

DOCTOR WHO

FORTEANA IN TIME AND SPACE

Cryptozoological creatures, ancient astronauts, conspiracy theories and UFOs: *Doctor Who* has tackled a wide range of fortean themes over the decades, reflecting as well as influencing the wider popular culture of which it is itself a part. Whovian scribe **PAUL CORNELL** surveys the series's treatment of such topics and asks whether it can really be considered a fortean programme...

Doctor *Who*, as most readers will know, is a British television series that was originally broadcast between 1963 and 1989, returned in 2005 and continues today. It's at once an institution, the heart of a geek subculture and a global phenomenon.

If we define fortean topics as those dealing with unsolved mysteries, then at first sight *Doctor Who* isn't a very promising venue for such discussions. Unlike *The X-Files*, which tried to keep its secrets, *Who* is often a rather reductive show, where telepathic powers are a result of living near a space-time rift,¹ and the supernatural is (nearly) always shown to have a scientific explanation. Astrology, for instance, as revealed in spin-off series *The Sarah Jane Adventures*, is just a plot by an ancient alien.² Magic, as demonstrated in 'The Shakespeare Code' (2007) is just science based on words, even when used by witches – who are also really aliens.

However, *Doctor Who* is also a show about an alien who uses a police box to travel between genres. It only sometimes does Hard SF. There is also, in its DNA, populist panto. It's a series that can guest star, in episodes made by the same production team, both sceptic Richard Dawkins³ and medium Derek Acorah.⁴ So it usually tries, with fortean matters as with everything else, to have its cake and eat it. Let's explore what the series has made of various key fortean topics.

FLYING SAUCERS

The Daleks, always pop culture creatures, often use flying saucers as their preferred mode of transport, starting with 'The Dalek Invasion of Earth' in 1964. (In the movie

