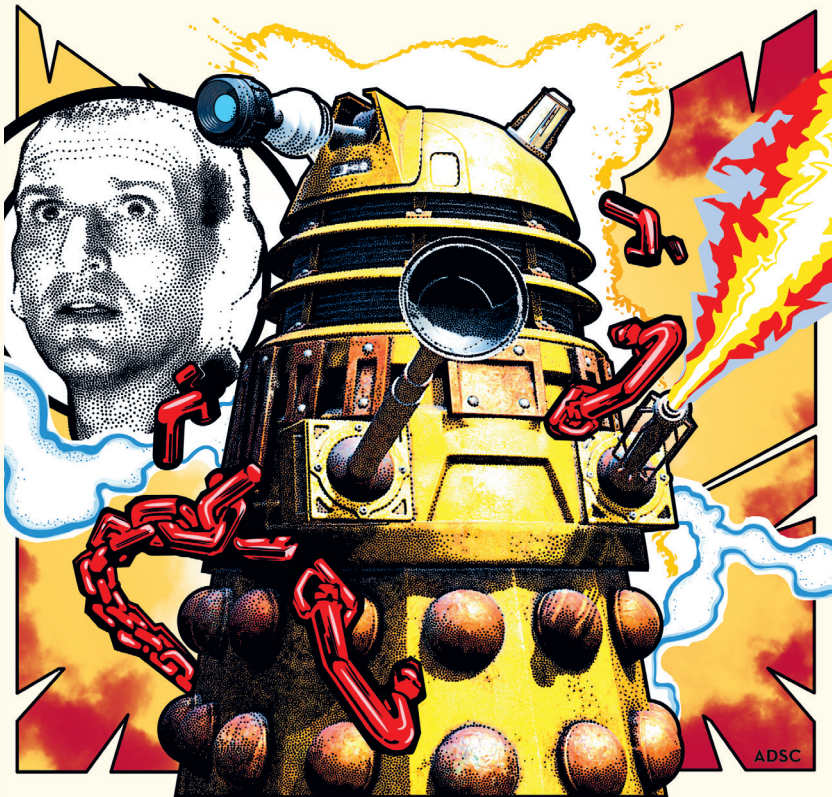
TARGET

DOCTOR WHO

DALEK

ROBERT SHEARMAN



DOCTOR WHO

DALEK

THE CHANGING FACE OF DOCTOR WHO
The cover illustration of this book portrays the Ninth DOCTOR WHO, whose appearance later changed when he absorbed the time vortex to save the life of his best friend, Rose.

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DOCTOR WHO

DALEK

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Dalek by Robert Shearman

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To Russell, Mark, Paul and Steven – look what we started . . . !

And to the original Owen Bywater,
the friend at school who got me into Doctor Who *in the first place.*
It's all his fault.

And I'd like to thank
Alex Romeo, Sam Durneen, Stuart Hardy and Alex North.

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Prologue

It begins, as it so often does, with a boy standing on a hill.

It is a little hill, for he is only a little boy. And from the top of it he can see the entire world stretched out before him – lush rolling fields, and thick-trunked trees, and deep lakes, and … No.

No, it is a *big* hill, the very biggest the boy can imagine. (It shoots up higher and higher, how high can it possibly go?) On the peak the boy feels as if he's scratching the sky. He's not sure how he feels about that. Maybe he begins to feel just a bit afraid.

We don't want the boy to be afraid. Not just yet. So:

A boy stands on a medium-sized, perfectly unthreatening hill, and he is happy.

He can see for miles. The rolling fields, yes, and the thick-trunked trees, and – there is something missing. What is it? The boy suddenly realises – there are no people.

There is no one anywhere, not in any direction, no matter how hard he looks. He is entirely alone.

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The boy wonders whether this should bother him, and then decides that it doesn't. No one – not even his parents! – but it's fine. It's good. The boy then wonders why he can't remember his parents, whether he even has parents. Should this bother him too? He's not sure.

He'll put it aside for a while. He'll work that one out later.

The peace of it. The utter, unbroken tranquillity – and all around him, fields (rolling), trees (thick), lakes (deep), and yes, up above too, that rich blue cloudless sky, just look at it, doesn't it make your head spin? Why, it could go on forever.

The boy revels in it. The freedom. And more than that, the *isolation*. And from deep within a thought suddenly occurs to him.

Enjoy this while you can. Because very soon the others will come. So many others, you have no idea! There'll be so many, and they'll blot out the sky, they'll block your view of the fields and the trees and the lakes. They'll fill in every last bit of space, and you'll never, ever be on your own again.

The monsters are coming.

The boy pushes these thoughts away, he tucks them into the part of his mind that's still worrying why he can't recall whether he has parents or not, and what his own name is, and isn't he actually in pain, isn't there some terrible pain he's refusing to acknowledge?

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The sky is vast and empty, and is broken only by a kite, and then the boy realises with delighted surprise that it's *his* kite, and he's the one holding the string.

