadly. But Big Finish have released quite a few audio adventures featuring the pair of them.

Sue: Are the actors still alive, then? In that case, give them cameos in the anniversary special. Is Tom Baker in any of them?

Me: Not yet. But he does appear in his own range of adventures with Louise Jameson as Leela. There's a sequel to *The Ark in Space* and *The Android Invasion* and...

Sue: So Tom Baker is doing Big Finish now?

Me: Yes.

Sue: I knew he'd listen to me eventually. I told him to do a Big Finish years

ago.

The Doctor and Leela find Chang in a local opium den.

Sue: They should bump into the real Sherlock Holmes. That would be funny.

They find Chang off his head on drugs instead.

Sue: Is there anything they haven't covered in this story? What about child abuse?

The injured Chang slides into a drug-induced death.

Sue: That was a great death scene, but they had to spoil it with the clichéd, "I can't get my dying words out even though I just recited 12 pages of script with no problems at all" bit. It's very annoying.

Weng-Chiang's new digs are situated in the House of the Dragon.

Sue: The set is fantastic. They must have thrown plenty of money at this.

Jago and Litefoot are captured by Chiang's thugs and imprisoned with two drugged-up 16-year-olds.

Sue: Okay, now they've definitely covered everything.

Jago and Litefoot discuss tactics.

Sue: So these two fellas could have been the first Torchwood?

Me: It very nearly happened.

They squeeze into a dumbwaiter together.

Sue: Okay, now it's definitely a 1970s version of *Torchwood*.

Unfortunately, their escape attempt is foiled almost immediately.

Sue: They're a bit useless. They'll have to toughen up a bit if they want

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their own series.

Weng-Chiang surprises Leela with a face full of chloroform. Leela fights back, uncovering Chiang's face in the process.

Sue: I've seen worse. The gimp mask was scarier, if I'm honest.

Part Six

The Doctor calls the Chinese intruders "little surprises".

Sue: There he goes again.

Thankfully, her frown doesn't last very long.

Sue: Tom loves this story. You can always tell if Tom likes a story or not, and this is definitely one of his favourites.

And then, believe it or not, Sue starts singing along to Dudley Simpson – she doesn't even know she's doing it. In fact the only aspect of Talons Sue has a problem with is Weng-Chiang, aka the Icelandic war criminal Magnus Greel.

Sue: He's over the top. Although at least I can hear every word he says behind that mask.

Leela attacks Greel from behind, but she fails to deliver a fatal blow.

Sue: I don't buy that for a second. Leela would have thrown a knife into the back of his head from 100 yards away. She could have taken him down easily.

The Doctor, Jago and Litefoot are locked in the basement, but the Time Lord finds a way out.

Sue: I've seen this before.

Me: In MacGyver?

Sue: No, in *Doctor Who*. Maybe golf was rained off that week. I definitely remember this scene because it inspired me and my brother to gas my

Me: WHAT?

Sue: It's true. We had two nanas: skinny nana and fat nana. Fat Nana was all right, but Skinny Nana was horrible. She lived with us for a while and she'd make us go to bed early. We hated her. Anyway, we must have seen this episode because we decided to get rid of her by filling her pillow with gas.

Me: I don't believe this...

Sue: It's true! There was only one problem – our house was electric. We

didn't have any gas.

Me: Thank heavens for small mercies.

Sue: It would have been around that time, so I guess *Doctor Who* must have been responsible. I haven't thought about that for years.

Me: If you'd been successful, you would have been a poster child for Mary Whitehouse. It doesn't bear thinking about.

The gas explodes and Sue jumps out of her skin. Captain Jack was sitting on her knee and the sudden movement made him dig his claws into her thigh.

Sue: Are we supposed to feel sorry for the bad guy?

Me: Are you mad? He's a mass murdering war criminal!

Sue: I know, but everything seems to go against him. You have to feel a

little pity.

Unfortunately, the final showdown fails to impress Sue. For every disintegrating chair ("That was clever"), there's Leela firing a gun into the floor ("Leela would never do that").

Sue: That was frustrating. The ending was rushed. It wasn't the script's fault, though. It was the execution.

Me: That was Philip Hinchcliffe's last story.

THE TALONS OF WENG-CHIANG

Sue: That's a pity. He was a good producer. He made *Doctor Who* a lot more adult and frightening. And there was a lot less CSO, too, which was good. Yeah, he'll be missed. Probably.

The Score

Sue: I'll have to knock some marks off for the casual racism, the mouse, and the shambolic fight scene at the end. But I really enjoyed it. The pacing was about right, and the sets, direction and acting were as good as it gets. The villain was a bit hammy, but you can't have everything.

8/10

Later that night, we watched the Lively Arts: Whose Doctor Who documentary together. It would have been rude not to.

Sue: It's a really slow version of *Doctor Who Confidential*. Some of these clips are almost as long as the episodes.

She perks up when they cover the topic of set design, but she nods off in the middle of an interview with an educationalist. She wakes up two minutes from the end and does that classic thing where she pretends she saw the whole thing, even though I was waving my hand in front of her face.

Sue: It reminded me of one of those *Up* documentaries. Ed Stradling should have tracked down the original interviewees to see whether they all turned out like you, or whether their kids watch the programme today. That would have been interesting. He missed a trick there.

COMMENT: "Sue will be pleased to know that Tom, Trevor and Chris *have* done a Big Finish audio together. Actually I'm sure she couldn't care less..." – Robert Dick

NOTES: "I am Chang and I can't be killed!" is a reference to the American anti-sitcom *Community*, which we both adored at the time.

And Sue really did tell Tom to "do a Big Finish" when she called him on QVC in 2001 in order to impress me. I cover this – in agonising detail – in our 'proper book' *Living With Doctor Who* (which is still occasionally available in selected branches of Poundland).

SEASON FIFTEEN DOCK HIS PAY!



This illustration funded by Robert Crowder

HORROR OF FANG ROCK

BLOGGED: 18 June 2012

Part One

Sue: What do I need to know about this one?

Me: Well, it's a new season and there's a new producer in charge.

She didn't ask me for a name. That's how interested she is.

Me: Oh, and this story was made in Birmingham.

Sue: Fascinating.

She couldn't care less. In fact, it's probably fair to say this story gets off to a very rocky start. Sorry.

Sue: New season. New producer. New shit special effect.

Two men are keeping watch on a lighthouse.

Sue: The CSO's a bit dodgy. They probably weren't used to it in Birmingham. I bet they didn't use CSO on *Pebble Mill at One* all that much.

When the TARDIS lands nearby, Leela fears the worst.

Sue: It's official – Leela is definitely psychic. She isn't a very good psychic, though. She needs to be more specific. Of course something feels wrong, you're a *Doctor Who* companion. Get used to it, pet.

Back in the lighthouse...

Sue: Gorgeous brickwork.

And...

Sue: Lovely cabinets.

Me: There's enough confectionary on those shelves to open a sweet shop.

Freezing fog envelops the coastline and the power goes out. The lighthouse keeper (or George Harrison, if you're Sue) heads to the generator room to investigate, only to be brutally murdered.

Sue: It's like *The Mist*. Maybe we should watch this in black and white?

The Doctor and Leela enter the lighthouse and he makes a bee-line for a discarded hat.

Sue: His hat fetish is back again, I see. Oh dear, that isn't a good look for him. Take it off, please.

The Doctor pumps Vince for information about the lighthouse.

Sue: Lovely cabinets.

Me: I know. You've already said that.

Sue: But they're *really* nice cabinets. And speaking of wood, this guy is

terrible.

Vince tells Leela that working in a lighthouse is a lonely business, and he amuses himself by hanging around the local seal population.

Sue: That isn't the best chat-up line in the world. Trust me, no one will want to marry this lighthouse keeper.

Reuben has his own pet theories about what could have killed George Harrison, including Frogs, Ruskies and spirits.

Sue: So this guy is basically a superstitious racist? I don't fancy his chances.

HORROR OF FANG ROCK

Sue makes some appreciative noises about this episode's camera movement, and she isn't surprised when I tell her that the director, Paddy Russell, was a woman.

Sue: What I can't believe is this was shot in a TV studio. It looks better than some locations we've been to. It's all down to the lighting. Paddy knew what she was doing.

Me: You can count the number of female directors who worked on the classic series on one hand.

Sue: That is very sad.

The Doctor charms Vince with tales from other worlds.

Sue: He's calling it Gallifree again. Maybe Tom Baker pronounces it the right way and we've been saying it the wrong way all this time? That would be embarrassing.

A circular frame is placed over the camera to represent the alien's point of view.

Sue: It isn't a Dalek, is it? A Dalek wouldn't fit in a cramped lighthouse, so I'm guessing not.

A luxury yacht appears out of nowhere – and it's heading for the rocks.

Sue: They're trying their best, bless them.

And then, after an interminable delay, the theme music crashes in as well.

Sue: That was rubbish. Why didn't they finish the episode with Leela being threatened by that alien thingy? What was Paddy thinking?

As the credits roll, I notice a familiar name.

Me: Look! It's John Nathan-Turner's first credit.

Before you start, I know he worked on The Space Pirates (as John Turner) but who wants to bring that up again?

Sue: That name rings a bell. Is he important?

Part Two

Sue: Leela couldn't care less about the crew of this ship that's just crashed. That's not very nice.

Leela gazes down from the top of the lighthouse and we get our first real glimpse of the alien creature.

Sue: What the hell was that? There's no scale. How big is it supposed to be? Is it the size of a bus? Can you step on it? Which is it?

The survivors from the stricken yacht stumble into the lighthouse. They include Lord Henry Palmerdale ("A cunt"), his secretary, Adelaide ("Posh totty"), and Colonel Skinsale, who just happens to be the local MP for Thurley ("I bet he's a Tory").

Sue: Here comes the fresh meat. It's clever, actually. I have no complaints about this script.

Reuben tells Leela the creature she spied earlier was the dreaded Beast of Fang Rock.

Sue: You know, this definitely rings a bell. Have I seen this before?

Me: You're probably thinking of Fraggle Rock.

Sue: Possibly.

Sue tuts every time Palmerdale opens his mouth, and she enjoys watching the Doctor put him in his place.

Sue: Why hasn't the Moff asked Terrance Dicks to write for the new series

HORROR OF FANG ROCK

yet? He isn't dead, is he? "Bwarry said to me". Just think, he could be saying, "The Moff said to me" instead. Just think about that for a moment, Neil.

The Doctor and Leela investigate the generator room.

Sue: This lighthouse sounds exactly like our washing machine.

Vince retrieves George Harrison's remains from the shoreline.

Sue: I wasn't sure about Vince at first, but he's starting to grow on me. He's sweet. Stupid but sweet.

It turns out Palmerdale and Skinsale are involved in a dodgy insider trading deal.

Sue: This is a bit deep for the kids, but I'm loving it.

The Doctor admits to Leela that they are in terrible danger.

Sue: Tom is really selling the threat to me this week. And Leela is great, too. I love the way she tells the Doctor not to be afraid.

We momentarily perceive events from the alien's perspective.

Sue: Am I supposed to know what that is?

Me: Well, they are mentioned in a David Tennant story.

Sue: That doesn't help.

Palmerdale wants to leave, so the Doctor unleashes Leela.

Sue: So it's okay for Leela to be violent when it suits the Doctor. That's a bit rich.

The episode concludes with Reuben's agonised screams echoing through the

lighthouse, as Skinsale looks on, bewildered.

Sue: Another poor cliffhanger. Shame.

Part Three

Vince is surprised when the power comes back on.

Sue: This set is so good, it still looks great when you light it.

Adelaide's incessant whining shows no signs of abating.

Sue: She belongs on the stage. Take it down a notch, love.