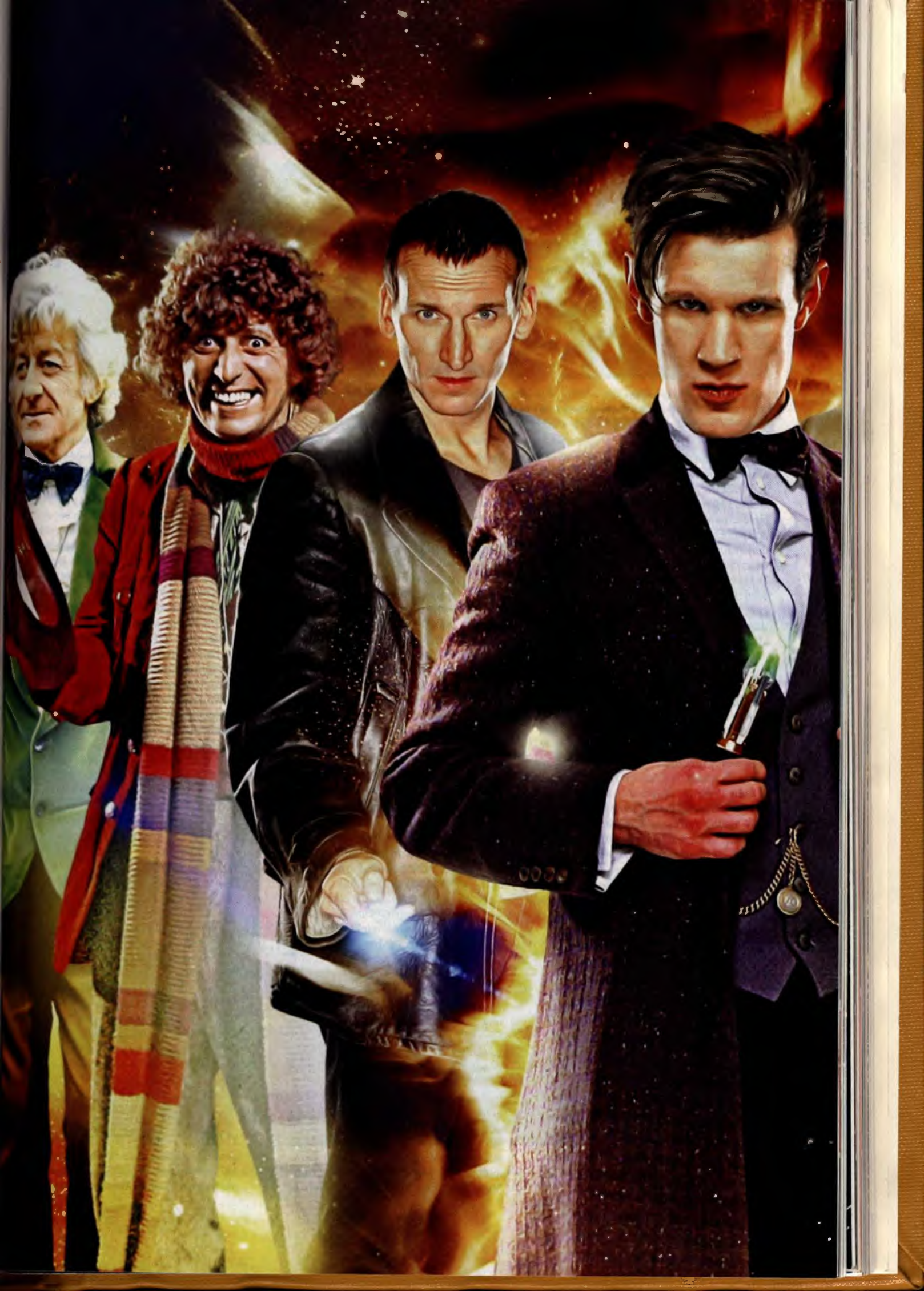
THE DALEKS USE FLYING SAUCERS AS THEIR MODE OF TRANSPORT

version,⁵ their ship looks more like a flying mouth organ.) Nothing is made of the shape onscreen, but Dalek creator Terry Nation once equated UFO sightings with Dalek ships.⁶ In 1965, in the Dalek comic strip in *TV Century 21*,⁷ the shape of Dalek flying saucers changed, influenced by the saucers George Adamski claimed to have encountered in 1952.⁸ These went on to become, from 2005's 'Bad Wolf', the version used in the new series. The Cybermen (in 1967)⁹ and the Dominators (in 1968),¹⁰ also travel in saucers without any mention of the UFO mythology, this being just what 1960s aliens do. In the new series, apart

from the Daleks, saucer-shaped craft are used by the Adipose,¹¹ Jathaa,¹² and Krillitane,¹³ sightings of the latter being the sole attempt to link these appearances with UFOs. At this point, the cultural reference being touched on is the film *Independence Day* with an image of the sky full of huge saucers. Following the start of *The X-Files* (1993), 1994's *Doctor Who* novel *First Frontier*¹⁴ introduced the Tzun – the *Who* universe's 'Greys' – who crashed at Roswell; as did the Nedenah – also the *Who* universe's Greys – introduced in the 1997 novel, *The Devil Goblins from Neptune*;¹⁵ as did the Grey Aliens – also the *Who* universe's Greys – introduced in the 2009 animated adventure *Dreamland*. The Silence, from 2011's 'The Impossible Astronaut', with their big-eyed grey faces, involvement in American politics and ability to erase memories, are the most recent version. Sometimes the *Who* universe's desire to embrace pop culture as swiftly as possible gets a little out of hand.



LEFT: The Daleks' spacecraft in the comics came to resemble classic Adamski saucers.





ABOVE: The use of flying saucers in the series morphed from a generic mode of alien transport favoured by 1960s aliens such as the Daleks and Cybermen to the incorporation of the myths of Roswell, Greys and the Men in Black.

THE MEN IN BLACK

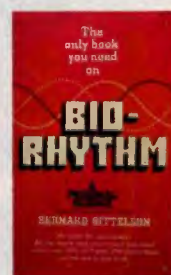
As revealed in the 2010 *Sarah Jane Adventures* episode 'The Vault of Secrets', between 1953 and 1972 the Alliance of Shades employed android Men in Black to erase human memories of extraterrestrial encounters and store alien debris in an other-dimensional vault. The process is described as an 'abduction', *Who's* latest version of the flying saucer is seen in the vault, and – although the episode's lizard man is nothing like those of conspiracy lore – the story also includes the *Who* universe's only references to implants and anal probes. UFO lore is here once again being viewed purely through contemporary cultural references.



