

**The Noir of *Who*:**  
Classic Film Noir's Imprint on the  
Resurrected *Doctor Who*

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May 2019

Typewriter keys pound out narration amid nocturnal views of the Manhattan skyline: "New York, the city of a million stories. Half of them are true, the other half...just haven't happened yet."

*Mark Hellinger's closing words in his exemplary film noir The Naked City echo unmistakably: "There are eight million stories in the naked city. This has been one of them," while the typewriting recalls neo-noir Hammett as the titular detective-turned-writer rewrites the film's events in a literary Moebius strip.*

An older man speaks: "So, will you take the case, Mr. Garner?"

Garner, the narrator, is a dark-haired young man wearing a gray raincoat over a dark suit, tie loosened at the collar: "Sure, why not?"

"Because you don't believe me," answers a large gray-haired man in a stylish blue three-piece suit: Dashiell Hammett's man of power, broadly afraid of nothing and no one.

"For 25 dollars a day plus expenses, I'll believe any damn thing you like."

The office where they stand is lit solely by two thick-shaded table lamps behind Garner's head, a desk lamp, an inconspicuous fire and street lights dimmed by thick curtains.

After more banter, Garner says "Goodnight, Mr. Grayle." He pockets a packet of bills, dons his gray fedora and departs. Outside, rain soaks Manhattan.

More typing: "The address Grayle gave me was an apartment block in Battery Park. He said it was where the statues lived...I asked him why he didn't go look himself...He didn't answer...Grayle was the scariest guy I knew. If something scared him, I kinda wanted to shake its hand."

An obscured Garner climbs short stone steps into an eerily dark brick building atop which a red neon sign flashes "WINTER QUAY." Inside the dusky lobby, he is a dark shadow crossing a black-and-white chessboard tile floor. His shouted "Hello?" causes a cage elevator straight from the Bradbury Building to whirr into life, its car descending and opening with a sharp ding. It deposits Garner at the end of a short hallway with blood-red carpet and doors reminiscent of the blistering-hot hallway at the end of the neo-noir *Barton Fink*.

The typewritten label affixed to the right of the door to room 702 reads "S. GARNER." Garner enters with a tentative "Hello? Anyone home?" A standing hat rack holds a fedora

and raincoat exactly like Garner's, while a battered wallet on a wooden side table contains the time-worn private investigator's photo-license of "S. Garner." Pulling out his wallet, Garner extracts the identical—albeit practically new—license.

Looking befuddled, Garner hears a noise in the bedroom, where a figure lies in bed. To Garner's angry-scared "Who are you?" the response is, "They're coming for you. They're going to send you back."

"Who's coming? Back where?"

"In time. Back in time. I'm you."

An old man with wispy gray hair sits up in bed, fully lit. Pointing mournfully at Garner, he repeats, "I'm you."

Garner darts into the hallway, murderous-looking marble statues at either end. Looking from one to the other, they get closer. Garner's drawn gun looks useless. Entering a dark stairwell—its slats cutting shafts of light—his descent is blocked by statues, forcing him to climb flight after flight as the typing reappears: "1. The Dying Detective."

On the rooftop, Garner backs to its edge as loud thumps shake the building. He pauses, bewildered. Looming behind him are giant sharp teeth menacingly arrayed inside a wide-open marble mouth. With his head framed by the Manhattan skyline, Garner turns to look, and exclaims, "You gotta be kidding me."

And we see...

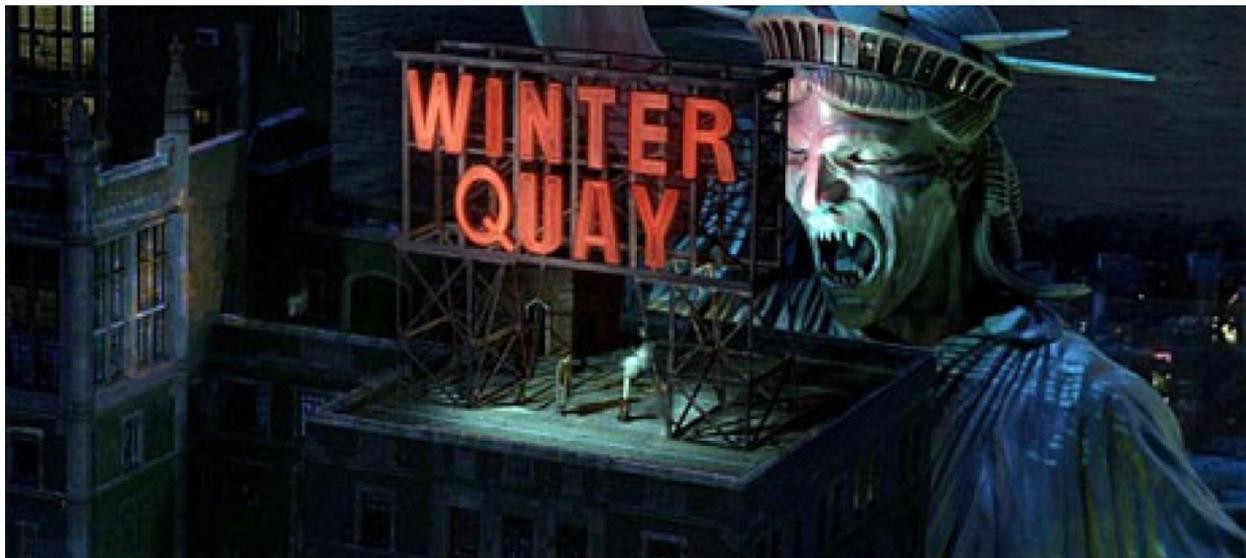


Photo from <https://feexby.files.wordpress.com/2012/09/winter-quay.png?w=593&h=333>

...just before the opening credits, not of a classic or contemporary film noir, but of "The Angels Take Manhattan", the September 29, 2012 episode of the longest-running science fiction television series ever: *Doctor Who*.

Yet only the overtness of noir distinguishes "Angels." While *Doctor Who* has mostly fit Craig Ferguson's pithy summation (*The Late Late Show with Craig Ferguson*, November 16, 2010) as "the triumph of intellect and romance over brute force and cynicism"<sup>i</sup>, it has also exhibited far more "noir" since its 2005 resurrection than one would expect. Among other elements, the resurrected *Doctor Who* has effectively utilized three interrelated aspects of classic film noir:

1. Characterization: *femmes/hommes fatale* and Chandler's "good man" gone wrong.
2. Doubling/mirroring: the divided self
3. Fatalism: convoluted timelines and inexorable fate

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"The Doctor" (original name a secret) is a centuries-old Time Lord from the planet Gallifrey. Time Lords can see and feel time itself, enabling them to protect the laws of time, including "You can't rewrite history, not one line!" ("The Temple of Evil," May 23, 1964).

For unknown reasons, The Doctor stole a TARDIS (Time and Relative Dimension in Space), the device Time Lords use for time/space travel, and ran away from Gallifrey. Despite having all of time and space to inhabit, The Doctor maintains a particular affinity for Earth.

