

# Hub Magazine

SCIENCE FICTION HORROR FANTASY

**PUBLISHER**  
LEE HARRIS

**MANAGING EDITOR**  
ALASDAIR STUART

**COMMISSIONING EDITOR**  
ELLEN J ALLEN

**REVIEWS EDITOR**  
PHIL LUNT

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## EDITORIAL:

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**by lee harris**

So, this weekend saw the last episode in the latest series of Doctor Who. To those who decried the casting of young Mr Smith in the title role, I offer the last 13 weeks as evidence of your wrongness. If Matt Smith isn't careful, he could well be remembered as the best Doctor, overtaking the phenomenally popular David Tennant. Karen Gillan is less successful as Amy Pond, though it's good to see a companion who is almost constantly on heat, and it'll be interesting to see how the triangle works in coming series.

But, oh how I wish we had more than 13 episodes in a season. I guess I'm just greedy!  
Congrats, Mr Moffat - you've kept me hooked!

# FICTION

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## Psikhushka

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by paula r. stiles

You're watching television in the common room. You like how the electromagnetic radiation makes a ring of fields around the box, invisible to everyone else. The pulses wash over you like summer waves.

"What's he got?" says the new nurse as he and his partner on duty count out pills, rattles in a bottle in the nurse's station. The evening round before bedtime.

"They call it 'sluggishly progressing schizophrenia'," the other one says. "Whatever keeps him here and nobody on the outside asking any questions."

"Wasn't that a Soviet diagnosis for dissidents when they put them in the "Psikhushka"?" The new one is young, eager, scarcely more than a boy.

The other one shrugs, glancing over at you as you watch the television. If you lie low and let your face go slack from the drugs, he won't bother you. "Could be. Who cares as long as he stays put?"

"We should put him in restraints for the night." The young one seems to think he should say this, that it's expected.

"Yeah, but you know he'll never stay in them." The second goon rattles more pills into a cup, probably yours. You used to remember why you hated him. "Give him an extra dose for bedtime. He'll stay put." That's why you can't remember.

Something pops at the station and the older nurse slumps forward into a spreading pool of blood. Ignoring him, the new one stands up and approaches you, a hypogun in his hand. The drugs slow your panic reaction enough that he touches you and confuses his neuroelectric field with yours before you can react. When you Blink, you bring him with you.

He's breathing hard and fast when the two of you Blink out on a road, though the drugs keep you very calm. You think you hear a distant wail, but you're not sure. The last time you tried, you didn't Blink far enough to get away for real; now you can't remember your own name.

The nurse who isn't a nurse still holds your arm. He drops the hypogun on the roadside and sneezes, no doubt trying to equalize the pressure in his ears from the air displacement. "Can you do it again?" he says. "Can you get us farther down the road? To the intersection, at least?" He still sounds eager, but in a different way.

This is a new development, but it beats more drugs. Closing your eyes, you try to concentrate. It makes you dizzy, but seconds later, the two of you Blink into midair and land on grass. The nurse yelps in surprise.

"Jesus Christ, Rob!" somebody says nearby. "I thought you were kidding! He really can do that!"

You open your eyes. The speaker is young and female, a loud, bright personality coming at you in 3-D from the cab of a dark-colored van. Already, she makes you tired, but you've Blinked too much to get away from her. When the nurse and 3-D Girl try to lift you up, your legs slip out from under you.

"Let's get him to the truck," the nurse, who obviously isn't a nurse, says. What did the girl call him? "Rob", that's right. Sounds familiar, somehow.

Not until they open the back door do you realize what they're doing. The black interior kicks up an old, bad memory of being drugged and thrown into the back of a van. You struggle, whimpering.

"It's all right. Shhh. Come on," Rob the pseudonurse says. His reassurance calms you enough that they get you in, though they have to pry your fingers off the door. Inside, Rob and 3-D Girl pounce on you. Rob holds you down while 3-D Girl cuts into your wrist with a knife. You yowl and fight.

"It's okay! It's all right!" Rob pants. "We're cutting your microchip out so they can't track us."

A final slice into your wrist makes you kick the door open. Something falls onto the floor with a faint clink. The girl lets go of you and picks it up as you break free of Rob and huddle into a corner.

"Smash it," Rob tells her as he binds up your wrist with gauze and tape. You let him do it once you realize he's trying to stop the bleeding.

The girl turns it over in her fingers. It's small, like a button. "But it has his hospital info on it."

"It's also got a tracking device. We'd be busted and psikhushka'd ourselves before we got halfway through the files. Smash it and throw it out the door."

Looking reluctant, the girl crushes the thing against the floor with the butt of her knife and brushes it out the door. After a brief consultation with Rob over directions that you don't understand, she gets out and closes you in with him.

Rob is watching you, expecting something you don't understand. "Do you remember me?" he says. You watch him back, not answering. He shakes his head and breaks his stare, looking at the dust on the floor where your microchip was. "You don't remember me," he says sadly. This seems important to him, as if you've failed some test. The van starts up.

Rob puts a blanket over you. You like him the better for it, even though you're still mad at him about getting cut. As the truck goes into gear and nobody so far has stuck a needle in your ass for Blinking, you start to like your new friends--or whatever they are--better.

You wake up on a bunk bed in a cabin. Birds sing outside, blasting away regardless of whether the sun is up or not then gradually falling silent again. It must be about four in the morning somewhere in the woods. You know this because you used to go camping back when...this memory comes from before the hospital, though, and you can't grasp it, just stroke it with the back of your hand in passing. It reassures you and that's all.

You lift your head, the mattress' stale plastic cover rustling under the pillow. You need to piss. You'd like to Blink outside to do it, but you're still too tired. You don't notice the young woman nearby nursing a baby until you almost stumble over her. She's not the same one as the girl in the van. She's younger, softer, less brittle--though they're all children to you. She smiles at you and nods, looking sleepy. You nod back and go outside, fumbling with the latch for too long before you can get out. She doesn't try to stop you; the others sleep on.

The smell of pine and the predawn chill brush past your face as you stumble out into the woods to find a convenient tree. You lean against it and take care of business. When you straighten up, something besides the woods plays across the front of your eyes. A dark room where you're plastic-tied to a chair, heart banging in your ears almost as loud as the bomb ticking underneath your feet. No way out. You were always good at getting out of bad situations, but you can't move or you'll set off the bomb. You can feel it like a living thing, crouching beneath the chair, ready to bloom into killing fire. You sit there, thinking, thinking as hard as you can of any kind of plan, wishing you could just be outside the building...

