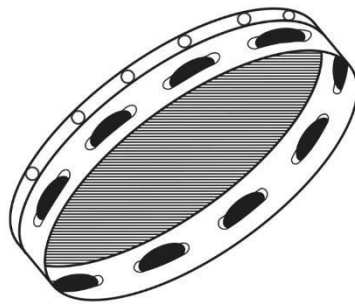


The Silver Archive #3
SAPPHIRE & STEEL
Assignments Five and Six



By James Cooray Smith

THE SILVER ARCHIVE

SAPPHIRE AND STEEL - ASSIGNMENTS FIVE AND SIX

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OVERVIEW — Assignment Five

Serial Title: Assignment One

Writers: Don Houghton (1, 3,4) and Anthony Read (2, 5, 6)

Director: Shaun O'Riordan

Original UK Transmission Dates: 11 August 1981

12 August 1981

18 August 1981

19 August 1981

25 August 1981

26 August 1981

Running Times: Episode 1: 25m 00s

Episode 2: 23m 40s

Episode 3: 23m 10s

Episode 4: 24m 40s

Episode 5: 25m 00s

Episode 6: 25m 00s

UK Viewing Figures: Episode 1: 16%

Episode 2: 19%

Episode 3: 17%

Episode 4: 21%

Episode 5: 17%

Episode 6: 18%

[As percentage of the viewing audience]

Regular cast: Joanna Lumley (Sapphire), David McCallum (Steel)

Guest Cast: Patience Collier (Emma Mullrine), Davy Kaye (Lord Mullrine), Nan Munro (Felicity McDee), Jeremy Child (Howard McDee), Jeffery Wickham (Felix Harborough), Jenny Stoller (Annabelle Harborough), Peter Laird (Greville), Stephen Macdonald (Dr. George McDee), Christopher Bramwell (Tony Purnell), Patricia Shakesby (Anne Shaw), Debbie Farrington (Veronica Blamey), Valentine Dyll (Radio cricket commentator)

Antagonists: Time/It, viral bacteria, and Emma Mullrine.

Critical Responses:

'It could afford to lose an episode or two and it's not the creepiest, but I like its ideas and its Agatha Christie aesthetic. I also think guest writers was just what the series needed. It's not a typical **Sapphire & Steel** story, if only for the sheer size of its cast, but I like that too.'

[Finn Clark, *Sapphire & Steel Assignment 5*, April 2010]

'What might have been a clever twist on country-house murder mysteries or J.B. Priestley's *An Inspector Calls* is frittered away on an unconvincing resolution that reduces Sapphire and Steel to mere spectators.'

[John Coulthart, *Haunted Corridors: The Temporal Enigmas Of Sapphire And Steel*, March 2015]

OVERVIEW — Assignment Six

Writer: P.J. Hammond

Director: David Foster

Original UK Transmission Dates: 19 August 1982
24 August 1982
26 August 1982
31 August 1982

Running Times: Episode 1: 24m 20s
Episode 2: 24m 00s
Episode 3: 24m 20s
Episode 4: 24m 20s

UK Viewing Figures: Episode 1: 16%
Episode 2: 16%
Episode 3: 15%
Episode 4: 15%

[As percentage of the viewing audience]

Regular cast: Joanna Lumley (Sapphire), David McCallum (Steel), David Collings (Silver)

Guest Cast: Edward de Souza (Man), Johana Kirby (Woman), Christopher Fairbank (Johnny Jack), John Boswall (Old Man)

Antagonists: The Transient Beings.

Critical Responses:

‘Not a lot makes sense, but then very little ever did in this show. It’s all brilliantly acted by the central trio and it is such a shame that this was the last outing that they ever had.’

[SciFiFreakSite.com, Assignment 6]

‘A terrific character-led piece of drama [which] ends in a wonderfully evocative and unsettling manner that would be far beyond the scope of a lesser TV show.’

