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The epic in the everyday: television and *Doctor Who*, 'The Chase'

Jonathan Bignell

The British science fiction television series *Doctor Who*'s interweaving of the epic with the everyday was a key component of its rapid popularity when it began on BBC in 1963 and has contributed to its ongoing cultural significance ever since. The programme's run continued unbroken until its cancellation in 1989, then in 2005 a reboot reinvigorated the series and it is still being made today. Its audio-visual style has changed, always remaining ambitious but restricted by the everyday constraints of its conditions of production. The first *Doctor Who* storyline began when two London schoolteachers tracked an enigmatic pupil back to her home, finding her living with her supposed grandfather in a scrapyard. The teachers followed the irascible old man and the girl into a police telephone kiosk that turned out to be their spaceship and whisked all four of them back in time to the Stone Age. The elderly Doctor (William Hartnell) was moody and irresponsible, and the science teacher Ian Chesterton (William Russell) and history teacher Barbara Wright (Jacqueline Hill), together with the young Susan (Carole Anne Ford) bickered with each other as, in a series of different storylines, they subsequently landed in past and future times and on alien planets. After the first adventure on prehistoric Earth, the second serial took them to a planet devastated by nuclear war, where a race of aggressive creatures, the Daleks, lived inside mobile armoured casings and sought to annihilate all other forms of life. These popular antagonists appeared again in the tenth *Doctor Who* serial in 1964 and then in the sixteenth serial 'The Chase' (1965), analysed in this chapter.

'The Chase' comprises six 25-minute episodes, written by Terry Nation and directed by Richard Martin, and was broadcast on successive Saturday afternoons starting on 22 May 1965. Its first episode takes the Doctor and his companions to the desert planet Aridius, but

once the Daleks' pursuit of them has begun, they embark on an epic journey that ranges across time and space, to Earth's Empire State Building, the sailing ship Mary Celeste, a Gothic haunted house funfair attraction, and then back into space to the jungle planet Mechanus, finishing in the planet's futuristic metal city inhabited by robots. The detail of the screenplay was written mainly by the BBC's script editor, Dennis Spooner, who was tasked with expanding Nation's brief but ambitious outline into a drama that could be produced with the BBC's available resources (Pixley, 1983: 46). The main body of the drama was shot in a television studio, and the vast majority of sequences are of characters talking to each other within confined interior spaces. The epic journey begins from, and includes significant passages of, relatively prosaic, studio-bound drama dominated by dialogue.

Combinations of apparently opposing epic and everyday qualities underpin not only *Doctor Who*'s achievement in the history of popular television but also its role as an exploration of what television fiction can be. The series' epic qualities include its breadth and scale of storytelling, potentially encompassing all of time and space and the opportunities that historical fact, scientific knowledge and imaginative speculation can offer to its creators. In the protagonists' encounters with alien civilisations and characters from distant epochs of Earth's history, moral questions are inevitably posed about the choices the Doctor and his companions should make, how they should behave towards others and what values might persist across different locations in space or moments in time. The notion of epic includes lofty seriousness, yet 'The Chase' embeds epic within the everyday routines of its characters and of the BBC's weekly output. The serial begins in outer space and shows significant events in Earth's history and culture, but 'The Chase' also shows ordinary moments in the lives of its protagonists and comes back to present-day London, literally back down to Earth, in its final episode.

‘The Chase’ is a serial that no-one would describe as the best or most important in *Doctor Who*’s history. Indeed, it sometimes feels like one hastily thrown-together idea after another, as the storyline runs through the dramatic possibilities offered by weekly science fiction adventure. Each week the protagonists face new problems and visit new places, jumping from one location to another as they flee from the pursuing Daleks, so that their epic journey in space and time becomes somewhat peremptory and repetitive, an everyday experience both for them and for *Doctor Who*’s viewers. The serial is thus, however, a meditation on what *Doctor Who* could be, at a transitional moment in the programme’s development when its protagonists and antagonists, and its generic and formal repertoire, had become relatively familiar. The programme was always a space for testing the boundaries of genre and format, and the engagement of television with the living culture of the present. *Doctor Who*’s testing of boundaries is evident in its engagement with the distinctions between epic and everyday, when these distinctions blur or the opposites collide. In combining the epic and the everyday, ‘The Chase’ implicitly reflects on how the everyday medium of television might aspire to epic grandeur and undermine it at the same time.

‘The Chase’s episodes were shot using three or four black-and-white electronic cameras working together, shooting the main action of each episode in a single day. This was an era when the BBC was making the programme ‘as-if live’, meaning that action was recorded in sequence, from the beginning to the end of each episode, in long unbroken tranches of performance that were then assembled on videotape with no significant editing before broadcast (Bentham 1986). To make an episode each week meant that production had to become a routine, everyday affair, in which time and money were limited and resources had to be used efficiently. A small number of action set-pieces or filmed special effects sequences using miniatures were shot separately elsewhere and edited into the programme, and ‘The Chase’ exploits this opportunity to realise a wide range of exotic, alien spaces,

places and creatures. 'The Chase' is an example of how *Doctor Who*'s format and style integrated different resources, including video shooting of performances in the studio, models, filmed effects, montages of photographic stills and inserted stock film footage. The scale and spectacle that epic implies had to be contained within the programme's gruelling everyday routine. Under intense budgetary and time pressure, the programme aimed to achieve the epic out of an everyday assemblage of different technologies, practices of performance and dramatic tropes. Moreover, the creators had to consider the artistic implications: the style of the specially filmed sequences had to match the style of multi-camera video production.