And the next moment, you land in the back alleyway, chair and all, right before the building blows up. You're so relieved that you don't think about what you've just done, that now you've given your enemies an even better reason to kill you. And who would believe you? Nobody can do what you just did, not outside of a comic book.

A baby's hiccup brings you back. You open your eyes; you've Blinked back into the cabin. The girl dozes in front of you with the baby on her shoulder. You try to remember having a family, but it's too hard, so you give up. You touch the girl's hair. She has a complex neuroelectric field, the kind you'd expect in a nursing mother who's feeding two. She opens her eyes wide and looks up at you.

"Sorry," she mouths. She probably doesn't realize that the shock you gave her came from sensing her neuroelectric field.

You spread your hands and shrug. Nothing to be sorry about. You pull up a chair and sit next to her, more falling than sitting. Goddamn drugs. You hope you won't have many side effects coming off them because you won't be taking any more. Only then do you realize that you, Kadisha and the baby are alone in the cabin. No sign of 3-D Girl or Rob.

"Where are the others?" you whisper, to avoid waking the baby.

She shakes her head. "Out getting stuff. We have to sneak." She frowns, letting the baby slide into her

lap. "I don't like it. I don't want my kid to grow up to be a thief." She looks at me, eyes as bright as those of the songbirds outside. "I'm Kadisha. You're Max, right?"

You don't know how to answer that from the echo chamber inside you that used to be a person. Instead, you slouch in your chair and try an apologetic smile that slides away from sheer exhaustion. You need to relearn how to smile.

If Kadisha notices your double failure, she doesn't say so. "They said you were big in the free-speech protest movements, that you had a lot to say about truth in the media, set up a lot of public demonstrations, before they locked you up. Rob's really proud of you. Talks about you all the time."

"Okay," you say. You can't remember what you said back then. "How long ago?"

She looks confused. "I dunno. Maybe four or five years? You just disappeared one day, snatched right off the street after a public demonstration, some people said. Once we figured out where they were keeping you, it was pretty easy. Shisky said you'd make a great spokesman and Rob said if we could break in, you could break us back out, you know? With that power you've got? That's a cool power."

"Thanks," you say. You close your eyes. When you open them, your rescuers are moving around you, Kadisha with her baby strapped to her back, in stone hard daylight. No one objects when you crawl back into your bunk and go to sleep. Rob wakes you from time to time to give you food. You eat and go back to sleep. He sits and watches you. He seems to be waiting for something that he thinks only you have.

Later that night, you wake standing in the woods and have to figure out how to Blink back in, since you can't see the cabin. At least you're not wetting the bed.

After that, it gets bad. 3-D Girl--that must be Shisky--tries to talk to you about something "important". Her face keeps dissolving into goo. You're having a bad withdrawal from the drugs, but that's too hard to explain. She finally gives up and lets you get on with it.

At least they don't hurt you or try to hold you down. They let you huddle on the bunk and cry it out. Rob tries to feed you. You're worse than the baby about that. You've long since learned not to scream. The nurse Rob killed in the hospital taught you that. They'll psikhushka *him* for that if they catch him. Sometimes, you hear a baby cry; sometimes you hear birds sing. Sometimes, you wake upside down inside of a module, staring at the Earth in space. It turns, huge and blue with brown patches, sliding silently under white cotton overhead. You reach up to touch it. So beautiful. You must have Blinked all the way to one of the private orbital stations that the rich use to get away from and above it all. A cabin in the sky. This would be a good place to hide from Them. You should remember it for later. Then, you Blink back out. Fortunately, you always seem to find your way back to the cabin in the woods. It's safe.

"We used to camp here when I was a kid," Rob says when you ask him why you're here. "You don't remember, do you?" he adds sadly. You shake your head. Whatever he wants from you, you no longer have. When he hugs you, you let him, even though you're sitting in your own shit by that point.

You wake for good one hot afternoon in the bunk. You stink and you want a bath. You get up and stagger to the door. Outside, around a picnic table, they're discussing you. You can see them darkly through the slats and the screen.

"It's no use," Shisky says. "He's been totally spaced out for two weeks. No way can he help us in the condition he's in."

"Give him a break," Rob says. Yay Rob. "He's been psikhushka'd for five years. What did you expect, Nelson Mandela? They didn't drug Mandela into a coma for years on end to keep him from walking through walls."

Shisky looks disgusted. "We got him out 'cause you said he was famous, Rob, 'cause he could help the Cause. Then, come to find out, he's just your old man."

"He was famous. He was 'The Cause' when he was our age and we were still babies." Rob says this as if he knows nobody else feels the way he does, but he'll hold to it, nonetheless. "They erased him from the history books. Did you think they'd teach him to us in school?"

"It's not nice what you want to do with him, anyway." Kadisha plays with her baby in one of those vibrating rockers. "He should have a choice, with a clear head, or we're no better than those government hospital people." You have a vague memory of rocking a child in one of those things. It's too tenuous to keep. You let it go.

The kids look up as you open the door and ease down the steps. You're very stiff. Either you haven't been moving around much lately or you've been Blinking a lot and didn't know it. The effort to move yourself and push air out of the way wherever you appear makes your bones ache when you do it too much.

"Hello," Rob says.

You recognize the polite form. "Hello," you say back, hoping you're doing it right.

Kadisha stands up. "Have a seat. Would you like something to eat?"

You assess your still nauseous and roiled up state. But your stomach is grumbling and it might help.

"Yes, please." Strange how you remember these small courtesies.

They watch you eat. Something stirs inside your hollow center. You've seen that look before--of being watched and weighed and copied. You chew slowly to avoid throwing up.

"Who are you?" you say once you're done.

The kids glance at each other, nonplussed, especially Rob, who wants so much from you. "People who wanted to help," Rob says finally.

This may be true. "What happens now?"

Shisky is watching you. "Do you remember anything?"

Not much to say there. "The hospital was bad." You want out of the conversation. When you look down at your pants, you see a ready excuse in the stains there. You must have been rocking in your bunk for weeks. "Where's a shower?"

