

Hub Magazine

SCIENCE FICTION HORROR FANTASY

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EDITORIAL:

by **alasdair stuart**

Thinking Voyager 2 Type Things

Voyager 2's one of my favourite things. It was launched the year after my birth, participated, along with Voyager 1, in a 'grand tour' that got us incredible photos of Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune and is now approaching the edge of the Sun's influence on the solar system. In other words, Voyager 2 is the furthest man from home and only getting further, a tiny little symbol of cutting edge 1977 technology carrying a disk with greetings in 55 languages and pictorial information aliens may need to understand who we are.

There's a slight possibility that on April 22nd this year they found it.

Voyager 2's started sending back garbled information and, whilst NASA think that it's a problem with the flight data system, German author Hartwig Hausdorf isn't convinced. He thinks Voyager 2 has been found and reprogrammed by aliens, that first contact may have happened, and happened at the end of the astronomical street instead of from light years away. It's a massively compelling idea, that not only are aliens here but they're right here and it's got as far as being reported by some mainstream UK newspapers.

Of course, there is the small point that Voyager 2 has been in space for over thirty years, bathed in solar radiation, in inconceivable cold and incredible heat, dancing with the magnetic fields and gravity wells of planets that could swallow the Earth over and over again. It's been through the wringer a bit and, if I were it, right now, I'd probably be sending back garbled transmissions. Assuming I wasn't dead from being catapulted into space decades ago with no food or oxygen.

So yes, it's tempting to say it's aliens but maybe, just maybe, Voyager 2's taking a break. It certainly deserves it.

Source: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/science/space/7722455/aliens-hijack-nasas-voyager-2-space-craft-claims-expert.html>



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FICTION

The Slaughterman

by **alasdair stuart**

Life in Hadley was measured by the smell and the noise. For a few brief weeks in spring, the air was clean and fresh and pure, the wind that moved across the valley bringing with it the smells of fresh plants, a new year, hope. These were the weeks where most people in the town were tense and on edge, where fights were common and Jane knew to keep her head down. Her job even required it, making her way out across the metal struts of the harvest cage, checking each weld, testing each gate. It was a difficult but not demanding job, and the moat crews, as grateful as she was to be outside, would wave to her from the ground and flirt in a way that was charming and meaningless and passed the time for all of them.

She loved those weeks, before the herd came and the only noises outside the town were the rustle of leaves on the trees and, occasionally, the songs of the waiting snipers.

Then, one day, as always, there would be a dust trail on the horizon and in less than an hour, the town would be transformed. By the time the Scout's jeep had careened through the gates, every one in town would be working at their positions. Weapons and armour would be handed out, vehicles checked and re-checked and final tearful goodbyes hurriedly exchanged as the Moat crews pulled out. When she was younger, Jane had been fascinated and frightened and excited all at once, wearing a flak vest twice her size and carrying a crossbow that weighed, it seemed, almost as much as she did. Now, standing in armour that chafed and constricted her chest, holding a rifle older than she was, she felt faintly ridiculous. The herd wouldn't get in, not until they needed them to. They never had.

Then, a single, red flare fired from one of the snipers. The first runners crested the hill and hurled themselves towards the trucks waiting outside the town, roaring from throats that were still almost whole as the pack followed them in. Jane had seen them up close, could pick out the blood stains on their chests, the holes at the centre. When she was younger she'd wondered who was heroic enough to try and kill the herd, now she wondered why they always missed.

The moat crews would wait, impossibly far from their trucks, staring the runners down as they closed the distance. The moat crews had no weapons and some wore no armour, a combination of bravado and practicality. Jane had seen two of them die when she was younger, the bulky armour and arrogance they carried back then slowing them enough for the runners to reach them.

A second red flare and this one was for the moat crew. They sprinted for their trucks as, behind them, Jane and forty other people fired flaming arrows into the moat. There was a rush of hot air, a curtain of flame and the runners stopped dead, the rest of the herd flattening around them.