As for The Doctor's name, in "Twice Upon a Time" (December 25, 2017), the 12<sup>th</sup> Doctor (Peter Capaldi) warns the about-to-debut 13<sup>th</sup> Doctor (Jodie Whittaker, the first female Doctor), "you mustn't tell anyone your name. No one would understand it anyway...except children. [...] But nobody else. Nobody else, ever." This pseudonymity evokes Hammett's unnamed Continental Detective Agency operative and reminds us the second "Mrs. DeWinter" in both Daphne DuMaurier's novel Rebecca and its 1940 film adaptation has no first name.

*Doctor Who* was conceived by Sydney Newman, the BBC Head of Drama who astutely made 27-year-old Verity Lambert the first woman to produce a drama at the BBC. With its hypnotic black-and-white title sequence and intelligent writing, *Doctor Who's* debut

episode (“The Unearthly Child,” November 23, 1963, the day after President John F. Kennedy was shot—a truly noir debut) instantly distinguished itself. “Unearthly Child” also featured the first of 40+ “companions” to travel with The Doctor and the first startled observation the TARDIS (now permanently disguised as a 1950s British blue police box) is “bigger on the inside.”

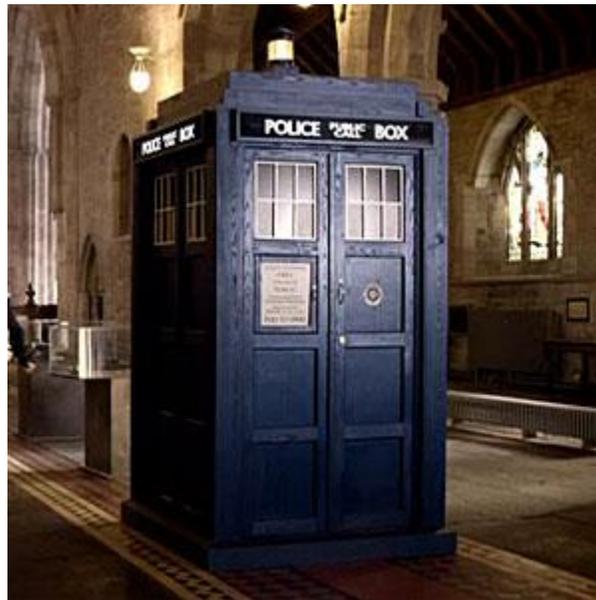


Photo from <http://www.thedoctorwhosite.co.uk/tardis/exterior/2010-tardis/>

A life-long fan, Newman once described science fiction “as a marvelous way—and a *safe* way, I might add—of saying nasty things about our own society.”<sup>ii</sup> The same is true of film noir, and not only in sci-fi/noir hybrids like *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. Actors like John Garfield (critiquing capitalism in *Force of Evil*) and Robert Ryan (anti-Semitism in *Crossfire*, racism in *Odds Against Tomorrow*) used film noir to express their social conscience. Media’s demagogic excesses were excoriated in *Ace in the Hole* (aka *The Big Carnival*), *Try and Get Me* (aka *The Sound of Fury*) and *The Underworld Story*. And crime-reporter-turned-director Samuel Fuller tackled faux patriotism in *Pickup on South Street*, inter-racial romance in *The Crimson Kimono* and prostitution in *The Naked Kiss*.

*Doctor Who* connected instantly to film noir, casting popular actor William Hartnell as the peripatetic Time Lord. Hartnell may best be known to film noir fans as Dallow, Pinkie Brown’s (Richard Attenborough) henchman in the 1948 film adaptation of Graham Greene’s novel Brighton Rock. Hartnell had played harassed publican Fencie in the 1947 robbery-gone-wrong noir *Odd Man Out* (co-star Cyril Cusack actually turned down the role of The Doctor), and also appeared in the films noir *Appointment with Crime*, *Escape*, *Footsteps in the Fog* and *Temptation Harbor*.

Within three years, however, Hartnell's arteriosclerosis led him to flub lines with increasing regularity. Facing cancellation, *Doctor Who's* producers had an ingenious solution: Time Lords could prolong their lives by "regenerating" into an entirely new body (with equally-new personality) while retaining all knowledge and memories. In "The Tenth Planet, Episode 4" (October 29, 1966), The Doctor regenerated into the 2<sup>nd</sup> Doctor (Patrick Troughton). Five additional Doctors followed before decreasing ratings and shrinking budgets led to the series' cancellation in December 1989. Other than a 1996 American series pilot that went nowhere (featuring Paul McGann as the 8<sup>th</sup> Doctor), the series would not air again until the BBC aired "Rose" on March 26, 2005 (starring Christopher Eccleston at the 9<sup>th</sup> Doctor). Executive Producer (and chief writer) Russell T. Davies would helm 60 episodes before being replaced by Steven Moffat in "The Eleventh Hour," himself replaced by Chris Chibnall in September 2018.

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Following the opening credits of "The Angels Take Manhattan," the 11<sup>th</sup> Doctor enjoys a sunny afternoon in modern-day Central Park with married friends Amy Pond (Karen Gillan) and Rory Williams (Arthur Darvill). The Doctor reads aloud from the hardboiled "Melody Malone" novel being typed in the cold open. While getting coffee, Rory encounters Weeping Angels, perhaps the most terrifying villains in the resurrected *Doctor Who*. "Quantum-locked" beings who turn to stone when seen, they are described as:



Photo credit: [https://vsbattles.fandom.com/wiki/Weeping\\_Angels](https://vsbattles.fandom.com/wiki/Weeping_Angels)

*"The only psychopaths in the universe to kill you nicely. No mess, no fuss, they just zap you into the past and let you live to death. The rest of your life used up and blown away in the blink of an eye. You die in the past, and in the present they consume the energy of all the days you might have had, all your stolen moments."* ("Blink," June 9, 2007)

Sent to 1938, Rory encounters Melody Malone, actually River Song (Alex Kingston), about whom more below. The Doctor and Amy follow in the TARDIS, despite difficulty landing in 1938 Manhattan. They learn Grayle has been torturing a captured Weeping Angel, explaining his terror. Rory soon meets *his* older self in a Winter Quay apartment, where Manhattan's Weeping Angels store time energy. After "old Rory" dies, Amy and "young Rory" find themselves trapped on the roof by the Statue of Liberty, the definitive Weeping Angel. "Young Rory" reasons if he dies then and there, the resulting paradox (he cannot be sent back from 2012 if he dies in 1938) would destroy Manhattan's Weeping Angels. In a heart-stopping moment, Amy and Rory leap together off the roof...and land unhurt in modern-day Central Park, alongside The Doctor and River. But a surviving Weeping Angel sends Rory back *again*. Since the TARDIS can no longer land safely in 1938 Manhattan, a tearful Amy allows the Weeping Angel to send her to join Rory, whereupon she writes the novel.