All three of them point past the cabin to the right, where an overgrown dirt road runs off around a bend. You go down there and find a pond. You jump in, clean yourself thoroughly and walk back (not Blinking) before your rescuers have stopped talking about you.

"Maybe we shouldn't have him do this," Rob is saying. "I don't know. Kadisha's got a point. It doesn't seem right."

"What?" you say, coming up right behind Rob. All three of them jump. The baby wakes up and starts crying.

"You scared us!" Shisky says. "Did you...um..."

"Blink in? No." You put your head to one side and look at them. "What do you want?"

The fall over each other telling you. They've been crying in the wilderness for so long. You remember how that feels.

We want to generate a media event," Rob explains. "We want to show that dissenting views are legitimate, too."

"We tried speaking out. Doing broadcasts of our own, blogs, podcasts, livecasts, viral marketing threads," Shisky adds.

Rob smiles and glances over at Kadisha. "Kadisha came up with some good ones. She's our media specialist."

Kadisha doesn't smile back. "Yeah, and they threw me in jail for a couple of days for being a troll. Since when did starting a flamewar become illegal? I threw up the whole time. That's how I figured out I was pregnant." She jiggles the baby, scowling. "And then they erased all my stuff. Said it was 'off-topic'. Every time you criticize the media, every time you say something that makes people think, it's 'off-topic'."

"So, we decided to do something they couldn't suppress or ignore," says Shisky. "And since the media's all fluff or mindless death and destruction these days, we figured we had to scare them."

"But not hurt anybody," Rob insists.

"Then we'd be as bad as them," Kadisha adds.

Shisky looks like she doesn't agree, but she won't go against the others. Everybody has a minority opinion. Instead, she says, "Rob had some old footage of you popping into events, hitting some politician with a pie or a slogan, and popping out."

You're pretty sure that you were more subtle than that, but maybe not.

"Once we decided to break you out," Shisky continues, "Kadisha got the idea that you do something like one of your old stunts, something that would be really dangerous otherwise, but a cinch for you."

"You don't have to do it if you don't want to," Kadisha adds quietly. "It's just that Rob says everybody

liked you back then because you'd never condone violence. That's why the authorities were always chasing you; you were persuasive. So, we thought you might go for this."

You're pretty sure that some of your old comrades didn't like your approach, that maybe one of them was behind your getting caught. But maybe not.

Now, Rob doesn't look so confident. "How many people can you travel with?"

"Two, possibly three, at a time," you say.

"That's enough," Shisky says. The other two give her a look. "What?" she protests. "It is."

"Just lay it out," you say, heading off the argument before it starts. God, they're young.

It takes them a while to explain. When they finish, you're still not sure it's a smart idea. They think they can make a big enough splash to raise the notice of some real revolutionaries, a group with resources and experience that might take them in. They're tired of running.

You don't have the heart to tell them that's a fantasy, that revolutionaries can be just as ruthless and cruel as fascist governments. They're young and they don't yet understand that it's all futile. So, you'll try their stunt. They got you out of the hospital. And you are beginning to realize who Rob is to you, even if you don't remember him or this place. You only hope you can get them out of what will come down afterward.

Before you leave, Rob takes you aside. "Are you sure you want to do this?"

"It's okay." You're touched by his concern.

He shakes his head. "No, it's not." His earnestness stirs a memory in the wind tunnel of your head. You remember how you held him when he was a baby, just a baby, like Kadisha's little one now. "I don't want to lose you, even if you don't remember me. I want you to know your grandson."

He means Kadisha's baby. His baby. You hadn't made that connection before. "You won't," you say, though it's a promise you shouldn't make.

"What did you think you were fighting for back then?" he asks.

"The freedom to say things nobody else wants to hear. Without getting locked up."

"That's it?" he says.

"Wasn't it enough?" He has no reply to that.

You take the crude device Rob gives you with the alarm clock stuck into the lumpy clay and put it under your shirt. He warns you about wearing a coat. That could get you shot on the monorail. You wonder when people stopped thinking being shot for wearing unseasonable clothing in public was criminal overkill.

The monorail is several miles from the abandoned campground. Shisky shows you a map and a photo of it, then tries a compass. You try to explain that you can sense the direction on your own through the earth's electromagnetic field. She doesn't understand. She probably wouldn't believe you could Blink if she hadn't seen it herself. So, you establish the direction with the map to humor her and Blink out to the monorail.

You Blink first into the area past the guard station and the turnstiles. A couple of people do a double-take, then keep on walking past you. You confuse them enough that they let your sudden appearance go as an optical illusion. Moving into the crowd, you let the flow take you upstairs onto the monorail. It's so easy you almost can ignore the ticking under your shirt, against your stomach.

Getting the bomb out unnoticed is not so easy, but once you do, you slide it under your seat. Here comes the hard part. As the monorail jerks forward, you stand and casually move down the aisle. You don't have much time--the bomb goes off in five minutes. You sit between two people, a woman and a man, and let their neuroelectric fields synchronize with yours. They look bored and indifferent, playing with their PDAs, staring out the window, picking their noses. Until you Blink them out.

You take them beyond the turnstiles, where they start screaming. You ignore them. You return to a riot. You wade into it and Blink again. You drop two more panicked rioters off beyond the turnstiles and Blink back.

The passengers are ready for you this time, so they think. Several of them rush you before you can get your bearings and wrestle you to the ground. You Blink two more out. They're so shocked that you are able to crawl out from under them and Blink back up the monorail.

You don't know how much time you have, but it can't be much. You stalk the few left. It's exhausting work, even two at a time. Any more and you'd lose yourself. One last hysterical girl goes after you with a fire extinguisher. You fend her off, your back crawling with the thought of that bomb crouching under your chair, ready to explode any moment. You Blink the both of you out when she takes a swing and misses, stumbling against you.

Now, the riot is around the turnstiles amid small tornadoes of air displacement and Security is everywhere. You Blink out fast and as far away as you can. They're bound to catch the action on the CCTV cameras. In fact, Rob and the others are counting on it. You don't have the heart to tell them you don't think this stunt will work. It's like tickling an elephant with a feather.

Rob and Shisky get you into the van before you collapse and away you all go, back to the campground.

"You should move," you say, when you realize they're still using that as a home base.

"It'll be fine," says Shisky. "They never come here anymore. Nobody even thinks about the natural environment. Too busy getting hooked up and plugged in."

