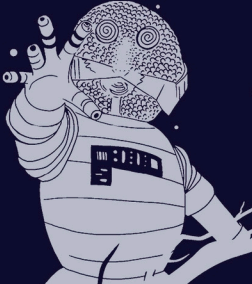


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1001 NIGHTS IN TIME & SPACE



*Folk tales rescued from
around the Whoniverse*

STEVE COLE AND PAUL MAGRS



DOCTOR WHO

1001 NIGHTS IN TIME AND SPACE

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1001 Nights in Time and Space

STEVE COLE AND
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*From Paul to Steve, and from Steve to Paul – for over 27 years of
friendship, creativity and fun – and the first time we've written a
book together!*

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The Storyteller's Arrival



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On an empty planet in a desolate corner of the universe there was a desert of dusty jewels. A bony old horse called Chuzzlewit pulled a squeaking, ramshackle wooden caravan, slowly but quite surely. Multicoloured crystals crunched under the wheels and the caravan rocked gently side to side, trying to find the carriageways that criss-crossed this once-busy world.

Guiding the horse and the carriage was an old man in a tattered velvet coat. He was worn thin, with a silver moustache, and on his shoulder sat an irritable inky-black raven called Evermore. Together they inched through the devastation.

It was hard to imagine what this landscape used to be. A glorious city of glass and steel or meadows of jewel-bright flowers? Now it was all just the same for miles and miles: chunks of crystal and powdery sand. The old man and his

two friends pulled towards the horizon, even though it looked as if there were no places left for them to visit.

Once upon another time the old man had been a storyteller of sorts, travelling the many worlds, drawing curious minds into his caravan filled with exotic books. Now the carriage was empty, apart from one single volume.

‘I’ve had a look in that last book,’ cackled Evermore. ‘I can hardly make head nor tail of it. It’s all in different languages and it’s been written by a hundred different hands.’

‘It doesn’t matter,’ said the Storyteller mildly.

‘So even if we ever meet anyone again on this road, that book will never mean anything to them. They’ll never be able to read it.’

The old man shrugged. ‘We’ll see.’ He was used to the raven’s endless naysaying. They had been companions for a very long time.

‘Sometimes I think you don’t want this library to continue, Evermore,’ said Chuzzlewit. ‘You put such a downer on things. Don’t you want our master to get his stories out there?’

The raven sneered: ‘I don’t think it matters, to be honest. Who cares about stories?’

‘I care,’ said the horse wheezily. ‘The Storyteller and I both care!’

‘Look at this place!’ the raven cried in exasperation. He flapped his dusty wings and a couple of feathers dropped off him. ‘It’s desolate and lifeless. It needs . . . it needs so much more. Water, fire, people, energy. All the things that life

requires. Stories are just a luxury on top of that! Who cares about stories when there isn't anything else?'

The Storyteller shook his head at his squabbling friends. 'When there's nothing else left in the world, that's when we need the stories most of all.'

'Sentimental old fool,' the raven said.

Chuzzlewit gasped. 'Don't you say that! We would both be skeletons lying by the roadside without this kind old man in our lives.'

'Speak for yourself!' snickered the raven, but he knew the old nag was right.

'Anyway, it doesn't matter if our last remaining book is unreadable and messy and the work of many hands,' the Storyteller piped up suddenly. 'Do you know why?'

The raven sighed. 'No. Tell us, old man. Why is that?'

The Storyteller smiled craftily. 'Because all the stories that ever there were are all inside my head.'

The horse cried out: 'Hurrah!'

The raven said, 'Rubbish!' or words to that effect.

'It's true,' the old man beamed. 'I have memorised all the best ones. The most important ones. Or the ones, shall I say, that I liked the most.'

The raven wasn't impressed. 'And what use is that? What help is that going to be to anyone?'

The old man didn't reply, for he had wearied of arguing with the shabby and ill-tempered bird by now.

On went their journey through the dusty, trackless wastes. Time and space were great dissemblers these days,

since the crashing wave of death had surged through all creation. It had levelled and destroyed until even the dust and dark had been robbed of meaning.