Neville Kidd pointedly photographed the 1938 scenes in "Angels" using the low-key high contrast lighting of classic film noir. As producer Marcus Wilson explained in 2012, he "[t]ried to shoot ["Angels"], not in a film noir style but [to...] look like film noir."<sup>iii</sup> In the same interview, Moffat's "Angels" writing is termed "Chandlerian." Asked if his "head is full of film noir," Moffat said, "As research I watched *The Maltese Falcon* and *The Big Sleep*." His research paid off, as the episode successfully uses various film noir tropes—*femmes fatale*, private detectives, convoluted timelines, doubling/mirroring, and a malevolent-fate ending—to tell a tragic story.



Photo from [https://www.syfy.com/syfywire/exterminate\\_this\\_are\\_all](https://www.syfy.com/syfywire/exterminate_this_are_all)

Again, however, the resurrected *Doctor Who* has been aesthetically and tonally darker overall. The in-universe reason for this shift is how the 9<sup>th</sup> Doctor engineered the end of the last great “Time War,” conflicts fought across all of time and space between Time Lords and Daleks (metal-encased squid-like creatures whose sole purpose is to “exterminate” non-Dalek lifeforms). Weary of the endless carnage, the War Doctor (John Hurt, a “shameful” incarnation between Doctors 8 and 9) simultaneously annihilated the Daleks AND the Time Lords. The devastating psychic impact of this type of act is described by Major Alec Palmer (Dougray Scott) in “Hide” (April 20, 2013) as he and The Doctor stand in a literal darkroom (the developing photograph of The Doctor evokes Weegee, whose darkly-beautiful photograph collection Naked City inspired the 1948 film noir):

***The Doctor:** Yes, but how does that man, that war hero end up here, in a lonely old house, looking for ghosts.*

***Palmer (remorseful):** Because I killed. And I caused to have killed. I sent young men and women to their deaths. Yet here I am, still alive. It...it does tend to haunt you, living, after so much of...the other thing.*

Like Detective Sergeant Dave Bannion (Glenn Ford) after gangsters killed his wife in *The Big Heat*, the 9th Doctor was “born in battle, full of blood and anger and revenge”



("Journey's End," July 5, 2008). He is crushed by guilt like Frank Enley (Van Heflin), who betrayed his fellow prisoners of war in *Act of Violence*, or Christopher Cross (Edward G. Robinson), who allowed another man to be executed for his crimes in *Scarlet Street*.

Reflecting The Doctor's transformation, the interior of the TARDIS itself changed from brightly lit...



Photo from <https://www.pinterest.com/hobnobsdaddy/tardis-consoles/?lp=true>

...into a dark and shadowy lair:



Photo from <https://www.inverse.com/article/21080-doctor-who-time-tardis>

The interrogation scene in “The Idiot’s Lantern” (November 10, 2006), set in 1953 London, has a distinctly noir feel.

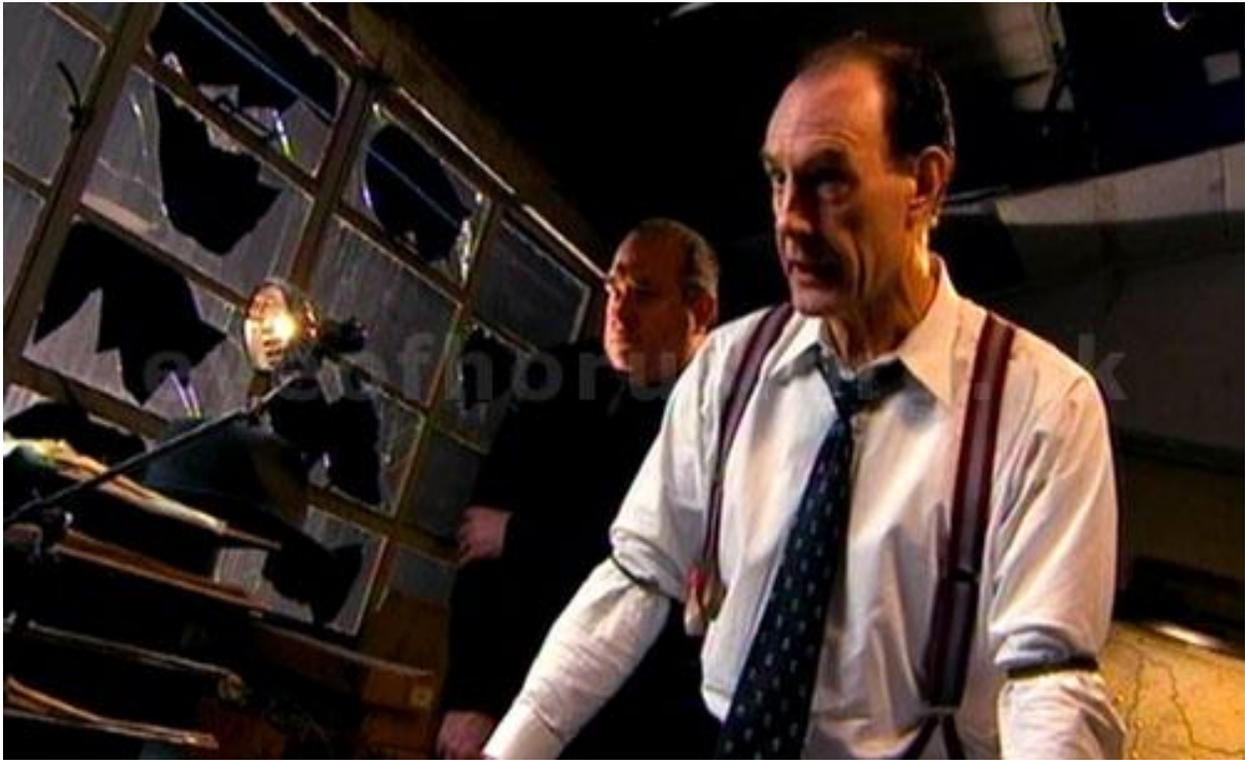


Photo from <http://www.eyeforhorus.org.uk/content/series-02/07-idiots-lantern.html>

Even new villains physically manifest noir: the tiny piranha-like Vashta Nerada travel as literal shadows, Weeping Angels thrive on darkness and The Silence—Edvard Munch’s *The Scream* in black suits, white shirts and black ties—are forgotten when you cannot see them (amnesia—a staple of classic film noir plots since 1942’s Street of Chance—as cloaking device).



Photo from <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/432486370440765340/?lp=true>

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An archetypal film noir character is the strong, seductive and duplicitous woman (or man) who uses a willing man (or woman) for selfish, often deadly, ends. The Rough Guide to Film Noir lists 10 exemplary *femmes fatale* including Phyllis Dietrichson (Barbara Stanwyck) in *Double Indemnity*, Elsa Bannister (Rita Hayworth) in *The Lady From Shanghai*, Kathie Moffat (Jane Greer) in *Out of the Past*, Anna Dundee (Yvonne DeCarlo) in *Criss Cross* and Kitty March (Joan Bennett) in *Scarlet Street*.<sup>iv</sup>

A thought-provoking variation on the *femme fatale* in the resurrected *Doctor Who* is the psychopathic River Song.

