



Published Opinion Piece – ‘Doctor Who’

NB: This was written to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of ‘Doctor Who’ and aimed at fans.

‘Doctor Who’: ‘Resurrection of the Daleks’ by Guy Lambert

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I committed a crime during ‘Resurrection of the Daleks’. There, I’ve said it, and in print, so now it’s public. The crime was plagiarism, and it was on a massive scale! So, after nearly 30 years, I feel it’s finally time to admit all in an open letter to the man I wronged:

Dear Mr Eric Saward,

I very much enjoyed your ‘Doctor Who’ serial ‘Resurrection of the Daleks’ back in 1984. I didn’t quite understand the ‘Movellan War’ references, who Davros was, or what Daleks were (I’d only seen one briefly in ‘The Five Doctors’) but I really enjoyed it. So much so that it inspired me to write. So much so that it inspired me to steal.

After the final episode had been transmitted, I ran behind the sofa! Not to hide from the Daleks, but to write my first ever ‘Doctor Who’ story. But it wasn’t really mine, it was yours. I’m sorry to say that I copied your story, and almost word-for-word.

I spent about an hour writing it on lined paper with a ballpoint pen. It just came gushing out. I changed a few things, like giving the Doctor a new companion (I thought that would be original and ground-breaking) and I think there was a lot more running up-and-down corridors. And probably more Daleks. And definitely appalling dialogue. But essentially it was your story, re-told, with fewer scenes and a lot more things blowing up for no reason.

My script editor was the one to spot it. He read the entire document (some 4 x A4 pages) and exposed the lie. We chatted about it over a cup of tea in the lounge while Mum made the dinner.

Oh yes, I should explain: my script editor was my dad, and I was 9. Does that make it ok?

All the best,

Guy Lambert

I wonder what Eric would think if he saw that. I hope he'd be amused, and very happy. You see, 'Doctor Who' was a huge inspiration for me. Peter Davison my hero, and I loved the monsters, the imagination, and the stories. Moreover, it was during 'Resurrection of the Daleks' that I first remember discovering that I didn't just love watching stories, I also loved telling them too.

My dad was on hand to give praise and point out the plagiarism, but during our 'Resurrection'-chat he was the first person to ever reveal a vital story-telling concept. "All stories," Dad pointed out, "have a beginning, middle, and an end." That changed everything. From then on, I thought seriously about writing, all thanks to the inspiring tales of 'Doctor Who'.

So hot on the heels of my copy-and-pasted epic, I sent the 'Doctor Who' Office my proposal for 'The Four Doctors'. Oh yes: Jon Pertwee, Tom Baker, Peter Davison, and Colin Baker would all team up for this epic story about a monster that had lost four eggs and needed them found. Basically, it was like 'Key to Time'... but with eggs... and about 10 minutes long! I was so convinced that it would be produced that I wrote to Colin Baker asking if he would be willing to appear in it. I'm pretty sure he said 'yes'. (So technically, I could dig out the story, write it up for Big Finish, and force him to star in it!)

I also wrote four, proper TV scripts for a story entitled 'Attack from the Sea'. Andrew Cartmel was extremely encouraging to new writers, and although I'm sure he never had time to read a word of my scripts, his office gave the impression that he was interested. To a young boy desperate to break into TV that was incredibly motivating.

In the early '90s, I wrote for my local Doctor Who club's fanzine, 'The Who St Kids Magazine'. At the time DWM was publishing short, original fiction, and we decided to do the same. Oddly enough one of the first stories I wrote was a kind-of sequel to 'Resurrection', involving the Seventh Doctor returning to visit Tegan to apologise for involving her in his violent world. They were watching news reports of wars playing on a TV in a shop window and to me, that was deep and meaningful stuff!

Since then, I have written a vast number of scripts for television, most of which you wouldn't have heard of, and produced a lot too. Nowadays I read lengthy books discussing the 'three-act structure' and the nuances of dialogue, but ultimately it still all comes down to that simple lesson learnt during 'Resurrection of the Daleks': beginning-middle-end.

What of 'Resurrection' itself? I adored it. I loved the action, the fast pace, the grime, and the true sense of danger. I loved the thrilling image of the High Council being attacked by the Doctor's clone! That was a whole adventure, and one my mind happily created. In many ways, it could've been my generation's Time War – what a story that would be!

Plus, there was the history of the show, all presented in flashbacks of every Doctor and companion (well, nearly every, poor Leela). As a child, I suddenly became aware of this show's mammoth past: how could I see all this stuff? Where was it? This felt like a mini-history lesson of worlds and people that had many stories of their own to tell.

Most of all I loved it because it was amazing television. This story inspired me, encouraged me, and helped make me the writer I am today.

Now, how to end this brief look back at 'Resurrection'? Well, let's go back to the beginning and my letter to Eric Seward. How about this for an ending:

P.S. Thanks for the inspiration, Eric!