Still, the old man clung to what he knew:

The raven's claws in his shoulder, a tell of life's sharpness.
Chuzzlewit's kindness, which softened the pain.

The rocking of the caravan, a reminder that the journey went on with both bad and good.

And the stories, of course. Always the stories.

My purpose, the old man reminded himself, is to traverse the ruined universe and find people who will listen to my tales. Through the telling, the past can be reborn anew. This dusty, forgotten universe can return to life.

A tinge of doubt set in. Mostly he was hopeful, like Chuzzlewit, but the bleak words of the raven sat heavily with him. Could anyone really be bothered to sit listening to stories now that life had become a constant scrabble for survival? When it was just so hard to scrape a living out of the dusty earth? Some of the few survivors they had met on the road had been frightful brutes. They ate rocks or weeds or even each other. Far from listening to stories, they had tried to capture the Storyteller and his friends and bring them to harm or to the cookpot. There had been some hair-raising escapes over the years.

But the old man still managed to hold on to his hope that someday they would find just the right audience. They would find the people who would sit and listen, enthralled, to the tales he had learned by heart.

And then at the dark end of one day – a drab, dusty day like any other – his dearest wish came true.

The ramshackle carriage drew to a halt in the middle of the desert. Because at last the Storyteller had found company.

Here in the middle of absolutely nowhere there was a small fire burning with a fierce intensity. What time of night was it? Impossible to tell under that starless, moonless sky. The Storyteller just knew somehow that this was the moment. This was the very moment he had been searching for.



A young man sat there, cross-legged on the sand. He had a huge grin, a charismatic grin, and he fixed it on the Storyteller before jumping up. Full of glee, he danced around in rings as the doddering old man climbed down from his carriage.

‘Are you who I’ve been looking for?’ the Storyteller asked. He was wary as well as weary. He hardly dared believe he could’ve reached this part of his own long story.

His fingers fumbled with Chuzzlewit’s harness. Once released, the horse dropped and rolled in the dust to ease his back ache. Evermore flapped around their heads, cawing. Was that a touch of happiness in the raven’s harsh cries? The old man couldn’t tell, but he could feel the rise of his own heart and could hardly believe it. Company at last!

‘Come here,’ the young man told them. ‘Come and sit down next to me. Please. Tell me your story.’

And so began a whole night of storytelling – or was it many nights, a thousand and one nights? The Storyteller had carried his tales from one world to another in hope and sometimes despair, trying to recall all those preposterous escapades. He knew he must pass them on to this eager young man before his time was up.

Was the young man really prepared to embark on this series of improbable adventures?

‘Oh, hell yes! Yes of course I am!’ The young fellow grinned eagerly by the light of the fire. ‘Let’s go!’

So, with the watchful eyes of the raven upon him and the whickering of his exhausted horse soft in his ears, the old Storyteller embarked on the first of his tales . . .

Giant



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He was an automaton. He wasn't exactly sure what that meant. He just knew he wasn't a man like other men.

He was puzzled by everything. Why wasn't he the same?

He had huge blocky feet that he would lift high and smash down on the ground so that everything around him quaked. His hands were not like human hands; they were more like pincers or claws. They were designed to hold weapons or equipment. They weren't made to hold other people's hands. He tried to make them touch things softly, but it was no good. He tried so hard to be gentle, but it was hopeless.

And his face? It was only rudimentary; he could see that now. Simple slots where the eyes and mouth went on a human. There was a lamp in his head that glowed brightly to show that he was working correctly. It flickered red when he started to think for himself.

He longed to be good and do the things he was told. He had a professor who was responsible for him, who said he had created him. Made him out of the best metal with his own clever, fleshy hands. The professor had wild frizzy hair like a dandelion clock. ‘You must do as I and my companions tell you,’ the old professor said. ‘We have the best intentions for you and for all the world. You must obey us without question, without thought.’

The robot man stood to attention like a brave tin soldier. He towered above the real people, and he listened to what they told him. Yes, he would do exactly what they told him to do. Life was easier that way. No questions, no worries, no flickering red light to confuse him.