[Dave Duntun, ‘Story Reviews’, *Sapphire & Steel Omnibus*]

Introduction

Any piece of writing about **Sapphire & Steel** will almost certainly be reduced to invoking certain adjectives before it's through, with the series inevitably being described as enigmatic, ambiguous, mysterious, inexplicable and/or opaque. This superfluity of adjectives is, of course, exactly because the series is not terribly easy to describe. Its two protagonists, their relationships to each other, the nature of their work, for whom they work and why, the extent of their powers and abilities, and even whether they are human, are, somehow, only a few of the things about the programme which are purposefully ambiguous.

'Ambiguous'. There's another one.

This not-quite-comprehensible aspect of the series' content is – in a way that cannot be deliberate and which is as frustrating as it appropriate – extended to the circumstances of its writing, production and even transmission. The incomplete and inaccessible nature of the Associated Television paperwork archive means that **Sapphire & Steel** is a series the production of which it is not easy to write about with any certainty.

We cannot be absolutely sure even when the fifth serial, the first of the two covered in this volume, was produced, only that it must have been complete before it was shown (time paradoxes and confusions of cause and effect like those its script deals with being the stuff of fiction). For anything more specific we are reliant, again not inappropriately given the nature of the programme, on the fallible human memories of people involved.

The third, fourth and fifth **Sapphire & Steel** serials¹ formed a second production block of the series. This was commissioned at some point in 1980 and followed the successful broadcast of the second serial (which formed the final eight parts of an initial production order of fourteen) after the conclusion of the 1979 ITV strike².

The three new serials were, it seems, both written and produced very quickly, so much so that series' writer/creator PJ Hammond, who had written every episode of the first four serials, found himself simply unable to proceed with writing a fifth.

'I didn't write the fifth story, because I was still writing against the clock, and I'd probably written too much in a short space of time; I was quite exhausted by that time and I couldn't think of something within the time[scale] available. So, Shaun [O'Riordan, producer] had to find somebody else to fill that gap.'³

With a month to go until immovable studio dates, and with Hammond's blessing, Anthony Read⁴ was approached, not by O'Riordan but by the series Executive Producer (and ATV Head of Drama) David Reid who was working with the writer on other projects. Anthony Read was enthusiastic, but busy himself with his work as Story Editor of **Hammer House of Horror**. He accepted the assignment but suggested that he split the writing of the serial with Don Houghton. The two were not close friends, but they shared an agent (which simplified

¹ As named in these volumes *Assignments Three to Five*, although these descriptions are no more 'authentic' than the fan derived, and somewhat lurid, titles applied by the Internet Movie Database or terming the serials *Adventures* rather than *Assignments* as the nineties VHS releases of the series did. Hammond later decided the second serial would have been called *The Girls That Gave Them Flowers* (*Counting Out Time* — 14m) had a title been asked for.

² A once notorious, now largely forgotten, industrial dispute which saw Britain's then only commercial station replaced by an apologetic test card for two months.

³ *Counting Out Time* — 22m 40s

⁴ Anthony Read (1935-2017) was a writer, producer and story editor, whose contributions to **Doctor Who** are probably the most remembered examples of a long career in television which included series such as **Z Cars** (1962), **The Troubleshooters** (1965-9), **Chocky** (1984) and its sequels and *The Baker Street Boys* (1985) for which he won a Writers Guild of Great Britain Award.

contractual matters) and as a one of the then-owners of Hammer, Houghton was arguably in some sense Read's boss.

There was, unusually, no bible for **Sapphire & Steel**, explaining the characters and concepts⁵. While this was in part because no one had anticipated anyone other than Hammond authoring episodes, it is likely the oblique nature of the series played its part in the lack of ready explanations. The writers then, were left to create their own version of Sapphire and Steel, based on their impressions of the programme as it had already been made and transmitted.

Sitting together at Read's home for a day, the two writers worked out a story between them, and divided the serial's six episodes evenly when it came to the actual scripting⁶. Houghton would write Parts 1, 3 and 4, and Read Parts 2, 5 and 6. The most obvious influence on Read and Houghton's serial, and one which Read acknowledged after the fact, is Agatha Christie's *And Then There Were None* (1939)⁷. Interestingly, this is a book which has been one of star Joanna Lumley's favourite novels since childhood⁸, although the **Sapphire & Steel** serial derived from it is her declared least favourite of the six⁹.