You don't mention the irony when the kids do just that, hooking up an old television and clicking through the usual channels. Once state of the art with a DVD recorder, it's obsolete, missing newer models' non-audiovisual sensory features loaded with subliminals and spyware. You've heard the hospital nurses talk about how even the news gets jacked up, so that people feel they're living instead of existing. Information junkies, getting everything but the truth.

The news comes on. What's front and center? The bombing on the monorail. The tragic bombing on the monorail. The vicious, evil bombing on the monorail that took 13 lives. You can't help appreciating the propaganda choice of bad-luck number.

Rob is stunned. "But...that's not true! You got everyone out! I could hear people yelling about it."

"If the truth weren't important, would they try to take it away from you?" You sip a cup of instant coffee. "They make the news. You don't. Simple as that." You down the rest of the coffee. "Sleep in the woods tonight. It's important. They'll find you. They have a perimeter to search now." You have an idea about where to go next, but you can't do it until you convince the kids to get out.

Rob, Shisky and Kadisha glance at each other, looking frightened. "There's no way we can get out of here in time," Kadisha says, jiggling the baby until he starts to cry. She looks ready to cry, too. "That's why we holed up here. There's no place out there safe from Them."

You feel tired and after a moment, you understand why--it's time you took charge. "Don't worry about it," you say. Not even Rob looks reassured. You let it go. "Sleep in the woods tonight. Make them think someone's in the cabin here. It'll be fine."

The kids do as you say, even unsure as they are. Their world has been rocked. Of course they thought that the truth would out.

You get the kids packed up and huddled out in the woods, three campsites south of the cabin, down by the water. Rob wraps his arms around Kadisha as she holds the baby. Nighthawks cry on the still, cold air. Shisky sits against your shoulder, having no one to watch her back like Rob and Kadisha. Poor kid. She's not brittle, just lonely.

"Do you think there are others like you?" Kadisha whispers to you.

"Yes," you say without hesitation. "They've just hidden better. Or they're dead." You've never doubted that. You can't be the only one of your generation faced with impossible choices, given a new one from somewhere in the DNA.

Shisky tries to post a watch, but with no fire and huddled together, everyone soon falls asleep. You don't. You try to reconstruct your thoughts, instead, to imagine something far away and high above. You hope it's still there, that private space station, a cabin in the sky like the cabin in the woods. Waiting. Out of reach.

You can get them up there. You're almost sure of it. But it's going to hurt you bad. You've never Blinked more than two other people before.

The ones who destroyed you come near dawn, sneaking in from the outside road. They're so proud of their woodcraft, as if it makes them braver, more competitive in life's big race. No matter how they creep,

you sense them, hostile neuroelectric fields, pushing in on your little group from all around, like a buzz of bees.

You're not up for this, but you have to try. You shake Kadisha gently. "Kadisha, wake up."

Confused, she sits up, holding the sleeping baby. "Are they here?"

"Yes." She starts up, ready to fly. You pull her back down. "Don't. It won't help. Come here and breathe."

You hold her hands and as you do, she settles. Rob is awake now and Shisky, who felt you stir. Your hindbrain rebels--too much interference from too many neuroelectric fields at once. But your conscious mind, the one your enemies tried to suppress, welcomes your little family's undamaged minds. If you can hook them all in, you can do it, even though you're already feeling the strain. You concentrate very hard on smoothing everything out, on synchronizing. "Just...breathe."

And the three of them do. As the woods come alive around you in a smash and crash of violence, as the cabin goes up in flames, you conjure an image before you, one high in the sky--a cabin in orbit, where you went before. But you went alone.

Someone shouts, "I've found them!" from very close. You have it; you think you can do it. There's just one problem. You can't take your family and keep yourself together. Thinking, feeling, speaking, *being* a real person who cares about someone else enough to Blink them someplace safe is too much. Something has to give.

So, you give. And Blink.

It's hard to remember. You can eat on your own now, even say a few words. Conversation swirls around you as the others make plans. Rob has found someone who will take them away to the Moon. Literally. This someone has established a makeshift colony there of old station parts, a haven. You don't take much of this in, but if Rob's doing it, it must be good. Because Rob is...because Rob is... You can't get it yet. Again. But you will.

Rob doesn't push you, though he uses his name around you a lot. Rob, Rob, Rob. As if you've forgotten. He tells the others, "He came back before. He can do it again." And they smile and nod. They have faith in you, even if you don't remember them. You smile back because they keep you safe. That's all you need to know right now.

While the others plan, you hold the baby, the Earth floating above you. He smiles at you. This is your grandson. Your grandson. You don't remember being old enough to have one.

Everything else is fragmented, a shattered comet. But the fragments still occupy the same orbit. You'll remember again. Someday. You're sure of that.



## Doctor Who: “Vincent and the Doctor”

reviewed by scott harrison



**Written by Richard Curtis**

**Starring Matt Smith, Karen Gillan, Tony Curran**

**Directed by Jonny Campbell**

Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> June, BBC 1

The idea of the Doctor travelling back in time and meeting famous names from Earth history isn't a concept unique to twenty-first century Who. Nor is the idea that the Doctor has, at some point in their life, been a major influence or guiding light within their work.

(However, the Doctor popping back in time just to roger one of England's most famous monarchs, purely because he's coming to the end of his current incarnation and just doesn't care anymore, *is* particularly unique to New Who and something we should perhaps gloss over for the moment. Ahem!)

As early as the show's fourth story, way back in February 1964, the Doctor's Saturday tea-time adventures began to become entwined with and, to a greater or lesser degree, influence the political, artistic or scientific endeavours or some of the most notorious and brilliant minds in world history. Here, in this case, the First Doctor, along with original TARDIS crew of Ian Chesterton, Barbara Wright and granddaughter Susan, find themselves in the year 1289 and travelling in the caravan of Venetian explorer Marco Polo across Cathay en route for the court of the mighty Kublai Khan.

Back then the programme had been designed as a family show that would not only entertained the hip 'n' groovy *Juke Box Jury* audience but would also explore scientific and historical themes that might prove educational and informative to all the young children watching. For the first four years of *Doctor Who* at least a third of each of its nine-story seasons would be given over to 'pure' historical adventures – all science fiction elements (save for the Doctor's party) ejected in favour of stories based on actual recorded events. A trend that was eventually stopped by the season four finale *Evil of the Daleks* in 1967.

