BBC

TARGET

DOCTOR WHO

SPACE BABIES

ALISON RUMFITT



DOCTOR WHO

SPACE BABIES

THE CHANGING FACE OF DOCTOR WHO
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SPACE BABIES

Based on the BBC television adventure
by Russell T Davies

ALISON RUMFITT

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For Dad
who scared me with the Doctor Who *theme*
when I was a child

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Prologue

Here is a story. You might even call it a fairy tale. Like the best fairy tales, it is funny and strange and a little bit scary.

It opens with a little child walking in the dark somewhere.

It doesn't matter where; it could be forest or a cave, or the hallway leading from their bedroom to the bathroom at night. It could be the alleyway that leads them home; it could be the empty space at the back of their wardrobe that stretches out, impossibly, forever.

As this child was brought into the world, so was something else: a dark reflection of the child.

An opposite.

The child is given toys and buttermilk and warmth and parental love. This reflection is not. The only toys it has to play with were fashioned by itself, and they are all rough, and some of them are sharp. And, as this child navigates this darkness, the reflection does, too.

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How must the reflection feel? It must be angry, right? If you were the reflection, you would be angry.

Here is the child. You can see it. You are without identity; you are only defined by the simple fact that you are not the child. So, when the child has the misfortune to stand still a little too long in the shadow of a gnarled tree, or to linger outside their bedroom door for a heartbeat longer than is advisable, that is your moment.

There is one of you for every child in the whole wide universe. That is how the world works, see? For someone to prosper, another must suffer. The monster. You. And you are alone in this place, and you are scared.

That is sad because it means that you are aware of being alone. What else is there but the endless circling, making noises just to fill the silence?

It's just you and your noises.

You don't know what you look like, or what the images that sometimes bubble up in your head mean – what is a bedtime, what is care, why do you dream of girls in red hoods running through forests when you have never even seen a forest, why do you dream of children in their beds, that you are hiding from within their wardrobes or creeping in the shadows at the back of their room, all these questions and abstractions, everything – and your body grows by the day, constantly shifting in shape and size.

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You don't know what you look like, but you know you dislike it.

It can sometimes be painful to move, which is one of the reasons you scream. That, and because screaming is all you can do to pass the time. All you can do to quell the crushing loneliness. You aren't sure if anyone or anything can hear.

This is what the story misses out; all those tales of bad things skulking in the dark places of the world forget to mention what you feel like. A little child walks from their bathroom to their bedroom. And the hallway, it looks so different at night. The dimensions seem changed. The child stops when they hear your breathing. They turn to look. They see you there.

They always see you when it's too late.

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He'd seen her there, as a baby on the steps of that church, bundled up in blankets. He'd seen someone walking away – a stranger in a cloak cutting a solemn path through the snowy London night. Her mother? She'd left her on the church step.

How desperate must somebody be to do that?

He could have gone after her. It would have solved the mystery, but more than that: he could have helped her, asked her why, assured her that he knew it would all be all right in time, Ruby would grow up to be an amazing young woman, she would be loved…

But he hadn't. He couldn't interfere. He'd stood and watched the woman vanish into the thickening snowfall. He'd seen the vicar come out of the church and pick little Ruby up before taking her into the warm safety inside. He hadn't realised that he was crying until the tears on his face started to freeze.

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Now she was here, standing on the edge of a cliff, looking out at the vista before her. The world rolled away, glittering in the beams from the setting sun. This was his favourite part, if he had to choose a favourite part. Showing someone something they thought was impossible, opening up time and space for them in all its wonder and complexity.

He loved being the Doctor.

He'd taken her from her birthday all the way back to the Jurassic period. In the sky, pterodactyls wheeled and screamed; they reminded him of seagulls on Brighton beach, monsters of similar size and aggression. And down below, brachiosaurs waded through the river that flowed at the bottom of the valley, moving in a herd. The sky was so clear, here, so bright and blue like the sky in a child's drawing.

Ruby must be used to London air, thick with car fumes. The air here tasted … nice? It was a long time before humans came and messed things up. It was much easier not just to breathe, but to stand still and think. As long as she kept an eye out for any roaming predators, of course.

'Oh my god,' she said, taking in the vista. 'That's so beautiful.'

It was.

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Welcome to the universe, Ruby Sunday, he thought. *It's big, pretty, terrifying, weird. There are amazing things out here, and horrible things, things which look amazing but are actually horrible and things which appear horrible but are, in fact, wonderful.*

What a joy it was to show her around.

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