



Frank Collins explains why he thinks the time is ripe for analysis of the revival of **Doctor Who** and how his new book **The Pandorica Opens** goes about examining Matt Smith's first series...

What are your *Doctor Who* credentials?

I suppose you could describe me as a life-long fan of the series. It was certainly a programme right at the heart of my own childhood and amazingly it does seem to have entranced several new generations since the revival in 2005. I was absolutely potty about the series, collected all the Target novelisations, jigsaws, comics... the lot. The series seems to have this very powerful way of inspiring its fans to be creative and you only have to look at the people who make the series now to see how far that passion can take you. However, I didn't really step into fandom proper - and by that I mean actually wanting to write about the series and actively responding to other fan discussions - until the first series of the Russell T. Davies

era had been shown. I had certainly had a go at getting fanzines off the ground in the past and was a regular convention goer (I still bear the scars of Longleat 1983) but, when the new series started, fandom also meant access to online communities and I grabbed the chance to talk and write about the series to a captive audience. From there I did regular reviews of both the original series and new episodes on Outpost Gallifrey and then Gallifrey Base. When Outpost Gallifrey decided to shut down its review section I saw that as a chance to get into the world of blogging and create my own platform for not only discussion about *Doctor Who* but also about many British television programmes and films. I never expected blogging to take off but it did and through fans I'd met on OG and GB I was asked to contribute to the Appreciation Society's magazine, Celestial Toyroom, and then was invited to become one of the writer contributors of the collaborative *Who* blog, Behind The Sofa. The demand for my views on British television, not just *Doctor Who*, has escalated from there really and the last three years of blogging have been quite astonishing in the sheer amount of interest generated. Of course, it's been the catalyst for the book commission too.

"I was absolutely potty about the series, collected all the Target novelisations, jigsaws, comics... the lot"

Why did you want to write a book about the latest series of *Doctor Who*?

Let's face it, classic *Doctor Who* has been written about, analysed and taken apart to the nth degree, probably as a symptom of the series being off the air for sixteen years, and while I do think there are still some interesting things to say about the original series, there hasn't yet been a great deal of analysis of the revival. It might be that we are a bit too close to it, historically speaking, to start to unpick it all but there is certainly a burgeoning academic interest in the series that is beginning to look at *Doctor Who* post-2005. We have entered a period where *Doctor Who* is now seen as a cultural product ripe for a deconstruction that takes us beyond the production history of the series itself. Unlike television writer Jimmy McGovern, I do think there is a 'serious' side to *Doctor Who* and it is a drama that reflects our times and is inherently 'social' in nature. It may do it in the guise

"While I do think there are still some interesting things to say about the original series, there hasn't yet been a great deal of analysis of the revival"

of science fiction and fantasy but it still tackles fairly important and very human issues. I suppose partly that is what the book sets out to do. Hopefully, I demonstrate that the series can be enjoyed as pure entertainment as well as providing a focus for debate and analysis, an analysis that takes in politics, religion, symbolism, psychology in parallel to its function as a mass media experience in the 21st Century. If someone goes back to the episodes of the last series, having read the book, and watches them anew through the filter of ideas I've provided then I will certainly feel I have succeeded.

How would you describe the content of the book and your writing style?

Essentially, the book takes each story of Series 5 as a chapter in its own right where in roughly three, maybe, four sections I review the relevant episodes and look at the series's character development, major themes, the use of design and music, references to previous episodes and the original series. The spine of each chapter is about themes and characters and that's where a lot of the research is included. So, I will bring in cultural, literary, political, sociological and psychoanalytical material to inform my views of the episode. Crucially, this is just one person's view and as I say in the introduction it is not intended to be an essentialist one. I am aware that a lot of references, particularly around cultural politics, might alienate some fans and with that in mind I've attempted to pitch the book at a level that is accessible to all. Anyone who is interested in what the episodes mean on many different levels will I hope find the book fascinating.

"I've attempted to pitch the book at a level that is accessible to all"



Did you enjoy writing this book and was it easy to write?

Basically, what prompted the commission of the book were the original reviews on my blog. With those being around the 2000 word count each it was a case of really expanding those and adding in new material. The blog reviews have now really become footnotes to significant analysis but I always went back to them and filtered them into the chapters. On a personal level, you are bound to be more keen to write about some episodes more than others and it is often a case of rewatching the episode a number of times, making a lot of notes and then planning the chapter before you actually find what it is you really want to say. With some stories finding the themes was relatively easy and it was just a case of then doing the research to underline my ideas. I read an awful lot of Jungian analysis on subjects such as Peter Pan and Tim Burton for the book simply because they have kinship to Steven Moffat's own concepts for the series. Trying to get your head around subjects I was only vaguely familiar with often meant going on a massive learning curve just trying to translate those concepts into layman's terms. Often, I would hit a brick wall and find an episode that I hadn't particularly enjoyed quite difficult to write about without then descending into monosyllabic mud slinging. When it all falls into place - all the viewings, the notes, the research - it sometimes writes itself but much of the time getting thoughts onto a page and making them coherent and relevant is hard and frustrating work, especially if you are writing against the clock.

"I would hit a brick wall and find an episode that I hadn't particularly enjoyed quite difficult to write about without then descending into monosyllabic mud slinging"

Do you have any other books in you?

I have plans for a book on the original series, filtering classic *Doctor Who* through the same prism I've employed for this book, taking entire decades of the series as a basis for discussion and analysis. Whether that will be worth attempting, who knows? I would love to do a book on *Life on Mars* and *Ashes to Ashes* simply because both stories have such rich themes about identity, good and evil, men and women, reality, life and death. Again, it would not be an episode guide. I would have opted for *Being Human* but Joanne's already beaten me to it. What strikes me about all three of those examples is each has a very strong fan base and fans can make really positive contributions to the analysis of such series as well as getting involved in the production of the books. It's good to get passionate devotees on board and I was very happy to work with a lovely group of set reporters to source images for this book.

What are you doing with yourself now the book is finished?

I am launching a major design show for the Liverpool Design Festival which involves over a hundred designers showing their work at St. George's Hall in Liverpool. That's my day job and it has been tough trying to write a book while all the planning for this was taking place. Note to self: don't do this again. I am going back to the blog and will start putting new reviews on there, will probably overhaul the look of that shortly and I will continue to contribute to *Behind the Sofa* and *Celestial Toyroom*, if they'll have me. I have been asked to write for other sites and you'll see my name popping up here and there. It really depends on how well the book is received too and I'd welcome some offers as a result.

"I have plans for a book on the original series, filtering classic Doctor Who through the same prism I've employed for this book"

"I am launching a major design show for the Liverpool Design Festival which involves over a hundred designers showing their work at St. George's Hall in Liverpool"

DOCTOR WHO: THE PANDORICA OPENS
by Frank Collins is published on 6th December 2010.

The book is available at a discount price of £12.49 and will be dispatched directly to customers as soon as stock becomes available.

A PDF previewing a section of the book is now available from the Classic TV Press website.