Palmerdale bribes Vince into sending a telegraph back to the mainland.

Sue: No Vince! Don't do it! Don't be a Benny!

A green blob makes its way up the side of the lighthouse.

Sue: What the fuck is that?

The alien reaches the gallery and kills Palmerdale.

Sue: Thanks for that.

A man who looks like Reuben locks himself in his room, so Leela breaks it down with a sledgehammer.

Me: Here's... Leela!

The Doctor tells her to leave the poor man alone.

Sue: Is it just me or is the Doctor off his game this week? He's making a right pig's ear of this.

HORROR OF FANG ROCK

The Doctor excels at one thing, though – when it comes to scaring the crap out of the remaining survivors, nobody comes close. Cue Adelaide's screams.

Sue: Oh, somebody slap her. Please.

Leela is only too happy to oblige. Meanwhile Reuben is glowing bright green in his bedroom.

Sue: Like an evil gnome.

The corpses start to pile up and Adelaide screams the place down.

Sue: There's no way she'll be the next companion. Leela can rest easy.

The episode concludes with the Doctor admitting he's made a terrible mistake.

Sue: See!

He's locked the enemy inside with them.

Sue: Finally, a decent cliffhanger.

Part Four

Sue: I'm a bit confused. **Me**: What's the problem?

Sue: How many aliens are there running around this place?

Me: Just the one.

Sue: Right, so how can it be hanging off the side of the lighthouse *and* an

evil gnome at the same time?

Me: It climbed out of the window.

Sue: Okay, that makes sense. But there's something else I don't understand

- how has this happened before?

Me: Er...

Sue: They keep telling us this thing has killed people before, many years

ago. But how can that be true if it landed here today?

Me: Well, the original story about the beast is just a myth.

Sue: So it's just a massive coincidence?

Sue: Yes, well, erm...

The Doctor finds the alien's power source. It was trying to contact its own kind.

Sue: Maybe it's like ET and it just wants to go home?

The creature kills Adelaide.

Sue: See, it's not all bad.

The Doctor sends Leela and Skinsale off to find something they could use against the alien.

Sue: Why is the Doctor asking them to look for biscuits?

Me: What?

Sue: What good are macaroons at a time like this?

Me: Not macaroons, you fool. Maroons!

Sue: What the hell is a maroon when it's at home?

The Doctor confronts fake-Reuben on the stairs. The creature reverts to its natural form. It's a Rutan, scourge of the Sontarans.

Sue: I definitely don't remember seeing that in a David Tennant episode. I think I would have remembered that.

The Rutan proudly boasts that no human could possibly harm it.

Sue: Just jump on it. It would be messy, sure, but it wouldn't stand a chance. Or repeatedly whack it with a plank of wood. You could even squeeze it like a big, fat zit if you had some insulated gloves. It's not all

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that, is it? How do the Sontarans take them seriously?

The Doctor has to destroy the Rutan mothership, and to do that he'll need to convert the lighthouse's lamp into a carbon arc beam, and for that he'll need some crystallised carbon. Skinsale recovers some diamonds from Palmerdale's corpse, but when the Doctor discards the gems he doesn't need to complete his mission, and Skinsale tries to salvage them, the Rutan nobbles him

Sue: Killed by greed. Typical MP.

Me: There goes the last surviving member of the guest cast.

Sue: Well done, Doctor. I told you he was mucking it up this week.

The Doctor tells Leela that Skinsale died with honour.

Sue: With honour? He was killed because he was a greedy bastard!

The Rutan is mortally wounded with a barrage from a Schermuly, and Leela takes some time out to gloat over the corpse.

Sue: She needs psychiatric help.

The Doctor makes some adjustments to the lamp, and then, as soon as he's switched it on, he and Leela make a run for it.

Sue: Don't slip on any phlegm on your way out!

The lamp destroys the Rutan ship, but Leela disobeys the Doctor's orders and she's blinded by the explosion. She begs the Doctor to put her out of her misery.

Sue: He may as well. He is having one of those days.

Leela's blindness is only temporary, although it has changed the colour of her eyes (we have to take the Doctor's word for this because it's too dark for us to

tell). I have to explain to Sue that Louise Jameson's eyes were naturally blue and she had to wear painful contact lenses to make them appear brown.

Sue: Really? I hadn't noticed. What a complete waste of time. Hey, wasn't *Don't It Make My Brown Eyes Blue* in the charts when this was made? Or is that a massive coincidence as well?

As they make their way back to the TARDIS, the Doctor recites a quick verse from 'The Ballad of Flannan Isle' by Wilfred Gibson.

Sue: So everybody dies and the Doctor celebrates by larking about. I'm not sure how I feel about that.

The TARDIS dematerialises.

Sue: I'm sorry, but that model looked terrible. Our TARDIS biscuit barrel is more realistic than that.

The Score

Sue: You could definitely make that story again today. You wouldn't have to change all that much. It was a confident script, and Tom Baker has never been better. I really enjoyed it.

9/10

Me: Why did it lose a mark?

Sue: The alien.

Me: That's a bit shallow, isn't it?

Sue: Oh come off it, Neil, it was terrible!

Me: I can't believe you're still knocking marks off for the special effects. **Sue**: It wasn't just the special effects, it was the whole concept. How could that thing win a fight against a Sontaran? Unless it pretended to be a Sontaran, and that would be confusing, visually. All right, I was disappointed when the Sontarans didn't turn up at the end. Okay?

HORROR OF FANG ROCK

Me: Fair enough. So what about the new producer, Graham Williams? **Sue**: Oh, I forgot all about him. I honestly couldn't tell the difference between him and the last one. I'm sure he'll be fine.

COMMENT: "Exactly what form of Political Correctness does Sue subscribe to which abhors using dismissive nicknames for foreigners but revels in taking the piss out of someone's speech impediment?" – Doctor Whom

NOTES: Sue was quite right: Crystal Gayle reached Number 5 in the UK Charts with *Don't It Make My Brown Eyes Blue* the very same month *Horror of Fang Rock* was broadcast.

THE INVISIBLE ENEMY BLOGGED: 22 June 2012

Part One

Sue: Great. Invisible monsters again. I bet this is another cheap one.

A spaceship is navigating an asteroid belt.

Sue: Oh shit, it's a spacey one. I don't like the spacey ones very much. I

like it when it's set in the past and...

Me: And they have wooden cabinets.

Sue: Yes, exactly. Look, I told you this would be cheap – someone's pretending to be an astronaut in their own bedroom, and he's invited his mates over to play with him.

Meanwhile, in the TARDIS...

Sue: Oh, it's the other control room again. Good.

Me: Are you serious? I thought you preferred the wooden one? You know,

all that polished mahogany and shit.

Sue: It was a bit pokey. I'm used to this. I like it. I've missed it.

Sometimes I can't figure Sue out at all.

Sue: Leela is a bit dense this week. She's acting as if this was her first journey in the TARDIS. There is such a thing as character development, you know.

The spaceship we saw earlier arrives on Titan and Sue pats herself on the back for spotting Saturn in the background.

Sue: Some of the model shots are very good, actually. They're very detailed. It reminds me of *Thunderbirds*, but done on the cheap.

THE INVISIBLE ENEMY

The spacemen egsit their spaceship and kill the crewmen they've been sent to relieve. And when they open their visors...

Sue: They've got Larry Hagman's eyebrows. I wasn't expecting that.

Sue isn't very impressed with Titan.

Sue: Why do the aliens insist on conquering shit holes like this? Who'd want to invade this place?

Titan's station manager, Lowe, (who's played by the legendary Michael Sheard), is alerted to the mayhem that's breaking out in the crewmembers' boudoir.

Sue: He just put his cup of coffee on top of his computer. It's a health and safety nightmare waiting to happen.

Lowe freaks out as the situation worsens.

Sue: Is this supposed to be funny? Does he want some pineapple with that ham?

Me: It's Michael Sheard.

Sue: I don't care who he is. Look at him! He isn't just eating the scenery, he's flame-grilling it first. And I can't read the signage in this place. That font is bloody ridiculous.

I pause the DVD so she can take a better look.

Sue: Egsit... Eggs... Egg storage? Is this where they keep the battery hens? *What*?

Me: Read it again.

Sue: Egsit... Exit. Oh, right. So this universe is dyslexic. Fair enough.

Leela is also learning how to spell.

Sue: Lula? Who the hell is Lula? Is *The Invisible Enemy* dyslexia?

Leela can sense imminent danger.

Sue: Here she goes again with her pointless warnings. It will be of no use to them whatsoever.

The Doctor is attacked by a mysterious force, and when he eventually comes to, he's speaking more gobbledegook than usual.

Sue: Is it an alien creature that feeds on language? That could be interesting.

The Doctor and Leela arrive on Titan and the Doctor confronts the infected crewmembers.

Sue: Half this script is just people repeating each other.

Me: Repeating each other.

Sue: Don't you start. It's exactly like that David Tennant episode that's set

on the bus with an alien that repeats everything, yes?

Me: No.

The Doctor has been infected.

Sue: Tom Baker can be very scary when he wants to be. His voice is terrifying.

The episode concludes as the Time Lord pulls a gun on his companion.

Sue: Great cliffhanger. That wasn't so bad. For a spacey one.

Part Two

The Doctor struggles against the malignant influence of the virus.

THE INVISIBLE ENEMY

Sue: It's really good, this. The Doctor is genuinely scared, and that's always

interesting.

The Doctor puts himself in a coma.

Sue: He should have propped himself against a wall first. That won't do

his back any good.

The biggest question posed by this episode is why Leela hasn't been infected

yet.

Sue: It must be a deadly strain of man-flu. Bloody fellas.

Leela and Lowe take the Doctor to the Bi-Al medical Foundation in the

TARDIS, and the facility's brilliant white interior dazzles Sue.

Sue: This is very swish. It must be a nightmare to keep clean, though.

When Leela checks the Doctor into hospital, she's asked for his personal

details.

Sue: Now Leela's calling it Gallifree! Does anyone working on this

programme know how it's supposed to be pronounced?

A nurse asks Lowe why he's wearing a protective visor indoors.

Sue: (*As Lowe*) They're from Gok Wan. Do you like them?

And then...

Sue: K9!

She can't quite believe it.

Sue: Is it really K9? Is this really K9's first story?

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Me: Yes.

Sue: I always imagined that the Doctor built K9 when he was bored one

day. I didn't know he turned up fully formed like this.

K9 is the property of Professor Marius.

Sue: So this bloke must die at the end. If the Doctor takes K9 with him, that guy can't survive. No owner ever gives up his dog. Unless the Doctor steals him, of course.

Not only does Sue recognise Frederick Jaeger ("It's Frank Spencer's flying instructor again"), she enjoys his larger than life performance.

Sue: Now this is for kids.

Me: That pretty much sums it up.

Sue: I like it. **Me**: *Really?*

Sue: It's a nice change of pace. Things have been a bit grim lately. This is the first time I can detect the hand of a new producer. It feels like a breath

of fresh air.

Me: If you say so. **Sue**: What's wrong with you, Neil? Don't you like K9?

Me: I love K9. Sue: Well, then.

Lowe removes his visor and reveals the full extent of his infection.

Sue: Is he turning into an owl?

Contact has been made.

Sue: That catchphrase is the sort of thing the Moff would come up with. I could imagine Matt Smith in a story like this. And I bet he'd love K9.

The Doctor asks K9 for all the data he has on cloning technology. The dog

THE INVISIBLE ENEMY

tells him the first attempt was made in the year 3922.

Sue: Poor Dolly. Completely written out of history. The scriptwriters didn't have much faith in science, did they? Over 2000 years before anyone even tried it? As if!

K9 keeps the infected medical staff at bay.