Producing a purely historical episode of *Doctor Who* now would probably be televisual suicide as the modern viewing audience looks to programming less for educational purposes and more for escapism and excitement.

Having spotted something alien and malevolent peering out of a window in Van Gogh's *The Church at Auvers* while visiting the Musee d'Orsay in Paris, the Doctor and Amy travel back to Auvers-sur-oise, France in 1890, to find an invisible alien called a Krafayis stalking the town's tiny cobbled by-streets. They soon befriend Vincent van Gogh who, only months away from committing suicide, is battling demons of his own, troubled as he is by acute mental illness and crushing self-doubt. The Doctor and Amy decide to show Van Gogh the impact of his work upon future generations, in the hope of bringing a little peace of mind to the Dutch painter in the last days of his life.

I have to admit, I was – like countless other fans – a little dubious when I heard that writer Richard Curtis would be providing a script for series 5. OK, so he's written for and created such classic comedies as *Blackadder*, *The Vicar of Dibley*, *Not the Nine O'Clock News* and *Spitting Image*, but let us not forget he's also unleashed upon the world such god-awful insults to the British Film Industry as *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, *Love Actually*, *Bean* and *Bridget Jones's Diary*. What he giveth with one hand, he seems to taketh away with the other. Would we be getting a classic like *Blackadder*, or a real stinker like *Love Actually*?

Those sleepless nights were all for nothing.

*Vincent and the Doctor* is a work of stunning genius and arguably one of the most beautifully realised and visually sumptuous episodes of *Doctor Who* ever produced. As with his earlier episode *The Vampires of Venice* director Jonny Campbell utilises the town of Trogir to the best of its abilities, convincingly transforming a modern day Croatian town in to provincial France in the closing days of the nineteenth century. As with Van Gogh's work, much is made of light and colour throughout the episode, particular deep blues and golden yellows, intended, no doubt, to match various pieces of the artist's work, most notably *Self Portrait* (1890), *Road with Cypress and Star* (1890), *The Starry Night* (1889) and *Still Life : Vase with Twelve Sunflowers* (1888).

Actor Tony Curran proves that he was born to play the role of the troubled artist by offering up a wonderfully measured and touchingly tragic portrayal of a character that could, in less assured hands, have spiralled into cheap, soap opera-esque mellow-drama. So similar is Curran in appearance to Van Gogh's own self portraits (particularly his 1889 piece hanging in the National Gallery of Art in Washington) that show runner Steven Moffat admitted in the accompanying *Doctor Who Confidential* that not only were they supremely confident to have the actor standing in the same shot as Van Gogh's own portraits but actually insisted on doing it several times throughout the entire episode.

It seems strange, given *Doctor Who*'s incredible history as well as the Doctor's unquestionable propensity for seeking out and befriending important historical figures, that the Time Lord hasn't found himself bumping up against Van Gogh before now. Indeed, as the Doctor has never been one to shy away from shameless name-dropping in the company of others, the fact that he's rarely been mentioned in the past might lead us to believe that this is his first encounter with the Dutch painter – remarkable in itself when you consider that such legendary names as Leonardo De Vinci, Napoleon Bonaparte, Chairman Moe Tse-Tung, Harry Houdini, William Shakespeare, Winston Churchill and both Queen Elizabeth I & II are listed among his close personal friends.

As for next weeks episode, the Doctor sharing a flat with that bloke off *Gavin and Stacy* might turn out to be a stroke of absolute genius or contender for the worst idea for an episode ever...which will it be?

## **Doctor Who: "The Lodger"**

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*reviewed by scott harrison*

**Written by Gareth Roberts**

**Starring Matt Smith, Karen Gillan, James Corden**

**Directed by Catherine Moorhead**

Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> June, BBC1

Comedy episodes of *Doctor Who* tread a very fine line. Get it right and you've got yourself a bona fide poll topping classic, get it wrong and the whole thing will stink like year-old Gorgonzola.

Since the Dennis Spooner penned story *The Romans* back in the programme's second season there have been many out and out comedy episodes scattered throughout its forty-seven year run. Many, like the aforementioned *The Romans*, *Unicorn and the Wasp* and *City of Death*, are regarded warmly by *Doctor Who* fans, while others, like *The Gunfighters*, *Love and Monsters* and *Nightmare of Eden* are anything but.

For a time, around the show's sixteenth and seventeenth seasons, the darker, more horrific content of the programme was played down. Despite a meeting the previous year where BBC Head of Serials Graeme McDonald had expressed his concerns to current producer Graham Williams that the humour was, perhaps,

going a little too far, the next two years would see dramatic tension and tight plotting roughly shoved aside in favour of jokey dialogue and visual gags.

Under the comedic pen of script editor Douglas Adams the show would continually walk that fine line; although sometimes getting it right, this swift descent into Footlights Review silliness and childish slapstick would bring the show only a hair's-breadth away from cancellation.

Fortunately, this latest episode of *New Who* got it spot on.

When the Doctor is stranded on Earth, separated from both Amy and the TARDIS, he decides to answer a flat-sharing ad he discovers in a newsagent's window. While he attempts to discover the cause of time disturbances in and around Aickman Road people are being lured to the flat upstairs by mysterious young children claiming to need help, never to be seen again. As the dry rot spreads in the flat below the Doctor must stop whatever is killing helpless passers-by, guide Amy and the TARDIS safely back to Colchester, get Craig and Sophie to finally admit that they love each other and win the local football match between rival pubs the King's Arms and the Rising Sun.

As with his previous episode *The Unicorn and the Wasp* writer Gareth Roberts proves that he has the deftest touch with comic dialogue and naturally humorous situations. Here, as with his wonderful Agatha Christie episode, the comedy arises naturally from characters and story rather than feeling like it was crowbarred in by over enthusiastic actors during rehearsals. With the prolonged absence of Amy this episode feels like it had much in common with series three's Doctor-lite story *Blink*, and I'm sure, come the next *Doctor Who Magazine* poll, it'll score just as favourably.

Matt Smith steals every scene, giving what is undoubtedly his best performance as the Eleventh Doctor so far – not to mention the funniest performance by the Doctor since William Hartnell romped through ancient Rome back in 1965. With performances this strong in only his first year on the programme, we can only look forward to series 6 with a mixture of expectation and excitement.

