

DALEK
I Loved
YOU

Nick Griffiths

GOLLANCZ
LONDON



Chapter One

Age 4-7

The Joys of Being a Small Boy

'Dreams are important. Never underestimate them.'

The Doctor, Snakedance

Welcome to January 1970.

The sixties are over. While a nation recovers from wearing flowers in its hair, a small boy living at 63 Murray Road, Horndean, Hants, is recovering from the excitement of Christmas.

The events of 1969 have largely passed him by, which is fortunate because they had involved plenty of warring and turmoil:

America had remained ensconced in Vietnam, getting nowhere. The alleged assassins of both Bobby Kennedy and Martin Luther King had been up in court. Charles Manson and his 'Family' had committed bloody murder, British troops had entered Northern Ireland and Richard Nixon had been sworn in as the new President of the United States. Later, history records, he would be hurriedly sworn out again.

Music had had its Woodstock and The Beatles had performed their last, atop the Apple Building.

Oh, and man had landed on the moon.

Only one event of 1969 had deeply affected young Nickolas [sic] Griffiths. In July, the halfpenny had ceased to be UK legal tender. HOW ON EARTH WAS HE GOING TO AFFORD ANYTHING NOW?

Happily, Christmases chez Griffiths have always been a time of giving. What four-year-old me received that Christmas of 1969, I really couldn't tell you – it was too many years ago – but I do know that the presents would have stacked impressively, because my parents/Santa were always generous at Yuletide, and that these lovely freebies would have arrived in a gaudily coloured, thick-paper bag, because they always did.

I always thought that bag was absolutely enormous, until I came across it in the loft one day, long after said bag and my childhood had been dispensed with. When you're six foot tall, it suddenly seems much less enormous.

Note to self: consider revising opinion of parents' generosity.

Being a child is a wonderful thing. At its start, people actually wipe your arse for you. They applaud when you perform even basic functions. For ages after that, they do everything for you, and they buy you things. And for ages after that, they applaud when you perform slightly less basic functions (such as getting a job) and continue to give you cash, even though you have a job but have spent all yours on booze.

Actually, I'm being a bit unfair here. When I said 'people' and 'they' I meant 'my parents'. 'People' didn't wipe my arse for me when I was two years old. I didn't toddle out into the street and flag down passers-by, proffering my soiled bum-crack.

Note to self: consider not revising opinion of parents' generosity.

★

I was born in the south-coast naval city of Portsmouth in August 1965, just a week after – though no one thought to tell me – J K Rowling, and had been driven bawling back up the M3 to the nothing-town of Horndean, where I would lead the first seven years of my life.

My father, Norman, is an engineer, works manager at Tri-ang, a subsidiary of the world's biggest toymaker but which will decline into receivership, the people who make Hornby trains and Scalextric cars; my mother, Lilian (Lynne), is a housewife. They're into their forties already and my four brothers, Max (actually Norman also, but you can see why he changed it), Michael, Gordon and Brian have long since left home. I am effectively an only child. Generosity and expectations will be showered upon me. It will suit me fine.

My Dad has noticeable ears, a kindly expression and a suit for work. Sometimes people hear him speak and think he is Australian. You might imagine my Mum as one of those pre-war film stars, with her dark loose curls and bright lipstick. She also looks a tiny bit like the Queen.

I like them a lot, which is handy since they are in charge of me.

What was life in Horndean like?

I can see a back garden path framed by trellises about which roses grow. I can see pine trees lined along the back, whose branches I regularly force my way up through. I will spend a lot of my childhood up trees and am gutted when those pines are one day chopped down without my permission.

There's a muddied area out there somewhere, cordoned off with wire netting, where I will one day be allowed to keep a rabbit in a hutch.

On the patio, I will take apart a large robot which had been given to me as a present, and I won't be able to put it back together again.

In the kitchen is a table. Its legs are metallic white and its top is yellow Formica covered in a bizarre pattern of black lines and dots, with a black plastic trim. Sometimes I will shelter under there with an empty pill bottle, mixing potions in the hope of becoming a wizard, while Mum whistles as she works at the sink. Except it's not really a whistle, more a blowing through pursed lips. If you get up close, you can smell the instant coffee.

I have a breakfast cereal plate which is plastic with a colourful comic design in the centre and a rim at right angles to the base. Presumably I am a messy sod. I remember first eating Shreddies off that plate.

Murray Road itself is built on a hill, which is great for cycling down at speed on one's blue-and-yellow bike with wide white wheels. At the top is Merchistoun Hall where I attend nursery school.

Please don't concern yourself that this book is going to be filled with poo anecdotes, but my sole memory of those nursery schooldays is of finally pulling my way up on to the supporting crossbar of one of the swings, swiftly filling my pants, recognising the hopelessness of my situation, and having to ask a passing friend to get a teacher to rescue me.

I remember being cleaned up – what wages were those people on? – and being allowed to walk home down the hill on my own, and my mother expressing surprise that I am back early. I don't recall my excuses but I do recall the washing machine going.

Other early memories? Weeing on the front lawn. (Sorry.) Playing with my only friends from just up the road, Peter and Stephen. Peter is my age, his brother is a couple of years younger and I am wondering now how exactly one plays with a two-year-old. And sitting on my toy tractor in the middle of the road, while the heavens tipped buckets on my head, wondering who I was and why I was

there: my first existential ponderings. I can still smell that sodden tarmac.

And my favourite anecdote: I am playing on the small triangle of unkept grasses beside the hedgerow that forms the boundary of Merchistoun Hall. A stranger arrives beside me, a small but older boy. He picks up a discarded rusty metal bucket, stuffs twigs, stones and leaves into it, and when he tips it out there is a ladybird among the rubble. 'I've made a ladybird,' he announces.

For weeks after that, when I am allowed out to play, I will return to the same spot and try to make my own ladybird. Unsuccessfully.

If you are that boy and you are reading this, please do get in touch. I'd like to punch you on the nose.

I've just looked at a Google map of Horndean, which has brought memories flooding back. The town itself is famous for one thing, a Gale's brewery that doesn't smell good: a cloying, bitter-sweet hop-scent that carries on the wind.