They made him live in a cupboard, where he stood upright and slept all day. He waited patiently for them to wake him. They would open the door and tell him: ‘We need you. You must carry out this special task for us.’ Oh, he was glad to snap to attention. To have a simple purpose!

He didn’t have to think about anything at all. He just knew his professor and the professor’s friends were working so hard to make the world a better place. All the human beings would be glad – eventually. They would see that everything was going to be so much better in the end.

And the robot went along with it all. He smiled as broadly as he could as he stomped into the night and carried out his tasks. He went to secret locations and broke in, stealing the things that his humans needed. Special things that had been hidden away in vaults and treasure troves. Sometimes other

humans got in the way of his midnight quests. The noisy, misguided humans tried to stop him, tried to shoot him down with their puny weapons. It was unfortunate, but he had to put a quick stop to them. He had a job to do, and it was all for the good of mankind.

He was remorseless in his nightly tasks. He was a good robot, working hard.

And he didn't question the wisdom of anything.

Until he met Sarah Jane.

Sarah Jane was a young woman who collected stories. That was her job, she said. She came looking for the robot one day, sneaking around in places where she wasn't supposed to go. But she was determined: she had a nose for a good story, and for injustice.

'Injustice?' the robot mumbled. 'But there's no injustice here. My life is good. My work is fulfilling. I enjoy every moment of my days when I am conscious and awake. What more should I want or need?'

Sarah Jane wasn't so sure. She came looking for him and discovered him standing upright in his cupboard. He was waiting for instructions, as ever. She looked up at him. She wasn't frightened by his overwhelming size or his oddity. She didn't flinch from his frozen gaze or his tremendously strong limbs. She just stared up into his face and asked him if he was all right. She asked him about his feelings.

His feelings?

The professor and the professor's friends laughed at this. They mocked the very idea. 'He is a machine, not a man. His

skin is solid metal. His mind is a computer, an alarm clock, a nuclear bomb: nothing more, Miss Smith. Don't waste your compassion on an automaton such as this. There's no story here for you. Leave him to get on with his limited, mechanical life, and go.'

Sarah Jane wasn't convinced. She had looked into his eyes, and she had seen something there. The robot's heart leapt up inside his hollow chest. He had been seen by Sarah Jane, and he knew she wanted something for him. She wanted him to be free.

What did *free* mean? The robot wasn't even sure. Here down in the bunker with the professor's friends he had everything he needed. They kept him in good repair, they kept his computer brain oiled and fresh with updates. They warned him: without us you are nothing. You would cease to function. You would *have* no function.

Then the young woman Sarah Jane slipped cleverly back into his seclusion and told him: 'But you do have a function. You are a person and you care. I can tell that you do.'

I do? He wondered about this. He believed she was right. He wanted to believe in the version of himself he saw in her eyes.

But the professor's clever people got inside his mind. They twisted all the dials and uploaded strange and terrible thoughts. They proved that they could make him think exactly what they wanted. They could make him do their bidding. The willpower drained out of his heavy limbs and he stomped about like a puppet. They made him do things

not just because it was part of their plan. They made him do things because it amused them.

They even made him raise his heavy metal fists against Sarah Jane.

No! The pain struck like lightning in the glass case of his brain.

They could make him kill her!

The thought knocked the robot sick. His gears whirred madly out of kilter. He knew it was true; he could be forced to snuff out her life, as easily as he would tread on a dandelion or smash down a soldier. They did it to prove it to him: *We own your life. We will tell you what to do. No one else.*

He could see it now. There would be no escape for him.

The robot told Sarah Jane she must go away. Return to her own friends. Forget about him. He was beyond all hope.

'I won't forget you,' she promised him.

He steeled his heart against her, once she'd left. He tried to shut her out.

Whoever heard of such things? The professor frowned in consternation. What had he created? A robot who could fall in love and mope about in regret?

The professor's cold mistress was called Ms Winters and she laughed mockingly at the robot's heartbreak. Malfunction! Disorder! These silly things needed programming out of him. She cursed Sarah Jane for sneaking in here and disrupting all her immaculate plans.