But, with the brief comedic interlude over, it's time to plunge headlong into the end of all things. There's a bunch of romans camped out near Stonehenge and there seems to be talk of Drahvins...remember those?

## ***Doctor Who: "The Pandorica Opens"***

*reviewed by scott harrison*

**Written by Steven Moffat**

**Starring Matt Smith, Karen Gillan, Alex Kingston**

**Directed by Toby Haynes**

Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> June, BBC1

Do you remember the days when British science fiction and fantasy television used to be straightforward and uncomplicated? I'm talking way back, in those seemingly carefree times; back before the telly-watching public (not to mention the programme makers themselves) had even heard the words 'story arc' or 'through story', let alone knew what they meant.

Back in the late 1970s and early 80s putting together a British genre series was pretty much about getting a bunch of workable scripts in front of the cameras as fast as possible in order to ensure that the network had something to broadcast other than the test-card. The production team had little time to think or plan too far ahead. More often than not the script editor would be working with eight to ten writers for each season, many of whom would be providing their first script for that particular series.

This isn't to say that the concept of a 'story arc' hadn't made it on to British soil at all. Mid to late 70s sci-fi shows such as *Blake's 7* and *Survivors* would carry over many plot strands, themes and character conflicts across the course of several episodes, sometimes only being resolved at the resolution of the final story of the season. Interestingly *Blake's 7* was also one of the first genre series (both here and in the U.S.) to include an end of series cliffhanger that would keep the viewer's interest until its resolution in the first episode of the next series – in fact, its season two cliffhanger is practically identical to that seen at the end of *Star Trek : The Next Generation's* third season some eleven years later!

If you can remember this time then you probably agree with me that these season spanning 'story arcs' are the greatest gift that American television has ever given us. Thanks to those influential U.S. shows of the 80s and 90s British television has a lot more depth, emotion and plausibility than ever before – *Doctor Who* perhaps benefiting more than most.

Watching the first part of this series 5 finale, *The Pandorica Opens*, it's blindingly obvious that show runner Steven Moffat has shaped each individual story this year in order to fit together like the pieces of some impossible jigsaw.

Acting on a message left to him by River Song at the dawn of time, the Doctor takes Amy to Roman Britain, in 102 AD. Meeting up with Professor Song (who is disguising herself as Cleopatra) they enter a secret chamber beneath nearby Stonehenge to discover the Pandorica, a legendary prison box that is said to contain the most notorious and dangerous being the universe has ever known. Things go from bad to worse when they discover that Stonehenge is transmitting a warning signal out into the universe, attracting some of the Doctor's oldest enemies, including Daleks, Cybermen, Sontarans and Autons. Add to that the terrifying fact that the Pandorica is slowly beginning to open and its dreadful contents will soon be unleashed upon the world, not to mention the prophetic painting by Vincent van Gogh that depicts the TARDIS exploding bringing about the end of the universe, this could quite possibly be the worst day in all the Doctor's lives...and it's about to get a thousand times worse!

As unbelievable as it sounds the series 5 finale is bigger and more audacious than the Russell T. Davis penned Davros / Dalek two parter that rounded off 2008's fourth series. In the accompanying *Doctor Who Confidential*, writer Steven Moffat explained that he wanted to raise the stakes unbelievably high, leaving the viewer in no doubt that this was the biggest, most dangerous situation the Doctor had faced so far. And he did just that. Moffat has managed to chuck everything bar the kitchen sink at these final episodes, masterfully weaving in characters and plot elements from many previous stories, most of which began way back in the season opener *The Eleventh Hour*. New boy Toby Haynes proves that he has both a talent and flare for directing *New Who*, presenting us with what is arguably the most atmospheric and cinematic episode this year. As with the earlier Weeping Angel story, *The Pandorica Opens* is perhaps the most exciting and visually flawless episode since the change in production staff last year – easily a contender for best Eleventh Doctor story so far.

By now all the main cast have settled nicely into their roles, and we'd expect – nay, demand - nothing more than top notch performances all round. And this is what we get. As usual Matt Smith is a joy to watch, particularly those scenes in which he plays opposite Karen Gillan. It's obvious that everyone is having a wonderful time making the series, Alex Kingston included, whose returning character of River Song becomes more endearing and more lovable with each appearance.

In an interview, back at the beginning of series 5, Matt Smith admitted that after he had read the script for *The Pandorica Opens* his first thought was "How are they going to get out of this?", and it's a sentiment this reviewer certainly shares with him. It's almost impossible to imagine how episode 13 will play out, who will feature in it, and how it will finally get resolved. All we can be sure of is that we will definitely be seeing

a certain little red-headed girl again. A certain little red-headed girl who we haven't seen since we left her sitting on a suitcase in her back garden waiting for the Doctor to return.

You see. The series finale relying on the return of a character we've not seen since the beginning of the series...that's a 'story arc' that is! And thank god for 'em!

## **Doctor Who: "The Big Bang"**

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*reviewed by scott harrison*

**Written by Steven Moffat**

**Starring Matt Smith, Karen Gillan, Alex Kingston, Caitlin Blackwood**

**Directed by Toby Haynes**

Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> June, BBC1

In a universe where nothing has ever existed and only the Earth and its Moon are left, a little girl is kneeling in her bedroom, praying to Santa Claus to send someone to fix the scary-looking crack in her wall. But no one comes. While time and space is slowly being erased, on little Amelia's world only she can remember the stars that used to come out at night, and history has become both jumbled and meaningless to the billions of people who stand in the eye of oblivion.

Disturbed from sleep by voices downstairs she discovers a mysterious pamphlet has been pushed through her letterbox instructing her to go to the National Museum. The next day, while walking through displays of a jumbled and confused Earth history (dinosaurs in ice, penguins from the Nile and strange and ancient Roman stone 'gods') Amelia Pond soon finds herself face to face with the most puzzling artefact ever discovered – the Pandorica. Another note tells her to stay in the museum and, after hiding behind one of the displays until the museum has closed for the day, Amelia emerges to find that the Pandorica is starting to open. But instead of finding a strange and ungainly young man trapped inside, she finds a young woman with long red hair who looks strangely familiar.

And, as the adult Amy Pond quite rightly points out, this is where it gets complicated.