Sue: K9 just hit that porter right in his cock. Does he always hit people in the cock? I suppose he must do, being so small.

The Doctor and Leela are cloned.

Me: Do you have anything you want to say about that?

Sue: Not really. It was a bit quick, I suppose. I like the way Leela doesn't want to meet her own clone because it would be too upsetting. Of course, it saves on any complicated doubling-up scenes...

Me: Doesn't it bother you that they've been cloned with their clothes on? **Sue**: Neil... IT'S FOR KIDS! I know you want to see Leela stark naked but it's never going to happen, love.

The Doctor's infection is getting worse by the minute and the medical staff has to hold him down.

Sue: (Screaming) Your mother sucks cocks in hell!

The clones are shrunk to microscopic size and injected into the Doctor's head.

Sue: This is a rip-off of something else. I'm sure of it.

Me: It's a homage.

Sue: The Incredible Journey.

Me: That's the one with a dog and two cats trying to find their way home.

Sue: I love that film. Why haven't we got that on DVD?

Me: Sorry. I do have a copy of *The Fantastic Voyage*, though.

Sue: What a surprise.

We compromise and watch a Doctor Who DVD extra instead. Sue's tolerance for these varies from story to story, and nine times out of 10 she isn't interested, or she'll fall into a coma before it ends. However, every once in a while, we stumble across a gem. I am, of course, referring to K9's appearance on Blue Peter, where he puts the wind up Shep.

Sue: That's the best DVD extra you've ever shown me. Play it again.

Me: If you insist.

Sue: Brilliant. That's made my night, that has.

Part Three

The clones enter the Doctor's head.

Sue: Are they dancing? They don't half pick their moments.

The Doctor's condition is monitored by Marius and his staff.

Sue: You can't hear a word anyone is saying because that nurse's latex uniform is squeaking and squelching so much. How much spillage did they expect in this hospital, anyway? She should be working at a car wash.

Only one thing can consistently drown out the sound of latex.

Sue: K9 doesn't have a stealth mode, does he? You can hear him coming a mile off! They should have overdubbed him with some whooshy sound effect to make him appear more hi-tech.

The Doctor and Leela's clones explore the Doctor's brain.

Sue: It's very imaginative, this. And quite funny, too. Although I can tell by the smirk on your face that you don't like this one very much, Neil. I don't have a problem with it. It's a great idea.

THE INVISIBLE ENEMY

K9 creates a barricade by blasting away part of a wall.

Me: And?

Sue: What's your problem?

Me: The crack! The bloody crack, woman!

Sue: Oh, that. Well, either it's got something to do with the Silence, the place was falling apart due to budget cuts, or they were having a bad day in the studio and they couldn't get the effect to work. Look, Neil, there's a talking dog on screen...

Me: It's not a talking dog. It's a personal computer that just happens to

look like a dog. **Sue**: Whatever.

The infected-Lowe rallies his troops.

Sue: Can't this bloke pose naturally? It's absurd. Every time we see this character, he looks like he's modelling for the Grattan catalogue.

When K9 is infected by the virus, he shoots Leela in the head.

Sue: This looks rushed to me. Was K9 supposed to miss her head by a mile? Was that intentional? I like his ticker-tape, though; it looks like his tongue. That's clever. Ticker-tongue.

With half the cast now under the thrall of the virus, Sue begins to lose patience with the make-up.

Sue: They look like they're going to a masquerade ball. Lady Gaga would suit that. Just give her some sequins and false eyelashes and she'd be away. The green latex would be optional, obviously.

The Doctor and Leela hunt down the source of the infection.

Sue: Will we actually see the virus at some point? **Me**: Yes, you'll see it in a minute. Be patient.

I stifle a fit of the giggles. I'm sorry, I can't help it.

Sue: I have a very bad feeling about this.

The clones step into the Doctor's imagination.

Sue: I don't want to say what the Doctor's subconscious mind is full of, but it's very rude.

The Doctor finally meets the virus, aka the Nucleus of the Swarm.

Sue: So it's a bin bag with a claw for an eye?

Me: You ain't seen nothing yet.

Sue: It's very abstract. But nowhere near abstract enough.

As the Doctor confronts the Nucleus, a cloned-Lowe tries to intervene. Leela stabs Lowe in his chest and he's eaten by the Doctor's antibodies.

Sue: *Doctor Who* is suddenly not for kids again. That was vicious. It sticks out like a sore thumb when everything else is so lightweight.

We suddenly – and I do mean suddenly – cut to Marius extracting something from the Doctor's eye. He places a slide in the cloning chamber and the sample grows into...

Sue: A giant seahorse. No, wait... It's a prawn. It's a giant dancing prawn. **Me**: Finally, we get to watch some hardcore prawn together, Sue.

Part Four

There's only one topic of conversation during our 450th episode of Doctor Who...

Sue: Just fling it on the BBQ and let's go home.

THE INVISIBLE ENEMY

Even the Doctor can't believe what he's looking at.

Sue: How am I expected to take it seriously if Tom Baker can't? This story just went from an eight to a five in as many seconds. *Jesus...* What possessed the director to shoot this thing in a long shot? It looks like something you'd see in a school play.

Of course, Nicol would choose this exact moment to walk in on us. Thankfully, she took one look at the Nucleus of the Swarm and walked straight back out again. I was relieved, frankly. And then Leela – for reasons that escape me as I write this – dresses up as a nurse.

Sue: She managed to find a costume that's even more demeaning than the one she was already wearing. Wow.

The Nucleus is escorted back to Titan.

Sue: It's another *Doctor Who* monster who needs a support worker to get around. It's becoming a theme. I mean, why would you want to take over a universe that you can't walk around in?

The Doctor and Leela arrive on Titan with K9 in tow.

Sue: K9 sounds like a Henry vacuum cleaner.

The Nucleus is installed in an incubation chamber.

Sue: Is it sitting on a loo?

I don't get much more out of Sue, aside from the odd, "That was shit", "That was really shit" and "Fuck me, that was shit!" But when the Doctor saves the day by blowing up Titan, she's got plenty to say.

Sue: Has he blown up a moon?

Me: It's only a moon. There wasn't anyone living on it. Well, nobody who

wasn't evil anyway.

Sue: I bet Saturn might have something to say about that. I can't believe he blew it up. I thought he'd come up with a cleverer solution than that. It's as if the scriptwriters tantalised us with a better solution but couldn't think of one. What a cop-out.

The Doctor and Leela return to the Bi-Al Foundation and Leela begs the Doctor to adopt K9.

Sue: All the kids are screaming, "Yes! Yes!"

Me: Twenty years later they'll all be screaming, "No! No!"

Marius hopes K9 is TARDIS trained.

Sue: Oh, fuck off.

The Score

Sue: I want to stress that I enjoyed the first two-and-a-half episodes, but it turned into a terrible mess. I think they tried to take on too much. You can't have weird sets, costumes, effects, aliens, model shots and a robot dog and expect to get away with it. They spread themselves too thin. Some of the ideas were excellent but the execution was beyond them. I didn't like the direction either. It was very flat. I liked K9, though.

4/10

COMMENT: "The model-making was often great, but apparently photographed by the sort of cameras used by local news journalists when reporting from a traffic jam on the A9." – AST

IMAGE OF THE FENDAHL

BLOGGED: 25 June 2012

Part One

Sue: I don't know why we're bothering any more.

Me: What?

Sue: Well, according to some of the comments on the blog, Doctor Who is

a complete waste of time now.

Me: For the last time, stop reading the comments.

Sue: The general consensus seems to be that it's all downhill from here. I

was hoping it was going to get better, not worse.

Me: Don't listen to them. They're talking nonsense. There are plenty of

great stories still to come.

Sue: Like this one?

Me: There are plenty of great stories still to come. Sue: Oh, bloody hell, it's Chris sodding Boucher again.

I didn't correct her pronunciation. That would have been cruel.

Sue: It looks like this one is set on Earth. That's something, I suppose.

We meet Adam Colby and Thea Ransome, two scientists whose idea of a good time is flirting over an eight-million-year-old skull.

Sue: This guy is a bit smooth. It's Giles from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, isn't it? And he's trying to seduce Valerie Singleton. Maybe he should offer her some Gold Blend coffee?

Me: That's Benedict Cumberbatch's mum.

Sue: She's beautiful. You can see where he gets it from.

Another scientist, the creepy Max Stael, enters Fendelman's laboratory.

Sue: It's a young George from *George and Mildred*. Hang on, what accent is that supposed to be? German? Italian? French? All of the above? **Me**: Eurozone, I think.

Meanwhile, a hitchhiker is being pursued by something threatening.

Sue: Now this is more like it. What a difference a week makes. This is proper *Doctor Who* again: scary, dark, and shot on film in a real location. Lovely.

The hitchhiker is killed.

Sue: It's nice to see a man screaming for a change.

Elsewhere in the universe, the Doctor is up to his elbows in K9.

Sue: Has he broken him already? He only got him five minutes ago. I bet he couldn't wait to start upgrading him, and now look at him. And what has Leela done to her hair? And why is she wearing another skimpy outfit? And where did she get that costume from? Did she make it herself? If she didn't make it herself, why has the Doctor got that costume lying around in his TARDIS? And what has she done to her hair?

The scientists have gathered in a farmhouse kitchen for breakfast.

Sue: Oh yes, this is very nice. Look at those lovely Windsor chairs. Steamed ash, I think. I'm going on a course soon where I'll learn how to bend steamed ash into...

I pause the DVD so Sue can explain basic wood turning techniques to me. This is almost as boring as Colby, Thea and Fendelman discussing science and stuff.

Sue: Okay, I'm confused. Is George her dad?

Me: They're work colleagues.

IMAGE OF THE FENDAHL

Sue: Work colleagues who just happen to live together? In a cottage? In the middle of nowhere? I see. So is there a bizarre love triangle going on here? You can cut the tension with a knife. Ooh, I love their earthenware. Very nice.

The sexual tension is so overwhelming, Colby has to take the dog for a walk. And that's how he discovers the body of the dead hitchhiker, although Fendelman begs him not call the police.

Sue: Why is George's tie so short? He can't even dress himself. And where

the hell is he from, anyway?

Me: That's Denis Lill you're talking about. He's a bloody good actor.

Sue: I'll have to take your word for that.

Me: He was in Survivors. You liked him in Survivors.

Sue: It's his accent. It's all over the shop. Oh, that cabinet is gorgeous. I'd

love a cabinet like that.

The TARDIS arrives on Earth, and as the Doctor opens its doors, cows can be heard mooing outside.

Sue: Oh, thank God. I thought that sound meant the Doctor needed to put some WD-40 on the TARDIS' hinges. That's a relief.

The Doctor and Leela encounter a local man named Ted Moss. He tells them that a rich foreign scientist, who made his money out of electronics – which doesn't make sense because he isn't Japanese – is up to no good at the priory.

Sue: At least we can rule Japan out for the accent. I'm leaning towards Mexico myself.

You'll be pleased to know she recognised Derek Martin in a heartbeat.

Sue: He's a terrible actor. He was rubbish in *EastEnders* and he's just as bad here. Oh well, at least he's consistent.

Derek is having a blazing row with an old woman.

Sue: Now, *that's* scary. Kids would have wet themselves, I bet. Old people are bloody terrifying when you're young.

The Doctor and Leela hide in the bushes surrounding the priory.

Sue: I have no idea what is going on, but it's very atmospheric, and the direction is okay. But why is the Doctor eating the shrubbery? That's a bit silly.

The Doctor and Leela are separated by heavy fog, which means the episode ends with two competing cliffhangers – Leela is pumped full of lead, whereas the Doctor is knocked over by a camera operator who can't see where he's going.