There doesn't seem to be any wind. Not so much as the hint of a breeze that could disturb the calm of the scene. But the kite darts about the sky anyway, dipping this way and that, as if it's an overexcited child that can't keep still, as if the kite was a little child and this boy was a big grown-up looking after him. It makes the little boy laugh.

Its wings are fragile, and only the little boy can protect it, and he *will* protect it, it's his mission.

The monsters are coming, they're getting closer, and once they're here you'll never be alone again.

The boy loves the pull of the kite in his hands. That he's got it under control. That he's the one giving orders.

The monsters.

And from behind a cloud he didn't even realise was there, the sun breaks through, and it's warm and it's beautiful and it fills the world.

The boy stretches out his hand towards it, he wants to touch it.

The kite is loose, he's lost the kite! The boy doesn't care.

Straining high to reach the sun. On his tippy-toes now, the little boy with his little arms and his little fingers itching for that warmth.

It's a moment of pure joy. This boy, this nothing boy, without a name or family (or future), daring to bask in

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the sunlight. And the green of the grass and the brown of the trees and the blue of the sky, and all the colours, and all the smells, and so many *ideas*, he has so many ideas, and things he wants to do and say and feel.

The monsters say, *These ideas are not for you.*

His arm is too heavy, it drops hard to his side. No, his whole body is too heavy, he cannot move.

The world, suddenly, is too heavy.

He watches helpless as the kite crashes to the ground. Too fast, too hard, those fragile wings shatter on impact.

The boy manages to say one word – 'No' – and it doesn't sound like the voice of a boy, it's already harsh and grating, and so so old, and so so tired.

Even the sky is too heavy, he can feel the vast weight of it as it bears down upon him.

As it contorts and tapers into an enormous finger. As it presses down hard, as it squashes him deep into the hill.

The boy is no longer there, and then the hill is no longer there, there is only that weighty murdering sky, and then the sky is no longer there, it's gone, it's gone. This world has been snatched away, it's gone forever.

The monsters are here. Never forget what you cannot be. And never forget what you truly are.

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1

The creature was in constant pain, but it had stopped caring years ago.

It dimly remembered caring. Sometimes it would struggle to recall what that felt like, to care – it had felt good, hadn't it? But the memory was too weak to grasp on to. It was one of the things that had fallen away, and was lost. Like so many of the other things. Power. Pride. Point.

The creature was not afraid to die. Not if dying was part of its mission. But the problem was exactly that, it couldn't be sure. Some days it believed it entirely, that death was its sole purpose now, and the realisation washed over like cool relief. But then the doubts would get in. What if instead its purpose was to stay alive? Was that possible? It was surely possible. What if survival, really, was now its only function? So, then, survive. Live on. No matter how hard the suffering.

And so that's how it had existed all these years. Caught between the not-quite living and the not-yet

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dying. Keeping its options open, waiting for new information that would help determine which was better. The agony of the torture no worse than the agony of the indecision.

It was a wonder it hadn't driven the creature mad.

But it wasn't mad. Not yet. Not quite.

The human is here again. The one with the drill.

Some days the creature hates the human. That feels right, it is good to have hatred for the enemy.

But hatred makes his nerves come alive, when it is usually easier to hide within the numb. And besides, the creature knows that the man is just fulfilling its purpose. Its purpose is to make the creature's life unendurable. And although the man is failing – because the creature *is* enduring it, it *is* – having a purpose is still something the creature can respect.

Better the human with the drill than the other humans – the ones who come in to clean away the bloodstains on the floor, and never dare to look at it. Better him, than the man who comes to inspect, and to plead for it to talk, to beg.

The creature hates that man in particular, and cannot help it, no matter that the effort of such hating sets its nerves on fire.

The human with the drill is here again, and the creature knows that the pain is about to increase tenfold, and there's nothing it can do about it. And it

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envies its torturer a little, not for the ability to inflict pain, but that it sets about its task so thoroughly.

And it's true, the creature envies that ability to inflict pain as well. To be able to cause suffering again! That would be good.

Its scream takes even the creature by surprise.

It has been so many years since it made a sound that the creature was no longer even sure that it could. It had begun to wonder whether its speaking parts had atrophied. It wondered whether, if it were ever required to speak again, it would quite remember how to do it.

It hasn't spoken because speaking is what the humans wanted it to do. And it hadn't made so much as a sound while they tortured it, because that gave the creature some small sense of satisfaction.

But now it is screaming. The scream is shrill and loud, and oh so anguished.

The human has penetrated another section of the outer casing, and is cutting into real flesh. It is agony, of course, but that is nothing new – the creature doesn't know why this latest atrocity in particular causes it to cry out, to break the silence of decades.

Maybe it isn't even the creature's choice. Maybe the man has cut into one of the defence mechanisms. Maybe the scream is a purely involuntary action.

Oh, it feels good to scream.

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It feels good to cry out at the world, at the injustice and cruelty of it, and try to shatter them with its voice.