Nearby is Cowplain, where my dentist dwells – a defiant sadist with a syringe the size of a fire extinguisher – and where a newsagent sells multi-coloured gobstoppers in a glass dispenser, which I covet. One day my Mum will offer to pay for one, provided I ask for it. I will battle my debilitating self-consciousness and eventually walk away.

That personality trait has never left me. Try being nervous of talking to strangers while holding down a career in journalism. Every phone call I make, I first take a deep breath.

These days, when we go on holiday, I do the 'driving and hiding', my wife does the 'talking to strangers'.

My mother and I shop regularly in Cowplain or, if we are feeling adventurous, further afield in Waterlooville, which is bigger. There is a restaurant in the latter in which we often

take lunch, and I am obsessed by a certain dessert cake which is a cube of sponge surrounded by chocolate wafers, with a dollop of cream on top, into which are stuck, butterfly-wing-style, two further chocolate wafers. I believe it was called the Chocolate Box.

The only problem: I am petrified of the stairs up into said eatery, which have gaps between each step, so one can see the floor way below as one rises. As we have already ascertained with the Christmas-bag incident, relative smallness can make heights and distances appear deceptively great. I have to crawl on my hands and knees up those stairs, just to reach my dessert heaven.

Fear of heights is another trait that will never leave me. Some 12 years later, I will find myself once again on hands and knees, edging petrified along the ridge towards Snowdon's peak.

What I am doing up there, fuck knows.

Crucially, into this carefree, only occasionally hair-raising existence, one day enters a tall man with a noticeable nose, wavy silver hair, friendly eyes and old-fashioned clobber, going by the name of the Doctor.

The day is 3 January 1970, the time 5.15 p.m., on BBC1. It's the first episode of *Spearhead from Space*, marking Jon Pertwee's debut as the nation's favourite Time Lord.

Spearhead from Space, for the unfamiliar: Patrick Troughton has regenerated into the Third Doctor (Pertwee). He's aided by companion Liz Shaw (a boffin, though obviously rubbish compared to our hero) and bossed about without effect by Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart (uniform, baton, moustache). The Nestene Consciousness plans to take over the Earth (a recurring theme) by controlling plastic – notably these shop dummies which come alive and are known as Autons. The same aliens would battle Christopher Eccleston's Doctor, to herald the show's triumphant return.

★

I had never caught any Troughton stories, presumably having been deemed too young to handle the tension. Presumably also, my parents had no idea how terrifying the Autons would be. Boy, were they scary.

It had been my Dad's idea to plonk me in front of the murderous mannequins. He had watched both Hartnell and Troughton, while I slept, dreaming of bunnies or similar, and had become a fan.

Doctor Who has always appealed to whole families. That's one of its beauties. It gobsmacks me that at a time when the BBC were reviving the likes of *Blankety Blank*, *The Generation Game* (with Jim Davidson!) and *Ask the Family*, or airing shows hosted by Ian Wright (clearly a former footballer), they had no idea what impact the return of a well-produced *Doctor Who* would have.

Indignation over.

My Dad – who is almost 90 but wears it so well that he still has hair that isn't fully grey, albeit splendidly wispy – tells me that his mother used to make sandwiches for the beat bobbies (including his stepfather) back in the twenties, and he had to race around after them, delivering the much-needed nourishment.

Often, he says, these bobbies would hole up in a police box, exactly like the Tardis, where they could eat their sandwiches in peace.

Spotting this blast from the past in a BBC television series was one enticement for him to watch.

Mine was far less nostalgic. I had seen nothing of anything that occurred in *Doctor Who* before. It was all utterly new, a seismic blow to the mind, such a giant leap for my imagination that I was instantly hooked.

When you are that young, you don't see the joins or the wobbles – that stuff is real. And they had set it on Earth. One scene, in which the 'shop dummies' come alive, is set in a regular high street where ladies and gentlemen wear

autumnal browns of low fashion sense and the days pass predictably. Forget the Earth – it might as well have been set in my house.

I cannot stress enough how much of a departure *Doctor Who* was from my previous – and would be from my near-future – televisual experiences. Here are:

Some Things . . . I Also Remember Watching as a Small Boy

- *Andy Pandy* – Wooden puppet in stripy jim-jams has low-key adventures with a teddy bear and ‘Looby-Loo’, then falls asleep.
- *Mary, Mungo and Midge* – In the opening credits of this very basic animation, mouse sits on dog’s nose to reach lift button; they ascend until they reach Mary’s flat; what they do when they get there escapes me. Am wondering now whether it was worth their effort.
- *On the Move* – I actually remember being glued to this lunchtime programme for people who were hard of hearing, even though I wasn’t.
- *Vision On* – Bizarrely, another show for the hard of hearing, in which Pat Keysell and Tony Hart did arty things or something, and a bloke invented Heath Robinson contraptions.
- *The Herbs* – Animated adventures in a herb garden. The hoot of that owl used to give me the willies.
- *The Clangers* – The closest I had previously come to watching outer-space adventures. I bloody loved *The Clangers*, and still do. My Mum knitted me one. No, not recently.
- *Pogle’s Wood* – Like *The Clangers*, another Oliver Postgate and Peter Firmin creation. The men are geniuses. *Pogle’s*

Wood captivated me. This one featured puppets (squirrel living with family in woods) in real-life settings. I watched it again a few years back, and what I didn't realise was that it was educational. These people are telling me how bees make honey! Was highly amused by Mr Pogle's 'Where's moi tea, Woife?' Mr Pogle clearly not reconstructed.

- *Joe* – Animation. Small boy, bowl haircut, large eyes. In a café?
- *Trumpton / Camberwick Green / Chigley* – I'm having problems differentiating between the three, but I recall being entranced by the musical box from which a mystery character would pop up, and of course that roll-call: 'Pugh, Pugh, Barney McGrew, Cuthbert, Dibble, Grub . . . peep!'
- *Blue Peter* – Rarely *Maggie*. We were a BBC household. Valerie Singleton, Peter Purves, John Noakes. I just loved counting down to Christmas with them, with that 'Advent Crown' made of coathangers.
- *Love Thy Neighbour* – By the time I was seven or eight, I was allowed to watch this sitcom about a bigoted white bloke living next door to a black family. Memories of weeping with laughter unforthcoming.
- *The Generation Game* – Likewise, this popular gameshow, starring Bruce Forsyth. 'Nice to see you, to see you, nice!' was his catchphrase. Adults making total fools of themselves. 'Give us a twirl, Anthea!' That conveyor belt and the inevitable cuddly toy. These things are ingrained on my subconscious. Is that a good thing?
- *Morecambe & Wise* – These two, I really did find funny. One Christmas special, I was lying on the pouffe in the lounge, laughed at a gag and my Christmas cake went down the wrong way. I choked, my parents panicked. Recall gasping, 'I don't want to die,' while becoming acutely aware of how young I was. Dad, unfamiliar with the Heimlich Manoeuvre, repeatedly whacked me on the back. I survived. Phew.