This chapter will focus most on the opening and closing episodes of 'The Chase', titled 'The Executioners' and 'The Planet of Decision'. It will reflect on how the epic and the everyday were often addressed in unexpected ways. *Doctor Who* was a low-budget series designed to capture large family audiences and draws from many well-known tropes and generic structures. But it was, at the same time, ambitious technologically, and important to the BBC's status in national culture and its continuing popular support, reflecting the institution's key aims to educate and inform its audiences as well as to entertain them. 'The Chase' has many odd enjambments of diverse ingredients. The chapter argues that the serial addresses its own diversity of mood and tone reflexively, questioning both the high-cultural kudos of epic and also the apparent inconsequentiality of the everyday. It often does this by thematising ideas of knowledge, representation and communication, and especially the role of television in these everyday human capacities and experiences.

The epic and television science fiction

Doctor Who built on popular understandings of the science fiction genre with storylines based on time travel and encounters with alien creatures. The programme had a consistent

format and stylistic repertoire, in which the Doctor and his traveling companions featured in serials that each comprised about six weekly episodes. At the end of one serial they would travel to a new location and a new serial would begin, with new settings, secondary characters and a new multi-episode storyline. Such a structure is characteristic of some versions of the epic as a narrative mode. Virgil's first-century BC poem *The Aeneid*, an example of the classical epic, has a single narrative that unfolds across twelve books but comprises distinct episodes set in different locations. A more contemporary epic, Anthony Powell's sequence of twelve novels, *A Dance to the Music of Time* (1977), explores how a group of contemporary characters interact in different combinations over several decades. 'The Chase' is a picaresque adventure, but as well as epic expansiveness it also includes many interior dialogue-centred scenes, combining the characteristics of the examples of classical and modern epic mentioned above. Unlike literary epics such as those, however, 'The Chase' exhibits a relative lack of narrative complication or character development. In these respects it contrasts with the repeated deferrals that interrupt Aeneas's progress towards his destiny of founding the Roman empire in *The Aeneid*, or the gradual growth of the introspective narrator Nick Jenkins's psychological self-knowledge in Powell's books. Instead, 'The Chase' comes across as an odd hybrid of movement and stasis, linearity and dispersal, which shifts tonally between the epic and the everyday.

The reason for borrowing aspects of structure from the epic was that *Doctor Who* ran year-round, with no expectation of an end and thus no narrative resolution or overall goal. It was thus like a soap opera designed for infinite prolongation, where the term 'epic' might indicate extension and breadth of characters and storylines, but where stasis and repetition fit the narrative to a daily or weekly rhythm of broadcasting. In this respect, *Doctor Who* is distinctively televisual, rather than literary, in its realisation of the epic's possibilities. The format of *Doctor Who* was devised by staff in the BBC's Serials department who were

accustomed to working on long-form weekly dramas such as the workplace drama *Compact* (1962-5) and the medical series *Dr Finlay's Casebook* (1962-71). It was overseen mainly by C. E. 'Bunny' Webber and the format was outlined in a memo he wrote in July 1963 to his superior, the BBC's Head of Serials (Webber 1963). *Doctor Who* was designed as a sequence of serials, each between four and ten episodes long and each commissioned from a different screenwriter. Each episode would end like a thriller, with a cliff-hanger to be picked up in the following instalment. The programme had been commissioned by Sydney Newman, BBC's Head of Drama, a Canadian producer first brought to the UK to add dynamism to the commercial ABC company's drama output. At ABC he initiated the critically respected *Armchair Theatre* (ITV, 1956-74) anthology of original dramas that gained top-ten ratings and had audiences often in excess of twelve million (Bignell and O'Day 2004: 29-30). He also created the landmark action thriller series *The Avengers* (ITV, 1961-9), and his ideas were both lucrative and culturally ambitious. Newman was poached from ABC by the BBC in 1962, and *Doctor Who* was part of his larger plan for the BBC to gain viewers and public profile with popular and ambitious dramas. *Doctor Who* was designed to attract a family audience on Saturday tea-times, after the BBC's afternoon sports programme *Grandstand* (1958-2007) and before the beginning of the evening entertainment schedule, initiated by the pop music panel show *Juke Box Jury* (BBC, 1959-67).

Science fiction was thought to be an appropriate genre for this mixed audience. The BBC had broadcast a live television adaptation of H. G. Wells' novel *The Time Machine* (1895) from its studio in 1949, with no location shooting and no visual effects, and in 1953, the BBC serial *The Quatermass Experiment* placed a deadly alien incursion in familiar London settings, to thrilling effect. For cinema science fiction the philosophical concepts of spectacle and the sublime (Bukatman 1999) are helpful to theorise versions of the epic in which slowed-down narrative pace and distanced point of view allow time to contemplate

elaborate special effects, such as in the lengthy effects sequences of *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) or *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* (1979). In contrast, the effects sequences in *Doctor Who* are short and integrated into the action, maintaining a pace designed to thrill, shock and energise the viewer. Science fiction was an established television genre, an everyday aspect of weekly schedules, but a genre whose serial instalments were built around surprising ideas, threatening monsters and storytelling that introduced uncanny narrative twists (Telotte 2008). Epic qualities in these earlier programmes included the picaresque journey, visually imaginative action set-pieces that could be achieved with limited resources and an overarching moral framework that tested the protagonist and also the alien and human civilisations he (or occasionally she) encountered.