One of the most celebrated of the then very recently dead Dame Agatha's novels, *And Then There Were None*, itself adapted many times for stage and cinema, sees ten characters picked off, one by one, after they arrive on an island and are then cut off from the mainland and all outside contact. The resemblance, with the Mullrine family and their guests being trapped inside the house by a break in time, and being picked off similarly, is little more than superficial. That said, aspects of the book are occasionally invoked in dialogue in the serial, most noticeably in Felicity McDee's statements 'And then there were eight!' (and variations thereupon) after certain murders are committed. It has also been noted¹⁰ that a phrase from the novel 'Two judges, who didn't come from this world at all' could be seen as the inspiration for inserting Sapphire and Steel themselves into a version of this story for television.

That 'for television' is important. It may seem odd, after three decades of ITV's **Poirot** and in the midst of another Christie revival, this time at BBC One, that in the late 1970s Agatha Christie's works were not merely not the television staple they are now, but that they were specifically barred from being made due to Dame Agatha's own dislike of the medium. The first significant television production of any Agatha Christie novel, *Why Didn't They Ask Evans?* had been transmitted on 30 March 1980, a very short time before Read and Houghton were engaged to work on **Sapphire & Steel**. With high viewing figures, strong critical response and, crucially, the strong approval of the Christie Estate, it was seen as one of ITV's biggest recent successes.

A spiritual sequel, an adaptation of *The Seven Dials Mystery*, would be made and broadcast before *Assignment Five* managed to be transmitted, and would become one of the ten most watched television programmes of 1981. *Assignment Five*, then, is a very specific intervention in a then emerging television trend. The early twenty first century equivalent would be to pitch the characters without warning into a pastiche of a Scandinavian television drama or 'Nordic Noir'.

This engagement with contemporary television trends is not the only way that *Assignment Five* sticks out among its P.J. Hammond scripted brethren. Not only does it have the largest cast of any **Sapphire & Steel** serial, it has

⁵ Callaghan, Richard, *Assigned: The Unofficial and Unauthorised Guide To Sapphire And Steel* (Ebook 62%)

⁶ The episodes credit them individually, with neither receiving acknowledgment for their storylining on the other's episode, nor credit for material reused from earlier episodes, e.g. the repeat of Houghton's final scene for Episode One as the cold open of Read's Episode Two.

⁷ Previously published under a different title

⁸ Lumley, Joanna, *No Room for Secrets* (2004)

⁹ *Counting Out Time*, 23m 11s

¹⁰ *Assigned* 62%

a larger cast than the other five serials put together. What's more, everyone in the serial, except Sapphire and Steel themselves, is a real flesh and blood human being. Unlike in the other assignments, there are no ghostly plague victims or Roundheads or Tommies, no suddenly dangerous transformed objects or faceless men. Thus, while the story itself is, with its literary antecedents and greater reliance on humour than the rest of the series, unusually arch, it is also the most concerned with human beings, their emotions and their relationships with one another – and to an extent that perhaps effects the characterisation of the series' leads.

Once completed, the scripts were accepted by producer/director O'Riordan and rushed into production. Anthony Read's personal archive indicated that the serial was written in the weeks immediately before an August 1980 recording¹¹. (It is likely the script for this serial, simply by virtue of it not being by Hammond, that O'Riordan would later recall 'working through the night'¹² in his ATV office with McCallum in order to 'fix'.) Actress Patricia Shakesby, who played Lord Mullrine's secretary Anne Shaw in the modern-day sections of the serial, recalled that the programme was recorded set by set 'as you do when you do a big movie'¹³, rather than weekly and in narrative order, and as some earlier **Sapphire & Steel** serials seem to have been¹⁴, and that the recording was prefaced by a complete read through of all six episodes attended by the entire cast¹⁵.