Traveling on the TARDIS after their wedding, Rory impregnates Amy. Soon after, Madame Kovarian (Frances Barber) has The Silence kidnap Amy, replacing her with an avatar. "Melody Pond" is born in the 52<sup>nd</sup> century on the asteroid Demon's Run ("A Good Man Goes to War," June 4, 2011) then taken to 1960s Earth by Madame Kovarian. Conceived in the time vortex, Melody has both human and Time Lord DNA, meaning she can be conditioned to become a weapon against The Doctor. Amy, Rory, River and the 11<sup>th</sup> Doctor unknowingly encounter young Melody (Sydney Wade) in Florida in July 1969 ("The Impossible Astronaut," April 23, 2011) as she escapes her captors. One night six months later, she wanders into a noir-lit Manhattan alley, where she assures a

concerned wino “It’s alright, it’s quite alright. I’m dying. But I can fix that. It’s easy really. See,” before regenerating in a chiaroscuro explosion of light (“Day of the Moon”).



Photo from <https://scifi.stackexchange.com/questions/94431/how-many-regenerations-did-river-song-use>

Later, a newly-regenerated River engages in a flirtatious cat-and-mouse game with The Doctor before kissing him with a poisoned lipstick with no known antidote (“Let’s Kill Hitler,” August 27, 2011). However, River soon begins to fall in love with the man she was raised to kill, upending her *femme fatale* persona (at least where The Doctor is concerned), using her remaining regeneration energy to *save* The Doctor. Nonetheless, Madame Kovarian eventually recaptures River and forces her to kill the man she loves. Indeed, we are told over and over that this is a fixed point in time—it must happen where, when and how it happens. Thus, when River instead empties her weapon pack, time itself collapses (“The Wedding of River Song,” October 1, 2011). Literally to “save time,” the 11<sup>th</sup> Doctor marries the psychopathic daughter of his closest friends—the woman who is ultimately incarcerated in a maximum-security prison for his “murder.” No classic film noir ever contained so many twists of fate.



Photo from <http://www.scifistream.com/doctor-who/s6/lets-kill-hitler/>

Film noir *hommes fatale*, meanwhile, include Sam Wilde (Lawrence Tierney) in *Born to Kill*, Webb Garwood (Van Heflin) in *The Prowler*, Charlie Oakley (Joseph Cotton) in *Shadow of a Doubt*, Fred Graham (Robert Mitchum) in *When Strangers Marry* (aka *Betrayed*) and multiple Zachary Scott portrayals (*Danger Signal*, *Mildred Pierce*, *Ruthless*). Jerry Slocum provides a homoerotic twist in *The Sound of Fury*.

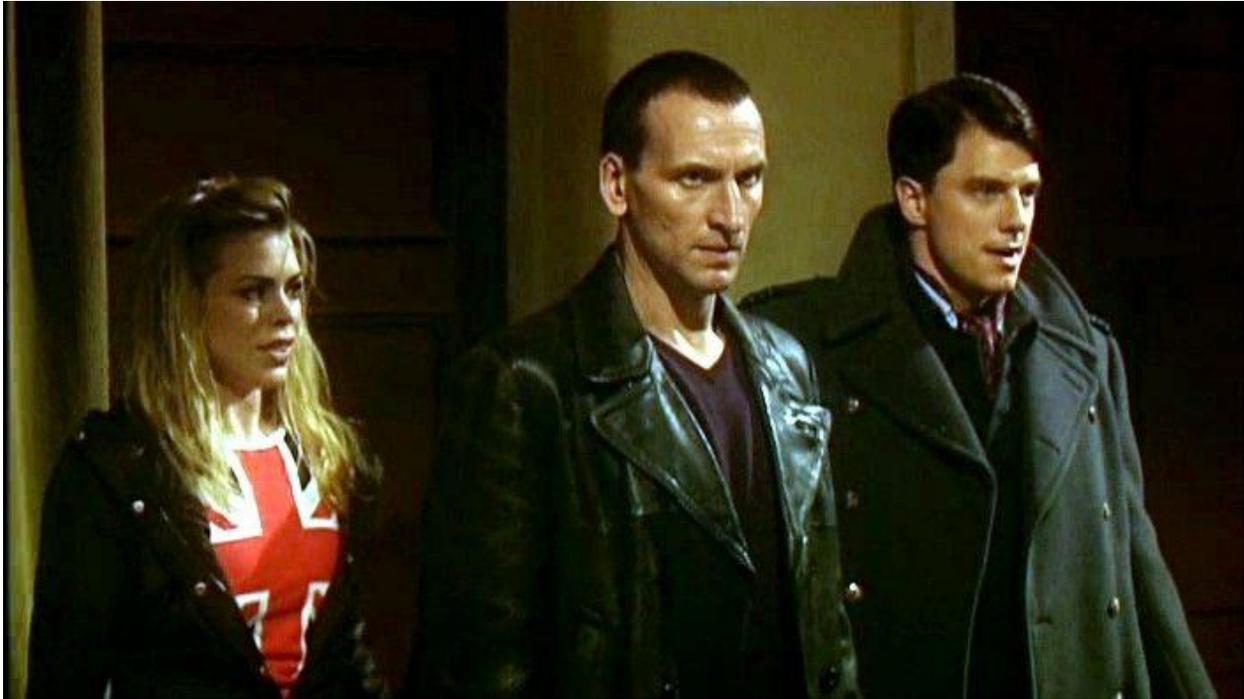


Photo from <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/12877548907161794/?lp=true>

Captain Jack Harkness (John Barrowman) is the resurrected *Doctor Who*'s clearest *homme fatale*. When we first meet him ("The Empty Child"/"The Doctor Dances," May 21/28, 2005), he is a con artist who left the 51<sup>st</sup>-century Time Agency after two years of his memories were erased (amnesia as HR policy). He is also a sexually-flexible man willing to betray and/or seduce to get what he wants. Handsome, charming and intelligent, Captain Jack briefly travels with The Doctor before turning the Torchwood<sup>v</sup> Institute, founded by Queen Victoria ("Tooth and Claw," April 22, 2006) to protect the Earth from aliens (even The Doctor), into The Doctor's ally. In fact, the spin-off series *Torchwood* (2006-11) is an even darker, more violent and sexually-explicit version of the resurrected *Doctor Who*.

But The Doctor's own transformation best exemplifies noir in the resurrected series. In "Into the Dalek" (August 30, 2014), the 12<sup>th</sup> Doctor asks Clara for help:

*The Doctor: I am terrified.*

*Clara: Of what?*

*The Doctor: The answer to my next question. It must be honest, cold and considered, without kindness or restraint. Clara, be my pal and tell me. Am I a good man?*

*Clara (taken aback): I...don't know.*

*The Doctor (resigned): Neither do I.*

Their exchange captures The Doctor's struggle to remain (per Craig Ferguson) a "force for good in an otherwise uncertain universe," evoking Chandler's idealized detective/hero:

"But down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid. The detective in this kind of story must be such a man. He is the hero, he is everything. He must be a complete man and a common man and yet an unusual man. He must be...a man of honor, by instinct, by inevitability, without thought of it, and certainly without saying it. He must be the best man in his world and a good enough man for any world [...]."vi

As we saw with Ford's Dave Bannion, this heroic persona can be difficult to sustain down those mean streets: Sam Spade (Humphrey Bogart) cuckolds his partner and sends his lover to prison in *The Maltese Falcon*; Mike Hammer is a narcissistic thug in *I, The Jury*, *My Gun is Quick* and, especially, *Kiss Me Deadly*; Jeff Markham (Robert Mitchum) is all too willing to run away with his client's lover Kathie in *Out of the Past*.