*

Naturally, I have watched *Spearhead from Space* since that original airing. A few times, in fact, given its pride of place in my past. So I must work hard to separate the memories specifically from those four Saturday evenings in January 1970.

First, of course, there was Pertwee himself. It helped that I had never seen him before. Recognising him from, say, *All Creatures Great and Small*, or his companion as, say, Bonnie Langford, that screeching infant harpy from 'talent' show *Opportunity Knocks*, would have instantly destroyed the illusion.

I had no idea that he'd been a star of Carry On films, nor that he had appeared in the likes of *Ladies Who Do*, *Nearly a Nasty Accident* or *The Gay Dog*. Neither was there ever a radio in our house, so I would have known nothing of his time on *The Navy Lark*. My Mum enjoys tranquillity and seems to regard any sort of music or performed spoken word as 'just a noise'.

So Pertwee already seemed somewhat other-worldly to me when he staggered on to the set, bulging-eyed and talking gibberish. I remember his nightshirt, which was odd because it was old-fashioned, and him staggering around corridors in it, but most of all he represented boundless wisdom and safety.

The Autons were terrifying, destructive, emotionless creatures, but Pertwee's Doctor took charge and defeated them. If he were around, everyone – and that included the viewer, because the Autons would definitely have come for me too – was safe.

Even today I am obsessed by cosiness: a bosomly, low-lit, warm environment, an emotional womb. Give me a traditional local pub over an All Bar One any day, or a country kitchen over something run by Conran. Or my home over anyone else's. Give me cushions, supersoft fabrics and a

real fire, and a woman's arms to lie in, ideally while she subconsciously scratches me. Yes, it's indulgent.

Doctor Who provided cosiness then, and always will, because it represents nostalgia and sanctity from harm.

People who say that *Doctor Who* is too frightening for children are fools. If the Doctor and his mates regularly got wiped out by the Daleks, they wouldn't be.

What else of Spearhead from Space?

The Brigadier struck me as purely The Authority Figure; it was only later that I would recognise the man as being a well-meaning buffoon. And Liz Shaw made no impression whatsoever. Indeed, when my thoughts returned to the Pertwee era during my twenties, I could recall only Jo Grant and Sarah Jane Smith as having been his companions. Perhaps if I had been a girl – and my Mum did call me 'Nicky' for ages, until I put a stop to it – things would have been different.

But there is one image that haunts me from that story, and I can picture myself as a four-year-old watching it now. That scene where the Auton is wading through ferns and woodland, hand snapped down to reveal its gun, hunting. How scary is that? This bald bastard in its durable denim, stalking remorselessly through the British countryside, stopping as if to sniff the air, intent upon murder.

If you haven't seen Spearhead from Space, do yourself a favour and order the DVD off Amazon (or any other reputable retailer).

Will it stand the test of time? Let's find out. I'm going downstairs to watch it now, for the first time in maybe ten years, and I'm going to try to do so objectively. It's cold out, and I'm going to get the open fire going . . .

OK, so the tape was missing. Unusual, since I am a dedicated hoarder with the covetous instincts of an only child. Woe betide anyone who picks up one of my LPs by its corner,

potentially creasing the cover. So I was forced to take my own advice and order the DVD off the internet – Play.com was cheaper than Amazon when I visited – and watched it instead one Sunday afternoon, with my wife, Sinead, and my son, Dylan. Be interesting, I reasoned, to see how they reacted. We didn't make it past episode three.

The action opens on two bit-part members of UNIT (United Nations Intelligence Taskforce – the 'Intelligence' part being wishful thinking) debating the identity of a formation of mysterious blips on a radar screen. The set around them is wonderfully seventies, back when computers were the size of garden sheds and lights flashed constantly to prove to viewers that everything was working.

Sadly, the director chose to show the objects in flight through the earth's atmosphere, when clearly the budget couldn't cope.

'They're so fake!' trills Dylan triumphantly.

He's eleven years old and used to high-end computer graphics. I was four years old and used to stuffed Clangers. But he is right, of course. This supposed storm of streaming energy orbs looks more like a QVC ad for rubbish perfume. I don't care. He does. Different eras.

Enter Liz Shaw, on the back seat of a limousine, accompanied by lounge music suggesting she is both sexy and cosmopolitan.

'Do you fancy her?' quips Sinead.

'No,' I mutter darkly.

Liz encounters the Brigadier.

'Do you fancy him?' quips Dylan.

This really isn't going to plan.

It turns out that 'Miss Shaw' is a bit of a brainbox. According to the Brig, she has degrees in medicine, physics and 'a dozen other subjects'. Fourteen degrees! That's enough trajectory to launch a missile! Given that 'Miss

Shaw' looks to be in her early twenties, I wonder where she found the time to play doctors and nurses.

She is the sceptic to the Brigadier's believer. Scully to his Mulder, if you will. (I accept that many won't.) He has met the Doctor twice before, so he knows. As humans have sent probes deeper into space, he tells her, 'We have drawn attention to ourselves, Miss Shaw'.

Miss Shaw scoffs audibly.

'She's like you!' Sinead accuses me, also triumphantly. 'Refusing to accept anything unless it's already proven!'

It seems, in gathering together my little reviewing panel of loved ones, that I have opened a can of worms.

Yes, my take on things is always logic-based. I did a degree in Electrical & Electronic Engineering, after all. By mistake.

But I should point out that this little set-to with my wife stems from a radio show we were listening to on Xfm (London's alternative music station), when guest Uri Geller claimed that he could make listeners' broken clocks and watches work again, if they held them next to the radio and we all shouted together, 'Work! Work! Work!'

A derisory plan.

Yet Sinead sided with Geller!