Tibetan monastery in 1967's 'The Abominable Snowmen', and resurrected that same year in 'The Web of Fear'. (The Great Intelligence returned to torment Matt Smith's Doctor in 2012's 'The Snowmen' and its sequels.) However, the series reveals a genuine Yeti – a thinner version of the same costume – at the end of that first story. Both Yeti stories (and the anti-pacifist fable 'The Dominators') were co-written by future *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* writer Henry Lincoln.¹⁶ The other notably forteen author to write for *Doctor Who* was Kit Pedler,¹⁷ author of *The Quest for Gaia*¹⁸ and presenter of *Mind Over Matter*, a TV show investigating psychic powers.¹⁹ He co-created the Cybermen with Gerry Davis.

THE OCCULT

That some form of mystical power, similar to that of the Ascended Masters referred to by Theosophists, existed in Tibet was accepted in *Doctor Who* as early as 1964's 'Marco Polo', when the levitational powers of certain monks were referred to. High Lama Padmasambhava in 'The Abominable Snowmen' may be intended to be literally the eighth century sage Guru Rinpoche, since he shares his name. (The former High Lama's centuries-long lifespan might be a result of his possession by the Great Intelligence.) This was changed in the 1974 novelisation, at the request of subsequent *Who* producer Barry Letts, himself a Buddhist. In that same year, Letts, writing the serial 'Planet of the Spiders',²⁰ introduces a Buddhist abbot into the series, calls him K'Anpo Rinpoche, and then reveals him to be a Time Lord! The portrayal, in those episodes, of the titular Spiders as both science fictional aliens and metaphorical Buddhist demons of selfishness is one of the series' best forays into the realm of religion. The story also starts with a display of real psychic powers, and features a healing blue crystal from Metebelis Three. During Letts's tenure as



producer the series also visited a very 1970s Atlantis, also crystal-powered. As companion Jo Grant says in the 1971 Letts co-written story 'The Daemons',²¹ which features ritual Satanism as a source of psychic power and a white witch whose beliefs aren't at all crushed by the Doctor's fierce materialism: "But it really is the dawning of the age of Aquarius. That means the occult. Well, you know, the supernatural and all that magic bit." The pseudoscientific ideas of Bernard Gittelson²² made their way into the series in 1978, Douglas Adams having the Doctor declare during 'The Pirate Planet' that: "My biorhythms must be at an all time low". Continuing the series' tendency to have its cake and eat it where magic is concerned, 2013's 'Hide' featured parapsychologists whose ghost turned out to be a time traveller, but also a genuine psychic.

FAIRIES

The 2006 episode of spin-off series *Torchwood* entitled 'Small Worlds' establishes the Cottingley Fairies as real in the *Doctor Who* universe; they are creatures who live outside time and steal human children.

GHOSTS

The aforementioned space-time rift time travellers, 'psychic residue' from powerful emotional events²³ and the atmosphere left behind by the spooky alien called Light,²⁴ as well as various misidentifications of monsters, account for almost all ghosts in *Doctor Who*. (Though who knows what's going on with the spooky manifestations that are left unaccounted for in the 2008 *Torchwood* episode 'From Out of the Rain'?) *Torchwood* goes so far as to state that there isn't an afterlife,²⁵ then, eight episodes later,²⁶ show a dead character joyously heading into one.

DEMONS AND DEITIES

The Doctor identifies Sutekh, the vastly powerful ancient alien he encounters in 1975's 'Pyramids of Mars', as also going under the name of 'Satan'. Another demonic being

calling itself 'The Beast' and voiced by the same actor, Gabriel Woolf, appears in 2006's 'The Impossible Planet'/'The Satan Pit', while a huge demon, Abaddon, similar in appearance, menaces Cardiff in *Torchwood's* 2007 'End of Days'. The *Who* universe's stance on these quasi-deities remains uncertain, though various other great mystical powers, like the enigmatic Eternals from 1983's 'Enlightenment' and numerous individuals of enormous power like 'The Nightmare Child'²⁷ have been namechecked as fighting in 'The Last Great Time War'. This sounded more like Ragnarok than a military campaign until we saw skirmishes from it in 'The Day of the Doctor' (2013). The bull-like creature from 2011's 'The God Complex' feeds off the faith of others, but can still be imprisoned. The Doctor himself, especially as Jon Pertwee, has something of Lucifer about him, trapped on Earth, having fallen from what then appeared to be a heavenly planet of superior beings.²⁸ He later goes one further than the fallen angel by successfully destroying his former home.²⁹ He also, as we learn in the very first *Doctor Who* adventure, 1963's 'An Unearthly Child', gave humanity the knowledge of fire.