Then Jane and nine others were out across the cage, bounding from strut to strut towards the gates on the outer rim. The metal was already hot from the sheet of flame but it had been hotter, taller in past years. Jane reached her gate and slammed it shut, one last creature slamming against it as she did so. There was a muzzle flash, at her eye level, from the tree line and the creature dropped.

A piece of the night detached itself from the tree. Moving on all fours, the sniper crab walked to the fallen creature, drove a knife into its head with focussed, casual brutality and then hauled it back towards the tree line. A third red flare went up and Jane saw the sniper was a woman, her face covered with black circular marks. Their eyes met for a second and Jane found she couldn't move. The sniper smiled widely and then buried her mouth in the chest of her still twitching prey. Behind Jane, the town cheered.

Weeks passed and the smell worsened. The herd were ripening, becoming sluggish and docile. Now

the town was content, sleepy and only the moat crews, patiently tending their constantly shrinking fires and the fence crews were working. Most of the fence crews were working on the Slaughterman's run, the corridor that ran into the town square, made of fence wire five times the thickness of the outer cage. Jane found herself with spare time and, where the others contented themselves with drinking, sleep or sex, Jane found her way to Michael.

Michael was the oldest of them, in his late forties. He was tall and rangy and had close cropped grey hair. He had taken one of the corner watchtowers as his own and the ground on two sides of it was carefully tilled and brimming with vegetables and flowers. The next floor up was a library and classroom, open to anyone who wanted to hear what Michael had to say. Most days it was only Jane.

The herd would ripen on Michael's watch, as they always did. They clustered around his watchtower and in his younger days Michael would yell abuse at them, scream and hurl curses even as the soldiers on the other towers took careful aim and ended their lives for a second time.

Now, he sang to them. Old songs, from before the fall. Songs that Jane didn't know and didn't want to. She didn't want anything but warmth and to be left alone and if that was impossible, then Michael's company was enough.

'Looking forward to the Slaughterman?' Michael was sitting on the edge of his watchtower, his voice carrying over the low moans of the rotting vocal chords beyond the wall. She looked up, fixed him with a weary stare. 'Are you?'

He smiled. 'Not at all. Come on up.'

He met her in the classroom, it's ceiling low and the two electric lights on each side hanging cold and dark. Michael was standing by the blackboard he'd scavenged, arms folded, a teacher waiting for his class.

'I'm not a child anymore, Michael.'

He looked at her appraisingly, then nodded, unfolded his arms. 'No, I don't think you are. Coffee?'

'Is it that nettle stuff you gave me, last time?'

He smiled. 'No, it's from my personal stash. Colombian. Last tin.'

He shook it and despite herself, she smiled. 'Use half a spoon's worth. I like it weak.'

She liked it strong but it was his last tin. He smiled faintly at the kind lie and put a kettle on the small, electric stove in the corner. 'Looking forward to the Slaughterman?'

'No.'

He didn't seem surprised. 'Me neither. I'm on duty when he comes in anyway.'

'Your choice?'

He poured the coffee, handed her a cup. 'Not entirely. The first year I was here I asked some awkward questions.'

Jane leaned forward, intent. 'Like?'

'What the world's like outside the valley? Why I remember running from my house, remember arriving here covered in their blood and nothing in between?' His hand was shaking slightly. 'Now though, I have another question.'

'What?'

He looked up at her and his eyes were tired and cold. 'We've been here twenty years. Why aren't the herds getting smaller?'

The day before the Slaughterman arrived, the tattered bunting Jane had helped make from old clothes, clothes that had been washed but still carried the smell, was hung between the buildings. He arrived in a helicopter that, ten years ago, Jane had been entranced by and this year knew was older than her father and held together, in one place, with twine. Even his uniform was patchwork, Cyrillic struggling for dominance with numbers and words from a dozen different units.