Sue: Oh, make your bloody mind up. I can't handle two cliffhangers at the same time. And what is the Doctor doing, anyway? And why should I care? And you should cut to the credits *after* you've fired the gun, you numpties!

Part Two

Sue: Is this Mick Jagger's back garden again? **Me**: Funnily enough, I think you're right.

Sue: I wasn't joking. I recognised the brickwork. Flemish bond. It's lovely.

Some tarot cards have been neatly arranged on a table.

Sue: If you took the Doctor out of this story, this could easily be an episode of *Tales of the Unexpected*.

She starts to hum the theme tune (she doesn't do the dance, thank heavens) and I'm forced to intervene.

IMAGE OF THE FENDAHL

Me: Yes, alright, love. You're missing the plot.

Sue: Oh, I don't care about the plot. I'm bored already.

And then Sue's Coronation Street detector goes off.

Sue: Oh, it's him. The taxi driver with the bad leg. Don somebody.

Me: Did you watch Coronation Street before you met me?

Sue: Are you joking? Of course I watched *Coronation Street*. You were the one who stopped me, remember? You said it was just old women gossiping in corner shops and we had to watch *Brookside* instead. I never did find out what happened to Don.

and find out what happened to Don

Derek Martin is killed by an unseen force, and when Colby discovers the body, he tells Thea that a look of pure terror was etched on the poor man's face.

Sue: They can't show his actual face because he can't do that particular emotion. He's useless.

Thea faints as the Doctor strolls into the kitchen.

Sue: Thank God. Maybe he can tell us what's going on. I'm completely lost.

Me: I'm barely following it myself, and I've seen this before and read the book.

Maggot-like creatures suddenly appear over her Thea's body.

Sue: What? Why? How? Eh?

They disappear again, but not before the Doctor can identify them as embryo Fendahleen. Unfortunately, Sue has other things on her mind.

Sue: What do the yellow pens represent?

Me: What?

Sue: All the men have yellow pens in their pockets. The only person who doesn't have a yellow pen is Thea. That must be important.

In the very next scene, a yellow pen can be seen poking out of Thea's lab coat pocket.

Sue: Hmm... Very interesting.

Me: No it isn't! **Sue**: I bet it is.

Me: Oh, knock yourself out. I give up.

Sue is annoying me almost as much as Adam Colby is annoying her.

Sue: What a smug cunt. I hope he dies next. A slow, painful death would be nice. I'm not fussy, really.

Colby continues to argue with an increasingly agitated Fendelman.

Sue: Fendelman should be in a Spaghetti Western. I think he's definitely Mexican. "Do you want some jalapeños with that, Adam? Huh?"

We also discover that Stael is a member of a mysterious cult.

Sue: Where the hell did that come from? Isn't having an alien skull, wormy things, and a scary old woman enough?

Fendelman suggests humans have evolved from aliens.

Sue: You know, I'm sure he's a good actor, but why did they saddle him

with that stupid accent? There's just no need for it.

Me: Well, his name is clearly significant. Fendelman, Fendahleen... **Sue**: So what? Who says you can't have a silly name and a normal voice? Who would complain about something like that? "Oh, I don't like this story because a man named Fendelman doesn't have a silly accent". What utter rubbish. And where the fuck is K9?

IMAGE OF THE FENDAHL

It's not all bad news, though, and Daphne Heard's performance as Grandma Tyler is rightly singled out for praise.

Sue: She's brilliant. More of her, please. Don is holding his own, too.

Thea is abducted by Stael.

Sue: There isn't a great deal of music in this one. It's very quiet, even when stuff is supposedly going on. I think I actually miss Dudley's marimbas.

When the Doctor enters Colby's lab, he is immediately drawn to the ancient skull sitting on the table. He even offers it a jelly baby.

Sue: Now he's just taking the piss. I bet that wasn't in the script.

The Doctor is forced into touching the skull against his will.

Sue: The direction is good, and this has the potential to be very atmospheric. It definitely looks good. But it's boring. Really, really boring. It's too adult for the kids and too tedious for the adults. Nobody wins. It doesn't help that Tom Baker isn't taking it seriously, either.

Part Three

The reprise begins with the Doctor offering the skull a jelly baby again.

Sue: It isn't even a real jelly baby. It's a liquorice allsort, for fuck's sake. Nice table, though.

Leela rescues the Doctor; she knew something was wrong thanks to her instincts.

Sue: Finally, her psychic superpower pays off. It's been a long time coming.

Stael drugs Thea up to the eyeballs.

Sue: Is somebody down there playing a church organ? And does the yellow pen mean you're a member of this cult? Is that the secret signal? **Me**: No!

Stael will become a god!

Sue: He comes from the same country that Fendelman wants to sound like he comes from. If that makes sense.

The Doctor revives Grandma Tyler with a recipe for fruitcake. And then he then explains that ghosts are merely the by-products of time fissures.

Sue: That's the first plausible thing the Doctor has said in this story. Tom Baker has had to up his game now that he's playing against the old granny. She's excellent.

Stael takes Fendelman and Colby hostage in the basement. Colby still acts like a wise guy, even with a gun pressed against his lips.

Sue: Do us all a favour and shoot him in the fucking head. Please.

The Doctor and Leela take the TARDIS to the Fendahl's old stomping ground, the Fifth Planet. The Doctor explains that the Fendahl is using astral projection to manifest itself back on Earth.

Sue: They are making this up as they go along. None of this connects to anything else, as far as I can tell. It's just one bizarre explanation after another.

The Fifth Planet has been placed in a time loop.

Sue: Like *Groundhog Day*?

Me: It's probably a bit worse than that. More like Groundhog Second. You

IMAGE OF THE FENDAHL

wouldn't get anything done.

Grandma Tyler gives her nephew a lecture about evil spirits as she fills some shotgun pellets with rock salt.

Sue: I could watch a whole series with these two fighting evil in the countryside. As a series, it's definitely got legs.

Down the basement, hooded cult members are waiting for the show to start.

Sue: I hope this isn't going to turn into *Eyes Wide Shut*.

Me: Speak for yourself.

The Tylers hear a gunshot.

Sue: The cult has executed Fendelman for crimes against foreign accents.

She doesn't realise she's right and Denis Lil has been shot in the head.

Sue: That was a bit bleak. And why shoot him and not the other cunt? That makes no sense whatsoever. Hang on a minute! Maybe they were lovers! It all makes sense now!

The Doctor and Leela brave the fog and return to the priory.

Sue: This story has all the right ingredients, but they don't work when they're mixed together. This would be a terrible fruitcake.

A fully-grown Fendahleen attacks!

Sue: Why has it got pink hair? It looks like a cross between a giant maggot and a Chinese Dragon. This isn't scary at all.

Me: Really? It scared the crap out of me when I was eight.

Sue: Seriously? I think they could have shown you anything and you'd have found it scary. It's rubbish. It's the alien equivalent of Ashley Cole.

Part Four

Sue: Why can't they run away?

Me: Well, the story implies the common dream people have, where they can't run away from something, is derived from a race memory we have

about these things.

Sue: You're having a laugh! They probably can't move because their jaws

are on the fucking floor. This is atrocious. **Me**: We've seen much worse than this.

Sue: Not today we haven't.

Sue believes she's nailed the problem.

Sue: We're watching two different programmes: *Tales of the Unexpected* and *Doctor Who*. And it's a mash-up that doesn't work.

Thea is transformed into a golden figure dressed in billowing robes. She rises from the floor, a giant pentangle behind her.

Sue: This reminds me of Marc Bolan at Newcastle City Hall in 1973. Marc came up on this huge star and it got stuck, and when they finally got him off it, he was so pissed off, he starting kicking it. It was a bit embarrassing, to be honest.

Stael, who realises he's made a terrible mistake, asks the Doctor to leave him with a gun so he can kill himself.

Sue: You and me both, mate. Bloody hell. This isn't for kids. This isn't for anybody, actually.

The Doctor hands the gun to Stael.

Sue: Bloody hell. You can't throw a powerful scene like that into the middle of this incomprehensible mess. It isn't appropriate.

IMAGE OF THE FENDAHL

Colby escapes with his life, but he quickly turns on Grandma Tyler, calling her a "stupid old witch" and even more cruelly, a "Swede-bashing cretin".

Sue: Please stick him with one of your anus thorns, Leela.

The Doctor explains that rock salt is the perfect weapon against their enemy, which is why people throw it over their shoulders for good luck.

Sue: I bet it's also the reason we use it to kill slugs.

The Doctor tells Leela the story of how the Time Lords interfered with the Fendahl on the Fifth Planet.

Sue: This is all very interesting, I'm sure, but it's just another idea that's being thrown into the pot at the last moment. I really don't care any more.

The Doctor believes Dr Fendelman was genetically prepared for this moment, although on the other hand, it could be a massive coincidence.

Sue: For fuck's sake. Even the script hasn't got the strength of its own convictions.

The Doctor comes up with a plan and Leela gives Colby a cheeky peck on the cheek.

Sue: That's completely wasted on him, pet. Still, nice rug.

The Doctor and Leela head for the basement, where, armed with flasks of salt, they battle a Fendahleen.

Sue: Tom Baker nearly took the camera out with that shot. It would have been a mercy killing, I suppose. And how did one of these things kill that hitchhiker at the beginning? He was running like the clappers and this lot can barely move.

As the Doctor places the skull in a lead lined box, he's surrounded by tiny Fendahleen.

Sue: Which one of them is dropping babies all over the place?

Thea starts floating around the priory as a disembodied ghost.

Sue: Er... Why?

The Doctor rigs the time scanner to implode and our heroes escape in the nick of time.

Sue: They're playing Dudley's music backwards. I like it.

Incredibly, Colby survives.

Sue: That's ridiculous. How can you let him live after you've killed Benedict Cumberbatch's mum? That's unforgivable.

Leela lets her hair down.

Sue: Thank heavens for small mercies.

The Doctor drops the skull in a supernova ("So is it indestructible or not? Make your bloody mind up!") and then, after some playful banter, the credits roll.

Sue: Is that it? Even K9 is hanging his head in shame.

The Score

Sue: That was rubbish. And boring rubbish, too, which is even worse. There were too many ideas that went absolutely nowhere. I don't even know what the Fendahl is, or was. Was it the worm, the gold woman, or the skull? It made no sense. The atmosphere was nice, and the sets were

IMAGE OF THE FENDAHL

great, but they were completely wasted on that script. I've forgotten it already.

2/10

COMMENT: "Please tell me 'stick him with one of your anus thorns' isn't a typo." – Lewis Christian

NOTES: Sue's brief dalliance with the blog's comment section meant I had to police spoilers even more rigorously than usual, just in case a post about Season 15 descended into a heated discussion about *Logopolis*, which happened all the time, believe it or not.

THE SUN MAKERS BLOGGED: 28 June 2012

Part One

Sue: Is there anything I should know about this one? **Me**: Only that it's late 1977 and context is everything.

Sue: I would have just turned 16... Oh look, it's Robert Holmes. I feel

better already.

A nervous man named Cordo is loitering in what appears to be a very drab corridor.

Sue: This reminds me of Brazil.

Me: The country? **Sue**: The film.

It's an astute observation (it helps that we watched the film again recently), because Roy Macready really does look like Jonathan Pryce. If you squint. Anyway, Cordo is supposed to pay his departed father's death taxes to Gatherer Hade.

Sue: This story is very brown. But everything was brown in the 1970s. It's basically the same colour as a Bond Bug.

Me: A what bug?

Sue: An orangey-brown, three-wheeled sports car from the 1970s. Like a sexy Robin Reliant. It was the same colour as the giant rib cage this guy is walking through now.

The Gatherer sits behind a giant table made from ma-ho-gany.