At ABC, Newman had commissioned the children's serial, *Pathfinders in Space* (ITV, 1959), a seven-part space exploration story that was closely based on emerging spaceflight technologies but had fast-moving action involving the British scientist Professor Wedgewood and his children. The format of *Pathfinders in Space* strongly prefigures that of *Doctor Who*, with its elderly scientist accompanied by younger assistants who get into scrapes. The task for the creators of *Doctor Who* was to use proven generic ingredients in a cheap, everyday science fiction serial that would be both popular and serious, like those predecessors. The multi-episode serials that comprise *Doctor Who* had to establish recurrent characters, a recognisable visual style and a fictional world that would permit extension over multiple series. The programme is paradigmatic of what Matt Hills identified as a 'perpetuated hermeneutic', an unresolved enigma that can be elaborated over time, centred in this case on the enigmatic central character, the Doctor, and 'hyperdiegesis' (2002: 137) in which an expansive fictional world can be explored an in almost unlimited number of storylines. The uneven tone of 'The Chase', then, results from the interaction of competing forces in *Doctor Who* that lead towards both the exotic and the familiar, the distinctive and

the generic, and extensive and intensive storytelling. These facets map in different ways onto the epic and the everyday.

The TARDIS and everyday space

The title sequence of ‘The Chase’, shared by the other *Doctor Who* stories of the time, prepares the viewer for an exciting and other-worldly experience and places the programme beyond the everyday. The sequence consists of a background of streams of cloud-like movement. The caption ‘Doctor Who’ emerges slowly out of these abstract patterns, and episode-specific captions follow. The sequence is accompanied by a simple electronic signature tune (by Australian composer Ron Grainer), but its instrumentation is more significant than its melody. It is a wholly synthesised electronic piece made by the BBC Radiophonic Workshop, a laboratory producing sonic effects and music to support BBC output on radio and television. The visual effects derived from *Doctor Who*’s Associate Producer Mervyn Pinfield’s previous experience with the BBC’s Langham Group, which experimented with innovative mechanical and electronic techniques including green-screen, mattes and split-screen. The visual and aural style of the title sequence is picked up elsewhere in ‘The Chase’ when Modernist design features and an interest in machines, robots and alien technology suggest the strange, unearthly and futuristic. The aesthetic choices of visual effects, electronic music and synthetically produced sound effects made in the opening title sequence of *Doctor Who* announce to the viewer that its fictional world is far distant from the everyday. Moreover, it asserts that the everyday television medium and the familiar format of weekly action-adventure can offer the thrill of transcending everyday experience.

The first scene in the episode immediately brings the viewer into an alien space (Figure 5.1). It is a short sequence with no camera movement and no cuts to another point of view, where the camera is focused solely on a Dalek using some kind of intercom or radio to

communicate with its colleagues. The Dalek moves slightly back and forth, moves its antenna and arms, and small lights flash on the top of its casing. These are conventions denoting that this Dalek is speaking, which would otherwise be unclear since the creature has no facial features. The audience hears the Dalek's grating, electronically distorted voice announcing the start of a pursuit of the Doctor and his companions through time and space, once the Daleks' own vehicle is ready for launch. The backdrop is a blank wall on which are mounted some rectangular, technological devices with functional-looking controls, wiring and an angular indicator light. There is little exposition of what this creature is, where it is located or why it might want to exterminate the Doctor, and this is significant since it shows that *Doctor Who*'s producers have assumed a level of audience knowledge of the Daleks and knowledge of the conventions for representing them. While the alienness of the creature is important to the drama, there is already a trace of the familiar, the everyday, about its role as an antagonist.

The opening of 'The Chase' then moves inside the TARDIS, one of *Doctor Who*'s most distinctive iconographic components and one that performs several functions relating to the epic and the everyday. Its name derives from the words Time And Relative Dimension In Space, referring to its huge interior space compared to its exterior dimensions, and its ability to move through both space and time. It looks from the outside like a British police telephone kiosk, a blue booth-like object often found in British towns between the 1930s and 1970s that was used to summon help from the local police station. Inside, however, the TARDIS is a huge spacecraft and time machine, with many rooms and complex technologies. It is a space within which narrative action takes place, typically in the form of exchanges of dialogue between the main characters and thus it is often a relatively everyday dramatic locale. The protagonists live and work there, and it is a home as well as a vehicle. In the latter aspect it is similar to the magical horses, flying carpets, ships or dragons that take the protagonists of

fantasy epics on their adventures. The near constant presence of the TARDIS in episodes of *Doctor Who* signals the programme's play with notions of epic and everyday in material, spatial terms.