As one of the oldest, she was part of the welcoming committee. He walked down the line, hair cut close to his head so no one would know it was thinning, scars covering his face and fingertips. When he drew level with her and shook her hand, Jane didn't notice the strength of the grip, or even the blank eyes above his smile. She noticed that on his right hip was a side arm and on his left was a hip flask. His breath

reeked as he clapped her on the shoulder.

'Hungry?'

She thought about Michael. 'Why aren't the herds getting smaller?' She stared him down and refused to release his hand and all of a sudden, she saw it; this man, this titan who had swept down across the herds her whole life, was frightened. She let go of his hand and he shook his head, muttered something and moved past her. Later, she would realise he'd said 'I'm sorry.'

The entire population of the town lined up, arranged by age and height and watched as he put his armour on and stepped onto the Slaughterman's run. It was raised two feet off the ground, a thick wire square with double doors at the far end, built into the city wall. Ten years ago, Jane had cheered and roared with the other children as the Slaughterman had donned his armour, stepped into the cage and the outer doors had opened. Since her birthday, all she could see were the snipers covering the killing floor, the slight limp in the Slaughterman's walk.

He cinched his last piece of armour on, looked around at the crowd and picked her out. He smiled and nodded once, waving.

The cage door shut and was locked behind him.

The outer doors began to open, two members of the fence crew winding the winches by hand.

The Slaughterman took a step forward, and the crowd cheered his bravado.

The Slaughterman took another step and the cheers became roars.

He took another and they began to die down.

He looked up at the far tower, at Michael's tower. His lips moved even though there was no way Michael could have heard him. Behind Jane, someone began to push forwards.

The doors opened.

The snipers caught the first ten, dropping each with textbook shots to heads made fragile from decay. The eleventh fell on the Slaughterman's neck and tore it out in one swift motion. The crowd screamed, surged towards the fence and Jane looked up at Michael. He shook his head, once, emphatic, a gesture directed straight at her. She pushed back as the others moved forwards, looked up and saw what none of them did.

The snipers fired into the ground outside the fence, keeping the crowd at bay as the Herd finished feeding. Once calm was re-established, they went back to the herd, methodically slaughtering each of them even as the first songs were raised in praise of the Slaughterman's ludicrous bravery and, at the back of the crowd, the cooks quietly peeled away and put on their masks and thick, brown leather aprons.

Jane turned away, walked behind her house and was loudly, violently sick.

Michael was on watch. There was a large bowl of steaming vegetable stew on the deck next to him and he was staring out across the valley towards the hills where, weeks earlier, the first runners had appeared.

'You alright?' He spoke without turning around, eyes glued to the horizon as she climbed the stairs behind him.

'No. You?'

He gestured to the stew. 'Eat, you're missing the feast.'

'I know.' She watched her left hand shake, clenched it, released it. '...They're cooking him.'

'I know. I'm sorry.'

'Michael. What happened?'

He turned, poured her a bowl of stew and balanced a hunk of thick, heavy bread on its side. 'He made a very brave choice. One I couldn't.'

'I wasn't talking about that.' She felt the anger rise. 'I was talking about' she gestured wildly. 'This, the town, the Slaughterman, everything. What happened, Michael?'

Her knees gave way and he guided her to the ground. 'Something terrible. The good news-' He smiled and it was pure and genuine and dazzling. 'Was we didn't do it. The bad news is we stood up to it.'

The weight of what he was saying pulled at her. 'We're in prison.' The words fell out of her mouth around the stew.

He nodded. 'There are worse places to be.' He was looking out across the valley as he said it. Still struggling with the realisation, and behind it, the knowledge that it was something she could not endure for the rest of her life, she swallowed hard.

'Why don't you ever come and eat, Michael?' The older man smiled and nodded towards a patch of the city where the ground had been tilled and plants grew.

'Your dad must hate that.'

'What?'

'Your questions. The fact you don't know when to let go.'

'It doesn't pay to. Why don't you eat with us?'