And not only detectives go off the moral rails. Decent men like Bart Tare (John Dall) in *Gun Crazy*, Professor Wanley (Edward G. Robinson) in *The Woman in the Window*, Joe Peters (Charles McGraw) in *Roadblock* and Dr. Richard Talbot (Kent Smith) in *Nora Prentiss* are lured by desirable women into criminal activity. Failure to provide for his family drives Howard Tyler (Frank Lovejoy) to join Jerry Slocum's crime spree in *The Sound of Fury*, with fatal results. But the definitive noir good-man-gone-wrong is Robinson's milquetoast bank teller in *Scarlet Street* who lies, embezzles and kills—before allowing Johnny Prince's (Dan Duryea) unjust execution for the crime—to win Kitty.

The "good" Doctor sees his character eroded by unbearable guilt and self-righteous egotism. In "Dalek" (April 30, 2005), the 9<sup>th</sup> Doctor is locked in a pitch-black room with an unknown alien subjected to brutal torture (like Grayle's Weeping Angel). After The Doctor offers aid, the alien slowly reveals itself to be a Dalek—albeit one too weak to "exterminate" a terrified Doctor, who then maliciously describes how he destroyed both their races. When the Dalek notes they "are the same" because both are "alone in the universe," The Doctor snaps, viciously torturing the Dalek himself. Later, having regained full power, the Dalek (now on a killing spree) seeks orders:

**The Doctor:** *Alright, then. If you want orders, follow this one: Kill yourself.*

**Dalek:** *The Daleks must survive!*

**The Doctor:** *The Daleks have failed! Now why don't you finish the job and make the Daleks extinct? Rid the universe of your filth! Why don't you just DIE?!?*

**Dalek:** *You would make a good Dalek.*

This theme is repeated in “Into the Dalek” after the 12<sup>th</sup> Doctor and medical personnel are miniaturized to enter a dying Dalek—evoking 1966’s *Fantastic Voyage*, coincidentally directed by film noir veteran Richard Fleischer (*The Narrow Margin*, *Armored Car Robbery*, *Follow Me Quietly*, *Bodyguard*, etc.). Confronted with its race’s atrocities, the Dalek observes The Doctor’s own cancerous hatred: “I am not a good Dalek. You are a good Dalek.” And in “Witch’s Familiar,” the 12<sup>th</sup> Doctor angrily confronts the Daleks he mistakenly believes killed Clara, leading Missy (about whom later) to tell her, “Listen to that. The Doctor without hope...Nobody’s safe now...He’ll burn everything, us too.” Befitting a Doctor fighting his own demons, Ali Asad photographed “Witch’s Familiar” in near-constant darkness, creating an oppressive sense of doom reminiscent of the neo-noir *Se7en*.

It is not only Daleks who trigger The Doctor’s dark side, though. In “Family of Blood” (June 2, 2007), the 10<sup>th</sup> Doctor (David Tennant), arrogating judgment to himself, metes out eternal punishments to the titular family: “He never raised his voice. That was the worst thing. The fury of the Time Lord.” In “Journey’s End,” the 10<sup>th</sup> Doctor is shown the collateral damage of his righteous arrogance. The Doctor, companion Donna Noble, some allies and a “human” Doctor (created when The Doctor short-circuited regeneration after being mortally wounded by a Dalek) are trapped on a Dalek base by their creator Davros, who seeks to detonate a “reality bomb.” In response, former companion Martha Jones (Freema Agyeman) threatens to destroy Earth with nuclear weapons (thwarting Davros’ plan), and Captain Jack threatens to destroy the base with a “warp star.” Davros easily stops them, then delivers his *coup de grace*:

*The man who abhors violence, never carrying a gun. But this is the truth, Doctor. You take ordinary people and you fashion them into weapons...Behold your children of time transformed into murderers. I made the Daleks, Doctor, you made this...How many more? Just think. How many have died in your name? [A sequence of 15 faces from prior episodes plays] The Doctor, the man who keeps running, never looking back because he dares not out of shame. This is my final victory, Doctor, I have shown you yourself.*

But The Doctor’s fall from grace is most clearly displayed in “A Good Man Goes to War.” highlighted by River’s climactic voiceover:

*Demons run when a good man goes to war.  
Night will fall and drown the sun when a good man goes to war.  
Friendship dies and true love lies.  
Night will fall and the dark will rise when a good man goes to war.  
Demons run but count the cost; the battle’s won but the child is lost.*



Stunningly photographed by Stephan Pehrsson in ethereal reds, blues and greens, nearly every face is shrouded in shadow. Outside the brightly-lit white room in which Amy is held captive,



Photo from <http://www.fanpop.com/clubs/amy-pond/images/22901185/title/amy-6x07-good-man-goes-war-screenshot>

little light is visible on the base in which most of the action takes place.



Photo from <https://thepawnshopblog.weebly.com/blog/pop-culture-series-1-who-is-the-best-doctor>

To rescue Amy, The Doctor calls upon those he once helped. However, when Rory tries to recruit River, she refuses, adding “This is the Battle of Demon’s Run, The Doctor’s darkest hour. He’ll rise higher than ever before and then fall so much further.”

After “too easy” a victory, The Doctor insists that Colonel Manton, allied with Madame Kovarian, tell his troops “to run away” so children will mock him as “Colonel Runaway,” adding...

*The Doctor:* Look I’m angry. That’s new. I’m really not sure what’s going to happen now.

*Madame Kovarian:* The anger of a good man is not a problem. Good men have too many rules.

*The Doctor:* Good men don’t need rules...But today is not the day to find out why I have so many.

While The Doctor spars with Madame Kovarian, a trap is laid for Amy, Rory and five allies, three of whom are killed in the ensuing battle (over which River recites the poem). Too late, The Doctor realizes his vengeful blood-lust blinded him to Madame Kovarian’s plan to kidnap Melody Pond, as revealed by the just-arrived River:

*The Doctor:* You think I wanted this. I didn’t want this. This isn’t me.

*River Song: This was exactly you. All this. All of it. You make them so afraid. When you began all those years ago, sailing off to see the universe, did you ever think you'd become this? The man who can turn an army around at the mention of his name. "Doctor," the word for healer and wise man throughout the universe. We get that word from you, you know. But if you carry on the way you are, what might that word come to mean?...To the people of the Gamma Forests, the word means "mighty warrior." How far you've come. And now they've taken a child, the child of your best friends. And they're going to turn her into a weapon just to bring you down. And all this, my love, in fear of you.*

Even though 12<sup>th</sup> Doctor tells his next incarnation ("Twice Upon a Time")...