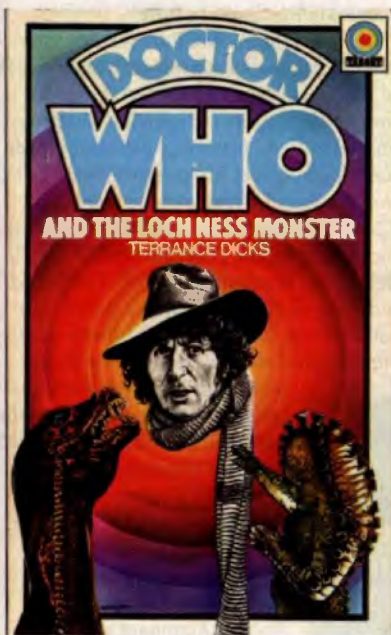
VAMPIRES AND WEREWOLVES

Both are unequivocally real in the *Doctor Who* universe. In 1980's 'State of Decay' it's revealed that vampires, led by the Great Vampire, were driven out of this universe by their mortal enemies the Time Lords, but survived in another dimension. Whatever scientific basis they might have isn't revealed, but they possess most of the attributes of supernatural vampires. Hæmovores, from 1989's 'The Curse of Fenric', are creatures from the far future, the last inhabitants of Earth, who survive on blood. Plasmavores³⁰ are humanoid bloodsuckers of the present, but the Saturnyne hid their alien nature by pretending to be 2010's 'Vampires of Venice'.



The first werewolf to appear in *Doctor Who* was the unfortunate Mags, the Vulpanan, in 1988's 'The Greatest Show in the Galaxy', who suffered lycanthropic transformations of an unexplained nature, but the full-blown condition, into a "lupine wavelength hæmovariform" (which is surely pushing the *Who* magic/science cake-eating handwave as far as it can go) was only revealed in 2006's 'Tooth and Claw'.

THE LOCH NESS MONSTER IS THE PET AND FOOD SOURCE OF THE ZYGONS



ABOVE: Cryptozoological mysteries such as the Loch Ness Monster and the Yeti turned out to have their explanation in alien science in the world of *Doctor Who*.

THE BERMUDA TRIANGLE

It's suggested that there may be more rifts in space-time like the one in Cardiff, which has been seen to abduct aircraft crews and displace them across decades,³¹ but the closest actual *Who* reference is the Master, in 1971's 'The Mind of Evil' listening to the King Crimson track 'Devil's Triangle'.

ARTHURIAN MYTH

As revealed in 1989's 'Battlefield', in a parallel universe the Doctor served (or will someday; he hasn't yet as far as we're aware) as Merlin to King Arthur. In the *Doctor Who* comic strips of Steve Parkhouse (left),³² Merlin, who crosses over into various titles in the Marvel Universe,³³ is referred to as a Time Lord, and regarded as an equal by them, without being a Gallifreyan.

CONSPIRACY THEORIES

The conspirators attempting to return humanity to a 'golden age' in 1974's 'Invasion of the Dinosaurs' have set up a fake space mission, similar to the 'Moon Landings were Faked' conspiracy, to fool those involved into thinking that the planet they land on is a new one, and not Earth, which in the meantime is to be forcibly wiped clean of pollution, free choice and permissiveness. A couple of references suggest the conspirators might also have a problem with 'international bankers'.

However, the fortean topic that *Doctor Who* deals with most often is unquestionably...

ANCIENT ASTRONAUTS

In *Doctor Who*, aliens or time travellers are responsible for: the formation of Earth;³⁴ life on Earth;³⁵ the invention of the wheel;³⁶ the construction of the pyramids;³⁷ the invention of astronomy;³⁸ the Mona Lisa (twice, sort of; it's complicated);³⁹ the aggressive traits of *Homo sapiens*;⁴⁰ the destruction of the Neanderthals;⁴¹ the concept of Satan;⁴² the



ABOVE: The theme of 'Ancient Astronauts' dominated many *Doctor Who* storylines of the 1970s, including *Pyramids of Mars* (1975) and *The Face of Evil* (1977).