Sue: I could watch this for hours. Please, keep talking about the wood.

Me: Praise the carpentry.

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Back on the TARDIS, the Doctor is playing chess with K9. He tells Leela to shut up as he ponders his next move.

Sue: How can anyone concentrate when K9 is switched on? It sounds like the cleaners are in the studio next door.

When the time rotor stops moving, the Doctor leaps around the console room like a maniac.

Sue: Calm the fuck down, mate.

The TARDIS arrives on Pluto in the far future and the Doctor and Leela discuss the prospect of going for a quick W-A-L-K without K9.

Sue: We do that all the time with Buffy. But Buffy is a stupid Labrador and K9 is a supercomputer. So this is cute, but silly.

K9 desperately wants to go with them.

Sue: Just like a real dog. Always wanting to be out. At least he doesn't moult. Oh, go on, Doctor, take him.

And then...

Sue: TAKE HIM!

But the Doctor doesn't hear her and he leaves the poor mutt behind.

Sue: That's never Pluto, by the way. It looks like Birmingham to me.

The wide shot helps. A bit.

Sue: It's miles better than them doing it in a studio with some crappy

CSO. Where is this, anyway?

Me: Pluto.

Sue: You know what I mean. **Me**: A tobacco factory in Bristol.

Sue reaches for a cigarette as Cordo appears on the factory's rooftop and shuffles towards its edge.

Sue: Teatime suicide again. We had one of those last week. How did they get away with this, Neil?

Cordo is at the end of his tether because he can't pay his taxes. The Doctor offers him a conciliatory jelly baby.

Sue: It's a liquorice fucking allsort again! That will only make things worse.

The Doctor talks Cordo down from the edge and the poor man tells him everything he needs to know about the planet's sociopolitical problems. However, when Cordo spots the Gatherer, he makes a run for it. And then, after some slapstick comedy, the Doctor follows.

Sue: Tom Baker is spoiling this. He's trying too hard to be quirky.

Gatherer Hade suspects the TARDIS belongs to smugglers.

Sue: Why is he dressed as a pink bee? His PA's costume is naff, as well. Are all the fashions on Pluto based on *Quality Street* wrappers?

At least the Gatherer's costume doesn't put her off the character completely.

Sue: He's very good. What's this actor been in before?

Me: Do I look like Toby Hadoke?

Leela, Cordo and the Doctor enter a large tunnel system.

Sue: The location is excellent. I didn't know tobacco factories had such

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large pipes, although I guess they have to blow the smoke up something. **Me**: This is a tube station in Camden Town, I think. I'm not Richard Bignell, either.

Cordo tells the Doctor and Leela about a group of tax evaders who have become outlaws.

Sue: So there's a community of rock stars, comedians and Tory Party donors all living together underground? That's interesting, not to mention topical.

It doesn't take very long for the Doctor and Leela to bump into these mysterious 'others'.

Sue: The people who made *Lost* must have seen this. They even look like the others from *Lost*. I bet they smell like them too.

K9 disobeys the Doctor's orders and leaves the TARDIS, eventually making his way to Level 42.

Sue: Coincidence?

No, that wasn't a reference to Douglas Adams. Anyway, I ask Sue if she recognises the actor playing Goudry.

Sue: Yes, I recognise his voice. Hang on... I definitely know this.

I pause the DVD. Minutes pass.

Sue: I've got it! He's the vicar on *EastEnders*!

Me: It's Michael Keating. He played Vila in *Blake's 7*. Actually, this story is

very Blake's 7 in look and feel. The costumes, especially.

Sue: You aren't selling *Blake's 7* to me, love.

For several years now we've fed a small pack of wild cats who visit us each

night (usually when we're in the middle of an episode of Doctor Who). We called them Blake, Avon and Vila. Sadly, Severlan died a few months ago and we haven't seen Vila in ages.

Sue: I often wonder what happened to Vila.

Me: He probably ran away.

The others' leader, Mandrel, provides the Doctor with a credit card the size of a paperback book.

Sue: You wouldn't get many of those in your wallet. If you had more than one bank account, you'd have to carry your credits cards around in a knapsack.

The Doctor visits a hole-in-the-wall machine while Cordo keeps watch, but when he inserts the card, a glass cubicle imprisons the Time Lord and he is gassed for being overdrawn.

Sue: Fucking bankers.

Part Two

Uniformed men have arrived to retrieve the Doctor.

Sue: Why didn't Cordo press that button and get him out? He had plenty of time.

The Doctor is hauled away on a gurney.

Sue: It's Barclaycard's Death Squad. I bet he gets charged for being carted away. This is very similar to *Brazil*. And Bob Diamond's darkest fantasies.

And then we meet the Collector.

Sue: Is he sniffing something off that paper? Is that what I think it is? What a banker!

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The Collector is an insane economist.

Sue: He's a tiny Ed Balls. He definitely livens things up a bit. It's a creepy performance.

Tom Baker wakes up in a straitjacket.

Sue: Didn't the Doctor know Houdini? Shouldn't he be able to get out of that?

The Doctor is deposited in a conditioning room with a man named Bisham. Bisham tells him Pluto's inhabitants are pacified with a drug called PCM.

Sue: We need a scene with some happy people in it. Just one scene would do it. All I've seen so far are depressives, rebels and bureaucrats. What about everybody else?

Mandrel's gang can't stop bickering among themselves.

Sue: It's *Oliver Twist* for middle-aged men. Mandrel is basically Fagin, and the loud-mouthed woman (who belongs on the stage, not television) is Nancy. She's bloody terrible.

The Gatherer decides the Doctor must be an arms smuggler, and the Inner Retinue will have to deal with him.

Sue: Oh very good. Was Robert Holmes a communist?

Me: No, that was Malcolm Hulke. But Holmes received a tax demand just before he wrote this, so he wasn't in the best of moods.

Sue: If any of the Inland Revenue saw this, I bet they crucified him later.

Leela accuses Mandrel of cowardice. She even insinuates he hasn't got a penis.

Sue: You go, girl!

Cordo volunteers to help Leela find the Doctor.

Sue: He's like Frodo in *Lord of the Rings*. Cordo – Frodo. Coincidence?

K9 blankly refuses to return to the TARDIS.

Sue: Typical dog. Buffy is exactly the same. Aww, look at him wagging his little tail...

The Gatherer releases the Doctor from the conditioning centre so he can identify anyone he contacts.

Sue: Is the Doctor going to leave the other bloke there? That's horrible.

The Doctor throws a bag of sweets towards Bisham on his way out.

Sue: (As Bisham) How am I supposed to eat these when my hands tied? I don't even like liquorice!

K9 stuns a guard.

Sue: How did that guard not hear K9 coming? Do the drugs they pump into the air-conditioning mess with your hearing as well?

"Humbug!" cries the Doctor as he offers the Gatherer a sweet.

Sue: Now he's confusing liquorice allsorts with humbugs. Oh, I see! It's because the Gatherer is dressed as a giant humbug. Okay, I get it now.

Leela, K9 and Cordo rescue Bisham from the conditioning centre before taking the P45 return route.

Me: That reminds me, it's my last day at work on Friday, and starting this Monday, I'll be able to give the experiment my undivided attention. **Sue**: Does that mean I'll have to watch more episodes a week?

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Me: Yeah, no more days off. We might even finish this by October.

Imagine that, Sue. Life without Doctor Who...

Sue: The quicker we finish this, the quicker we can divorce.

The good guys are stopped in their tracks by two security guards on a buggy.

Sue: A golf buggy with a mattress tied to the front? Scary stuff! I must say, apart from the odd joke here and there, this is very average so far.

Part Three

I should warn you that Sue had a bad day at work today, and she wasn't in the best of moods when we watched this particular episode. If only I had some PCM handy.

Sue: This is ridiculous!

When K9 stuns one of the guards, his colleague gets out of his buggy and looks behind him.

Sue: What the fuck is he looking for? And if this is K9's POV, it's nowhere near where it should be. The direction in this scene is atrocious.

Leela's gang commandeer the buggy.

Sue: They should spend most of Part Three executing an *Austin Powers* three-point-turn.

There's some casual sexism about lady drivers, which gets up Sue's nose, but there's worse to come.

Sue: They'll have to get out and move the bodies. Oh wait, that edit suggests to me they just ran them over. I'm not convinced that buggy would have made it over them, but there you go.

They hurtle down a corridor at a cool five miles per hour.

Sue: It's not exactly Star Wars, is it?

Me: It isn't even THX-1138.

Leela is sent to the Collector.

Sue: I like the little fella. Is that his real voice or is he putting it on?

The Doctor plants the seeds of revolution in Pluto's downtrodden masses.

Sue: It's very topical. Nothing much has changed. The Doctor should come down here and sort our fat cats out.

Leela is threatened with the steamer.

Sue: What's the steamer? **Me**: Swedish waterboarding.

The bad guys gather for Leela's public execution. Attendance is poor, which the Gatherer puts down to people watching it on the telly for free.

Sue: They should have made it pay-to-view.

Leela's casket plunges into a hidden chamber.

Sue: So it's a public execution where you can't see a damn thing? Is it any wonder they didn't sell many tickets?

The episode concludes as Leela is about to be steamed alive.

Sue: I've seen better. The script was quite funny, though. It actually cheered me up a bit.

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Part Four

The Doctor rescues Leela from the steamer, but K9 goes missing in the process.

Sue: How can they not hear him coming? He's obscenely loud. Sorry, Neil. I won't mention that again. I know it's pointless.

The Doctor and the Collector go head-to-head.

Sue: I love the Collector's eyebrows.

Me: Remind you of anyone?

Sue: Yeah, I'm not stupid. He's supposed to be Denis Healey, which is

bang out of order, actually. You might want to pause this.

Cue an animated discussion about how amazingly cool Denis Healey was, and how Robert Holmes should have paid his taxes and stopped moaning.

Sue: This programme is made by middle-class fuckers for middle-class

fuckers. Pay your fucking taxes.

Me: Okay, calm down.

And that's when Nicol walks in.

Nicol: What's going on?

Sue: We're watching an episode of *Doctor Who* where the bad guy works

for Barclays Bank.

Nicol: Are you serious? Have you seen the news? **Sue**: Barclays in the future is even worse, Nicol.

Nicol can't resist joining us for the last five minutes.

Nicol: Why are they dressed as jockeys?

She's referring to the Gatherer's PA, Marn.

Nicol: She just needs a hat and she's good to go in the 4.15 at Kempton.

The Gatherer is manhandled by a bunch of revolutionaries.

Sue: Nice Frankie Howerd impersonation, there.

They throw him off the top of a tall building.

Sue: No way! Did that just happen?

Nicol: That'll be Bob Diamond next week.

Nicol claps eyes on the Collector.

Nicol: It's Dr Evil's Mini-Me.

The Collector is so infuriated by the Doctor's meddling, he returns to his natural form.

Nicol: So the planet was taken over by some green poo? That's a bit embarrassing.

Sue: That was silly. They didn't need to do that.

The Doctor, Leela and K9 prepare to leave Pluto behind.

Nicol: You didn't tell me K9 was in this! I would have come down earlier if I'd known that. I love K9.

Me: Well, that's certainly news to me. You can always watch the next one with us. You'll love it.

Sue: It's good to see the Doctor getting a nice send-off for a change. **Me**: Waved off by a bunch of murderous psychopaths. Yeah, it's lovely.

The Score

Sue: The last episode nudged it above average. The script was very witty and the villains were excellent, but the execution was dull, and the

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direction wasn't very good. It was all right, I suppose.

6/10

COMMENT: "I think the Collector's eyebrows are as much Joe Gormley as Denis Healey." – Peter J Ross

NOTES: Bob Diamond was caught doing something despicable at Barclays Bank in 2012. The fact that I had to look that up on *Wikipedia* tells you everything you need to know about the current state of our country.

