The Doctor’s Mrs Robinson

Alex Kingston romped as Moll Flanders and sizzled in ER – so how’s life when she’s not smooching with Matt Smith?

ALEX KINGSTON is talented, beautiful, elegant and experienced enough at 48 not to demean herself by having a publicist as a babysitter, although she remarks, “Interviews usually upset me in one way or another.” Her personal life, she insists, is off-limits. “I lead a very quiet life and never court publicity. I don’t go to a restaurant and let slip I’m leaving by the back door, like some celebrities. My life isn’t interesting enough for anyone to hack my phone. I don’t agree with people opening up their lives to the public, but we’ve been brainwashed into thinking this is how it must be. I’m just not interested.”

We’ll ignore, for the moment, her marital status, her interesting way with actors who kiss over-enthusiastically, and the breasts she displayed magnificently in 17 energetic sex scenes during ITV’s Moll Flanders in 1996, which led to worldwide fame as Dr Elizabeth Corday in ER, and discuss Doctor Who instead. She plays River Song [catchphrase “Hello, Sweetie”], a time-travelling action hero, who first appeared in 2008 when she was described as “sort of the Doctor’s wife.”

“I wasn’t quite sure about accepting when I was asked to do two episodes. Living in America I hadn’t followed the resurgence of Doctor Who, but I cried when I read the script to Silence in the Library because it was such a sad story – River Song encounters the Doctor in the 18th century. It’s similar to Audrey Niffenegger’s novel The Time Traveler’s Wife – two people who have great love for each other, but are never able to meet in the right space or time. The sadness was of a woman with a close connection to the Doctor who sacrifices herself to save his life. I didn’t expect to be asked back.”

Doctor Who, though, ignores earthly conventions and last year River was resurrected. Time was going backwards, of course: in the earlier episodes this year the Doctor was shot dead by someone in a spacesuit, but then the story continues centuries earlier in his lifetime when he’s still alive. In June it was revealed that River is really Melody Pond, daughter of the Doctor’s companions Rory and Amy; she was conceived in the earlier episodes.”

She’s been on the set so tends to dust off old storylines there are all sorts of things people forget different generations can pick up on. They think in sneaky references that go over the heads of children but parents and grandparents will understand. In the new episode, Let’s Kill Hitler, there’s a camera angle that directly references The Graduate, which she biffs and gets immediately.”

Indeed, Moffat calls her Mrs Robinson, after the mother in The Graduate who seduces the son of a family friend, and there’s a bit of the woman in Kingston’s on-screen relationship was 20-year-old Matt Smith. “Well, I didn’t kiss him in the earlier episodes.”

Smith had better be warned if the kissing doesn’t stop. One actor, who she won’t name, was over-enthusiastic on stage and he bit his tongue which needed four stitches. “I’m not a toughie but I’d warned him and it was getting annoying, she explains, winnily.

Parts of Doctor Who are terrifying for children. “That’s its power. It’s part of its development, learning to conquer fear of the unknown, which the programme does in an incredible way. I remember at seven desperately wanting to see it but knowing I’d be terrified, so I’d either have a cushion in front of my face, or watch through a crack in the door. Although when I see it now with my daughter [ten-year-old] she’s been on the set so tends to discount it. That’s her safety net.”

“To be honest, Doctor Who fans are a mixture of crazies plus solid citizens, but they’re not phased. On ER I’d be asked just once for a signature. For these fans once is never enough, I find that a little hard to handle.” She has respite recently as the insecure middle-aged mistress of a prince in a brilliant production of The Graduate in Kingston’s on-screen relationship was 28-year-old Matt Smith. “Well, I didn’t kiss him in the earlier episodes.”

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“aristocratic.”

STEVEN MOFFAT’S EPISODE GUIDE

MATT SMITH AND KAREN GILLAN ON STARDOM
The Doctor has an appointment. In Utah, by Lake Silencio, on the Plain of Desolation, an Impossible Astronaut will rise from the deep, and strike the Time Lord dead. We all saw it happen – his final moments, the failed regeneration, the body in the burning boat. No hope, no escape, no excuses: we have seen the future and the Doctor is not going to survive it. The summer is over, the Doctor is back – and he’s embarking on his final voyage...

The first half of series six was all about questions. Who was the Impossible Astronaut? Who are the Silence and why do they want the Doctor dead? Who is River? Who is River’s boyfriend? All these things were answered. We saw the future and the Doctor is not going to survive it.

But who is she to the Doctor? That’s only the beginning. In the Pührer’s office, at the heart of the Third Reich, the Doctor is in for one of the biggest shocks of his very long life.

The Ultimate Episode Guide by Executive Producer Steven Moffat

8 LET’S KILL HITLER

Writer Steven Moffat Director Richard Senior

Guest star Caitlin Blackwood

Amy and Rory have waited a long time for news of their daughter. Too long. But when they summon the Doctor, the consequence will change all their lives. The TARDIS crashes into Berlin in the 1930s and they find themselves face to face not only with Hitler, but with a unique assassin from the distant future – and only the beginning.

The Piper’s Office at the heart of the Third Reich, the Doctor is in for one of the biggest shocks of his very long life.

9 NIGHT TERRORS

Writer Mark Gatiss Director Richard Clark

Guest stars Emma Cunniffe, Daniel Mays

The TARDIS is more than just an element of time travel; it’s one of the main characters. The Doctor turns up on his doorstep for a second time; there’s a terrible alien threat, of course, but never mind that – dear God, there’s a BABY!

The Girl Who Waited

Writer Mark Gatiss Director Nick Hurran

Guest stars David Walliams, Craig Parkinson

The TARDIS is more than just an element of time travel; it’s one of the main characters. The Doctor turns up on his doorstep for a second time; there’s a terrible alien threat, of course, but never mind that – dear God, there’s a BABY!

11 THE GOD COMPLEX

Writer Toby Whithouse

Director Nick Hurran

Guest stars Craig Parkinson, David Walliams

The brief to brilliant writer Toby Whithouse was: “Tell me that you think your Time Lord has finally met his match.” He didn’t, and did.

12 CLOSING TIME

Writer Gareth Roberts

Director Steve Hughes

Guest stars Frances Barber, Simon Callow

The Doctor turns up on his doorstep for a second time; there’s a terrible alien threat, of course, but never mind that – dear God, there’s a BABY!

13 THE WEEDING OF RIVER SONG

Writer Steven Moffat

Director Jeremy Webb

Guest stars Frances Barber, Simon Callow

The Doctor turns up on his doorstep for a second time; there’s a terrible alien threat, of course, but never mind that – dear God, there’s a BABY!

Caitlin Blackwood, David Walliams

The Doctor turns up on his doorstep for a second time; there’s a terrible alien threat, of course, but never mind that – dear God, there’s a BABY!

Matt Smith and Karen Gillan

On The Challenges of Stardom

Radio Times 27 August – 2 September 2011

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