Ironically, after all this frantic activity, the transmission of the serial was delayed for almost exactly a year, with Episode One debuting on ITV on 11 August 1981. It is interesting to wonder if any of the original audience noticed temporal discontinuities unrelated to plot that resulted from this delay. The story takes place in 1980, with 1930 repeatedly said to be 'fifty years ago', with the term used exactly rather than rhetorically. Mullrine's calendar and the party invites specify that the party is being held on Saturday 21 August (were the story to take place in 1981, the 21st would be a Sunday, and the Sunday five days before the transmission of Episode Six at that).

So, again, in a bizarre example of art and life paralleling, rather than imitating, one another, the serial has two timelines; the mad dash for production that is in no way reflected by the lackadaisical trapeze to transmission, resulting in a story about drifting back in time that explicitly has to take place more than a year before its first audience could see it. Wholly coincidentally, by the time the serial arrived on television the No 1 selling single in the country was, and would remain for all of its run, Shakin' Stevens cover version of Jim Lowe's 1956 hit 'Green Door'. This curious retro record, which defiantly tried to turn back the clock more than twenty years, is oddly redolent of aspects of *Assignment Five*, where the presence of a green door in 1980 prevents immediate access to the room behind it in 1930, despite a nostalgic attempt to reach the past.

If the audience noticed, no one said. The serial was transmitted at 7pm on Tuesdays and Wednesday, and gathered 17-19% of people watching television at the time, no better and no worse than the previous serials. There was little publicity and little reaction to a story that was something of an oddity even within the very odd series of which it was a part. 'It's not the direction I would have gone in,' commented Hammond of *Assignment Five* in later years, before adding, 'But it's nice to have a variation.'¹⁶

¹¹ *Assigned* 59%

¹² *Counting Out Time* 17m

¹³ *Assigned* 60%

¹⁴ Shaun O'Riordan recalled that **Sapphire & Steel** would have been impossible to shoot as 'a straight through show' i.e. more or less 'as live' as some ATV productions were made even in the late 1970s, (Commentary on *Assignment One*, Episode One, 21m) but that does not preclude the programme being made on an episode by episode basis and/or in story order, it merely means that the production made use of recording breaks when needed. It is also possible that the Anne Shaw scenes are a special case in that the character only appears on one set. Even an otherwise story order recording might choose to shoot all the scenes on a single set featuring a single character separately to the rest of the production, in order to minimise the time the set needed to be up, and in any case the sets for the Mullrine's main reception room and the house's entrance hall are continuous, as a glorious tracking shot in Episode Three demonstrates.

¹⁵ *Assigned* 61%

¹⁶ *Counting Out Time*, 23m 29s

The remainder of our discussion of *Assignment Five* will take place in the order in which it was written, transmitted and perhaps (largely) recorded: Episode by Episode. When dealing with a paradoxical series about time, sometimes the best thing to do is go in a straight line.

Assignment Five

Episode One by Don Houghton

'I remember the house was always full of perfect roses,' seventy-four-year-old Emma Mullrine tells her brother Arthur, remembering the summer of 1930 from a distance of fifty years. 'Such an exciting year,' she coos. That she does so ensures *Assignment Five* begins by stating its principal theme, of the dangers and delusions of nostalgic reminiscence, of living in the past. It also lets the audience know from very early on that the, generally sympathetic, Miss Emma's divorcement from the lives of ordinary people is total. Her 'exciting year' of 'perfect roses' is also at the beginning of the Great Depression, as living standards across the West collapsed in the aftermath of the consequences of the Wall Street Crash.

Miss Emma has no excuse for not being aware of this, she was not only alive, she was an adult (we will find out later in this episode that she was 24 that year). More than that, her own financial prosperity, in 1930 and ever since, is a result of her brother Arthur's business acumen and her lover George's inventive brilliance being, between them, enough for their family finances not to be affected by that financial cataclysm. The Great Depression saw millions thrown into poverty not only through no action of their own, but in a way that no action they could possibly have taken would have prevented. Emma, as we shall see as the story continues, is, while charming and pleasant, ultimately self-absorbed to the point where few other people are even real to her.