How could I know for certain, she chided, that the arch spoon-bender's techniques wouldn't work?

Well. Er. I just *did*. Put that on your exam sheet and smoke it.

Did Einstein have to put up with this sort of thing?

There are often paradoxes, being a *Doctor Who* fan. I am prepared to wallow in the existence of knobbly-faced alien life forms, while knowing with reasonable certainty that there aren't any. And the one person capable of dealing with them knows for a fact that they do exist, and deals with them in a wholly pragmatic manner.

Argue your way around that little hornet's nest.

*

Back to Spearhead from Space, and the Doctor is tumbling out of his Tardis into Epping Forest, conveniently the landing site of the mysterious objects from earlier.

Meanwhile, some local yokel poacher has found one of the things – a blue/pink, pulsating, misted plastic casing, housing heaven knows what, emitting a high-pitched signal – and is digging it out of the earth.

Don't do that, you fool!

Suddenly, all hell breaks loose back at UNIT HQ, where an earwiggling, adenoidal cleaner has told the press about the radar blips and about the Doctor, who is by now tucked up in a cottage-hospital bed.

The Brigadier fobs off the Fourth Estate, while a dubious-looking chap with a strangely shiny face in the background takes everything in. Clearly an agent for the forces of evil.

Cut to: the Time Lord is being kidnapped by fake ambulance men, with his mouth taped shut. Ever resourceful – and I had totally forgotten this scene – he clobbers one of the kidnappers and makes his escape in a wheelchair.

In a wheelchair! How many times have you seen that on your TV screens?

UNIT men fire on the departing ambulance. 'Shoot at the tyres!' one officer barks, failing to spot the irony that his privates haven't previously managed to hit the entire vehicle.

Cut back to: the Doctor, wheelchair discarded, stumbling on foot into a small Epping Forest clearing and surprising two UNIT soldiers. One takes aim and fires. He's hit something for once! Only it's our hero.

Episode one end credits roll.

'So they've just killed him?' enquires Dylan.

I explain that the bullet probably only winged him. No one ever actually offs the Doctor. Certainly not at the end of episode one.

‘What an idiot!’ notes my son of the UNIT dolt.

The point, though, is that he’s into it, just as I was almost four decades earlier – and we haven’t even glimpsed an Auton yet. (Sinead is by now reading a magazine.)

It’s alright, breathe easily: I’m not going to drag you scene-by-scene through all four episodes. These classic *Doctor Who* stories were never intended to be watched in one go, there are always lulls in the action if you try, and I am frankly grateful when Dylan asks if we can go to the park before the end of episode three – before the appearance, I am well aware, of one of the show’s least-credible-ever monsters: the Nestene Consciousness.

How he and Sinead would have hooted at the sight of those rubbery octopus tentacles, sagging out of the big vat, which Pertwee had to wrap around himself while gurning, to act ‘being attacked’.

What is the point in explaining to a child of today that wobbly sets and rubbery aliens were always part of *Doctor Who*’s charm? Naïvety, on the part of the viewer, is a blessing in disguise. When we lose it, a fair wodge of inner beauty dies.

I’m not the sort of person who collects hilarious tales of my two-year-old’s utterings and sends them in to tabloid Letters Pages. (But here is one.)

I do remember just the one anecdote, from when Dylan was three or four. We were driving – it’s all right health and safety fascists, I was at the wheel – around the Tottenham Hale one-way system and there’s a car dealership on the right.

The sales bods had tied balloons to each of the vehicles, highlighting some unbeatable deal on offer. The boy spots this and says to me, ‘Look, Dad! You get a free car with every balloon!’

If only it were true. We could puncture all the petrol-guzzlers shortly after purchase and spend ages batting around the air bags.

I have seen some mind-blowing sights. Many parts of the Scottish Highlands. Spurs players scoring against Arsenal. The view from the back of our hotel, when we dropped off Mexico's Copper Canyon train ride in El Fuerte, was as unexpected as it was stunning (and there were hummingbirds on the porch).

But in those situations your mind is programmed what to think. 'Gosh, what a view!' – that sort of thing.

When a small child lets go of their helium balloon and it floats up into the sky, and you watch it bounce around in the thermals, the mind is set free. Where will it end up? What journey will it take and what sights will it see from that enviable vantage point?

The tot who lost the thing, assuming they are not bawling, is even better off, because their imaginings may well involve dragons and princesses and castles in the air.

It's a similar story with the message in a bottle, only we should avoid littering the sea with our empties. Plus, too many people would waste the opportunity. Imagine actually coming across a bottle washed up by the shore one day and feverishly unfurling its message to find: 'IM GONNA B FAMOS! CARLY XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX'

I consider myself a nailed-on cynic. In my day job as a TV writer/reviewer, you should hear me railing at the screen over plot inconsistencies or rubbish scripts. I remember when someone had a gun trained on hugely tedious doctor-detective *Dangerfield*, I was shouting, 'Shoot! Shoot!'

But I never apply the same standards to *Doctor Who*.

Why? It would be arrant madness!

The whole thing is crazy. You just have to let your mind go. Imagine thinking, 'You surely can't defeat the Daleks by reversing the polarity of the neutron flow?'

That is one of the reasons why *Doctor Who* is so great.

★

Of course, as a fan of the show, I do sometimes find myself marginalised and on the defensive. In response, I have developed a devil-may-care-shrug and subsequent-sulk manoeuvre.

It's funny, and this goes for any hobby that is not socially accepted – i.e. anything from the collecting of stamps or porcelain frogs to angling, as opposed to the playing of football or fighting while smoking – but you often find yourself cocooned in an artificial world of your own devising, gradually building up the courage to cry, 'I am an individual!' followed by, 'Ouch! Leave me alone!'

Until, that is, you go off and meet a group of fellow enthusiasts, when you can bask in the collective obsession, praying that cool people don't spot you.

Actually, I do have to mention the beginning of episode two.

An officer is standing over the UNIT idiots, who are kneeling, inspecting a prone, unmoving Doctor.

'Gave us no warning, sir!' says the idiot with the gun.

'How could he, with his mouth taped?' his superior points out.

'Is he dead, sir?'

Is he dead? Fuck me! You're the 'professional' serviceman who's been bending over him for the last five minutes!

Doctor Who's writers really didn't seem to have much time for men in uniform.