'I have my vegetables.' He gestured towards the small, chicken wire green house tucked into one of the back corners of the wall. 'I have what people bring me.'

'That's not an answer.'

He looked out over the valley and didn't answer for a long time. Then, finally, he turned to her and said. 'Because one day it'll be someone I know.'

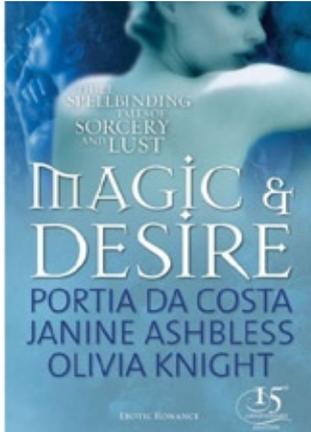
She stood and looked out across the clearing. The female sniper she'd seen tear at a body was lying face down, the back of her head missing. Even predators had standards, she found herself thinking and then the bile rose again and she turned and threw up over the side of the tower.

Michael put an arm around her and didn't say anything. He smelt of garlic and stock, of soil and a deep, wide calm. She thought about the Slaughterman, about the look of absolute serenity on his face as they retrieved his corpse and finished it. She thought about prison and what was to come. She thought about the world that had done this to her. Then, she gently disengaged from his arm, lifted her head and looked out into the darkening country.



Magic and Desire

reviewed by *alasdair stuart*



'The House of Dust' by Janine Ashbless

'Ill Met By Moonlight' by Portia Da Costa

'The Dragon Lord' by Olivia Knight

Published by Black Lace

rrp £7.99

A collection of three novellas, *Magic and Desire* showcases not only three of the best female authors working in erotica but also the best the genre has to offer. 'The House of Dust', the opening novella by Janine Ashbless demonstrates this perfectly, following the events surrounding the death of King Tamuz of Uruk in Sumer and the lengths that his chief Priestess, Shari, goes to not only avenge his death but reverse it. Ashbless has a deft, precise hand for world building and the city, and Shari's role within it, are deftly drawn within the first five pages. This talent description takes on an increasingly intense, at times nightmarish tone, as Shari descends through the multiple gates of the underworld to retrieve Tamuz's soul. These sequences, and the ordeals Shari endures, not only counterpoint but accentuate the loving, passionate relationship she enjoys with Tamuz. Sex becomes a means of communication, of negotiation, of protection and finally of the love between a King wrongfully murdered and a Priestess who will do anything to get him back.

'Ill Met By Moonlight' by Portia Da Costa takes a different tack, focussing on the relationship between Lois, a young woman on holiday and Robin, the fairy who falls for her. There's a cheerful pragmatism to Da Costa's work, presenting Lois as a charming, resolutely human young woman who reacts to her new situation with a combination of pragmatism and deep, deep love. Likewise, Robin is presented as someone both fascinated by his new human form and entranced by the idea of spending the rest of his life with Lois. Da Costa neatly accentuates the drama by introducing a ticking clock, with Robin doomed to lose his human form at the end of the witching month, May. The explanation for this is elegantly handled and there's an underlying sweetness, a cheerfully scruffy, normal feel to the relationship that's made all the more impressive by Robin's true nature.

Finally, Olivia Knight's 'The Dragon Lord' deals with Princess Nina, a young woman who has come to the part of her life where she has to take a husband, for the good of her kingdom. The courtly intrigue as Nina struggles to cope with the expectations of her parents, the affections of Mahli the man who has been chosen to marry her and her own affections for Drake, a representative of the mysterious Kingdom of Kao. Knight neatly balances the courtly matters with the practical, physical aspects of arranged marriages and Nina's 'problem', an ability to start fires with her eyes. The revelation of just what Nina is not only brings the romance into sharp relief but also leads to a final image which is as haunting as it is beautiful, finishing the book on a real high note.