*"Never be cruel. Never be cowardly...Remember, hate is always foolish, and love is always wise. Always try to be nice, but never fail to be kind [...] Laugh hard. Run fast. Be kind."*

...the necessity to remind his future self ("let's get it right") of Chandler's precepts underscores the inevitable tension between the "untarnished hero" and the "mean streets" in which (s)he labors, be they in mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century Los Angeles or across all of time and space.

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Film noir reflected the divided self both cinematically, by casting faces in shadows, and physically, through doubles and mirroring. Examples of the latter include 1) twin sisters in *The Dark Mirror* and *The Guilty* (and twin brothers in *Among the Living*) and 2) portraits in, among others, *Corridor of Mirrors*, *The Dark Corner*, *Laura*, *Scarlet Street*, *The Unsuspected*, *The Woman in the Window* and, of course, *The Portrait of Dorian Gray*. Twice in *Window* Joan Bennett's Alice Reed is reflected in the window through which Professor Wanley stares at her portrait. *Shadow of a Doubt* features two psychically-linked "Charlies": Cotten's "Uncle Charlie" and Teresa Wright's Charlie Newton. In *Strange Impersonation* and *Hollow Triumph* (aka *The Scar*), Nora Goodrich (Brenda Marshall) and John Muller (Paul Henreid), respectively, physically transform themselves into another character; in *Hollow*, a mirror itself causes the scheme to unravel.

Doubles in the resurrected *Doctor Who* include: Mickey/Ricky Smith (Noel Clarke) in "Rise of the Cybermen/The Age of Steel" (May 13/20, 2006), as well as shape-shifting Zygon mirror images of Queen Elizabeth I (Joanna Page), Kate Lethbridge-Stewart (Beverly Cressman) and Osgood (Ingrid Oliver) in "Day of the Doctor," and Clara in "The Zygon Invasion/The Zygon Inversion" (October 31/November 7, 2015).

And then there is Missy/The Master.



Photo from <https://www.syfy.com/syfywire/a-farewell-to-doctor-whos-missy>

After appearing at the end of most Season 8 episodes, the mysterious “Missy” (Michelle Gomez), dressed like a noir Mary Poppins, tells a horrified 12<sup>th</sup> Doctor (“Dark Water,” November 1, 2014) her name is “short for Mistress. Well...couldn’t very well keep calling myself The Master, now could I?”

When eight-year-old Time Lord Academy initiates stared directly into the untempered schism of the Time Vortex, “some would be inspired, some would run away, and some would go mad” (“The Sound of Drums,” June 23, 2007). One initiate went mad and ran away, morphing in the process from The Doctor’s friend to his arch-nemesis (and negative image).

As Missy, though, she has mixed feelings about “my boyfriend” (“Deep Breath,” August 23, 2014), seeking redemption throughout Series 10, despite briefly allying with an earlier incarnation (John Simm; “World Enough and Time/The Doctor Falls,” June 24/July 1, 2017). Simm’s Master is clearly attracted to Missy, his future incarnation. Ultimately, however, the incarnations kill each other, becoming literal *fatales*.

Of course, the clearest reflection of the divided self in the resurrected Doctor Who are duplicates of The Doctor himself. Multiple Doctors have appeared in the same episode, not always happily. In “The Three Doctors” (December 20, 1972), the 1<sup>st</sup> Doctor sniffs, “Oh, so you’re my replacements: a dandy and a clown.” While assisting the War Doctor

(initially put off by his future selves) in “The Day of the Doctor” (November 22, 2013), the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Doctors squabble over the question “Did you ever count...how many children there were on Gallifrey that day [you ended the last great Time War]?”

In “Human Nature” (May 26, 2007), the 10th Doctor excruciatingly transforms into the human “John Smith” to hide from the Family of Blood on Earth in 1913. To remain undetected, The Doctor must forget who he is (amnesia as disguise). Unfortunately, he did not anticipate falling in love with Joan Redfern (Jessica Hynes), an oversight “John Smith” disdains (“Falling in love, that never occurred to him? What sort of a man is that?”). And when the Family pose an existential threat, “John Smith” resists transformation, desiring only to share his life with Joan (shown in a poignant flash-forward). A heartbroken Joan is equally unimpressed: “If The Doctor had never visited us, never chosen this place on a whim, would anyone here have died?...You can go.”



Photo from <https://alexmoreland.co.uk/2017/06/02/ten-years-of-the-tenth-doctor-the-family-of-blood/>

Harsher self-division occurs in the haunting “The Rebel Flesh/The Almost People” (May 21/28, 2011), photographed in eerie shadows by Balazs Balygo. Near-future humans create “flesh” doppelgangers to handle dangerous chemicals. These “gangers” are melted down (or simply discarded) when no longer necessary. After a solar flare also transfers emotions and memories to the gangers, a battle for dominance occurs, ending in an uneasy truce. A flesh avatar of The Doctor is created, though (for once) the two get along famously.

But the Series' nadir of self-division nadir comes in "Time Heist." The Doctor, Clara, Psi (Jonathan Bailey) and Saibra (Pippa Bennett-Warner), who replicates—or "doubles"—anyone she touches, are directed by the unseen "Architect" to break into the most secure bank in the universe. Their memories of how they arrived there are erased—amnesia as self-protection.

In the climax, they confront bank director Madame Karabraxos (Keeley Hawes) in the bank's private vault. Unfazed, she calls her Director of Security on a computer screen:

**Karabraxos:** *Intruders, in the private vault. Send me The Teller. I want to find out how they got in, and then...I want to wipe their memories.*

**The Doctor:** *She's a clone.*

**Karabraxos:** *It's the only way to control my own security. I've a clone in every facility. [To the screen] Get on it right away.*

**Ms. Delphox:** *Yes, of course.*

**Karabraxos:** *And then, hand in your credentials. You're fired. With immediacy.*

**Ms. Delphox:** *But please...I've been in your service...*

**Karabraxos:** *...ever since the last one let me down, and I was forced to kill it. I can't quite believe that you're putting me through this again...My clone, and yet she doesn't even protest. Pale imitation, really. Ha. I should sue.*

**Clara:** *You're...killing her. You just said "fired."*

**Karabraxos:** *I put all of the used clones into the incinerator. Can't have too many of moi scattered around.*

**Psi:** *Sorry...you don't get on with your own clone?*

**The Doctor:** *She hates her own clones. She burns her own clones. Frankly, you're a career break for the right therapist. [An idea strikes him]. Shut up. Everybody just, just shut up.*

**Karabraxos:** *[Mimicking The Doctor] And what is this display? Now, as amusing as you are...*

**The Doctor:** *Shut up. Just shut up. Shut up shut up shuttity up up up. What did you say? What did...what did YOU say? What did you say about your own eyes? De-shut up. Say it again.*

**Saibra:** *How could you trust someone if they look back at you out of your own eyes.*

**The Doctor:** *[To Clara] I know one thing about The Architect. What is it that I know about The Architect? I know one thing, one thing I have known from the very start.*

**Clara:** *What?*

**The Doctor:** *I hate him. He's overbearing. He's manipulative. He likes to think that he's very clever. [Pointing to himself] I HATE HIM. Clara, don't you see?!? I hate the architect!*

**Karabraxos:** *What in the name of sanity is going on in this room now?*

*The Doctor: We're getting sanity judgment from the self-burner?*



Photo from <http://www.unleashthefanboy.com/news/doctor-who-time-heist-bank-robbery-new-level/120678>

Of course, The Doctor *is* The Architect, and he sees his own darkest side in him.