Many years after *Spearhead from Space* went out, as fate would have it, I got to meet some Autons and chat to them. Which was odd. Not the Pertwee-era ones, but the remodelled Autons that kicked off the new series in 2005.

This was for a *Radio Times* feature to accompany a photo-shoot, which took place in a hangar cum studio on an estate outside Cardiff. Television studios are usually daunting,

chilly places where technicians echo, but the wind outside was blowing a gale that could freeze eyeballs, enough to make its space feel welcoming.

And in there was the redesigned Tardis interior: all organic and curvaceous, like a heart inside an orchid. Hard metal walkways, a swish, added seat and console spattered with antiques shop detritus.

Though it looked amazing, nothing inside me stirred. It felt disconcerting. Junior Nick would have leapt up there and transported us all back to 1562 by mistake, then crapped himself while waiting dutifully for teacher's wrath. I guess I just didn't hold out much hope for the series, because of all the promises and subsequent failures of yesteryear. (All right, I did allow myself to sit in the seat, and very comfy it was too.) A new version of the show – I believed at that moment – could never recapture former glories, clutch me to its nostalgic bosom. And I had no intention of raising my hopes, only for them to be dashed once again.

As the day wore on, I spoke to make-up people, Edward Thomas, the *Doctor Who* designer, and a delightfully friendly costume designer. I saw photographs, mere tantalising glimpses, of a pig in a spacesuit, the reworked Dalek, that mad old bird who would zombie towards the screen in episode three, and finally the Autons, in real life. As it were.

There were Auton men in suits and Auton brides in full wedding fluff; their features were kitsch, well-defined, with eyelids, sexy noses and full lips. To me they didn't have the same menace as their hastily featured, hairless predecessors. Or did they?

The actors were all extras drafted in for the day. Their latex masks, which covered the entire head, had sat waiting for them, lined up on stands, while they donned their costumes – kind of Man at C&A meets Berketex.

It was hot in there, they would all report, and not overly pleasant, but none of the six had claustrophobia issues, and one chap told me that he had done NBC (Nuclear Biological

Chemical) warfare training, so he was extra-fine. Bit of a show-off. I didn't quiz him any further on the point.

Clustered pinpricks in the eyeballs of each mask allowed the wearer to see (just) and when the photographer was not snapping, straws were inserted into their mouths, to open up the air gap and allow the actors to breathe more easily.

These were the self-same masks that the actors wore during the filming itself, spreading mayhem on the streets of Cardiff.

I wouldn't say that I left that studio a fresh convert. But I had certainly allowed myself to entertain hope.

It's fair to say that my Dad isn't an adventurous holiday-maker. But then he came from a time before charter flights and cheapo airlines, when British people distrusted Spaghetti Bolognese and foreign-language skills weren't high on the curriculum.

I always thoroughly enjoyed my childhood summer holidays, I just failed to realise the minor distance we had travelled to take them, until I looked at Google maps earlier.

Shanklin is about 22 miles from Horndean, as the crow flies. Happily, for adventure's sake, there were no crows available so we had to take the ferry or hovercraft on the crossing to the Isle of Wight.

I'm not one of those people who can lie on beaches all day long. As a child that's not a problem, because there is always a rockpool to be investigated, a sandcastle to be built or a parent to be buried in sand.

Actually, I don't really like sand – and I used to hate it. We'd be down there, the English Channel lapping coldly at the shore, my parents on deckchairs, Mum in her sunhat and turquoise all-in-one, Dad in his swimming shorts (blue with white and red stripes), me in my trunks and, without fail, socks.

A large part of being a *Doctor Who* fan involves learning to stop worrying about what other people think of you.

Highlight of the day was often the evening meal, at our traditional haunt, the Cliff Tops Hotel. Or more specifically, the sweet trolley. Mum and I craved the sweet trolley, which was wheeled ceremoniously to one's table on completion of the main course, a travelling cornucopia of eye-popping confection.

She often went for the creamy concoction with sponge fingers round the outside, called something like bateau mouche. I played the field. One day I had a knickerbocker glory so tall that I had to stand on my chair to eat it, and the adults around craned in their seats to witness such cuteness.

Those were the days, though I'm glad I've moved on.

If we didn't go to the beach, rain not being unheard of on the Isle of Wight, there were the attractions. The names Godshill and Blackgang Chine are seared into my memory. They're so evocative.

Godshill was and remains a model village. I don't remember any little houses at all. What I do remember is a bloody marionette woman on a penny farthing, in a hut, which used to spook the hell out of me. So anachronistic was she that to my young eyes it was like seeing a ghost.

There may also have been some gnomes available. After the cycling woman, I don't think anything really registered.

And Blackgang Chine. What a name is that! Having always taken it at face value, I must admit to having no idea what a chine is. Allow me to consult my *Collins English* . . . which offers: 'Southern English dialect, a deep fissure in the wall of a cliff'. How about that?

Possibly then, the name refers to a band of smugglers using a certain outsized cranny to spirit away their contraband, unseen by roving customs officers. What that has to do with the dinosaur-populated adventure park of today, I have no idea.

★

A final memory of the Isle of Wight: Janine, chocolate-brown eyes that melted around the heart, a girl's long, dark hair, arms, legs, a one-piece bathing suit, bucket, spade and occasional harrumph. My first love. But we were only five or six and we had to get back to school.

Mrs Brown: she was my first teacher. The name of the establishment escapes me.

Mrs Brown had an impish, rounded face that was always smiling, big eyes, and light brown perhaps reddish hair. I liked her. I remember sitting cross-legged on a mat while she read us stories, and making peppermint creams in icy green, taking them home and proudly scoffing the lot.

I can recall not one classmate's face or name, though I have an image in my mind's eye of a school photograph with Mrs Brown standing back row, centre, of a group of small boys and girls with awkward haircuts, each failing to wonder where the future will take them.

How our pasts disappear as the experiences build and memory becomes selective. Presumably it's a subconscious choice, what we retain. If I were a girl, already intrigued by relationships and who said what to whom, I might have remembered a few more classmates, with whom I made daisy chains and early bonds. But I'm not and I keep stored which *Doctor Who* monsters scared me the most.

The Silurians appeared after Spearhead from Space, and I can picture them as if it were yesterday.