Magic and Desire is an immensely strong trio of stories, all of which not only refuse to shy away from sex but use it as a means of illuminating character, furthering plot and changing the reader's approach. These are explicit stories, make no mistake, but anything less would do the writer and reader a real disservice. By turns smart, grim, funny, romantic and sexy these are deep, rich stories that demand your attention and know exactly how to get it. Both magic and desire abound here and if you're even a little interested in either, you need to make room on your shelves for this.



by Nathan Long
Published by Black Library
rrp £7.99

Forty-five years ago a friend in middle school handed me a dogged-eared copy of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* on a Friday afternoon and urged me to read it. Coincidentally, it was late fall and the temperature was falling along with the leaves on the oak trees in our yard. I read under the covers non-stop through a tempestuous rain storm; and ever since, most vampires have both terrified and fascinated me. Let me be clear, not all vampires are created equal. I prefer my vampires to follow the literary tropes established by the master, Stoker; consequently, my vampires must be nasty, sinister, brutish, sanguine, cynical, and dangerous.

Black Library's newest vampire novel, *Bloodborn*, by Nathan Long, satisfies my criteria. It is dark, cynical, entertaining, exciting, and true to both Warhammer and vampire lore. It is also a mystery, a swashbuckler, and a flawlessly presented and plotted tale. And like Stoker's novel, I received *Bloodborn* on a Friday and finished it on the following Saturday.

Bloodborn should not be a surprise to anyone who has read Nathan Long or followed the Warhammer mythos. Since its inception, Black Library has included vampires in its mythology based on the successful Games Workshop's table-top games. In that regard, both Kim Newman and Steven Savile have written vampire novels for the intellectual property and recently Mike Lee has been re-creating the history of the undead in his macabre *Nagash* trilogy. Now, Nathan Long, creator of the Black Hearts trilogy and current author of the *Gotrek and Felix* novels, enters the field brilliantly with *Ulrika*.

Ulrika, a young Kislevite noble woman, first appeared in William King's *Daemonslayer*, and should be familiar to all readers of the *Gotrek and Felix* novels. Alive, she was brave, beautiful, and maddening, especially for Felix. In death, she is still brave and beautiful but now also ruthless and deadly.

The novel begins a few weeks after the action of William King's *Vampireslayer*. *Ulrika*'s abductor, Adolphus Krieger, is dead at the hands of Snorri Nosebiter and she is a fledgling vampire, tormented by an insatiable hunger and under the control of Gabriella, her mistress. *Gotrek and Felix*, knowing they cannot help her, leave, as she struggles to come to grips with her destiny.

The novel in a fundamental way is a *Bildungsroman*, or a coming of age novel. But this theme is just one aspect of the multi-layered plot. Long has shown himself to be adept at genre fiction and he has melded several forms into this novel to great success. On one level it is a vampire story but on another it is the story of a young woman deserted by her friends, who must learn how to live in an alien culture and environment. On another, it is a truly suspenseful detective story accompanied by horror tropes.

In keeping with the idea of the *Bildungsroman*, *Ulrika* is reborn both literally and figuratively. And as a newborn (born of blood), she is, in every sense of the word, a child. At times she is petulant, demanding, selfish, reckless, and stubborn; and, throughout, her mistress, Gabriella, like a stern mother, has to rein her in and instruct her to focus and be disciplined and sensible. In that regard, Long accomplishes the near impossible; he creates an action novel, a swashbuckler, that both demonstrates a feminine voice and churns out a healthy dose of mayhem and action. This ability to make the protagonist live and breathe as a woman, rather than as a cardboard representation of a woman in an adventure tale, is truly remarkable and will, most probably, attract female readers unfamiliar with the Warhammer mythos.