Still, not all “doubling” in *Doctor Who* is tragic, as seen in this exchange in “A Good Man Goes to War”:

*Rory: I've come from The Doctor, too*

*River: Yes, but at a different point in time.*

*Rory: Unless there's two of them.*

*River [Grinning lasciviously]: Now, that's a whole different birthday.*

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After watching the “death” of the 11<sup>th</sup> Doctor at Lake Silencio, Utah (“Impossible Astronaut”), River is stunned when a two-centuries-younger version of the 11<sup>th</sup> Doctor walks out of a nearby diner bathroom. After slapping him, this exchange occurs:

*The Doctor: Okay. I'm assuming that's for something I haven't done yet.*

*River: Yes, it is.*

*The Doctor: Good. Looking forward to it.*

River's relationship with The Doctor is so convoluted each maintains a journal (resembling the TARDIS) to track *when* they are. When the 10<sup>th</sup> Doctor first meets River in *his* timeline, it is the last day of *her* life: "spoilers" epitomizes their interactions.

Film noir similarly disorients viewers with non-linear narratives. Single continuous flashbacks (*Double Indemnity*, *The Guilty*, *Laura*, *Murder My Sweet*, *Out of the Past*, *Possessed*, etc.) were sometimes divided, as in *They Won't Believe Me*. *Rebecca* embeds a flashback within a flashback, while *The Locket* embeds a flashback within a flashback within a flashback. There is the drunken recollection of murder in *Black Angel*, an alternate-timeline dream sequence of *The Chase*, and characters-as-children flashbacks from *Ruthless* and *The Strange Love of Martha Ivers*. But these pale next to the multiple flashbacks, from different points of view, in *I Wake Up Screaming* (aka *The Hot Spot*), *The Killers* (both versions), *Mildred Pierce*, and, of course, *Citizen Kane*.

"Blink" contains the definitive *Doctor Who* statement on temporal complexity. Having been sent with Martha Jones (and without the TARDIS) by a Weeping Angel to 1969, the 10<sup>th</sup> Doctor seeks help by filming his responses to a written transcript onto what will become a DVD "Easter egg." Sally Sparrow (Carey Mulligan) watches the clip in 2007, mystified how The Doctor can respond, 38 years earlier, to everything she says; her words, meanwhile, are transcribed by Larry Nightingale (Finlay Robertson) onto a copy of The Doctor's end of the conversation. In the final scene, Sally hands her copy of the now-complete conversation to The Doctor, *who has not yet been sent to 1969*, completing the narrative loop.

On the DVD clip, The Doctor says:

*"People don't understand time. It's not what they think it is...It's complicated. Very complicated...People assume that time is a strict linear progression of cause to effect, but actually from a non-linear, non-subjective viewpoint it's more like a big ball of wobbly-wobbly, timey-wimey...stuff."*

The 12<sup>th</sup> Doctor breaks the fourth wall in "Before the Flood" (October 10, 2015) to provide this example of the bootstrap paradox: taking Ludwig von Beethoven's music to Beethoven's time, finding no such person existed, then publishing the music under the name "Ludwig von Beethoven" (who, then, wrote the music?). These explanations do little to assure us time travel's paradoxes "by and large work themselves out" ("Hide").

While *Doctor Who*'s fractured timelines mostly serve as entertaining narrative devices, they can have painful consequences. In "The Girl in the Fireplace" (May 6, 2006), the 10<sup>th</sup>



Doctor, Rose Tyler (Billie Piper) and Mickey find a fire burning in an 18<sup>th</sup>-century French fireplace—on a crewless 51<sup>st</sup> century spaceship. They talk through the fireplace to a young girl in 1727 Paris named Reinette Poisson (Jessica Atkins)<sup>vii</sup>. When The Doctor revolves through the fireplace wall moments later, months have passed on Reinette’s side. Rotating again shortly thereafter, an adult Reinette (Sophia Myles) is so delighted to see her childhood friend she kisses him passionately (a series first), leading the latter to say—when queried by a manservant—“I’m The Doctor, and I just snogged Madame de Pompadour.” The ship contains random portals into Madame de Pompadour’s life; one traps The Doctor in the past until he locates Reinette’s original fireplace. Before making one last revolution, he says:

*The Doctor: Give me two minutes. Pack a bag.*

*Reinette: Am I going somewhere?*

*The Doctor: Go to the window. Pick a star. Any star.*

But the faulty wall decrees that when he returns moments later *for him*, years have passed and Reinette has just died (aged 45), leaving a heartbreaking note for her “lonely angel.”

Fate’s malevolence is even more apparent when a character attempts to alter fixed points in time. In “Father’s Day” (May 14, 2005), Rose saves her father Pete (Shaun Dingwall) from being killed by a hit-and-run driver while walking to a wedding in 1987, leading vulture-like Reapers to kill humans to “heal” the time rupture. Realizing who the young woman who saved him is, and what she has done, Pete allows himself to be killed by the car after all—though at least he does not die alone this time. In “Vincent and the Doctor” (June 5, 2010), after spotting a monster in Vincent Van Gogh’s *The Church at Auvers* at a London exhibition, the 11<sup>th</sup> Doctor takes Amy to 1890 to meet him (Tony Curran). Aiming to prevent his suicide that July 29, they bring Van Gogh to the same exhibition, where a curator (Bill Nighy) proclaims him “not only the world’s greatest artist, but also one of the greatest men who ever lived.” Moved as Van Gogh is by this affirmation, he still takes his life, as a devastated Amy soon learns. And in “The Waters of Mars” (November 15, 2009), the 10<sup>th</sup> Doctor arrives on the first human base on Mars the day in 2059 it was mysteriously destroyed. Base commander Adelaide Brooke’s (Lindsay Duncan) heroic death inspires her granddaughter to pilot Earth’s first lightspeed ship, triggering space exploration by her descendants. When the virus-infected humans that destroyed the base threaten Earth, The Doctor must choose between rescue and not altering a fixed point in time. With no companion to ground him, he cracks:

*“There are laws of time. And once upon a time there were people. And those people were in charge of those rules. But they died. They all died. And do you know who that leaves?!?”*

*ME! It's taken me all these years to realize the laws of time are mine, and they will obey me!"*



Photo from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-4zUpQzZ5Q>

Safely returned to Earth with two colleagues, Adelaide worries The Doctor has altered history for the worse. Taking matters into her own hands, Adelaide shoots herself, essentially restoring the original timeline—and shocking The Doctor out of his arrogance (“I’ve gone too far.”).