Doctor Who and the Silurians, for the unfamiliar: Hibernating reptilians are awakened by nearby nuclear power station. The Doctor tries to negotiate, hoping that everyone can learn to live in harmony. Untaken by such namby-pambiness, the Brigadier blows them all up.

★

It's funny, but I don't remember any of that peace-making aspect. I can see caves and Silurians: greeny-brown lizard men with slightly fishy faces and a third, red eye on their forehead, which glowed when they bumped people off. I was convinced they were out to kill everyone, rather than protecting their own interests.

At the age of four all aliens must seem like *The Enemy*, and no doubt I sided with the Brigadier. Yet *Doctor Who*, particularly when it was being scripted by hippies and Buddhists during Pertwee's tenure, preached a text of open-mindedness, conciliation and live-and-let-live. Science, logic and debate solved things, not snap decisions and explosions.

Take the classic example of the Doctor's morality: Tom Baker in *Genesis of the Daleks*, when he holds the two wires in his hands which, if touched together, will wipe out the Dalek race. 'Do I have the right?' and all that.

I remember thinking, 'Of-course-you-bloody-do!'

But that was the Daleks, who have no redeeming features, other than being ideal for imitating in the playground. Otherwise I would consider myself a peace-lover, with half a mind in Science and half in the Arts. I've never had a meaningful fight in my life, and I've been on a peace march – that's pretty peaceful. How much that has to do with inner soul, upbringing or a television programme, it's impossible to say, but the amount of *Doctor Who* I have watched could easily be perceived as brainwashing.

The Autons returned the following year, 1971, which was always going to be a Murray Road event. This time they wore *Hi-De-Hi* blazers and comedy heads, which made them still more sinister, but it wasn't they who made *Terror of the Autons* one of the scariest stories of my boyhood.

Nor was it even *The Master*.

★

Terror of the Autons, for the unfamiliar: Boring Liz Shaw has been replaced by dippy hippie Jo Grant. Fellow Time Lord, The Master, Yin to the Doctor's Yang, arrives on Earth wearing black. Through the Nestenes he takes control of plastic and a series of horrible deaths occur. No guesses who saves the day, though allowing his nemesis to escape.

This one had everything, accompanied by those bizarre synthesiser sounds, made as if by someone twiddling knobs during their death throes.

The old boy squished to death in his own inflatable armchair; the toy daffodils distributed by the Autons, which shot a plastic film over the nose and mouth of people who sniffed at them, and – most hideous of all – that devil-doll that came to life when the heating was on, and stalked some hapless victim in their own home.

That doll. It looks like a cross between Tony Hart's Morph, after eating all the pies, and Nosferatu. There is no way they would get away with that nowadays. It's scarier than Ann Widdecombe (pre-bleach-job – which surely softened the edges).

Memo to self: Contact producer of new *Doctor Who* re: possible story. The Cloning of the Widdecombe?

Those are not recollections based on later video viewing. Those costumes and special effects were the stuff of glorious nightmares. If that self-elected guardian of the national morality, Mary Whitehouse, didn't get in touch, she certainly should have done. It's too late now, of course. She's dead.

The Master deserves special elaboration, being such a stalwart of that era. According to Jon Pertwee, actor Roger Delgado was the sweetest of fellows, who wouldn't have said boo to a goose. Which was undoubtedly true, but put it this way: I wouldn't have dared approach the man in a dark alleyway and ask for an autograph.

If the devil-doll was Nosferatu, Delgado's look had more than a touch of the Draculas. His face seemed to slope forwards, like a convenient toboggan run, his eyes were unnerving black holes and his facial hair was like something concocted by, well, a BBC make-up department to make someone look the personification of all evil.

Roger Delgado would never have got a job playing Santa, and didn't five-year-old me know it.

Some Things . . . That Give Me the Fear (Besides Doctor Who Monsters – and Heights)

- Snakes – If they really are more scared of me than I am of them, I have no idea how they function on a daily basis.
- Youths – Not all youths, obviously, but the ones with the swagger and the relaxed upper eyelids, particularly in a group. And wearing hoods. I have actually joined Middle England.
- Joining Middle England.
- Gore – I could never become a doctor. People's insides. I shrink, squealing, from the sight of any internal organ, broken bone, unreasonable gash or missing limb. Thank heavens, then, that after the toy-making business folded my Dad got a job making artificial limbs, so that he could bring home one evening, in a plastic bag, a hand, and leave it nonchalantly on the breakfast bar. I can only assume that it was an artificial one. I didn't hang around long enough to find out.
- Hospital dramas – Why would anyone want to watch these? It bewilders me. When there is no gore or death, which is the best-case scenario, everyone's lying around in rows of beds, looking ashen-faced and wondering whether they can make it to the toilet.

- Needles – I doubt I could inject myself to save my life. But more specifically, needles in the hands of . . .
- Dentists – I have no problem with them as people – although none of my best friends are dentists – but why would anyone choose dentistry as a profession? ‘What would you like to do when you grow up, son?’ ‘I’d like to stare into people’s bent gobs, sniff their decaying last meal and cause them mental, physical and financial anguish.’ I’ve already mentioned my boyhood dentist. Hilariously, he did such a brilliant job that one wag at junior school dubbed me ‘Fleabags’, on account of my dodgy teeth. The Griffiths family has great hair and antibody DNA, but rubbish tooth DNA. My Dad’s a bundle of false teeth and I’m pestered by crowns and fillings. I’ll save the story of my tooth getting knocked out by the git at the kebab stall, and the subsequent student-dentist-with-paperclip, for a later chapter.
- Extremists – Of any persuasion. Why would anyone want to harm another human being on account of their beliefs? I shall refrain from mentioning any specific belief systems, in case they send people to come and get me.
- Politicians – What are these people on? I would laugh in the face of such formerly bullied egomaniacs, if they couldn’t walk into the Houses of Parliament tomorrow and propose a law banning Nicks. Some might go into politics for all the right reasons, but by the time they’ve had a whiff of power, most become fawning, lying, cheating, money-grabbing monsters. Political power feels to me like a runaway train, and no one even sold me a ticket.

And so, conveniently, to the Daleks.

Many have posited theories about the Doctor’s arch-enemy’s popularity, all incredibly interestingly, but the main reason to me seems obvious. They were not Men in Suits.