The creature sees that the human is recoiling. It is too loud for him. He has dropped the drill, clamping his hands desperately over his ears. Good. The creature is inflicting pain on him this time. *Good.*

And the scream is like a sharp spike. It drives upwards through the roof of the cell, it drives through half a mile of concrete until it reaches the surface and the desert above. And then it just keeps driving, up from this disgusting planet that has trapped him, up into the outer reaches of space.

Up, to find out whether anyone in the universe can care.

The creature knows that now it has been broken, there will never be silence again. But there could be a strength to that too. It will make that a strength.

It stops screaming. And the echoes ring around the walls as the human with the drill stumbles to his feet.

He is hurting. He is smiling too.

'Good boy,' he says to the creature. He sounds almost affectionate, he sounds *proud*. 'That's a start. Now, let's see what else you can do.'

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2

Rose Tyler hadn't been travelling with the Doctor long, but already she thought she knew him better than she'd ever known anyone.

Sometimes this worried her. When they were apart, sheer common sense would speak up, and tell her that the whole situation was ludicrous. She didn't know him at all. How could she? With all the stuff he had seen and done, with the hundreds of years he had lived. And she was this 19-year-old girl from Peckham, and she'd got four GCSEs, and she'd worked in a shop. How could she ever think she *understood* the Doctor? That she could ever do more than scratch the surface?

But then, when she was actually with him – oh, it was different. Then she couldn't doubt it at all. He looked at her in a way no one had really ever done before: as if she were the single most interesting thing to be found in the entire universe, and he was fascinated by her. And they could talk – they could talk for hours without stopping! – they could talk about anything! So that's exactly what

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they did. She was never bored in his company, and somehow, wonderfully, he made her feel he was never bored in hers. The universe was incomprehensibly vast, but they weren't just tiny irrelevant specks against the scale of it – they were the Doctor and Rose, and they were vast and important too. The universe was *theirs* – and all they had to do was seize hold of it together.

She *did* know the Doctor better than she'd known anyone. And at the same time, she would only ever know a fraction of him, and that was what was so exciting, and so scary. At 16 she'd started a misguided relationship with Jimmy Stone, and he'd looked the part, he'd got a job and drove a moped. She'd thought she could spend a lifetime getting to know him; they'd begun dating on Saturday, and by that Thursday night watching the football in that pub in Vauxhall she'd realised she'd run out of things to learn. She'd drunk deep from an especially shallow glass.

When she'd met the Doctor he'd seemed weighed down by some terrible tragedy. She only knew a little of it, even now – he didn't like to talk about it. He was the last of his own people, a race called the Time Lords, the only survivor of a great war. He'd admitted that for years he'd been travelling the universe without care, seeing where the TARDIS would randomly take him. Doing his best for the people he met there, but never with any real sense of purpose. But he was happier now. He'd laugh. He'd tell jokes. They weren't very good

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jokes, but he would tell them! And sometimes he'd beam a smile that could charm the cosmos. He told Rose that he had found that purpose at last. He was going to show her *everything*. All the strange wonders of an infinite number of worlds, the wonders he had for so long taken for granted. He would see the universe anew through her eyes.

Rose didn't dare think she was responsible for his recovery, but she had helped him, surely? She knew she had. And so they explored the universe – and it's true, most of the time things went badly wrong, and they were plunged into terrible danger. But Rose didn't mind. The good times or the bad – what did it matter, so long as they were facing them together?

They were in the TARDIS now, his impossibly sized spaceship locked within a small blue police box that could take them everywhere and everywhen. The Doctor was in one of his ebullient moods, which meant he was practically dancing around the console as he operated the controls, and he was talking clever things nineteen to the dozen in order to impress her. And Rose loved him like this – but it always worried her too, as if he were trying a little too hard to be happy, as if he were pushing something away.

'There's a pleasure planet out on the Sydonian rim,' the Doctor was saying. 'And I thought, really, a whole planet for pleasure? A planet's a big place. That seems like a dare.'

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Rose laughed. 'I could put up with a bit of pleasure.'

'Well, hold tight, Rose, because you're about to get 12 whole continents' full.' The Doctor grinned.

And then froze. He clasped his hands to his ears, his mouth gaped in surprise and pain.

Then Rose heard it too. The sound piercing through the TARDIS – loud, shrill, desperate. It filled her head. 'What is it?' she cried.

'Distress signal,' the Doctor said. 'Sent out on every wavelength, it's extraordinary.' He'd broken out of his paralysis, he was flicking switches and pulling levers at the console with ever more urgency. 'Trying to get a lock on it.'

Rose felt the TARDIS lurch as it changed course, and then the bottom seemed to fall out of the world – they were plummeting through space, downwards, hard and fast. And just as she was certain they would crash to the ground, the ship settled and the sound was gone.

'We're here,' said the Doctor. 'Come on!' And without even looking back he had opened the doors and he was out, striding into the unknown.

Rose chased after him. Good times, bad – so long as they were together.

'Where are we?'

'Earth. About half a mile beneath the Utah desert.'

'And when?'

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