extinction of the dinosaurs;⁴³ the destruction of Atlantis (three times, two of them by different aliens, referred to within two years, under the same production team!);⁴⁴ the construction of Stonehenge;⁴⁵ the end of the siege of Troy (the Doctor);⁴⁶ the Great Fire of Rome (the Doctor);⁴⁷ the Great Fire of London (the Doctor);⁴⁸ the legend of Medusa;⁴⁹ the continuing existence, sonnets and inspiration of, Shakespeare;⁵⁰ Newton discovering gravity (the Doctor);⁵¹ Hans Christian Anderson's story of 'The Emperor's New Clothes' (the Doctor);⁵² the mystery of the *Mary Celeste*;⁵³ hæmophilia or possible lycanthropy in the Royal Family;⁵⁴ the novels of HG Wells;⁵⁵ the First World War;⁵⁶ Hitler's annexation of Austria;⁵⁷ the death of President Kennedy;⁵⁸ and the singing career of Bing Crosby.⁵⁹ The Doctor also delivered,⁶⁰ heard the voice of,⁶¹ was attacked by,⁶² and, according to the Master, *actually was* Genghis Khan.⁶³

Erich von Däniken published *Chariots of the Gods?* in 1968.⁶⁴ From 1970 to 1979, there's only one year (1973) in which *Doctor Who* doesn't make at least one reference to the classic Ancient Astronaut myth. Von Däniken was very much part of the BBC's cosmology at the time, with documentaries such as *The Case of the Ancient Astronauts* (1978) debunking, but having a splendid time with, his theories.

Let's chart *Doctor Who*'s fascination with the Ancient Astronaut myth year by year.

1970: I've heard it said that Malcolm Hulke's *Doctor Who* stories 'The Silurians' (from this year) and 'The Sea Devils' (from 1972) were clearly influenced by Ivan T Sanderson's *Invisible Residents: The Reality of Underwater UFOs*,⁶⁵ but I'm not so sure. The book came out in the USA in 1970; the first of these stories was broadcast in January of that year, and written the year before. Sanderson's book didn't get a British edition until 1974, two years after the story it most resembles. Sanderson asserts that the seas are either home to visiting aquatic aliens or an ancient undersea intelligent race, perhaps predating humanity. The Silurians, (who've

THE TOPIC DEALT WITH MOST OFTEN WAS ANCIENT ASTRONAUTS

recently returned to the series,⁶⁶ notably in the form of Victorian adventuress Madame Vastra⁶⁷) are just that, though living on land, but it's hard to see how Sanderson could have influenced Hulke, or vice versa.

The Sea Devils are much more like the creatures Sanderson envisages, but they don't do the key thing that his beings do: fly UFOs. Hulke, a lifelong Marxist who seems to have had an interest in the fortean, has human beings reduced to quivering wrecks by a 'race memory' of the Silurians. In one of his *Doctor Who* novelisations,⁶⁸ he has the Doctor check out Ezekiel Chapter 1, verses 5-6, saying that he wonders

if the creatures described are aliens or time travellers. "The whole universe is full of mysteries," he says. "The important thing is to keep an open mind." A very fortean point of view.

1971: The demonic appearance of 'The Dæmons' explains why powerful beings and individuals – including, the Doctor asserts, Moses – are often depicted with horns. The titular creatures influenced the development of mankind in many ways, including inspiring the industrial revolution (presumably hiding said horns under a top hat).

1972: 'The Time Monster' features one of Atlantis's

three destructions, this time by an alien Chronovore.

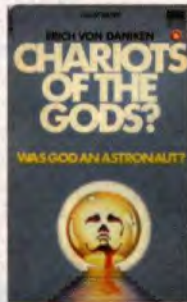
1974: 'Death to the Daleks' (which ends with the destruction of the Dalek ship by a heroic suicide bomber named, erm, Galloway) features the Exxilons, who influenced many young cultures, including the builders of Peruvian temples on Earth.

1975: 'Pyramids of Mars', featuring the aforementioned Sutekh, details a 'War in Heaven' between factions of the Osirian race. This influenced Earth culture, leading to the building of the pyramids, one of which is Sutekh's prison. His robots look like mummies, his teleporters like mummy cases. His enemy Horus, fiction here predating 'fact', is responsible for the building of pyramids on Mars (though Cydonia isn't mentioned). I wonder if the link between pyramids and Mars can be traced to any source earlier than this *Doctor Who* story.

1976: In 'The Masque of Mandragora', an alien influence on history is again worshipped as a supernatural power, a metaphor for superstition holding back science in Renaissance Italy.