Although *Doctor Who* has come up with a host of cracking aliens clearly bearing two arms, two legs and a head, as well as a few rather unconvincing ones – we can see you, Mister Nimon – there was no sense that the ubiquitous pepperpot tyrants had anything of the human about them.

You have to wonder what the designer's inspiration for the coloured hemispheres all over the skirt bit were, or the detail on the eye stalk, and why, after drawing up something quite so bizarre and original, he risked ruining the effect by lobbing in a sink plunger.

But the Dalek was, and remains, a design classic. If they don't have one in the Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art, they are making a mistake.

Then top that look off with that grating voice. 'Kill!', 'Murder!', 'Vanquish!', 'Maim!' – all bad. But 'Ex-ter-min-ate!', rasped out by a demented alien Domestos gargler, has such an air of ruthless efficiency about it. I would far rather be vanquished than ex-ter-min-ated.

So I can well imagine my childhood self being petrified of them, and my parents confirm that this was indeed the case.

The Daleks first troubled the Murray Road television set on New Year's Day, 1972. I would have been six-and-a-third, again recovering from the colour-blast of Christmas. Is that a Lego set in my mind's eye, from brother Max? Is that Dad's mother-in-law, sat in an armchair, all silver hair and horn-rimmed spectacles, glued to *Coronation Street*?

Day of the Daleks, for the unfamiliar: Guerrillas from the future travel back in time to the seventies, to alter a course of history that would find the Daleks running the Earth. The Doctor helps them. Jo gets in the way.

Ah, Jo Grant. Little Jo Grant. She wore very short skirts and I failed to notice.

I can see why they replaced Liz Shaw with her. Liz was your stiff older sister who swotted day and night and liked trad jazz. Jo was your flighty younger sister, who missed taking her O-levels because her diary was upside-down, and who bought all the latest records by anyone deemed cool and danced to them while grinning at everyone.

Jo needed constant care and reassurance. She was less use to the Doctor than a manual on cunnilingus.

I thought she was great.

But not as great as the Daleks.

Childhood duty, of course, demanded that I hide behind the sofa at their every appearance. Sadly, as the Foreword told, I was obliged to use a mere armchair. Besides the Daleks, the only thing that got me cowering there was 'Tatty-bye!' / tickle-stick comedian Ken Dodd.

I also remember their slaves for that story, the Ogrons, very clearly. Think *Planet of the Apes* meets the Mitchell brothers. They were meathead workhorses, only slightly dimmer than Jo, and a frightening presence.

People always mention this crucial weakness of the Daleks: that, in the days before computer graphics, they couldn't climb stairs. I really don't recall that holding any sway with me back then, and I think I've worked out why.

Firstly, you can't stay upstairs forever, particularly when there is school to go to. But also: people in *Doctor Who* hardly ever went up stairs! Practically, because the television cameras of the day were so bloody heavy. I bet (not very much money) that if you watched Day of the Daleks now, you wouldn't see one person going up a flight of stairs. My recollection is that they chased the Doctor, Jo and their allies around a very big house, like a slow-motion version of Benny Hill.

Also in 1972, I completed my first collection.

I don't know what it is about medium-sized boys that

cultivates their magpie instinct, but I suspect it must be their fathers: a handed-down generational thing.

Esso's Top Team Collection was a hotchpotch of the best players from each of the UK's national sides. These were thin metallic discs, featuring a photographic head-shot, and I have them here in front of me, still stuck firmly to their full-colour, fold-out collector's display. We amassed two complete sets, Dad and I. But then, we did cheat.

I had been studying the fledgling collection on the sofa one day, put them to one side, shifted my weight, and the lot slipped down the side, off a light tan leatherette cushion. Though we fished with knives and forks, they could not be retrieved.

So Dad strapped me into his white Rover and sped us down to Esso. If we'd had a siren, we would have used it.

I remember sitting in the passenger seat, literally praying.

We had lost, at most, a dozen players. When Dad came back from the cashier's, his cradled arms were filled to overflowing. What he had said, I have no idea, but it no doubt involved tears, and it had worked.

If being a father comes with a job description, that sort of thing should be in there.

Before that had come Esso's 1970 World Cup Coin Collection, but that was really Dad's, acquired 'on my behalf'. I have that set here too.

Brian Labone, Peter Simpson, Henry Newton, Keith Newton, Mick Jones . . . These names mean nothing to me.

A head of each squad player appears in relief on each lightweight, shiny coin. Brian Labone looks a bit like a Roman emperor. For all I knew, he was one.

But football interested me only vaguely as a small boy. Far more enticing had been Sugar Smacks' 'Free Dr. Who Badge' promotion.

(Sugar Smacks are basically today's Sugar Puffs, with the domestic violence element removed.)

There were six to collect and I managed five of them: Dr. Who [sic] – I am annoyingly pedantic; I would point out not only that is he 'the Doctor' not 'Dr. Who', but that 'Dr' is a contraction not an abbreviation, and therefore requires no full stop (or rather full point) – The Master, The Brigadier, Jo Grant and Bessie (the Doctor's vintage yellow roadster), each slightly lamely illustrated, as if that mattered to me at the time.

Though my sticky fingers delved desperately into the packed snow-crunch of each new Sugar Smacks box, head to one side, tongue lolling, eyes wandering, following teeny exploratory movements of sweating fingertips, the UNIT badge was fated never to emerge.

How I had coveted that bastard badge.

Five out of six. Five. Out of six.

NEVER would I let that happen again.

By 1973 I had become a big boy. Tri-ang had gone bust and Dad would have been commuting from Horndean to Basingstoke, Hampshire, to Blatchford's, the artificial limb manufacturer.

Let's have a look on Google maps. As the crow flies, it's a journey of around 25 miles – for a man who holidays at less distance, that's quite some way.

No wonder thoughts were turning to a move.

I should note in my parents' defence that they would have emigrated to Australia some years previously, with my four brothers, had paperwork wrangles not scuppered the plans.

London to Sydney, again as the crow flies, is 10,562 miles.

Alton would have to do me.

★

Around the same time, a magazine came into my life, which I still own and treasure. It's kept in a close-fitting clear plastic bag and the cover has come off its staples, a result of the million readings it has endured, but you can tell that it is loved.