Producer Shaun O'Riordan, on this serial pulling double duty as producer and director, has noted how strikingly middle-class *Assignment One's* family are to 21st century eyes,¹⁷ and commented on how this contrasts with the production team's then determination to have the people threatened during the course of *Sapphire and Steel's* adventures be 'ordinary'. The phlegmatic pensioner and hobbyist Tully in *Assignment Two* and the occupants of the grotty boarding house in *Assignment Four* qualify better as 'ordinary' than the Jardine family, with their enormous house on what seems to be a private island, but in *Assignment Five* we find ourselves not even in the company of well-heeled professionals, but instead in the home of one of the very upper middle class.

Steel's alias for penetrating this world is 'The Honourable Miles Cavendish', indicating that the persona he is adopting (or the person he is impersonating, it is unclear if there is a real Miles) is of someone who is the son of a Baronet, a Viscount or an Earl. An aristocrat, or at least the son of a member of the House of Lords. Arthur Mullrine, though goes one better, and is – at least in the nineteen eighty sections – actually a Lord himself; a peer of the realm.

Yes, it is made clear that he has been given, not inherited this title, and that it is a recognition of his pre-eminence as a businessman, but it is also clear that, even before Mullrine and McDee's money making adventures in the 1930s, the Mullrines at least were particularly well heeled. Their house is essentially the same in 1930 and 1980, and this is not simply a matter of avoiding redressing sets: the Mullrines have clearly long had money. Felix Harborough talks of Mullrine as a younger man 'Hell bent on making a second fortune for the Mullrine family' and it is a 'second fortune', not a **replacement** one; there is no implication that the Mullrines or McDee's lost money in the depression, despite Arthur's personal experience of the Wall Street Crash.

The victims of Time (or 'It' as *Sapphire and Steel* call their offscreen antagonist in these six episodes) are people who are, in the normal course of things, immune to outside threats, immune even to the greatest economic meltdown of their century, except as a spur to greater profit. This makes sense, because in this story, unlike any other **Sapphire & Steel** serial, they are in peril because of deliberate action by a human being, in this case Miss Emma (although we will not discover this until Episode Six).

¹⁷ Commentary 1:1 2m35s

Yes, the story's true villain is an abstract something which is presumably sufficiently anthropomorphised to be able to communicate, and make a bargain, with Emma and which may (or may not) be an avatar for Time itself, but it is kept offscreen, leaving its avatar and co-conspirator to do what talking and explaining there is to be done. The threat to everyone in the serial is ultimately a lonely little old lady, and the story's concerns are human, rather than abstract. Lost love and loneliness are the problem here, not the unintended danger of nursery rhymes or a monster's ability to use photochemical processes against human beings.

It is appropriate then, that almost as soon as the story has started, and long before we understand the complicated interrelationships of the Mullrines and their associates in two different time zones, the squabbling over memory begins. Not just with Emma's fatuous observation about roses, but also over the memory of the late, lamented George McDee. We know little of George at this point, but watch as his widow and a woman we do not yet know was his lover argue over whether he liked parties, or was fond of the house they are standing in. As they do so a portrait of the man himself looms large over them, just as it seems McDee himself has loomed over this extended family in the not-yet-specified number of years since his death.

Arthur Mullrine is proud of the company that he and McDee built, so much so that emotion rises in his voice as he recalls their early successes, so much so that he is determined to mark the firm's 'fiftieth year of operation' with a party that pretends to take place in their **first** year of operation, with guests instructed not simply to dress 'in period' but also to refrain from wearing artificial materials, such as polyester¹⁸, that did not exist in 1930.

Exactly what Mullrine is marking, and how, is not entirely clear from the serial itself. Was there a party at Mullrine's house on this night, on 21st June, in 1930? If so, what was it celebrating? Partial answers, some contradictory, will be revealed over the course of *Assignment Five*, but it's enough in the context of Episode One to say that Mullrine has invited his sister and half a dozen friends and colleagues to his home to pretend for an evening that it is fifty years ago on that very night, and that he has gone to considerable trouble and expense to assist them in that affectation.