1977: In 'The Face of Evil' the Doctor is himself the ancient astronaut, a giant carving of Tom Baker coming to be worshipped, over centuries, by an alien tribe. The props and set designs, featuring technology made into ritual objects, are clearly influenced by Von Däniken. In 'Image of the Fendahl', a 12-million-year-old human skull becomes the focus point for the Fendahl, a being that "is death". An attempt by the Time Lords to kill it destroyed the fifth planet of the Earth's solar system. Gestalt psychic powers and the supernatural as alien science form part of a plot which ends with a scientist called Fendahlman realising that he's been genetically influenced to return the alien to life.

1978: In 'Underworld' we discover that the Time Lords were ancient astronauts too, influencing a race called the Minyans. By this point, the Ancient Astronaut mythos pervades popular culture so much that it's as if the influence





ABOVE: Whether the latest incarnation of the Doctor (Peter Capaldi) will continue to explore fortean themes will be revealed when the new series of *Doctor Who* hits television screens later this month.

can go both ways, with these far-future aliens unconsciously re-enacting the adventures of Jason and the Argonauts – something the script acknowledges rather than explains.

1979: In 'City of Death' we discover that Scaroth, last of the Jaggaroth, splintered in time, has caused all human advancement in order to finally get humanity to a point of technological development where he can travel back in time and save himself. He fails and his ship explodes, leading to the creation of life on Earth. In 'The Horns of Nimon' we again see mythological elements appear in a story set in the future.

By the time the new series came along, the popular imagination was no longer interested in ancient astronauts. The Dogon, in the *Doctor Who* universe, are a many-eyed reptilian race mentioned in *Torchwood*,⁶⁹ but nobody sees fit to point out that they share a name with the tribe in Mali said to have been influenced by aliens in *The Sirius Mystery*.⁷⁰

The new series does have, however – as does pop culture in general these days – a more informed understanding of how fortean myth seeps into the popular consciousness, from the various responses to the titular beings in 'Army of Ghosts' and the media frenzy over

the cubes in 'The Power of Three' (2012), to the framing of the legend of The Last Centurion, as seen in 'The Big Bang' (2010)⁷¹ as the sort of thing one might have read about in *The Unexplained*.

There's only one direct reference to Charles Fort in *Doctor Who*, and that's in Gareth Roberts's novel *The Highest Science*,⁷² in which a 'Fortean Flicker' causes strange juxtapositions and coincidences, including transporting a party of London commuters waiting for the 8.12 from Aldgate to the planet Hogsuum. However, I'd suggest that the series has a very specific claim to being fortean – one based on its very nature. Fans of *Doctor Who* argue over the proper titles for televised stories. We argue over who counts as a companion and who doesn't. This being a series in which time can be rewritten, we argue about the very existence of a *Doctor Who* 'canon'. *Doctor Who*'s utter uncertainty about what has happened in its own universe, and its joy in that uncertainty, strikes me as the most fortean thing of all. **FI**

Thanks to: Ian Edmond; Anthony Keetch; Alistair McGowan; Jonathan Morris; Lance Parkin; Andrew Pixley; Jim Sangster.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



PAUL CORNELL is an award-winning writer of novels, short fiction and comics, as well as a TV screenwriter for *Doctor Who* and other series. His latest book is *The Severed Streets* (Tor, 2014).

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12 *Torchwood* 'End of Days' (2007).

13 'School Reunion' (2006).

14 David A McIntee, *First Frontier* (Virgin Books, London, 1994).

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19 *Mind Over Matter* (Thames Television, 1980).

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21 Written with Robert Sloman as Guy Leopold.

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23 *Torchwood*, 'Ghost Machine' (2006).

24 'Ghost Light' (1989).

25 'Everything Changes' (2006).

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35 'City of Death' (1979).

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41 'The Daemons' (1971).

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43 'Earthshock' (1982).

44 'The Underwater Menace' (1967), 'The Daemons' (1971), 'The Time Monster' (1972).

45 'The Time Meddler' (1965).

46 'The Myth Makers' (1965).

47 'The Romans' (1965).

48 'The Visitation' (1982).

49 *The Sarah Jane Adventures*, 'Eye of the Gorgon' (2007).

50 'The Shakespeare Code' (2007), 'City of Death' (1979), *The Kingmaker* (Big Finish, 2006). There are so many incursions into Shakespeare's life in *Doctor Who* across all media that many of them are said to have been 'corrected' either by manipulating Shakespeare's memory or time itself.

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