The camera discovers Ian, one of the Doctor's human travelling companions, sitting in the TARDIS, wearing a stripy casual shirt rather than his customary jacket, as if he is on holiday. He reads a book called *Monsters from Outer Space*, which he says is 'a bit far-fetched', amusingly distancing the action of *Doctor Who* from the generic tropes of popular science fiction. His fellow former teacher and TARDIS passenger Barbara is also engaged in what seems to be an unnecessary pastime, rather than necessary work. She is laying out panels of fabric on the floor, with which to make a dress for the young Vicki (Maureen O'Brien), successor to the first serial's Susan character, who is travelling with the Doctor after being orphaned in a spaceship crash in the twenty-fifth century. Vicki herself wanders around the TARDIS, with the camera following her listless perambulation. A sense of enclosure and purposelessness is conveyed partly by the long durations of the shots comprising the sequence, and the apparent absence of a spatial focus within the TARDIS set. The TARDIS has become a domestic space, in which adults quietly get on with their own thing, whereas the youthful Vicki seems to feel both trapped inside and uninterested in doing anything. The TARDIS has become like a contemporary household on a dull weekend afternoon in 1965, perhaps matching the experience of many of its viewers on the Saturday when the episode was broadcast. Even a spaceflight can become everyday and rather boring.

The Doctor, on the other hand, livens things up with an excited demonstration of his new Time-space Visualiser (Figure 5.2). He had been given the Visualiser at the end of the preceding *Doctor Who* serial, 'The Space Museum' (BBC, 1965). This large prop, taller than the actors, has a television monitor at its centre. Within the story, it acts as a relay device that can show pictures from any time or place. In production terms, it is a monitor linked to the

studio's vision mixing gallery and can display pictures deriving from stock film footage or video feeds from other studio cameras (Pixley 1983: 47). The Visualiser sequence is distracting and mildly amusing, but its repertoire of supposed wonders quickly becomes everyday for both the viewer and the characters in the TARDIS. The first moment Visualised is Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, requested by Ian, and Lincoln's (Robert Marsden) delivery is ponderous and tedious. Its hectoring, educational tone is not shared by the next sequence, suggested by Barbara, which is an encounter in which Sir Francis Bacon (Roger Hammond) suggests that William Shakespeare (Hugh Walters) should write a play about the Prince of Denmark; it is a knowing joke about the controversies surrounding Shakespeare's authorship of *Hamlet*. Vicki intervenes to set up the Visualiser to play footage of The Beatles performing 'Ticket to Ride', which she describes as 'classical music', another of the programme's destabilisations of hierarchies of cultural value. The Beatles film was a recent, pre-existing promotional film and many younger viewers would have seen it on the BBC's weekly pop music show *Top of the Pops* (1964-2006). The Visualiser sequence throws together a diverse collection of modes of address, high culture and popular cultural ingredients and different times in human history. The sequence's tone ranges from the dry and school-teacherly to humour at the expense of the Doctor and the Visualiser's technology, as he tinkers with its controls and eventually hits it with his screwdriver. The remarkable machine and the remarkable things it can show become reduced to distractions from everyday routine.

In the format developed at the start of production in 1963, the alien Doctor was conceived as senile but brilliant, traveling through time and space in a vehicle that he did not wholly control. His companions would be a child, and two contemporary schoolteachers so that science and history could feature as educational elements for the children who were always assumed to be part of the programme's audience. By the time of 'The Chase', *Doctor*

Who had become a success primarily because of the appeal of its futuristic serials, but the programme still aimed to fulfil an educational aim by going back in time. The Visualiser expresses the ability of television to bring historical periods together, including future histories, when it features performers embodying Elizabeth I (Vivienne Bennett), Shakespeare, Francis Bacon and Abraham Lincoln, and Barbara describes it as a 'time television'. For The Beatles to represent classical music from Vicki's 25th century point of view is to recognise the historicity of Britain's present, placing 1965 in a continuum that includes far distant futures as well as the past. However, the epic sweep that this historical reflexivity implies is undercut by the tone in which these different times are presented. In as much as it represents television, the Visualiser has the effect of homogenising the wide range of different places and times it can show, and decontextualising them. History becomes everyday and relatively undifferentiated.

Suddenly, the drama's tone changes from the everyday to the epic as the Visualiser shows the Daleks using their own time machine to leave their home planet and pursue the travellers. The Daleks, their technologies and their home planet are depicted with angular, mechanical and metallic design motifs, and the design of the tank-like Dalek creatures, without faces, skin or legs has an aesthetic that expresses their difference from humans and humanoids, and from the homeliness established so far in 'The Chase'. As Tat Wood and Lawrence Miles have suggested, the design cues for the Daleks are successful mostly because they grant the creatures agency and character without anthropomorphism:

> The Dalek's head-piece and eye-stalk make clear that this is a self-willed thing, that it's a kind of mechanised, technological life-form, but at the same time – and in a way no other screen monster has been able to match – it has not a hint of an expression,

nothing to link it to humanity or suggest that it's anything but a threat. (Wood and Miles 2006: 27)

The design of the Dalek timeship has parallels with the TARDIS, in that the main area represented is a large open control room, with a door to the outside, and a central console containing instruments and controls. The console in the Dalek ship has a central transparent pillar and within it there are moving, spinning objects demonstrating that the ship is in operation. But whereas the TARDIS has a largely plain and uniform interior with circular motifs, the Dalek ship is equipped with geometric, often square design features and black-and-white concentric rings. Whereas the TARDIS is most often seen as a room or suite of rooms, the Dalek ship has vertical levels and an elevator that moves the Daleks from one deck to another. The aesthetic feel of its design presents it as a factory rather than a home, very far removed from the everyday.