In the recent issue 423 of *Doctor Who Magazine* episode 11 scriptwriter Gareth Roberts spoke of the fundamental difference between the characters of the Tenth and Eleventh Doctors. "I think (the Doctor's) brain gets rewired and different bits lead to different sections every time he regenerates." states Roberts. "David's Doctor had an amazingly well wired-up brain...I think Matt is more like earlier Doctors, in that his brain is wired-up more haphazardly." I couldn't agree more with Gareth Robert's words, putting his finger on the very nub of series five's phenomenal critical success. This, in my opinion, is the very reason why Matt Smith's characterisation has brought sheer pleasure to an average audience of seven to eight million people over the past thirteen weeks.

When it was announced that the twenty-seven year old actor would be taking over the role of the nine hundred plus year old Time Lord there were several fans and critics who were quick to pour scorn on the new production team's choice. *Doctor Who* novelist and creator of *Faction Paradox*, Lawrence Miles, dismissed the new Doctor as 'sub-Tenth Doctor' whilst suggesting that Steven Moffat et al had been less than courageous in their casting (and if his regular messages on Twitter are anything to be believed, he has thus far refused to watch a single episode of series five).

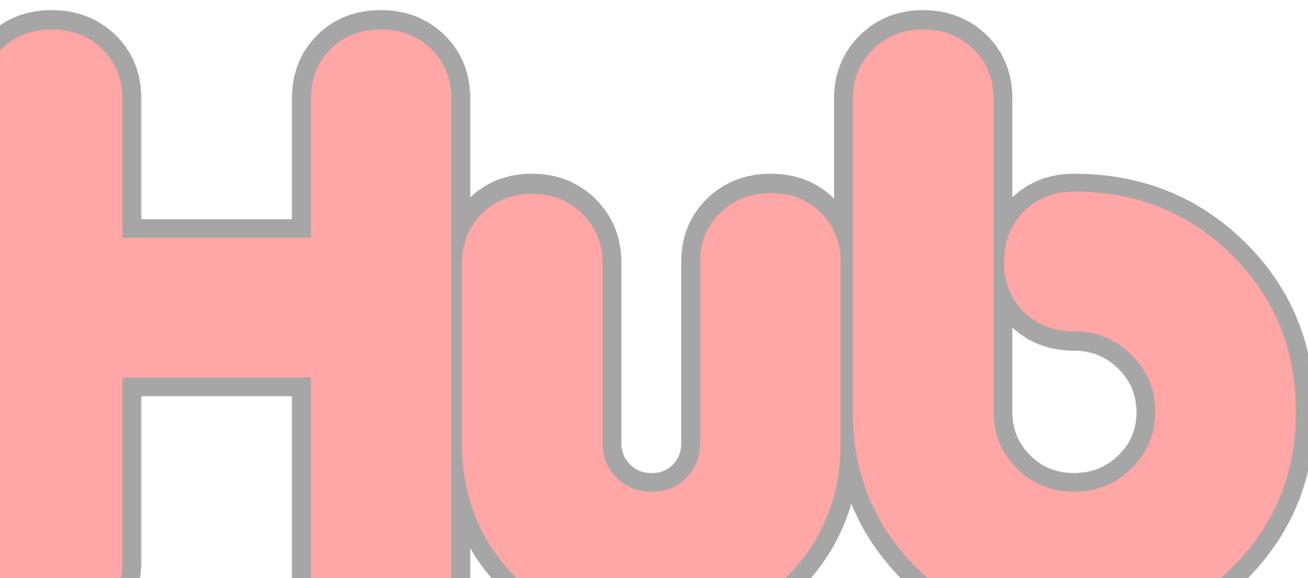
Yet Smith's performance has been nothing less than consistently marvellous, presenting the audience with a characterisation that couldn't be more different from any of his predecessors, especially that of David Tennant. *The Big Bang* being no exception.

Writer Steven Moffat's plotting and pacing are both superb, complemented splendidly by Toby Haynes sensitive direction, culminating in what are arguably the best and most visually stunning episodes of series five. The regular cast go through their paces with plenty of verve and energy, while particular note should be given to Caitlin Blackwood who turns in a sparkling performance as little Amelia Pond, which is made all the more remarkable when you learn that she has never acted before. My only criticism is that she isn't given enough screen time and it would have been wonderful to see her as the Doctor's companion for an entire episode. Let's hope we see her again soon.

Talking of companions, strangely this will be the first time in *New Who* that both the same incarnation of the Doctor and the companion have appeared together in two consecutive seasons, which is something I've been hoping for since Rose left the TARDIS; hopefully disproving Russell T Davies' old adage that characters must continually change and move on in order to keep the programme fresh and viewers interested. *Doctor Who* fans of old will know that this is nonsense, of course, as companion Sarah Jane Smith lasted the better part of four years and the camaraderie that built between her and the Fourth Doctor was a pleasure to watch.

And sadly that's it until the Christmas Special in six months time. It's been a strange and exhausting journey, as is always the case when the reset button is pushed and we have to get used to a new Doctor; but there have been many changes this time, the likes of which we haven't seen since its return six years ago. But it's been an exciting journey, nevertheless, and both the show and the audience have come out the other side stronger and all the happier for it. It's a great relief to know that *Doctor Who* is in good hands and that its future is assured.

Fingers crossed that the Christmas Special involves the Egyptian goddess aboard the Orient Express, because that sounds bloody marvellous!



# FEATURES

## **Amy Pond's Legs and Amy Pond's Brain**

*by emma jane davies*

I like Amy Pond. I like that she's hot, I like that she's sexy. I would like to see more Amy Pond on the television. If Amy Pond was up for it (and she seems like the kind of girl who might be), I would.

I also like Amy Pond's short skirts. I like her hot pants. I like her legs. I would like to see more of Amy Pond's legs on the television.

There is however, a line, beyond which we get silly. Amy Pond in Renaissance Venice, wearing a denim skirt that barely covers her ladygarden, is SILLY. Amy Pond wearing hot pants in Wales in the middle of winter is SILLY. Karen Gillan is a redhead, a very beautiful redhead, and I can only imagine the lengths that she must have gone to, to prevent her naturally pale skin from turning lilac.

I am not a Daily Mail reader. The sight of bare skin does not shock me. The last thing I want to do is give justification to the anti-Pond prudes. I am aware that Karen Gillan has some say over her own wardrobe. However, just as I hated the way that the Who team made the gorgeous Rose Tyler look frumpy and fat (and whiny and tearful and insecure), I also hate the way the Who team (Gillan included) have made Amy Pond look like a bit of a Peri Brown.