It's the *Radio Times Doctor Who Special*, 68 pages, which was bought for me on a Saturday shopping trip to Southsea. (Remember those quaint times when shops never opened on Sundays?) I can still picture myself coming out of the newsagent, gazing in fevered anticipation at its wraparound cover, which shows Jon Pertwee on an alien planet, strange gloopy sand-coloured surface and purple horizon, pursued by a queue of classic foes: Sea Devil, Cyberman, Dalek. His red tartan cape is in full swish as he spins around, startled, about to launch into some Venusian karate. The Earth hangs in the background, its moon merely a dot.

It's a fantastic, alluring cover, even by today's standards. And it promises: 'The 10th year of BBC1's great adventure series. Inside: The stars, full background, how to build your own Dalek and a chilling new Dalek story by Terry Nation.'

All that for 30p.

According to the inside blurb, nine million people were tuning in to *Doctor Who* every week. Programmes nowadays would kill for that figure – besides, of course, the new *Doctor Who*, which almost manages it and occasionally surpasses it.

Why did it mean so much to me, that magazine?

At the ages of four, five, six, seven, life goes past pretty quickly, even though you're not doing very much. That burgeoning brain is working at a hundred miles an hour, taking new stuff in, sifting fact from fiction and failing wilfully on the Santa/Tooth Fairy front – and plenty is new.

All those *Doctor Who* monsters I had lapped up would have seemed distant memories even then. That *Radio Times Doctor Who Special* brought them flooding back.

I didn't bother reading the interviews with Hartnell, Troughton and Pertwee, which were too wordy and anyway the actors really didn't matter. I made straight for the episode listings, which detailed every single story from day one – most of which I had missed seeing, several on account of not being born – with write-up and colour pictures.

Sensorites, Daleks on Westminster Bridge, early Cybermen, a Yeti, Ice Warriors and, yes!, from my era, Silurians, Axons, the Daemon, Alpha Centauri, Sea Devils, Ogrons, Draconians, Bessie, Giant Maggots!

I just stared and stared and stared. I'm not sure I have ever left those pages.

A few things are worth noting.

On page 21, in the blurb for *The Tomb of the Cybermen*, a sentence goes: 'Victoria saves the party from the Tombs, but the Cybermen retaliate by sending Cybermats – small'. And there it seemed to end.

Retaliate by sending Cybermats – small?! Bit of a blunt description, I thought. I remember being utterly perplexed. For years.

Looking at it now, it's just an odd line-break; you simply have to raise your eyes to the top of the next column, where it continues: 'metallic creatures – to attack them.'

On page 40, the first of a two-page, suitably futuristic illustration that ushers in Dalek creator Terry Nation's exclusive tale, 'WE ARE THE DALEKS!', I have doodled my own Dalek, in biro.

Quite why I thought my drawing skills might add anything to the vivid cityscape under attack, I have no idea. It is shit. A spindly, ill-proportioned thing that would have had trouble terrorising a death-bed geriatric.

Final mention is reserved for the 'How to Build a Dalek' feature, which fills six pages, with instructions, materials required and copious line drawings.

Approximate total cost of building Dalek: £15.

Like any boy, I was desperate to build one. Imagine owning a tame Dalek! You could get in it and scare people!

Then you look properly at the materials required. They include: 28 lb bag modelling clay, 28 lbs fast-setting potter's plaster, 4 sq yds hessian scrim, ½ pint PVA release agent, 2 oz accelerator, 2 oz catalyst, strips of glass matt . . . I could go on. In fact, I will: 6 lbs layup resin, acetone, 2 6V 0.3 amp bulbs and holders . . . Including, of course, a sink plunger.

Suddenly I wasn't so desperate. I don't know what layup resin is even now, and if you wrapped me in hessian scrim, chanting, 'This is hessian scrim! This is hessian scrim!', I wouldn't be any the wiser.

I had a toilet roll holder, one battery (dead), four boiled sweets and some fluff from the corners of a pocket. Would that do?

Approximate total cost to sanity of building Dalek: incalculable.

Wisely, Dad steered well clear.

I have never loved a magazine more. I doubt I have ever loved a book more . . . Well, one springs to mind.

Our neighbours on one side at Murray Road may have been called Owen and June. Whatever, the lady of the house one morning ushered me over and handed me a hardback tome titled *Adrift in the Stratosphere* – an incredibly sweet gesture. These days, neighbours are more likely to fornicate on your driveway than shoot you with a big gun because your driveway was a bit uncomfortable.

I still have that book, too. Somewhere.

It's a real boy's-own adventure of a journey into outer space – written by the hardly romantically named Professor A M Low (I just searched for him on Amazon and the best it could do was *Low Back Syndromes* by Craig E Morris) –

starring three lads named Peter, Philip and . . . the last name escapes me, but I suspect he was the fat one. How they managed to get into space, rockets not being generally left around, I have no recollection, but I read that book repeatedly and moaned to my parents that I wished they had named me Peter.

Adrift in the Stratosphere, Doctor Who, a few Ladybird books on planets and stars and NASA's real-life explorative efforts were giving me the serious space horn.

In a couple of years time, I would compile 'Project: Space', a handwritten research effort with iffy illustrations, as part of a bid to win a scholarship to a public school.

And as trailers for the rest of a book go, I'm not sure that can be beaten.

I have missed out one anecdote from my early years, which springs to mind. When I Tried to Dig Down to Australia.

Someone must have told me that if you dug straight down, you would eventually hit Australia. And I must have understood their every word, bar 'eventually'.

I'm there in the back garden with a red plastic, wooden-handled beach spade and it must have been summer because the earth was very dry and hard-packed. I can picture the hole, which was perhaps eight inches in diameter and no more than two inches deep. Yet I fully expected at any moment to break through a final crust of dirt, at which the ground would fall away and I would be able to peer down into what I imagined as some kind of Lost World, of blue skies, mountains and seas.

Even a bloke's head popping up through the hole, wearing a dangly-corks hat, going, 'Strewth, mate!' would have been something.

I was beginning to understand the concept of failure.

★

Coming up: We move to Alton, a blubbing street-full of friends fails to wave me off; the Weetabix Doctor Who promotion makes my year; Tom Baker takes over as the Doctor; Mum offers to make some outfits for my Action Men, I accept . . .