

JANET FIELDING



# FIVE STAR

FASTEN YOUR SEATBELTS  
FOR A TIME FLIGHT INTO  
THE FUTURE WITH  
**JANET FIELDING's**  
AUSSIE AIR HOSTESS  
TEGAN JOVANKA

WORDS: ROBBIE DUNLOP

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**W**HEN SFX JOINS JANET Fielding for a natter, she's on a break from recording a *Doctor Who* audio play for Big Finish. But don't expect her to divulge anything about the plot. "I could tell you, but I think I'd have to kill you!" she laughs. However, she can reveal that "It's a fun story. It's more episodes than usual. And as per usual it's a great cast."

Secrecy is nothing new for Fielding. NDAs accompany virtually every *Doctor Who* job she lands, whether it's a documentary, commentary or audiobook. However, no project in recent years has been on *quite* the same scale as her return to the television series. A few white lies were told to ensure that the news didn't leak. "I had to," she stresses. "People all the time on Twitter were saying, 'Wouldn't you love to come back into *Doctor Who*?' 'Yes, I would!' You know?"

#### RETURN TO OZ

Tegan's long-awaited comeback in "The Power Of The Doctor" was seemingly a wish-fulfilment for showrunner and '80s-era fan Chris Chibnall, who had expressed his desire to bring back the character in a February 2020 interview. Fielding was aware of his comments when *Doctor Who* casting director Andy Pryor contacted her.

"He asked whether I'd be interested in returning to the show. I thought about it for all of three seconds and then said yes," she says. "And then I worried on all sorts of fronts. Because I hadn't been in front of the camera for 37 years, would I be able to remember lines? I don't need to learn lines any more, so I'm out of the habit."

Fielding was given the opportunity to share her ideas on Tegan and where she might be in her life. "[Chibnall] liked them – I think they meshed with the sort of things in which he was interested. My theory was that you couldn't travel in the TARDIS without being profoundly changed, and so the Tegan who went into the TARDIS was not the Tegan who eventually came out of the TARDIS. And that it changed the course of her life."

"The Power Of The Doctor" was filmed in Cardiff in autumn 2021. "The worst thing was that they started with my first scene," Fielding says, "and unfortunately it involved talking to a mobile phone."

In the scene, Tegan reconnects by video call with fellow companion Ace (Sophie Aldred). "Sophie wasn't there," Fielding says, "so the First Assistant Director was reading in for me. That was a bit weird. And I could see myself on the phone! I had to get them to put tape over it because it was so off-putting. Now whenever I



Her last story  
"Resurrection  
Of The Daleks".



In her debut  
"Logopolis"  
with Baker.