Although the camera dwells on the Visualiser screen to show the Daleks beginning to chase the TARDIS, all of the characters have by then walked off out of frame, so they fail to realise they are in danger. In this way the programme separates the Daleks from them and from the everyday, establishing the Daleks as the embodiment of threat, and establishing the pursuit narrative as a kind of epic journey. As Gary Gilliat (1998: 17) explains, Dalek-mania and extensive merchandising of *Doctor Who* products had erupted in the Autumn of 1963, ran throughout 1964 and the first half of 1965, but were waning by the broadcast of 'The Chase' in June. The drama of 'The Chase' both acknowledges the audience's familiarity with the Daleks by the lack of impact they have had on the protagonists thus far, while the programme also reinforces the danger they represent.

Epic ambitions and everyday routines

The TARDIS functions as a portal, or threshold between spaces and places. In fantasy and science fiction, everyday objects such as this apparent police box, or the wardrobe in the epic multi-volume Narnia fantasy stories, for example, can suture two different settings together and permit characters to jump between them. In television drama this is structurally important because it means that separately shot sequences can be narratively connected. The Doctor is a traveller, and the TARDIS joins the space from which it dematerialises to the space in which it then appears. In this regard its function is very similar to the transporter in *Star Trek* (NBC, 1966-9) or the underground machine in *The Time Tunnel* (ABC, 1966). The TARDIS is a means to explore a potentially infinite number of story worlds, with the potential to take the protagonists on epic and thrilling journeys, and in production terms it enables the making of numerous weekly dramas that are structured and made in relatively similar ways as part of an everyday production routine.

In 'The Chase', the Doctor lands the TARDIS on a distant planet that its inhabitants call Aridius, heated by the twin suns seen in its bright sky. A long shot establishes the TARDIS's location in a desert, partially buried by a sandstorm. Vicki and Ian begin to explore the planet, thus opening up the narrative possibility of parallel narratives: when the TARDIS crew separate, one group might get lost or captured and the other will need to rescue them. The Doctor and Barbara begin to sunbathe on the sand, continuing the motif of leisure and hints of beach holidays that were suggested by the preceding sequence in the TARDIS, but as Vicki and Ian wander away into the distance and into the unknown, this also suggests a false sense of security. Moreover, in sequences like these where shooting on film was used for exterior shots, leaving the TARDIS meant departing from video onto film. The shots of Vicki and Ian on distant sand dunes have a quite distinct visual quality because of the different lighting styles and image quality that film produced. Black and white video pictures have less contrast than film, and a rather flat quality compared to the more lustrous texture of

film. The space outside the TARDIS really feels like another world because of this difference of medium, so for narrative and aesthetic reasons the episode now feels as if it is moving away from the everyday.

Doctor Who was working with newly developed technologies and innovative production techniques, primarily to achieve the minimum number of breaks in recording and the minimum number of videotape edits, film inserts or post-production processes (Wood and Miles 2006: 85-9). 'The Chase' was shot at Riverside Studios in London, which was small compared to the BBC's purpose-built facilities at Television Centre, and the three or four large and heavy cameras that shot the episodes were mounted on cumbersome hydraulic pedestals. Camera movement required careful planning to prevent revealing another camera in shot, shooting the off-set area by mistake, or leaving a camera out of position for a forthcoming shot. Episodes were shot in story order, in lengthy unbroken sequences to save on the cost of expensive video tape, which could only be edited by physically cutting and joining it. If actors forgot their lines, the Assistant Floor Manager could briefly stop the sound recording while a prompt was supplied. The whole procedure was a curious mixture between live theatre performance and filmmaking and was noticeably clunky even at the time. Shooting *Doctor Who* was a hard grind that depended upon an effective everyday routine.

Lacking a budget for the spectacular special effects that could be seen in cinema science fiction, in the 1960s *Doctor Who* relied on a few relatively simple effects to impart a sense of the other-worldly and alien. For example, the dematerialisation of the TARDIS was accomplished by mixing from a live studio shot including the TARDIS to a photograph of the same set without the TARDIS. The two types of video effect available at the time, Inlay and Overlay, worked by substituting part of one image with another. Areas of the camera frame could be overlaid with black masking, and then video feeds from different electronic cameras

could be inlaid into selected areas of the picture. Overlay also used the principle of substitution, where an object or an actor standing in front of a black backdrop could be overlaid onto an image being shot with another camera, so that the actor or object appeared against that background. A further effect routinely used in *Doctor Who* was the overloading of a studio camera's aperture by too much light, which caused the cameras to produce an image in negative. This simple technique was used to portray the extermination ray with which Daleks could vaporise their opponents, negative images of whose bodies would writhe in apparent agony before vanishing from the shot. Extraordinary events could be portrayed in ways that exploited the capability of the relatively simple studio technologies, bringing the ambition of the epic into the everyday routines of the small BBC studios.