Irrespective of its vampire setting or the fact it operates as a *Bildungsroman*, the novel ultimately

succeeds as a mystery set in a horrific Gothic environment, where sword and sorcery rule the day. Ulrika and Gabriella are sent to the city of Nuln to investigate the very public and brutal murders of several vampires. The exposure of vampires in the midst of the city sets off panic in the streets and Long minutely describes the city and its inhabitants' fears as well as their brutalities as days pass and the number of corpses increases. He also describes the social castes of the city and the various organizations that run it as well as the empire. Witch hunters follow the vampires and ghouls spring from the cemeteries. Long even sends his characters into the famous sewers of Nuln, the home of the skaven, to ferret out clues.

The novel is perfect in its execution and brilliantly plotted. It references many events and characters of the past, known to the followers of the Gotrek and Felix novels, but also introduces new characters and sets its young heroine on her path. It is also true to its setting. When Ulrika is not fighting with rapier and dagger, she is dressed as a lady in satin gowns, appropriate to the attire and the age of the empire. And underpinning the work is a complex history of vampires and a vast undead world for its young heroine to explore. The novel is self-contained but it is clear that Ulrika is just beginning her adventure.

Finally, there is an interesting trick of time working within the novel, which will create all sorts of conundrums for fans of the Gotrek and Felix novels. As I said above, the novel begins a few weeks after the temporal setting of *Vampireslayer*. That was twenty years preceding the action of Long's latest Gotrek novel, *Shamanslayer*. Therefore, Ulrika's stories will run concurrent to the latest Gotrek novels. I suspected this time-hopping will produce some exciting plot devices and twists.

In addition to *Bloodborn*, I also recommend Long's *Shamanslayer* and Mike Lee's *Nagash the Sorcerer*.

Doctor Who: "Hungry Earth / Cold Blood"

reviewed by scott harrison



Written by Chris Chibnall

Starring Matt Smith, Karen Gillan, Arthur Darvill, Meera Syal

Directed by Ashley Way

Saturday 22nd / 29th May, BBC1

Anyone who bought the 2008 box set *Beneath The Surface* will have already reacquainted themselves with the original Earth Reptile trilogy. The Silurians first appeared in Jon Pertwee's second outing as the Third Doctor, the classic 7-part story from 1970 *Doctor Who and the Silurians*, in which an atomic research station in Derbyshire has been built on top of system of caves that house the original intelligent inhabitants of the Earth. Believing that a rogue planetoid would collide with their world they put themselves into suspended animation until the threat was over. The planetoid settled into alignment with the Earth and became the Moon and the Silurians slept for millions of years, until the activity at the research station above began to slowly revive them.

Proving immensely popular with Saturday teatime audiences the Silurians were almost immediately pencilled in by the production team for an explosive rematch, and two years later made their second appearance with the Third Doctor in *The Sea Devils*, only this time writer/creator Malcolm Hulke decided that these creatures would be the aquatic relations of the original Silurians, necessitating a complete redesign of the costumes. Viewers would have to wait a further twelve years until they saw both Silurians and Sea Devils team up against mankind a hundred years in the future in the much hated Fifth Doctor story *Warriors of the Deep*.

Owing to their popularity amongst the *Doctor Who* fan-base it was inevitable that the Silurians would be redesigned and reimagined by the *New Who* team for a twenty-first century audience – as with the Ice Warriors, it's not a question of 'if' but 'when'.

In the small Welsh village of Cwmtaff the most ambitious drilling project ever has finally reached its target of 21 kilometres below the earth. However, the intense drilling has disturbed something ancient lying dormant beneath their feet and the very ground itself is fighting back, swallowing the drilling crew. When the Doctor arrives and Amy becomes a prisoner of the awakening Silurian population he soon realises that both sides must swiftly broker a lasting peace in order to halt the growing threat of full-scale war.