My belief that we would finish the blog in October 2012 was naive in the extreme. I was seven months out.



Part One

Sue: It's the Bristol Boys.

I've been schooling Sue between stories because the experiment is the...

Sue: They were responsible for the giant prawn, weren't they? I don't like

the Bristol Boys very much.

Nicol: What are you talking about?

Yes, I persuaded Nicol to join us for Underworld; let's call it payback for overcooking my chips last night. Anyway, the episode begins with a stunning vista that features a cornucopia of stars and planets. But as the camera pans right, we're left facing darkness.

Sue: Did they run out of stars or is it supposed to look like that?

Leela is flying the TARDIS through this area of empty space (Sue: "Is she allowed to do that?") while the Doctor is off painting something. Sue reckons it's a ceiling, whereas Nicol opts for some still life. I couldn't care less.

Sue: I've never noticed this before, but the thing that moves up and down in the middle of his TARDIS...

Me: The time rotor.

Sue: Yes, well it's a bit wonky, isn't it? Shouldn't it go up and down in a

straight line?

Me: We can but dream.

A frustrated Leela gives K9 a slap.

Sue: Hey! That wasn't a great message for any kids who have pets. Who's

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idea was that? She kicked him last week.

Even the Doctor tells K9 to shut his trap.

Nicol: Why are they so nasty to K9? What has he done to upset them? I love K9. Leave him alone.

Meanwhile, on a spaceship piloted by an elderly woman...

Sue: It's a Saga cruise liner. In space.

The ship is crewed by Jackson, Herrick, Tala and Orfe (aka the Minyans of Minyos).

Sue: A lot of thought has gone into their costumes. Their spacesuits look very practical.

If only she was impressed with the costume's contents.

Sue: He isn't very good. The Welsh one. He's too hammy. He looks like Peter Gordeno, if Peter Gordeno let himself go.

The Doctor and Leela arrive on the Minyans' ship and discover that the crew have been searching for their sister ship – the P7E – for 100,000 years.

Sue: How did they last this long without killing each other? **Nicol**: I've been on this ship five minutes and I'm bored already.

The crew managed this incredible feat by constantly regenerating.

Sue: Now that's what I call botox. So the Mignons...

Me: Minyans.

Sue: Whatever. They must be more advanced than the Time Lords. They can regenerate thousands of times, and they don't have to go through the rigmarole of changing their faces and personalities, although that would

probably get boring after a while, especially if you looked like a rough Peter Gordeno.

Sue is perplexed by the symbols which adorn the ship's floor.

Sue: Have they been playing Scrabble to pass the time? At least they have some comfortable leather sofas to lounge around on. That must have helped. Actually, the more I think about this, the more insane it seems.

The Doctor connects K9 to the ship's navigation systems, which causes the robot dog to yelp.

Nicol: Does K9 ever go, "Woof"?

Me: Only if you pour petrol over him and set fire to him.

The ship enters a spiral nebula, and then – get this – it begins to turn into a planet.

Me: Is that feasible, Nicol? Nicol: Is what feasible?

Me: The physics. Is it feasible?

Nicol: I'm sorry, I wasn't paying attention. I was trying to figure out where I'd seen that blonde woman before. She was in *Fawlty Towers*, you know.

Me: Put your bloody phone down.

Nicol: But this is rubbish!

Me: You promised to watch it with us. You said you'd give it your

undivided attention. The experiment is the...

Nicol: Did you know that Peter Gordeno's son is in Depeche Mode?

Me: Yes, but Peter Gordeno isn't in this.

Nicol: Oh. Sorry.

The credits roll.

Sue: Well, I liked it. **Nicol**: Mother!

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Sue: Seriously, Nicol, this isn't that bad. Hang on, who's Anthony Read when he's at home? And where has Robert Holmes gone?

Part Two

Nicol is on her phone again.

Nicol: According to a poll of 200 stories in *Doctor Who Magazine*...

Sue: 200!? You told me we were over halfway through this ages ago, Neil.

Me: That number includes the new series. We're not doing that,

remember?

Sue: We'll see about that.

Nicol: Anyway, according to this poll, Underworld is rated 197th out of

200.

Me: (*Under my breath*) Generous.

Nicol: So why are you making me watch it, Neil?

Sue: Hey, it's not that bad. I've seen a lot worse. And I didn't vote in that

poll.

Meteorites start to cling to the Minyans ship (Sue: "Like a deadly honey nut cluster"), but when they blast their way free, they end up on a collision course with a planet.

Sue: They don't have any seatbelts. They haven't got a hope in hell.

The crash landing is cushioned by the planet's liquid surface.

Sue: If this planet is still forming, shouldn't it be boiling hot? Shouldn't

they be roasted alive? **Nicol**: Not necessarily.

She isn't convinced with Nicol's explanation (I dozed off myself), but at least they can agree on one thing...

Sue: What the fuck?

Nicol: What the hell?

Yes, we have landed on the planet Chromakey.

Sue: It's all gone a bit Pete Tong.

I haven't the heart to tell her that nobody uses that phrase any more. Not even Pete Tong.

Nicol: That character just walked straight through a rock.

Two mysterious figures, dressed from head to toe in black, are monitoring events from a control room.

Sue: That look is very S&M.

Me: They look like something out of a *Hostel* film. Or a random Saturday night in Sitges.

Nicol: How can they see anything out of those tiny little holes? They must be sweating like pigs.

Sue: This story is so cheap, they're replaying shots of the same crappy

CSO effect. That is not good, Neil. That is not good at all.

Me: You'd better get used to it. **Sue**: You must be joking.

Me: They didn't have any money left. It was this or nothing.

Nicol: They should have gone with nothing.

Sue: I suppose you have to admire them for trying. It doesn't look that

bad, sometimes. Oh, wait... No, that isn't good.

And that's when Nicol walked out.

Sue: This reminds me of the time our boss thought it would be a good idea to run a TV drama module where the whole thing was shot in the studio with chromakey backgrounds. It was supposed to be set in a service station and it took us forever to set the cameras up.

Me: What did it look like?

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Sue: Shit. Like this looks like shit. And we tried it 20 years after this was made. What were they thinking?

The Doctor and Leela explore the virtual caves.

Sue: What you save on cost, you lose on pace. You can't move the camera without it being a big faff, so everything is static and boring. I can see why this came 197th in that poll. Hang on... That means there are three stories even worse than this one. Have we seen them yet? Please tell me we've already seen them.

Me: I'll kill Nicol when I find her.

The Doctor and Leela hide in a mining cart and Sue's patience is sorely tested when the guards fail to notice our heroes' pathetic attempts at subterfuge.

Sue: Maybe if the guards didn't have those stupid masks on, they'd actually hear them banging about. This is fucking terrible. Please make it stop, Neil.

Herrick deflects a guard's weapon fire with a gun that doubles up as a shield.

Sue: He's like Captain America. If Captain America looked like Peter Gordeno and was a bit shit.

The guards finally take their masks off (BBC Health and Safety probably stepped in).

Sue: Why wear them in the first place? I'm surprised they don't faint when they're on duty. The sweat is pouring off them.

The Doctor and Leela rescue a man named Idas. Sue doesn't understand why they bothered.

Sue: He's as memorable as a kitten fart.

The guards fumigate the caves, which means the fake CSO background now has fake gas superimposed all over it.

Sue: This isn't exactly *Genesis of the Daleks*, is it?

The Doctor tries to reverse the polarity of the gas. "Whatever blows can be sucked!" he declares.

Sue: This story blows *and* sucks, mate.

We are then treated to one of Doctor Who's most drawn-out cliffhangers, as the Doctor tries – and seemingly fails – to do something clever with his screwdriver.

Sue: And it started so well, too.

Part Three

It's Monday evening and Nicol has joined us again. She must like it, secretly.

Nicol: Did Tom Baker fall asleep during the last cliffhanger?

When the gas has been safely pumped away, the Doctor shares his delight with the audience watching at home.

Sue: There's no such thing as a fourth wall as far as Tom Baker is concerned. They should have docked his wages every time he broke it. That would have stopped him.

K9 returns to the fray.

Nicol: I didn't know K9 could hover over the ground like that.

Sue: He can't. That's bad CSO, love.

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K9 prints out a map for the Doctor to follow.

Sue: What a clever boy. Who's a clever boy, then?

Me: Please, Sue. Don't.

Idas is worried about fire-breathing dragons.

Sue: Don't worry, mate, the BBC can't stretch to dragons, never mind fire-breathing ones. It can't even stretch to a real set. You'll be fine.

Our heroes reach the planet's lower levels via a zero gravity elevator.

Nicol: Bad physics, bad acting, bad special effects and bad music. All in the same scene.

Sue: I can't argue with that. This is terrible. They should have called this *Underpants*.

I bury my head in my notebook when Tom Baker starts flapping his arms up and down. That way I can pretend it never happened.

Nicol: I'm sorry, but this is pathetic. And I've seen *Twilight*.

Sue: Can't we play the DVD at double-speed? We could get it over with in half the time.

I'm sorely tempted.

Me: The one good thing about *Underworld* is the episodes are relatively short.

Sue: You must be kidding. They feel like they're double the usual length. So how does that work?

Herrick and Jackson shoot their way past some guards.

Nicol: When did Star Wars come out?

Me: In the UK? Late December 1977. This story appeared on television a

week later.

Nicol: You can tell.

Me: Don't be silly. They didn't have enough time to rip *Star Wars* off. You make it sound as if they made this programme a couple of days before it

was transmitted.

Nicol: You mean they didn't? They actually spent time on this?

The Doctor and Leela are introduced to the slaves who are mining this planet.

Sue: *Doctor Who* is obsessed with mining. Mind control and mining. They can't get enough of it. It'll be mind-controlled miners next.

Herrick is questioned by the mysterious seers.

Sue: They're just a couple of berks in burkas.

The seers reveal their true faces.

Sue: Oh. That actually makes sense. I quite like the design of their helmets. It reminds me of the old *Flash Gordon* serials. Very retro.

The Doctor, Leela and Idas hide in another mining cart, only this time they're delivered to a waiting crusher.

Sue: Another terrible cliffhanger. Has this director ever seen *Doctor Who* before?

Nicol doesn't comment. She's too busy playing with her phone.

Part Four

Sue has had it with Idas.

Sue: He had better not be the next companion. He's more suited to a

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consumer affairs programme like That's Life!, or This Is Shit!.

And then...

Sue: They shouldn't have broadcast this story, Neil. You know, quality

control. I mean, look - Leela's leg just disappeared again.

Nicol: Does anybody know what's going on?

Sue: Not a clue, Nic. Neil?

Me: Don't look at me. I don't think I've seen this episode before. I usually give up in the middle of Part Two. I probably saw it when I was eight, but

if I did, I've blanked it from my mind.

Sue: The first thing Jackson will do when he gets back to his ship is regenerate. He'll have to if he wants to stand a chance with his fit co-pilot.

The seers hand the race banks over to Herrick.

Sue: Aw, that was nice of them.

According to Herrick, the quest is over.

Sue: Thank fuck for that.

Nicol: There are 10 minutes left according to my stopwatch.

Sue: Oh God.

Me: Stick with it, Sue. You can do it. The experiment is the...

Sue: If you finish that sentence, I will fucking kill you.

K9 tells the Doctor the race banks are clever fakes, and they're actually fission grenades in disguise.

Sue: So the bad guys made these grenades on the off-chance this lot would come looking for the real ones, and they wouldn't bother checking to see if they were fake before they left? Well, it almost worked, I suppose.

The Doctor ushers the slaves into the Minyans' ship.