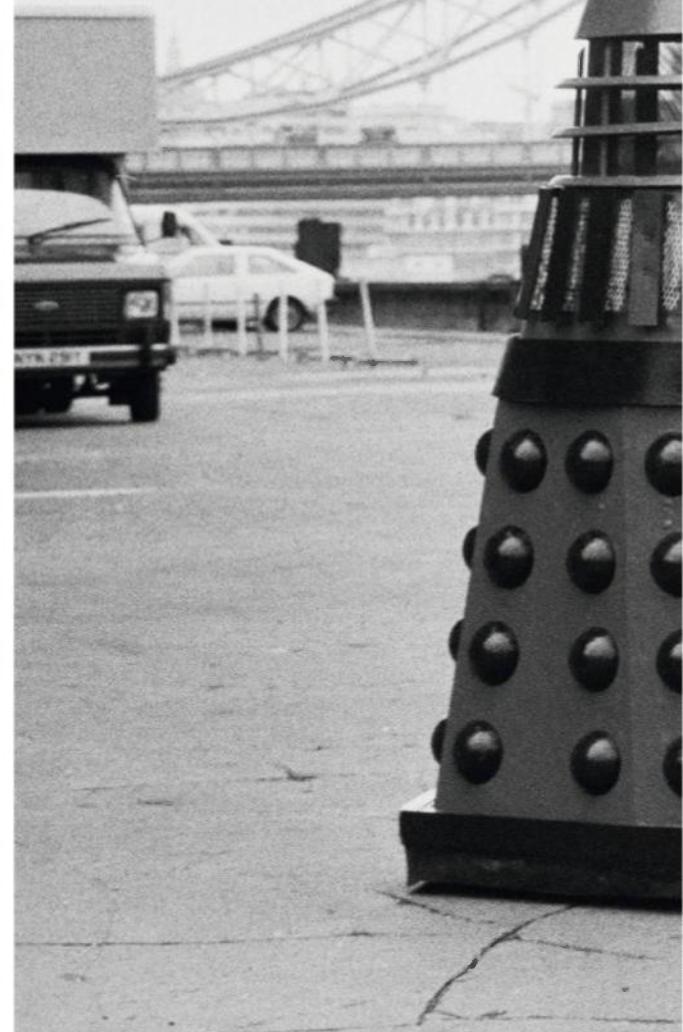


With Davison  
and Mark  
Strickson.



Shooting  
"Time-Flight"  
at Heathrow.

“The Tegan who went into the TARDIS was not the Tegan who eventually came out”



see somebody talking on a phone, holding it out and talking, I think, 'Can you see yourself?' How off-putting is that?"

To prevent her and Aldred from being spotted by fans, they were driven to and from set wearing heavy robes which Fielding compares to those worn by people who go cold-water swimming.

"We'd have to put the hood over our heads and then they'd hold an umbrella over us," she recalls. "People were always turning up to see who was going in and out. Luckily, because of Covid, we all had to wear masks. So, if we had time off and we were walking around Cardiff, we could wear a mask, and nobody would recognise us. The dread was running into

people I knew. They were really lovely to us," she concludes of her Cardiff caper. "Sophie and I got treated right royally. It was a lovely experience."

Tegan's return was made public in a trailer following an episode broadcast at Easter 2022. "That was amazing," Fielding smiles. "My Twitter feed went absolutely bananas." But did she apologise to any of the friends she'd lied to? "No. Too bad!"

We're speaking to Fielding days after the announcement of the Season 20 box set, the second of her three Peter Davison seasons to be released on Blu-ray. "People liked the trailer, didn't they?", she smiles. She's referring to "The Passenger", a mini-episode written and



A press photo call for "Resurrection Of The Daleks".

directed by Pete McTighe, which reunited Tegan with her fellow time traveller Nyssa (Sarah Sutton) after four decades. "It was lovely," Fielding says. "It was really nice to see her character back on screen. Fans absolutely adore her, so that was a real treat. And I love the script – it's fabulous. Such a cool idea."

The filming took place at a funfair in Southend. "It was late at night the week before the longest day of the year, so the sun hadn't set. But we were really cold."

However, as Sutton made evident in a behind-the-scenes video, the moment had been

prepared for. "I often take a hot water bottle because it's a great way to help keep you a bit warmer," says Fielding. "Sarah expressed her envy for my hot water bottle. They all did actually. Pete must have been freezing – he had a T-shirt on if I remember rightly. There's hardy, then there's hardy!"

Seeing Fielding snuggled cosily under a blanket is a familiar sight for viewers of the Blu-ray range's *Gogglebox*-esque *Behind The Sofa* features. In this case, it's not because the studio is chilly. "It doesn't matter how warm it is, I like to watch television under a covering of →



some kind," she says. "My sister-in-law owns the Urban Sewing Lounge [in Brisbane] and over the years she's made me various patchwork things, and then other people have given me blankets. Then as a wind-up for Peter Davison, [Blu-ray range producer] Russell Minton made an 'Everybody Loves Tegan' blanket, which I proudly unfurled, much to Peter's horror!" She laughs. "I love him really!"

With the forthcoming box set, Fielding will have appeared in a record-breaking 10 seasons of *Behind The Sofa*. "That's because I'm so lippy," she states, defiantly. She knows that her style is popular with viewers. "It started back in the '90s when Peter [Davison] and I were doing DVD commentaries," she explains. "We were more honest than most. We wanted to make it more interesting. We could be rude about each other and the special effects and things like that if they didn't work. We'd tell it how it is."

Fielding has watched (and remarked upon with great honesty) dozens of classic *Doctor Who* stories over the past couple of years. So what has she learnt about the show?