A case in point is Mullrine's 'trick' with the tape recording of a long-ago cricket commentary hidden in the back of an ancient wireless. This begins to play as Howard McDee turns the radio on in the hope of finding out the score in a cricket game being played in the real world in 1980¹⁹. Obviously, it exists as an example of both the jokes Mullrine will play on his guests and of the lengths he has gone to in order to recreate 1930 for them. It also allows the moment, several minutes later, where the back is again removed from the wireless to reveal the valves one would expect to find in a pre-war radio²⁰.

In what may be a deliberate touch, the details of the cricket match being reported on are wrong. Yes, the first Test of the 1930 Australian cricket tour of England was indeed at Trent Bridge, but it took place 13-17th June, with no cricket played on 21st and at no point during the Trent Bridge test were Australia 123 for 1²¹. Yet the personnel listed for the game are accurate, and the choice of Don Bradman and Wally Hammond as the batsman and bowler playing as the radio is turned on is interesting in itself, at least in so much as it invokes the intense personal rivalry between the two players which, unusually for cricket, seems to have drifted into personal

¹⁸ Invented in 1941.

¹⁹ On June 21 1980 England were playing the West Indies at Lord's. Howard wants to know 'How Boycott is getting on'. He was caught out for an atypically low 8. As this match would have already taken place by the time the scene was recorded, this may be a deliberate joke.

²⁰ Felix's comment after Mullrine's subterfuge is revealed that his party trick was 'All done with mirrors!' feels like another nod to Agatha Christie, whose most celebrated novels include *They Do It with Mirrors* (1952) and *The Mirror Crack'd from Side To Side* (1962), the latter of which was being made as a big budget film in the summer of 1980, and was much in the news. It would be released just before Christmas that year.

²¹ 'England v Australia 1930'.

animosity. This is, after all, a story about a silly game which becomes deadly serious. (It may also be relevant that Wally Hammond shares his surname with **Sapphire & Steel**'s creator, whom this is the first episode of the series without.)

The story the commentator tells of Hammond catching a swallow after mistaking it for a ball in flight seems to be not so much apocryphal as without precedent, and certainly not part of the mythology of Hammond's career. If this was invented by Houghton, rather than inserted by him in error, it is worth wondering what he meant by it. It is perhaps an oblique reference to the proverb of one swallow not making a summer, which would nicely dovetail with some of the story's other concerns.

That the date Mullrine is trying to recreate in his party is June 21st, and that this is, as he notes, the summer solstice, could be seen as tapping into the 1970s vogue for Folk Horror²². This subgenre, usually concerned with the past reaching out to damage, overwhelm or destroy the present (or at least the characters' present) might seem a natural categorisation for **Sapphire & Steel**. Yet while *Assignment One* invokes nursery rhymes, folk myth and the political-military conflicts of the mid to late sixteenth century, little in *Assignments Two to Four* or *Six* really follows on from that initial story.

Getting dark before seven o'clock in the evening, which is what happens here as the cricket is discussed, is the antithesis of what should happen on the longest day of the year, even somewhere with as mercurial summers as England. (Although Felix does dismiss the bad weather as exactly what one would expect in an unpredictable English summer.)

By the time Sapphire and Steel arrive in this episode of their own series²³, we are already thirteen minutes in, and they already look wholly out of place in their 1980 clothes and hair. The audience has been seduced, as Mullrine wants his guests to be seduced, into seeing 1930 before 1980, even in a television programme, with its video interiors and studio lighting, that repeatedly accidentally asserts through its technique that 1980 is exactly where it's from.

Sapphire and Steel have a mission (we have been told in *Assignment Three* that the Agents normally receive some kind of brief before engaging) but they are unsure exactly what it is. Going upstairs to change into clothing appropriate to 1930, they worry that the host of the party may have 'started this as a game' and that an undefined 'It' has 'taken over someone downstairs'. It could be 'any one of them,' says Sapphire. 'Or all of them!' counters Steel. Sapphire points out that this wouldn't make sense. That 'there has to be a victim. Or victims.'