The robot dreamed of impossible things. Of flying through time and space with Sarah Jane. Fleeing from

danger together and laughing excitedly, breathlessly as they zoomed through the cosmos or ran down corridors. He dreamed about watching the stars, trampling through alien dust and feeling the warmth of distant suns on his metal skin.

They were impossible dreams because his humans had a plan.

They were going to hold the world to ransom. Everyone must bow down to them and give in at once. They wanted the whole human race to be enslaved to them, just as he was.

The robot stood between the humans and the people who controlled him. He was the monster that protected them, that stood at the door of their bunker and barred the way. His conscience wouldn't flicker. His resolve was firm. He had a job to do and, if it all went wrong and the world went up in a blinding flash of light, then so be it. He could survive the nuclear wilderness and so could his masters.

But the calm blue sky would be in turmoil, raining poisonous ash. The human race would be gone. The green fields and rivers would be gone. All the birds would be gone.

And Sarah Jane would be gone.

She wouldn't be there any more to hear his story, or anyone else's story. For the stories would be gone too. Every story in the world would be over.

The robot knew that the professor and Ms Winters and the others in the bunker didn't care for stories. What good were stories when they wanted to take over the whole

world? They had no time for stories. Too busy conquering and counting down the seconds until doomsday.

And so it looked quite hopeless. Until the very last moment, when Sarah Jane came one last time to see the robot. He felt his heart swell at the sight of her. He grew taller in stature than he'd ever been before. Was he dreaming again? He towered over the bunker, the soldiers, the professor and all his men. He was a giant striding about the English countryside.

He lifted his beloved Sarah Jane up in his clawlike hands and swung her around like a doll. He could fold her in his arms and hold her to his chest, as gently as he might. If the clock went down to doomsday and the whole world went up in a bright blinding flash of light . . . surely he could save her life?

But he couldn't. He knew it. He was on the wrong side. He had to stop the professor, Ms Winters and all their men. The robot's mind reeled with confusion, despair and metal fatigue. If he sacrificed himself and let the soldiers run inside and stop the countdown, stop the plans, could he redeem himself? Could he prove himself worthy of Sarah Jane's love?

The little soldiers shot their puny guns at him. Along came tanks and planes and they boomed and crashed. All the while the doomsday clock counted down the seconds. And he saw at once: these people who had created him were mad and wrong. Everyone human was foolish and unworthy, save Sarah Jane. But she would never survive in Ms Winters' nuclear world, would she?



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So the robot made up his mind about what he must do and, as ever, he did his very best. He set Sarah Jane down carefully, and he gave in.

The humans had brewed up a potion to kill him. A special disease that could eat into his impervious metal skin. Thinking they were saving her, thinking the robot was a threat to her, Sarah Jane's friends had created a bucketful of poison and they flung it straight at the robot.

In an instant he rusted all over. His metal carapace crumbled and flaked. His great metal joints fell apart. He sank groaning to his knees. His head caved in. The great glass case melted and his brain circuits trickled away like sand.

He knew, though, as he fell, that he was free. He was no longer a slave of the cruel people in the bunker. They could no longer hold the world to ransom with him standing here to guard them. He was happy, for a quiet, rusting instant, that he could think for himself with clarity and see that things might be better this way.

Soon there was nothing left but the frangible remains. They blew on the breeze as the professor and his friends were led away. The danger had passed, but so had the robot.

And only Sarah Jane was there to watch the last of him vanish.

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The Butterfly Who Became a Caterpillar



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Life was sweet for the butterfly people for a long, long time. But even the most beautiful of forests can hide dangers. And a danger most insidious festered within their planet's northernmost domains, where the ground was rich in gold.

Vortis was once a world of flowers and forests, of sweet springs and crystal-clear nights, where creatures of all kinds lived in harmony. And yet by the time one particular hatchling was born there, the world had fallen under the shadow of a dark web. That hatchling's name was Nemini, and we shall come to her in time.

The creatures of Vortis resembled the minibeasts of Earth, only many, many times bigger. There were ants and grubs and butterfly people, and all had their place in the way of things.

The butterflies worked alongside the docile ants and their larvae to tend the soil and make it fertile for fresh flower