"I thought we were going to Rio," is not an excuse. It is a writing device to get around the fact that the Who team have dressed Amy inappropriately for the weather, in order to show off her stunning legs. This does not make it any more believable. It takes two minutes to pop back into the TARDIS and swap your hot pants for a pair of jeans. Besides, if you were expecting Rio, why the heck are you wearing a cardigan and a leather coat?

Who's companions are notorious for dressing inappropriately in historical settings, and it's never worked. Unless it's part of the plot, it comes across as SILLY. Every time I see it done, my disbelief fails to suspend, especially when the natives go on with their daily lives as if they haven't seen a semi-naked woman step out of a big blue box.

There's a line. In the middle of Renaissance Venice, that line is canions or breeches (which, to be frank, would be far sexier than a denim skirt anyway). In the middle of a Welsh winter, that line is OPAQUE TIGHTS. It is possible to be sexy whilst wearing appropriate attire for your surroundings. Skinny jeans and long boots are sexy. A silk dress is sexy. A corset is very sexy. Unlike hot pants, they are also subtle.

Too much overt sexiness turns you into arm candy, burying your personality and hiding your intelligence, because people are too busy looking at your body and saying things like, "Fwoargh, that Amy Pond is a bit of alright." Currently, Amy Pond will go down in companion history as "the hot, vapid one with the legs." I'd much rather see her as "the hot, kooky one with the brain," because she does have a brain. Did you notice?

Let's face it. The BBC wardrobe department (Gillan included), are dressing Amy Pond for the dads. Sci-fi is a field dominated by men, and is notorious for limiting women's representation in the genre to under-dressed, over-exposed sexpots. Frequently their characters are brainless, passive or reactive instead of proactive, require rescuing and defending (sometimes with macho fist fights), or serve no actual purpose to the plot. Take a look through a list of the top one hundred sci-fi films, and count how many of them have prominent or leading female characters with distinct personalities, see how many of their names you can remember, and try to recall points in the plot where they altered events by making a crucial decision.

Now count how many films have more than one significant female character, and how many films have a female character who is not a love interest.

Even amongst the progressive and/or woman-centred science fiction, we still find the sexpot. Uhura, though revolutionary in her day, was still a secretary in a short skirt. Lara Croft may have been a female lead, but she was a walking pair of tits with an underdeveloped personality. Barbarella was, well, deliberate.

Star Wars broke ground back in the seventies. Princess Leia, although she did require rescuing, had a proactive, commanding character who actually influenced the plot. Terminator and Alien also broke new ground, simply by having a female lead (even if she was always on the defensive, running away from a violent threat). Star Trek made huge inroads by having a female-dominated cast in Voyager – Captain Janeway, B'Elanna Torres as chief engineer, and Seven of Nine, who managed walk the fine line of being both sexy, and intelligent. Yes, the outfit was sprayed on, but the fact that Seven was proactive, had a big brain, a distinct personality, and was slightly terrifying, balanced the gratuitous one-piece. As a result of having several strong female characters, Voyager actually passed the Bechdel Test. Women spoke to one another, and not always about men!

Doctor Who made inroads of its own back in Sylvester McCoy's day, with Ace. Ace was the first Doctor's companion who did not scream and run away and require constant supervision in case she wandered off and died. Melanie Bush was pathetic. Leela was a walking jungle Jane outfit. Peri Brown was a screaming cleavage. On the other hand, Ace was ace. The Doctor Who team wrote her as an antidote to the companions who went before. She blew stuff up, against orders. She smashed up Daleks with baseball bats. She spouted dreadful fake slang. She was hot, without being blatantly under-dressed for the weather. The Doctor couldn't control her, but he loved her with a fatherly affection that he rarely showed his previous companions, with perhaps the exception of Sarah Jane.

Having a loose cannon for a companion is a great opportunity for plotting and conflict. I had very high hopes for Amy Pond, first when she handcuffed the Doctor to a radiator in episode one, then when she took matters into her own hands in episode two, "The Beast Below," and released the star whale against the Doctor's orders. Unfortunately, we haven't really seen any more of that side of Amy, apart from a brief moment of trying to seduce the Doctor, and, under River Song's influence, making him look foolish now and then. To suggest that Amy's character is poorly formed, inconsistent, and indistinct, is justifiable. The scriptwriters don't seem to have a clear grasp of who she is. So far, Amy is largely passive and predictable. Sure, she uses her ingenuity when she needs to, for example, by training a gun on the Silurians (to no benefit, the action became irrelevant due to her immediate capture), but it's very much a case of the plot driving her actions, rather than the other way around. She is largely reactive, not proactive.

Even "Amy's Choice" did not give Amy a choice. Aside from the fact that her relationship with Rory isn't believable (she's both too hot, and too smart for him) and such attempts to justify the pairing in the script will not work, the idea of Amy, very pregnant, driving a van into a wall to kill herself? Over Rory? How Greek. How "woe is me, I shall throw myself on my husband's funeral pyre." Some choice. Yet again, Amy was reactive instead of proactive, responding to events beyond her control instead of taking charge of the plot. There was an opportunity for a very powerful psychological battle to take place when the Dream Lord trapped Amy alone with him on the frozen TARDIS. It could have been electric. It did not happen. In the end, the Doctor resolved the episode, not Amy.

A female character needs to have a mind of her own to justify her own existence in the script, otherwise she is a decoration. In Amy Pond, we have a chance to see a companion who can create conflict by not doing as she is told. She can be sexy and intelligent at the same time. She does not have to become a gaudy piece of arm candy put there for the dads to enjoy, with a beer, post-football, on

Saturday teatime. She does not have to be a stereotype. She does not have to be Peri Brown. I'm not asking for radical feminism, or extra layers of clothing, just a believable woman who exerts her influence and makes significant decisions. Thus far, the Who writers (with the exception of Moffat) have not given her enough opportunity to be these things.

I would like the Who writers to think harder about Amy Pond, and what makes Amy Pond tick, because when she is written well, she is glorious to watch. I would like them to go away and watch Ace and the seventh doctor, and perhaps Tank Girl, or Terminator, and then get back to us, having stopped salivating over the legs, and started to concentrate on the brain.