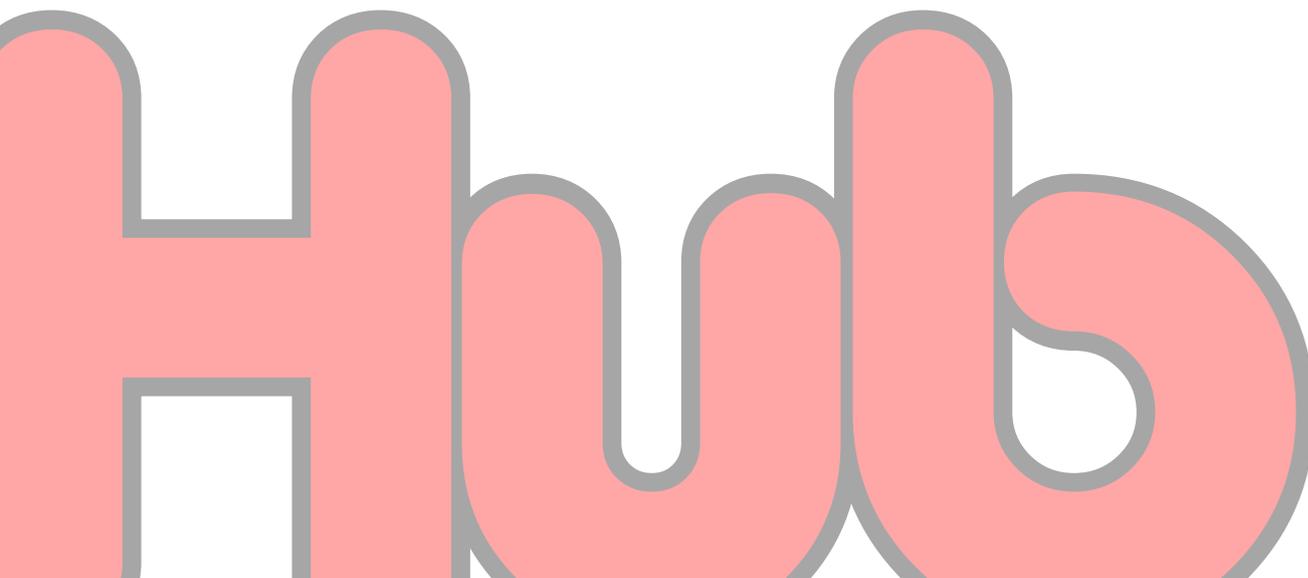
If there's one thing *New Who* has mastered over the past six years it's the ability to maintain the excitement, drama and momentum of a 2-part story. Thankfully the horrors of series one's *Aliens of London/World War III* fiasco is behind us and – with the possible exception of the pig-men in *Daleks in Manhattan/Evolution of the Daleks* – the production team have finally realised that you don't need to put excruciatingly bad childish concepts into 2-Part stories to keep the little ankle-snappers interested.

As with Moffat's earlier Weeping Angel double episode this is *Doctor Who* at its atmospheric best. All pacing and editing problems that previous series five episodes have displayed are no longer in evidence here. Dark, moody and wonderfully written and acted, this is everything we've come to demand from the BBC's most popular drama series. Matt Smith is nothing short of dazzling as the Doctor, with each performance as fresh and hypnotic as the previous week's episode, even Karen Gillan manages to pull in another good performance, particularly during the frightening dissection scenes.

Yet, it's such a shame that, as this is most probably Arthur Darvill's final appearance on the show, the *Doctor Who* team actually get his character spot on for once, no longer needing to resort to comedy prat-falls and shameful face-pulling to bring out a wonderfully poignant and well judged comedy performance. Let's hope Steven Moffat learns something from this when he's creating his next 'amusing' sidekick.

And now the pace is beginning to build towards the inevitable shattering (quite literally) climax. 26-06-10 is only four weeks away. Something dark and sinister is beginning to unlock itself within Stonehenge. Is it a box, a cage or a prison?

Perhaps one of Van Gough's paintings might hold the key...



FEATURES

Poetic Faith: Disbelief and the Geek

by trudi topham

When I was young – and let's not dwell on how young – a film came out, and I liked it a lot. That film was *Biggles*, and it took several years before it was available on video.