"God, I don't know," she laughs, pausing to reflect on an aspect of the series that clearly resonates with her. "I've learnt that *Doctor*

**“Science fiction is a very strange beast, isn’t it? People become really devoted”**

*Who* has a very rich culture. And a lot of people find it a really good place to escape to. And what you find over time is that it's meant a lot to people at various crisis points in their life. You occupy a place in their hearts for that reason. And that's a very privileged place to be."

#### TEAM TEGAN

As for the stories, does she enjoy watching them? "No. Not if I'm in them. I can enjoy them if others are, but not if I'm in them." Season 20 – which includes prominent roles for Tegan in "Snakedance" and "Enlightenment" – will prove a more challenging watch for her than usual, then.

Despite her fond memories of the classic series, fielding has a preference for 21st century *Doctor Who*. "I think the character development is better these days and that makes it more universal," she says, "but I could be wrong. It had a huge following back in the day, and it has a huge following now, so I'm obviously wrong."

"Science fiction is a very strange beast, isn't it? People become really devoted. I think partly because it's a place of escape and it's also a place of exploration. You can get to explore all



Fielding hated "the bloody boob tube"!



Back, in "The Power Of The Doctor".



In party mode for "Black Orchid".



Pensive in "Four To Doomsday".



Reunited with Nyssa (Sarah Sutton) for "The Passenger".

sorts of different ideas and concepts. Very often the stories are analogies, or they're exploring themes that are current, that are present in the wider world."

The upcoming box set includes several new documentaries. We'll see Fielding, Sutton and Davison on a road trip to the Timelash convention in Kassel, Germany – "We had such a laugh. We bicker all the way!" – and on a visit to Amsterdam where they filmed "Arc Of Infinity" in 1982. This involved a get-together with the Dutch *Doctor Who* fan club.

"I had been somewhere, and somebody from the fan club had given me a card. I said to Russell, 'Why don't we hook up with these people?' And so that's what we did. They

thought there was going to be a BBC crew, but they didn't realise until they arrived at the location that we were going to be there too." The cast joined the fan club on a boat trip, on which they answered questions and signed memorabilia, before revisiting several original filming locations.

"The trouble was *Pride* was about to happen so everything had changed," Fielding says. "There were things up all over town, so it was very different. But I had a great time."

Before Fielding heads back to the studio, *SFX* makes an observation. In all the years she has been recording for Big Finish, she has yet to appear in a play with her original Doctor, Tom Baker. Is there any particular reason?



Careful everyone, the Mara is back!



Filming "The Passenger" in Southend.



One has to look one's best.



"...and then I says, Pete, I says..."



High summer but still freezing cold. Aussies. eh?



Fielding does her best Tommy Cooper.

"I only did one story with Tom [on television]," she says, "so basically he always gets Lou [Jameson] to do them." Fielding's first appearance in "Logopolis" coincided with Baker's departure, so the two worked together only fleetingly. Was Baker a welcoming presence on the set?

"No," she states, honestly. "He wasn't a welcoming presence on the set. Quite the contrary." She pauses. "It was a long time ago. I don't have strong feelings about it one way or the other now."

It's no secret that Baker was tired and frustrated as his tenure on the programme came to an end. Fortunately, Fielding's experience with the Fifth Doctor and co is a

very different story. "Look, that's my team. And it's a bit like my last lines [on the show]. I want to do something that I'm going to enjoy. I know I'll enjoy working with Peter and, when I did 'The Power Of The Doctor', I knew that I'd enjoy working with Sophie. Do you know what I mean? Why bust a gut to work with someone when you may or not enjoy working with them?

"I don't know. People tell me that Tom's changed a lot, and he says he has. But I don't know. We did a DVD commentary together, him, Chris Bidmead [script editor] and me. That was fine.

"The thing is," she continues, "I don't feel particularly relaxed with Tom. I don't feel

unrelaxed but... Yeah. On the other hand, Pete [Davidson] and I take the piss out of each other all the time, and I like to operate on that level. It's very Australian."

Seventeen years on from her Big Finish debut, Fielding's time in the studios with "Team 5" is no less enjoyable. She'll continue to play Tegan for as long as she's asked. "Why wouldn't I? I enjoy it!"

Bonzer news for *Doctor Who* fans. Now, someone please tell us where we can buy one of those Tegan blankets? ●

*Doctor Who: The Collection Season 20* is coming soon. *Doctor Who: In The Night* is released by Big Finish on 5 September.