On Aridius, the stylistic disjuncture of inside and outside, video and film, prepares the viewer for the introduction of threat into the narrative when the Daleks pursuing the Doctor land there. At the end of episode 1, in a cliff-hanger sequence over which the programme's closing music begins, a Dalek gradually appears out of the planet's sandy surface. Its shiny metal form moves slowly out of the sand towards the camera, inviting viewers to note that the Doctor and his companions are now in immediate danger. This exciting moment was created in simple ways. Aridius was represented by three techniques that were part of *Doctor Who*'s everyday production. Location filming of coastal sand dunes at Camber Sands in Kent, that had been dressed with some fabricated alien-looking vegetation, was matched up with interior studio sequences using sand-scattered floors and a painted backdrop that suggested a distant desert horizon (Pixley 1983: 47). In the studio, a small sandbox represented the surface of Aridius and from it a miniature Dalek was pulled by wires to represent its emergence from beneath the sand. The climactic revelation of a Dalek was an idea that Nation had used in screenplays several times before (Bignell and O'Day 2004: 93-6). In Nation's first serial for *Doctor Who* a Dalek threatened a terrified Barbara at the end of the

first episode, and in the year before ‘The Chase’ a Dalek emerges slowly from the waters of London’s River Thames in ‘The Dalek Invasion of Earth’ (BBC, 1964). So, on one hand, the revelatory appearance of the Doctor’s antagonist fits an understanding of ‘The Chase’ as an epic, Manichean battle between good and evil that ranges across space and time, with thrilling moments of jeopardy. But, on the other hand, the structural motif of the Dalek’s sudden appearance was a familiar dramatic strategy that some viewers would have expected.

Moreover, the soundtrack accompanies the Dalek’s emergence with a spluttering sound that it seems to make, as if it had some grains of sand stuck in its throat. This introduces a comic tone that conflicts with the camera’s image (Daleks do not have throats) and contrasts with the accompanying music stings that invite viewers to recognise danger and threat. In this thrilling moment of tension, ‘The Chase’ is in danger of undermining its epic ambitions and not taking itself seriously.

Undermining the epic

The emergence of the Dalek is reprised for the start of episode 2, ‘The Death of Time’, and its invocation of threat contrasts with the actions of the peaceful reptilian Aridians, formerly the aquatic inhabitants of the planet in a city beneath its seas before their evaporation, who welcome the Doctor and his companions. The Aridians are fishlike humanoids, in slightly bowed attitudes, who contrast with the non-humanoid appearance of the Daleks and also the Aridians’ enemies the Mire Beasts, large, aggressive tentacled creatures originating in the muddy bottom of the sea. The planet’s sandy surface suggests a seabed and Vicki calls the desiccated remains of its plants ‘frozen seaweed’. Nation’s screenplay deploys a concept of evolution, from the monstrous, ravening Mire Beasts to the intelligent, social Aridians who have both language and culture. The creatures on Aridius have also adapted to fit the changes in their newly dry environment, further echoing Darwinian theory. A huge sweep of

geological time, climate change and consequent evolutionary adaptation introduce grand scientific narratives into 'The Chase', combining epic scale with a pedagogical mode of address.

The choices made in specific episodes and serials need to be seen against the broad sweep of *Doctor Who* as a long-running programme. *Doctor Who* was designed to feature both historical stories and futuristic ones, each of which could serve a pedagogic and 'serious' function. At the outset, BBC staff John Braybon and Alice Frick (1962) had recommended in a research report that the new project that would become *Doctor Who* should avoid large and elaborate science fiction settings since the BBC's budget would not run to very convincing special effects. For the same reasons, Newman had instructed the programme's producer Verity Lambert to avoid casting human performers to play 'Bug Eyed Monsters' and robots because these would remind viewers of low-quality US sci-fi films. Conventions of realism were important to *Doctor Who*, as part of a certain seriousness of purpose. But 'The Chase' fails to conform to these parameters. The Aridians are rather obviously actors wearing body suits with fish-like fins attached to them, and the Mire Beast is a cumbersome prop operated by wires. The culture and history of Aridius are not explored, and instead the Aridians become a meek labour force for the Daleks and their underground city is blown up. 'The Chase's version of the science of climate change and evolution is largely a means to move towards the monsters and physical threats of the action adventure and thriller genres, upon which its version of the epic is built.

The fast pace of the action and consequent underdevelopment of the premises underlying the storyline may have been influenced by BBC executives' desire for *Doctor Who* to target the largest possible audience. In its first season the Controller of Programmes for BBC 1, Donald Baverstock (1963), had sent a memo to Newman encouraging the *Doctor Who* production team to 'centre the dramatic movements much more on historical and

scientific hokum' rather than 'slow prosaic dialogue'. As the serial continues, the TARDIS's epic journey becomes an increasingly perfunctory jump between locations, and the dramatic tone of the episodes increasingly shifts towards the metafictional and self-conscious in ways that further challenge the series remit. At the start of episode 3, 'Flight through Eternity', the vengeful Daleks begin a rapid pursuit of the TARDIS in their time machine, and both machines materialise in a sequence of different locations. The TARDIS materialises on the viewing platform at the top of the Empire State building, created in the studio with the surrounding environment of New York portrayed by inserted stock footage (Pixley 1983: 48). Here the group meet a visiting tourist (Peter Purves) from Alabama, dressed in a large cowboy hat. The performance is a caricature, and although it may be evidence of a lack of skill on Purves's part, the scene could also be read as a reflexive comment on the touristic movement between spaces that characterises this episode. The character (named Morton Dill in the script) suggests that the time travellers must be Hollywood actors practising a special effect and he tries to photograph them. Before he can do so, the TARDIS dematerialises, the Daleks arrive and Dill finds them hilarious, thinking they too are stunt performers in a film. In a sense, of course, that is what they are: the Daleks are moved around by people inside the prop casings constructed by BBC designers.