Finally, though, I could buy it. I could own one of my favourite films of all time ("all time" being approximately ten years or so) and I could watch it as often as I liked, whenever I liked. And as my father was the one who I'd gained my love of Science Fiction from, I decided to share it with him.

We were doing so well. He seemed to be enjoying it, even. Right up until a mean ole German officer pulled out a gun.

Dad threw his hands up in the air. "They didn't have those in World War II!"

Thus went my first brush with *The Curse of the Geek*.

We've all done it. You've done it, I've done it, geeks we've never even met have done it. Sooner or later we've all been brought up short and declared "That's not right!" And it was over some silly little thing that reasonable, normal people stare at us for. I'll bet you've even heard the immortal words "who cares?" – hardly the best balm to soothe the frayed suspension of disbelief.

The worse sin, though, occurs when another geek is up in arms about something we genuinely *don't* care about. It gives us a good, hard look at ourselves. *My god, our lizard brains say to us, is that what I sounded like when I was ranting about that 'seven simultaneous networks' line in Swordfish?*

And in that flash of realisation, of vulnerability, we turn on each other. Cry 'Havoc' and unleash the dogs of nerdrage.

The dust settles, and two camps form: on one side of this great divide are the handful of fans who were truly incensed that *Victory of the Daleks* used the wrong Spitfire for the time period; on the other is the *Who Cares* settlement.

The population of *Who Cares* varies from one story to the next. Whether a film, television programme, book or short story, something somewhere will brush up against a punter's own knowledge and cause such a violent disconnect that the whole story collapses.

And here's the real problem. This is what we really get so upset over. It's that the writer or other creator of whichever piece of media has offended us hasn't done their research. The "semblance of truth," as Coleridge put it, isn't there any more, and we lose our investment in the story. It's worse for us, too: as lovers of speculative fiction of any flavour, we require our fictional universes to carry a little more believability than contemporary literature. Our writers have to work hard at giving us that semblance of truth so that we can go along with their spaceships, time-travelling aliens, and dragon-riders. They can't just drop a reference to Big Ben or Heathrow for us to let a tale work its magic in our minds.

Let's see what Samuel Taylor Coleridge had to say on the matter. "It was agreed, that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic, yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith."

Coleridge was fighting with a desire to include supernatural elements in his stories, which were facing off against an audience whose belief in such things was waning. It was no longer good enough to write about monsters and witches as though such things were accepted fact: he realised that for such blatantly unreal story elements to be 'believable', they had to be surrounded by enough truthful elements that the reader would willingly disengage from what is real and what is not.

Only then could the audience truly enjoy a tale of such flagrant unrealism.

We want to enjoy stories. It's human nature. Our imaginations are powerful things, and stoking the fire takes us to places that our everyday lives just cannot. It doesn't matter whether we read science fiction or crime novels. I'm neither a teleporting rapist nor a mafia don, and I suspect you aren't either. The life of Inspector Morse is every bit as fantastical as that of John Constantine, and for us to allow those stories to whisk us away, we have to be able to shut the world out.

The very second that a story presents us with something which we absolutely, unequivocally, *know* to be false, it's a slap in the face to our imagination and it brings us crashing back down to the real world. We feel betrayed. How could this story lie to us? How could it string us along for so long, then crap all over our fun?

Here comes the sad truth. This isn't a geek plague. We aren't alone. I've known police officers who can no longer enjoy crime dramas, and nurses who just can't tolerate stories set in hospitals. We may cringe Obi-Wan Kenobi and Darth Vader's lightsabres swapping colours throughout their fight, but I promise you that the non-nerds are suffering too.

When I was young, I didn't have the faintest idea what Dad found so offensive about a German officer carrying the wrong pistol. Now, alas, I understand all too well. And I don't care that the police can't enjoy *A Touch Of Frost*; I just care that computers which can connect to seven networks simultaneously aren't that bloody amazing.



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