Sue: I don't think I've seen this many extras in an episode of *Doctor Who*

before. They even hired a dwarf!

Nicol: That's where all the money went. That's why they don't have enough money for any sets.

Jackson doesn't want this rabble on his ship, even when the Doctor points out that the refugees are his own people.

Sue: Finally, a decent scene. That was quite interesting, actually. But it doesn't make up for the rest of it. Not by a long chalk.

The Doctor swaps the fission grenades for the data banks, duping the seers in the process. Their mad supercomputer, the Oracle, tells them to get rid of the grenades immediately.

Sue: Flush them down the loo!

The grenades go off.

Sue: Worst villains in *Doctor Who*. Ever.

The Minyans can't wait to take the race banks back to Minyos II. It won't take them long – 370 years, give or take.

Sue: Just enough time for one more game of Scrabble!

Nicol: I wonder which word they'll make with the letter Q?

The Doctor is suddenly reminded of Jason's mythic quest for the Golden Fleece.

Sue: Bollocks. *Jason and the Argonauts* was great. *Jason and the Argonauts* had sword-fighting skeletons and scary monsters in it. This rubbish doesn't even have a real cave!

K9 isn't convinced, either.

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K9: Negative.

Sue: That reminds me, am I allowed to give negative scores?

The Score

1/10

Sue: What can I say? I liked K9.

COMMENT: "Has any other actor been in so little yet left such a pervasive mark in history as Peter 'Bloody' Gordeno? Even my mum randomly mentions him nowadays, and he haunts *UFO* even though he's only in it for 17 minutes over 20-odd episodes." – John Williams

THE INVASION OF TIME

BLOGGED: 7 July 2012

Part One

Sue: Is there anything I should know? **Me**: No, it's just a regular four-parter.

May I rot in hell.

Sue: This had better be good. We're due a good one. Who's David Agnew?

Me: He doesn't exist.

Sue: Is it because they were embarrassed with the script, or were they

getting around the BBC's rules and regulations again? **Me**: It's co-written by the producer and the script editor. **Sue**: Right, so this story should sum them up nicely, then.

The Doctor is negotiating with three aliens on a spaceship.

Sue: They look like giant slugs. If slugs could stand upright, that is.

Me: They're chairs.

Sue: The aliens this week are talking chairs?

While Leela anxiously waits for the Doctor to return to his TARDIS, she takes her frustrations out on K9. Again.

Sue: A dog isn't just for Christmas, Leela.

The Doctor signs a contract with these mysterious aliens.

Sue: That was a quick signature. I bet he signed it 'Who'.

The Doctor returns to his TARDIS and tells K9 to shut Leela up. And he isn't

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joking, either.

Sue: Ooh, it looks like some serious shit is going down this week.

Meanwhile, on the planet Gallifrey, a guard named Andred is alerted to an unidentified time capsule approaching the planet's airspace.

Sue: He's wearing gold Wellington boots. That's nice.

Me: Do you know where we are?

Sue: Yes, it's Gallifrey. I know it's Gallifrey because this guard looks like a

Beefeater.

The aliens monitor the Doctor's progress.

Sue: They look like giant bullets.

Me: They're chairs!

When the TARDIS materialises in the Panopticon, half-a-dozen guards arrive to intercept it.

Sue: The direction is pretty good, the sets look better than they did the last time we were here, and they've spent a small fortune on those guards. You can see where all the money went this year. Still, it *is* Gallifrey. You have to pull out all the stops for Gallifrey.

The Doctor tells Cardinal Borusa he's returned home to claim the Presidency of the Council of Time Lords.

Sue: Ooh... that is interesting.

The Doctor refuses to take no for an answer, and at one point he even screams at Borusa.

Sue: Scary stuff. The script is excellent and I'm definitely intrigued.

The Doctor wants to access the Matrix, which we last saw in The Deadly Assassin.

Sue: Does this mean we'll get another episode in lots of surreal locations?

Me: Oh yes, we'll definitely get one of those.

The aliens monitor the Doctor.

Sue: They look like giant runner beans. **Me**: They're chairs, woman! CHAIRS!

Sue: And why is Dudley Simpson playing the theme tune to Zelda?

As Sue parps away on her imaginary trumpet, the Doctor enters the Panopticon for his induction ceremony.

Sue: The set is definitely better this time. It's cleaner. The hall isn't exactly packed, but I bet the ceremony was a rush job and they didn't send the invites out on time. These things happen.

At least Leela was invited.

Sue: Hang on, why is Leela here? Sarah Jane wasn't allowed to go to Gallifrey, so what makes Leela so special? Sarah Jane will be furious if she ever finds out. She'll scratch Leela's eyes out.

The Doctor is handed the Sash of Rassilon, the Rod of Rassilon and the Great Key of Rassilon.

Sue: Are they resting on the pink pillows of Rassilon?

The Doctor is crowned with a circlet, but as he accesses the Matrix, he falls to his knees in agony.

Sue: Jesus.

Me: It's not that bad.

Sue: No, he looks like Jesus. Jesus crossed with Noddy Holder. Those ginger sideburns are a bad idea. Anyway, that was a good start. I definitely want to find out what happens next.

Part Two

The Doctor isn't very happy when Leela threatens to fillet a guard.

Sue: Here's an idea, Doctor – take the fucking knife away from her!

Sue wrestles with the Doctor's increasingly erratic behaviour.

Sue: So, is the Doctor evil? Or is he just pretending to be evil? Or is someone, or something, forcing him to be evil? Which is it?

Me: Wait and see.

Sue: He must be bluffing. He has to be.

The Doctor tries to gain access to a secret passageway in Borusa's office, and when his sonic screwdriver doesn't work, he turns to the audience and complains about it.

Sue: Dock his pay. It's the only way he'll ever learn.

When the Doctor isn't talking to himself (and us), he's talking to an empty chair.

Sue: So the aliens *are* talking chairs? They can look like any chair in the universe?

She's joking. I think. Anyway, the Doctor hopscotches down a corridor.

Sue: Tom Baker almost took the camera out with his elbow. Has he completely lost the plot?

The Castellan (who Sue recognises as the man with the eyepatch from The

Android Invasion and not much else) monitors the Doctor's movements with technology that's clearly based on tiny balls.

Sue: Not only is he talking to a gobstopper, he's sucking one, too.

Sue is great when it comes to noticing incidental details like these. Oh, and this...

Sue: Andred's pants are very tight. He's got the male version of camel toe.

The Doctor locks himself in his TARDIS, and when Leela begs to be let in, he put his hands over his ears and blocks her out.

Sue: It's all gone a bit dark. And I don't just mean the lighting.

And then Sue asks a question that's so complicated, I have to pause the DVD.

Sue: Is everyone on Gallifrey a Time Lord?

Me: Er...

Sue: Are all the guards Time Lords?

Me: Er...

Sue: Can the guards regenerate?

Me: Erm...

Sue: So how do you become a Time Lord? Do you have to take an exam? Are you born into it? Is it like the House of Lords? How does it work? It isn't fair if only a select few can become Time Lords and the rest of them are nothing more than glorified slaves. And that's the impression I'm getting.

Me: Well...
Sue: Yes?

Me: Wait and see.

Back on Gallifrey, the Doctor discusses his plans with K9.

Sue: Could you rewind that, please? I'm a bit lost.

I play the scene again.

Sue: Thanks. But I'm none the wiser. I know they want to blow something up, I just don't know what or why. The Doctor is very militaristic in this

story. That thing he's wearing around his neck...

Me: The Sash of Rassilon.

Sue: It makes him look like Chewbacca.

Leela ducks into a corridor to avoid a patrol.

Sue: She's walked into a Sure Start Centre. The children have painted these murals on the wall. Do Time Lords have babies?

Me: Er...

Leela encounters a woman named Rodan.

Sue: Big radiators.

Me: What?

Sue: Gallifrey's radiators are very big. Why haven't they worked out how to hide their plumbing yet? It seems a bit daft when they can travel in

time. Anyway, is this woman a Time Lord or what?

Rodan explains to Leela that she's basically a glorified air traffic controller.

Sue: Look at the state of her desk! Has somebody vomited all over it? Has it ever been cleaned? I wouldn't touch that with yours, Neil.

Meanwhile, back in the Panopticon, the Doctor offers a jelly baby to Andred. Sue leans in as the Doctor removes his hand from the bag.

Sue: It's a real jelly baby! Finally! They're really pulling out all the stops for this one.

The Doctor locks the TARDIS door behind him, but a guard arrives with some spare keys.

Sue: He's been down to the stores. I bet it took him ages to find the right box. And I bet he had a tea break while he was down there.

The guard tries several keys with no success.

Sue: I could watch this all night.

The Doctor gives Borusa a ruddy good bollocking, which is amazing. But if you're Sue, the episode's most exciting moment occurs when K9 navigates his way through a very narrow pathway in Gallifrey's basement. She was on the edge of her seat when he got stuck. And then the episode concludes with the Doctor introducing us to Gallifrey's new masters.

Sue: They must be having a laugh. BacoFoil? BACOFOIL?

The Doctor laughs his head off.

Sue: Yeah, I don't blame you for laughing. *Jesus!* As in – Jesus Christ, this is pathetic!

Part Three

Sue: Is this the big one? **Me**: The big one?

Sue: Is this the one where the Doctor kills all the Time Lords? I've been

dying to see this.

I've given up trying to tell her the Time War takes place off-screen.

Me: Wait and see.

The Vardans...

Sue: Sorry, the what? **Me**: The Vardans.

Sue: Never heard of them. They're just CSO that's gone wrong. They look like something you'd put in as a placeholder if you didn't have the real

effect ready.

The Doctor examines his new lead-lined quarters.

Sue: It's an interesting set. **Me**: I'd love a study like that.

Sue: Don't tempt me. You know I like a challenge. It wouldn't be real lead,

though, but this isn't either.

The Doctor confides in Borusa.

Sue: I knew he wasn't the bad guy. I knew he wouldn't let me down.

The Doctor insists Leela be banished from the Capitol.

Sue: The Doctor wants to protect her. He doesn't want her in the city when he blows it up and kills all the Time Lords. He could have dropped her at a nice beach resort before any of this started, of course, but there you go. He was probably worried the TARDIS wouldn't find her again, and she'd end up killing half the tourists.

Leela and Rodan leave the Capitol.

Sue: I was hoping it would look more like *Dune* and less like Rhyl. Gallifrey is one disappointment after another.

They immediately run into Gallifrey's Outsiders.

Sue: They're very posh for a bunch of savages. I bet the only clubs this lot are familiar with are book clubs.

The Vardans start throwing their weight around on Gallifrey.

Sue: It's a shame, this. It would have been okay if the monsters were up to scratch. It should have been the Daleks. Or the Cybermen. I mean, just look at them! Just scrunch 'em up and chuck 'em in the bin. They'll scream, "Foiled again!" Geddit? Foiled. Foil. Tin foil. No?

The Castellan reminds Sue of somebody (besides Leonard Rossiter, that is).

Sue: He's Gallifrey's Nick Clegg. He's dressed in yellow, he's obsequious, and he'll do anything for a whiff of power. Oh, and I want to punch him in the face.

The Vardans expect the Doctor to dismantle the quantum force field that protects Gallifrey.

Sue: Even their voices are rubbish. They sound like continuity announcers. No offence, Glen.

The Doctor asks his allies to trust him and materialise.

Sue: They can't do that because they're still in the oven... Because they look like tin foil, and you use tin foil for cooking...

Me: Yes, Sue, we get it.

Sue: Hang on, if they haven't materialised yet, they may look okay in a minute. There's still hope.

The Castellan loves nothing more than rooting out potential troublemakers from the Time Lords' ranks.