Next, the TARDIS arrives on the deck of the sailing ship Mary Celeste, and once the Daleks arrive their patrolling of the decks makes all the passengers leap overboard, neatly explaining the historic mystery of the ship's abandonment. The action on the deck of the ship is located with cuts to long shots that represent it by means of what is very obviously a model. Then, in episode 4, 'Journey into Terror' the TARDIS appears in a haunted house occupied by Dracula (Malcolm Rogers) and Frankenstein's monster (John Maxim), and the tone again becomes self-conscious. The sequence is accompanied by dissonant, Gothic organ music which could be either diegetic or a non-diegetic commentary on the programme's

arrival in this unexpected genre. The TARDIS crew grapple with the monster, a Dracula costumed like Bela Lugosi who keeps repeating the same phrases over and over again, and a semi-transparent ghostly woman (Roslyn De Winter as the grey lady of haunted house films). *Doctor Who* had established realist conventions in which fantastical story elements, and other fictional characters and environments, were avoided. This sequence seems to break the rules, especially when the Doctor suggests that he and his companions are in some kind of hallucinatory space created by the dark sides of their consciousnesses. In different ways, these short sequences in the middle of 'The Chase' seem to puncture the epic ambitions of *Doctor Who*.

The leap into a Gothic mode had stood out as transgressive to the producer, Verity Lambert, during pre-production. In a memo to the director Richard Martin about the script, she wrote:

> Although this is a good sequence in itself, I think that, if we go into these realms of fiction, we are opening a door on the 'DOCTOR WHO' series which may run us into considerable trouble in the future. I also feel that, although nobody really takes 'DOCTOR WHO' seriously, we have created throughout the series a kind of 'illogical' reality: in other words, we have presented the places we had visited in a realistic way. […] I do not feel that the Daleks should arrive in a place which is an earth [sic] fictional place and, if they do not, it really means that the place does not exist at all except in the minds of our four characters. (Lambert 1965)

As a result of Lambert's memo this disturbance to the everyday verisimilitude of the fictional world was resolved, as the camera pulls back and reveals a sign saying 'Frankenstein's House of Horror – Festival of Ghana 1996'. Despite explaining that the location was a funfair

attraction, this invites the viewer to read the sequence as a reflexive comment on *Doctor Who*'s fictionality and to retain greater critical distance from the story as they (but not the Doctor or his companions) get the joke that has been played on them.

The Daleks activate a robot replica of the Doctor inside their ship in episode 5, whose title 'The Death of Doctor Who' again raises the stakes of threat and peril for the Doctor. The episode is set at night on the jungle planet Mechanus where both the TARDIS and the Dalek ship have landed. The robot was played by Hartnell's body double Edmund Warwick in long shot but with inserted close-ups of Hartnell's face. Dialogue spoken by the double was voiced by Hartnell from out of shot. The visual transitions and inserted dialogue are far from seamless, opening up the possibility of reading moments in 'The Chase' as metafictional commentaries on performativity and the television conventions of role and representation in *Doctor Who*. But they are also lapses within the programme's general seriousness about the realist conventions that Lambert defended. Moreover, in this sequence a BBC camera appears in shot, evidently by mistake, and the covering of leaves on the ground of Mechanus is thin enough to show the shiny studio floor beneath. Such errors reinforce the repeated shifts in the serial between foregrounding and disavowing fictionality, caused by the attempts to realise the epic within the constraints of everyday weekly production.

In the final episode, 'The Planet of Decision', the robot inhabitants of Mechanus capture the Doctor and his companions, taking them to a sophisticated mechanised city elevated hundreds of feet above the jungle. A fellow prisoner, suave and confident space pilot Steven Taylor (Peter Purves) is delighted to see them. He explains that fifty years previously he had been sent to scout the planet prior to colonisation by Earth. Purves' performance here is very distinct from his portrayal of Dill, the former being languid yet athletic, while the latter was awkward and melodramatically expansive. Despite different costumes and a beard, viewers must have recognised that Purves played both. Earlier, Elizabeth I, Abraham Lincoln

and The Beatles were equivalent as performers on the screen of the Doctor's 'time television', Dracula, Frankenstein and the Doctor's double were actors playing robots who portrayed fictional characters and the Daleks were (mis)recognised as studio props. 'The Chase' poses a challenge to its viewers about how they should interpret its tone, taking it seriously in its own terms and disavowing its fictionality or instead interpreting its evident constructedness as a metafictional strategy.

The final episode of *The Chase* was intended as a spectacular, action-filled climax, befitting the epic sweep of its six-week journey through space and time, and drew an audience of 9.5 million viewers, equivalent to 19 per cent of the British population (BBC Audience Research 1965). It demanded extensive special effects, props and scenery, to portray the Daleks' invasion of the city and battle with the Mechonoids, in the chaos of which the Doctor and his companions escape at the last moment before its destruction. Visually, tracking shots across the studio floor, and canted frames, rapid zooms, superimposed explosions and overhead shots of the city give much more variety and excitement to the realisation of the sequence compared to the visual style of previous episodes. The Daleks' and Mechonoids' movement is in itself uncanny and exciting, yet also graceful. The battle between them was shot on film by the BBC Ealing film unit (Pixley 1983: 49), so that the elaborate movement of the creatures and use of real flamethrowers could be planned and safely executed. Rapid editing between different angles on the action gives a sense of scale to the sequence, and post-produced animated explosion effects were added to denote the destructive force of the combat between the two races of sophisticated mechanical creatures. The everyday practicalities of shooting the battle sequence, however, reduced its impact on *Doctor Who*'s future serials. There were only three Mechonoid robots and four Daleks available for shooting the sequence. Nation and the production team were considering using the Mechanoids again in future *Doctor Who* stories, but the spherical, geodesic Mechonoids

were very difficult to manoeuvre, were never used again and overall 'The Chase' backed up Drama department staff's recommendations for *Doctor Who* to avoid expensive and cumbersome spectacle. Indeed, the serial's final sequence decisively returned *Doctor Who* to the everyday, by bringing the escaped humans to the London of 1965.