The Doctor’s inevitable regeneration (a form of death), though is the definitive fated moment in the resurrected series. As the 11<sup>th</sup> Doctor plaintively observes to Clara in “The Time of the Doctor” (December 25, 2013), “It all just disappears, doesn’t it? Everything you are, gone in a moment...like breath on a mirror,” echoing Roy Batty’s (Rutger Hauer) final words in the neo-noir *Blade Runner*: “All those moments will be lost in time...like tears in the rain. Time to die.” And when the 12<sup>th</sup> Doctor was convinced by the 1<sup>st</sup> Doctor (David Bradley, “Twice Upon a Time”), also resisting regeneration, to accept his fate, he still claimed “one more lifetime won’t kill anyone...well except me.”

Cornell Woolrich (aka William Irish), more of whose stories were adapted into films noir than any other author (arguably 17 just between 1942 and 1956), provided the definitive noir statement on death. Woolrich biographer Francis M. Nevins, Jr. wrote it was...

*“...perhaps the most important moment of his life, literally his dark night of the soul, when he suddenly understood, not just intellectually but in his heart and blood, that someday like Cio-Cio-San [of Madame Butterfly], he too would have to die, and after death there is nothing. It happened...’one night when I was eleven, and huddling over my own knees, looked up at the low-hanging stars of the Valley of Anahuac, and I knew I would surely die finally, or something worse.’ This...was the beginning of ‘the sense of personal, private doom.’ [...] I had that trapped feeling, like some sort of a poor insect that you’ve put inside a downturned glass, and it tries to climb up the sides, and it can’t, and it can’t, and it can’t”<sup>viii</sup>*

The 10<sup>th</sup> Doctor most actively resisted this fate, famously crying “I don’t want to go” just prior to regenerating (“The End of Time, Part Two,” January 1, 2010). He told Donna’s grandfather Wilfred Mott (Bernard Cribbens; “The End of Time, Part One,” December 25, 2009) his regeneration will be signaled by “four knocks.” Eventually (“End of Time, 2”), he faces a choice: save Wilfred by exposing himself to a massive dose of radiation or let him die (as Wilfred suggests—after, you guessed it, knocking four times on the door of the booth in which he is trapped). Wallowing in self-pity, The Doctor declares “Well, exactly, look at you. Not remotely important. But me...I could do so much more! SO MUCH MORE! But this is what I’ll get, my reward. But it’s NOT FAIR!” That he ultimately saves Wilfred, calling it “an honor,” does not excuse his arrogant petulance.

Of course, the most catastrophic alteration of a fixed point in time in the resurrected *Doctor Who* is River NOT shooting the 11<sup>th</sup> Doctor at Lake Silencio: all of history happens simultaneously. Once the younger 11<sup>th</sup> Doctor discovers his scheduled demise, he spends Series 6 trying to “outrun” it. Finally realizing running is futile, he accepts his fate...though not before figuring out how to survive.

You may not be able to outrun destiny, but you can occasionally delay it.

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It took only nine episodes for *Doctor Who* to reach its aesthetic noir pinnacle. The two-part “The Empty Child/The Doctor Dances,” 2006 Hugo Award winner for Best Dramatic Presentation, are the first of six episodes (“Girl in the Fireplace,” “Blink,” and 2008’s “Silence in the Library/Forest of the Dead”) Moffat wrote before becoming showrunner in 2010. Gorgeously photographed in electric blues and muted browns by Ernest Vincze (2006 BAFTA Cymru winner, Best Director of Photography—Drama), the story unfolds over a single night during the 1941 London Blitz.

Chasing an unidentified cylindrical object, the 9<sup>th</sup> Doctor and Rose park the TARDIS in a shadowy London back alley. While The Doctor seeks answers in that most noir establishment, a nightclub, Rose spots a small boy (Albert Valentine) on a roof wearing a gas mask and calling for "Mummy." Climbing light-slicing fire escapes after him, she winds up dangling from a barrage balloon during a German air raid before Captain Jack rescues her. The Doctor, meanwhile, follows teenaged Nancy (Florence Hoath) to a house with a supper abandoned due to the raid, which Nancy shares with other kids "living rough." The Doctor joins them, inquiring about the gas-masked-boy following Nancy asking "Are you my mummy?" As the boy (who we soon learn is Nancy's brother Jamie, killed by a German bomb the night the unidentified object landed) seeks entry, Nancy warns The Doctor not to let Jamie touch him, lest he become "empty" as well. Following Nancy's advice to visit "the doctor" in Albion Hospital, The Doctor wanders its shadowy halls to find hundreds of patients with precisely the same injuries—down to fused gas mask—as Jamie. Captain Jack confesses he tried to con The Doctor and Rose into buying the cylindrical object, a "harmless" Chula battlefield ambulance, before transporting them to his ship. Realizing Captain Jack's ship (also Chula) is loaded with nanogenes, microscopic robots which heal living tissue, The Doctor concludes the nanogenes from the ambulance saw mutilated dead Jamie in his gas mask and *thought* that is what humans look like. They then "healed" other humans by turning them into Jamie. When Nancy tearfully claims it is "all my fault," The Doctor finally understands: "Teenage single mother in 1941, so you hid, you lied, you even lied to him." At The Doctor's urging she embraces Jamie and tells him, "I am your mummy, I will always be your mummy." In a moving sequence, the nanogenes recognize the "superior information" of the parent DNA.



Photo from <https://creativecriticality.net/2018/11/21/timestamp-169-the-empty-child-the-doctor-dances/>

Running to the child, The Doctor pleads, “Oh come on, give me a day like this, give me this one” and pulls off the gas mask to reveal a fully-healed boy. The Doctor then uses “upgraded” nanogenes to restore everyone, proclaiming: “Everybody lives! Just this once, Rose, everybody lives!”

That moment of supreme jubilation, however, the idea that “just once” nobody died when The Doctor triumphed, only underlines just how much classic film noir influences the resurrected *Doctor Who*.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M9P4SxtphI4> Accessed June 14, 2018.

<sup>ii</sup> Cook, Benjamin. January 12, 2006. “Chaos and Creation in the Junkyard,” *Doctor Who Magazine Special Edition: In Their Own Words*. Panini Comics (12): 5.

<sup>iii</sup> <http://femalearts.com/node/309> Accessed June 19, 2018.

<sup>iv</sup> Ballinger, Alexander and Graydon, Danny. 2007. *The Rough Guide to Film Noir*. London, UK: Rough Guides, Ltd., pg. 210.

<sup>v</sup> “Torchwood” is an anagram of “Doctor Who.”

<sup>vi</sup> Chandler, Raymond. 1944. “The Simple Art of Murder” (revised edition) in Haycraft, Howard. 1946. *The Art of the Mystery Story*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, Inc., pg. 237.

<sup>vii</sup> She did not gain the nickname “Reinette” until 1731, when she was 9. [http://departments.kings.edu/womens\\_history/pompadou.html](http://departments.kings.edu/womens_history/pompadou.html) Accessed June 30, 2018.

<sup>viii</sup> Nevins, Francis M., Jr. 1988. *Cornell Woolrich: First You Dream, Then You Die*. New York, NY: The Mysterious Press, pg. 8.