Sue: This one could be William Hartnell's brother. Hey, maybe it *is* the Doctor's brother.

When this particular Time Lord is escorted outside, he asks the guards to slow down because he's in his 10th regeneration.

Sue: David Tennant seemed to manage okay. Just saying.

The episode concludes with Andred barging his way into the TARDIS.

Sue: The cliffhangers have been pretty good in this story. If only the monsters were better.

Part Four

Sue: The Vardans have changed. Is this what they really look like?Me: No, these are new CGI effects. I thought you could do with a break.

Sue: They are marginally better, I suppose. Marginally.

The Doctor mocks Andred's failure to stage a palace coup.

Sue: Maybe the Time Lords start out as guards or air traffic controllers? Or maybe's there's a prequel series to be made where a young Doctor is a Time Lord cop.

The Doctor tells Andred that Rassilon's mind lives on in the APC Net, and he may be able to help them.

Sue: What is Tom staring at? Why can't he look at the person he's talking to? I'm sorry, but Tom Baker is beginning to get on my tits.

Leela rustles up a (very) small army.

Sue: What a motley crew. I wouldn't bet on this lot taking over a small shop, let alone a city.

The Doctor returns to Gallifrey's basement to mess with its transduction barriers.

Sue: Gallifreyan technology isn't all that impressive. I thought it'd be made of crystals and stuff like that. It's... ordinary.

When Gallifrey's barriers are deactivated, the Vardans finally reveal themselves.

Sue: WHAT WAS THE POINT?

Even the Doctor is disappointed.

Sue: Disappointing? *DISAPPOINTING*? Understatement of the fucking century. All that for *that*? How shit must Gallifrey be if it can be threatened by these losers?

Leela and her rag-tag army advance on the citadel.

Sue: So, can this lot regenerate or not? I doubt they'd want to, but you never know.

It finally dawns on the Vardans that the Doctor has betrayed them.

Sue: They act like henchmen. I can't believe they're supposed to be all-powerful alien conquerors. They look like extras from another story who have wandered into this one by mistake. I mean, Gallifrey has basically been invaded by chartered accountants. This is so embarrassing.

K9 works out where the Vardans hail from ("They're so shit-hot, no one has ever heard of them"), and the Doctor promptly places them in a time loop.

Sue: What an anti-climax. That was dreadful.

The Doctor has triumphed once again.

Me: So what mark are you going to give that?

Sue sighs.

Sue: The ending was rushed, the villains were rubbish, and the subplot

with Leela and that tribe went nowhere. It started out well – the script was pretty good – but they didn't do it justice.

4/10

And then...

Sue: Fuck me, it's the Sontarans!

Me: I know!

Sue: So this hasn't finished yet? You lied to me?

Me: Yes, but it was worth it, wasn't it? Isn't this an amazing cliffhanger? It knocked my socks off when I was eight years old. It was the most

shocking thing I'd ever seen on television.

Sue: Okay, it's a pretty good cliffhanger. Big round of applause. But it also means the last three episodes were a complete waste of time. How many

episodes are left?

Me: Two.

Sue: Sod that, let's put Dallas on.

Part Five

Sue: Cor blimey, guv'nor... Apples and pears... Stone the crows... Is that

Sontaran actually a Cockney?

Me: Well, he's definitely more Cockney than you are. That sounded Welsh.

Borusa returns to his office and squeezes a tiny ball.

Sue: Gallifreyan air freshener. The Doctor must have reeked.

Borusa pipes the sound of bells into the Panopticon, and everyone legs it when the Sontarans are temporarily disabled. Everyone except the Castellan, who stays behind to help his new overlords.

Sue: Why isn't Nick Clegg running in the opposite direction? And why is he wearing welding gloves?

Leela slaughters a Sontaran with a knife to the probic vent.

Sue: It's a bullseye!

The Doctor and his friends make it back to Borusa's office and lock themselves in. The Sontarans start to batter the door down.

Me: (As a Sontaran) Open the door, you slag. You're nicked!

Our heroes escape through a secret passageway. But before they leave, the Doctor unlocks the door for the Sontarans.

Sue: Why did he do that? He could have stalled them for ages. Seriously, why did he do that?

Another Sontaran is killed.

Sue: Why don't they cover up that hole of theirs with a flap? Why do they walk around with it unprotected like that? Oooh, K9 can go backwards!

The Doctor asks Borusa for the Great Key of Rassilon, and after a lot of persuading, the Cardinal finally hands over an ordinary looking key to his former pupil. The Doctor throws it away.

Sue: I didn't think so. I was expecting a big gold key with diamonds encrusted in the...

Borusa hands over the real key.

Sue: Oh.

The Sontarans bring their weapons to bear on the Doctor and Borusa, but thankfully our heroes are protected by the Cardinal's personal force field.

Sue: The Sontarans aren't coming out of this well. I like the relationship

between the Doctor and his old teacher, though. I knew he'd come good in the end. It's quite sweet, really.

Unfortunately, Borusa's batteries are about to run out.

Sue: Take them out and give them a little rub. Trust me, it works every time.

Upon reaching the safety of his TARDIS, the Doctor sends Leela, Borusa, K9 and Andred to the VIP suite. Then he teams up with Rodan to repair Gallifrey's transduction barriers.

Sue: These two work well together. She's a lot more capable now she's back in the studio. She'd be an interesting companion, actually. But Leela has settled in nicely now, so you can't get rid of her. And if the Doctor travelled with two women at the same time, it would look a bit suspect.

The Castellan reverses the TARDIS' stabiliser banks and the Doctor declares they'll be thrown into a black star.

Sue: Dock his pay!

Part Six

Sue: It's as if a bunch of fans got together to make an episode of *Doctor Who* at ICI Wilton.

The Doctor, Leela and Rodan head deeper into the TARDIS.

Sue: Where are we now?

Me: The TARDIS.

Sue: This is the TARDIS?

Me: Yes.

Sue: The TARDIS?

Me: Yes. Have you gone deaf, love?

Sue: No, but this DVD seems to be on a loop.

These corridors really do look the same.

Sue: I don't know what I expected the rooms inside the TARDIS to look like, but it definitely wasn't like this.

The Sontarans enter the console room.

Sue: It doesn't feel right seeing this lot in the TARDIS. It feels like she's being violated, somehow.

Our heroes are still traipsing through the TARDIS' interior.

Sue: Why would the Doctor programme his TARDIS to look like a disused hospital? Why is that even an option?

Andred and K9 decide to kill some time in the TARDIS workshop.

Sue: And why does the TARDIS have windows? And why black them out with bin bags? This is so cheap, they must be taking the piss. I just don't buy it.

Commander Stor is confident that he will defeat the Doctor.

Sue: He can't even put his helmet on straight. How will he see a thing out of that? Do you want to try that again? No? That will do? Are you sure? Oh, all right then.

As the Sontarans pursue our heroes through a swimming pool area, one of them is incapacitated by a sun lounger.

Sue: Attacked by an alien that looks like a chair. I can't believe he didn't fall into the water. Cheap!

And then it's wall-to-wall questions.

Sue: Why is there a small secondary school in the TARDIS? And why does the TARDIS have stairs? Don't the lifts work? And why does the place look like it smells of urine?

I stop jotting these questions down after a while. And then it's the scene that breaks the camel's back, as Stor's peripheral vision lets him down BUT he still manages to shoot Andred in the arm.

Sue: Can I give this a negative score?

Leela and Borusa end up going round in circles.

Sue: Déjà poo.

The Doctor manages to entice a Sontaran into the maw of a giant plant with nothing more than a birdsong impression. Yes, you did read that right.

Sue: They could afford to make a giant plant that's on-screen for less than 30 seconds, but they couldn't make a corridor with some circles on it? And who waters these plants, anyway? Does the Doctor have to come down here every night before he goes to bed?

The Doctor puts the finishing touches to his demat gun.

Sue: Nice cupboards. I'd love to give them a coat of Farrow & Ball.

The Doctor tests the demat gun on an advancing Sontaran, who promptly vanishes.

Sue: The Doctor shouldn't be allowed to carry a gun, let alone use one. This is terrible.

Commander Stor threatens to destroy the galaxy in a fit of pique.

Sue: With a hand grenade? Piss off!

So the Doctor kills him.

Sue: Unbelievable.

The Doctor is knocked unconscious, and all that remains of the demat gun is the Great Key.

Sue: It's a shit gun if you can only fire it twice.

Rassilon has wiped the Doctor's memory.

Sue: I wish he could wipe mine so I didn't have to remember this.

The Doctor returns to his TARDIS with the sound of jubilant Gallifreyans ringing in his ears.

Sue: And now the Daleks turn up...

The Doctor opens the TARDIS door and he ushers his companion inside. But Leela wants to stay on Gallifrey.

Sue: What? WHY?

Leela reaches for Andred's hand.

Sue: FUCK OFF!

Even K9 wants to stay behind.

Sue: WHAT?

Sue is gobsmacked. And furious.

Sue: I know Andred's pants are tight, but this is ridiculous! Leela would never do that. Never in a million years.

The Doctor finds a box with 'K-9 MII' stencilled on its side.

Sue: Where did he get that from? Is there a shop that sells K9s?

The Doctor turns to the audience at home and smiles.

Sue: DOCK HIS FUCKING PAY!

The Score

Sue: Oh dear. When the Sontarans turned up, I thought to myself, 'They can still pull this out of the bag'. But then it got worse.

0/10

Me: But what about the first episode?

Sue: If it wasn't for the first episode, I'd probably give it minus-two.

Me: I'll lock the doors.

COMMENT: "No, no, no, this won't do at all. No way does *The Invasion of Time* merit a worse score than *Underworld*. Take a mulligan on this one and have her try it again at a later date (maybe between Seasons 16 and 17). Or at least have her read the novelisation and critique that instead." – Jason Miller

NOTES: The comment above still makes me laugh today. Like that was ever going to happen, Jason.

Glen, the continuity announcer mentioned by Sue, will make his mark on the experiment in the next volume.

And that's as close as we're going to get to a cliffhanger ending. Sorry. [Turns to smile to the readers at home...]

SUE'S SCORES

Robot: *The same old, same old.* 5/10

The Ark in Space: Tom Baker was brilliant. 7/10 The Sontaran Experiment: Too short. 5/10 Genesis of the Daleks: Excellent. 9/10 Revenge of the Cybermen: A mess. 3/10

Terror of the Zygons: *It had a lot going for it.* 7/10

Planet of Evil: I couldn't care less. 5/10

Pyramids of Mars: *Mick Jagger won't be very happy.* 7/10 **The Android Invasion:** *It fell apart at the end.* 5/10

The Brain of Morbius: A bit mad. 8/10

The Seeds of Doom: *It can't get any better than that.* 10/10

The Masque of Mandragora: Very accessible. 9/10 The Hand of Fear: Worst. Monster. Ever. 6/10 The Deadly Assassin: The ending let it down. 8/10

The Face of Evil: *I miss Sarah Jane*. 4/10 The Robots of Death: *Average*. 5/10

The Talons of Weng-Chiang: Marks off for the casual racism. 8/10

Horror of Fang Rock: Confident. 9/10 The Invisible Enemy: I liked K9. 4/10 Image of the Fendahl: Boring rubbish. 2/10

The Sun Makers: Witty. 6/10 Underworld: Underpants. 1/10 The Invasion of Time: Oh dear. 0/10

NEXT TIME

THE KEY TO TIME
DECK CHAIRS
A BIG GREEN COCK AND BALLS
and GLEN ALLEN

in

THE (STILL) MAD ONE: THE WIFE IN SPACE VOLUME 5

The Ribos Operation to Logopolis

Foreword by Andy Miller

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