Back down to Earth

'The Chase's enjambment of epic and everyday is poignantly expressed when, to the Doctor's regret, Ian and Barbara decide to steal the Dalek time machine and use it to return to the Earth of their own time – a clever inversion of their original accidental departure with the Doctor in his TARDIS when *Doctor Who* began. With the Doctor's help, they travel back to 1965, and on the Time-space Visualiser the Doctor and Vicki witness Ian and Barbara's joy at their return. Shots of the Visualiser's screen give the programme access to Ian and Barbara's points of view and thus the sequence brings the television audience back to Earth via the Visualiser's own version of television. This final sequence offers unusually full access to Ian and Barbara's experience, mainly via a montage of still images, accompanied by upbeat, cheerful music. The representation of place, time and mood are very different here from what viewers had seen before in *Doctor Who*. The photographic verisimilitude of the images of London locations provides a sense of authenticity and contemporaneity, distinct both from the story world of the TARDIS and of the alien planets previously visited. The places that Ian and Barbara visit now are well-known London tourist destinations including the Thames embankment and Trafalgar Square. The grandeur of the city's landmarks, which aligns with the epic, is made everyday by rendering it as a sequence of tourist snapshots.

Ian and Barbara are pictured on a London street, cavorting next to a police telephone box that looks just like the TARDIS but is instead an everyday item of street furniture. Some of the stills show Ian and Barbara travelling through the city in a much more banal mode of

transport, a London bus (Figure 5.3). The streets are the area around White City underground station and BBC TV Centre: everyday places but also the site where *Doctor Who*'s adventures in space and time were dreamed up. Throughout, the contrast is between Ian and Barbara's former experience of moving through time and space to the distant past and future, and to alien planets, versus their movement between familiar yet distinctive public spaces in the London of 1965. They are at home in the everyday world from which they originally came but are shown skipping and laughing with joy and excitement at experiencing it anew. They are now travellers and tourists in London rather than in outer space, returning from an epic journey to a more quotidian journey like those that viewers could make themselves.

For Wood and Miles the final sequence of 'The Chase' completes a Modernist design aesthetic (or more accurately its Mod popular culture remediation) developed across this serial:

> They go to a funfair, they tune in to The Beatles, and at the end Ian and Barbara run around Swinging London. The Daleks have a time machine that's op art on the inside and streamlined on the outside. It makes feedback noises like a B-side by the Yardbirds, or the intro to 'Reflections' by Diana Ross and the Supremes, and it's lost in a time vortex resembling a kaleidoscope. (Wood and Miles 2006: 151)

Their point is to stress the contemporaneity of the programme's design aesthetic, as an attraction for predominantly young audiences. Despite 'The Chase's epic qualities, it is a drama rooted in the present. Indeed, Wood and Miles (2006: 151) refer to 1960s *Doctor Who* as 'a place you visited' in the sense that its serials offered a particular kind of experience combining exciting adventure on an epic scale with a link to an everyday reality from which it departed and to which it would always return.

By 1965, *Doctor Who* and the Daleks were losing their appeal, after numerous toys, comics, clothing and other merchandise for children had been released featuring them (Bignell 2007), and the epic scope of 'The Chase' has been read, with some justification, as a slapdash response by Nation to the BBC's request for him to churn out yet another Dalek story at short notice. The serial has a devil-may-care tone that suggests a certain sloppiness, something that the epic allows because of the genre's episodic, recursive movement from one action sequence or narrative turning point to another. A sense of exhaustion is manifest when narrative mechanics that had been used often in the programme before crop up again, such as that the Doctor's group gets split up, someone gets lost and then captured, and the Doctor falls into an obvious trap. There are also the technical errors and the ill-judged, somewhat confusing dual performance by Peter Purves described above. However, some of the comic reworking of history, myth and fiction works well, especially on the Mary Celeste where the legendary abandonment of the sailing ship is explained by the Daleks' sudden appearance aboard it. 'The Chase' incorporates historical events and mythic characters in order to both reward and destabilise its viewers, playing with what they may think they know, about history and science but also about what *Doctor Who* can do. The serial shows how television could assimilate spectacular action into a familiar and domestic fictional world, and how the everyday routines of its production could ingeniously accommodate an epic journey in a low-budget weekly drama. In doing these things, *Doctor Who* addresses its own conventions, as a programme comprising long-running serials whose storylines swept across broad expanses of time and space and raised the stakes of dramatic conflict in Manichean battles between good and evil. Despite its oddities, and in part because of them, the serial exemplifies the ambition that enabled *Doctor Who* to continue in much the same way for another twenty-four years, so that the programme became an epic television achievement for the BBC. This weekly serial

explores, sometimes unintentionally, how the epic and the everyday could be integral and intertwined in *Doctor Who* because they are properties of television itself.

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