This elliptical conversation, like many in the series in which the lead characters discuss their work, gets away with a lot by being between two people, both of whom know the same things. That which is unspoken, which could be revealed to the audience without crude info-dumping, is used to hide that which is unexplained. This extends to the nature of Sapphire and Steel's enemy, the aforementioned 'It' which comes up again and again in such lines as 'why'd 'It' choose this house?' They both know what 'It' is, so neither has any reason to say, except to inform us, and so neither does. Urgency is maintained, tension is created, but clarity is never offered. The closest the series ever gets to really defining the nature of that which Sapphire and Steel fight is in Sapphire's explanation to Robert Jardine in the second episode of the first serial. This must be understood to be partial given that she is not simply explaining to a child but doing so immediately after explicitly confirming to Steel that she will put it to Stephen in simple terms. There, though, time is both the corridor that surrounds all things and the thing that breaks through that corridor when the corridor is weakened by human action or by other factors. That's paradoxical, time seemingly attacking and weakening itself before attacking humans.

²² The term was not actually used in the 1970s, being a retrospective application not be coined until the next century, albeit the term originates with Piers Haggard, director of *The Blood on Satan's Claw*, and thus a key figure in any movement that existed.

²³ Steel's voice booming from outside a locked door by way of introduction recalls his first appearance in the first serial.

P.J. Hammond has often noted that his original title for the series was **The Time Menders**²⁴ and that implication of healing or fixing or mending, along with the series' opening narration's reference to Sapphire and Steel not being 'transuranic'²⁵, perhaps ties into this notion of time being both the enemy and the thing the enemy is attacking. Perhaps the best analogy is to some forms of cancer, where the human (or animal) body begins to fight itself.

If so, its extrapolation in this story, if not this episode, is effective, even if it is instinctive rather than deliberate. Here, the threat to the Mullrine family and their guests, and ultimately the whole world, stems from one of their own.

Downstairs from Sapphire and Steel's discussions, those guests have already spied through the window a church tower that was bombed out and raised to ground during World War Two. This would seem to give the lie to Felix's assertion to Mullrine that 'you can't make it 1930, you can only pretend.' More, Felix's wife Annabelle finds herself unable to remember what year they are really in. It's here that we first get some idea of the complicated interrelated sex lives of the Mullrines' circle. Annabelle is having an affair with Howard McDee, something that both his grandmother and the Mullrine siblings seem to have noticed, even if Felix has not.

In the opening scene of this episode, we have already had it implied that there exists a sexual relationship between Lord Mullrine and his secretary Miss Shaw²⁶, via his references to her 'bedroom in the annex' that both, laughing, acknowledge she doesn't need to move through the house to access. There will be more descriptions, if not depictions, of the bedhopping that goes on in this clique in later episodes. For the moment the audience will have to content themselves with Sapphire's ability, on entering the party, to intuit what we already know, using her seemingly inexhaustible telepathic powers, which also tell her, as will become important in the next episode, that the elderly Felicity McDee has been unfortunate to live long to enough bury 'both her husband and her son'.

As the episode comes to a close there are puns on 'fortune', both in the sense of clairvoyance and also as in the kind of which Arthur Mullrine has amassed two, while Felix's comment that Arthur could use Miles' (which is to say Steel's) ostensible expertise in 'the futures market' to 'make a killing' foreshadows the murder plot, as does his other observation that 'logically if it was 1930 only you and Emma, and Mrs McDee could be here. The rest of us haven't been born yet.'

As the party progresses, Sapphire and Steel become interested in the electric, computer-assisted door to Mullrine's office, the only part of the drawing room in which they are located which would not have been there in 1930. (We are told Mullrine had it installed in 1938). The 1920s pseudo-science of ley lines, which enjoyed a revival in the 1970s, is invoked as Sapphire and Steel discover that a ley line (here not defined) runs under the door to Mullrine's office. Sapphire seemingly detaches a part of her consciousness to investigate what is happening behind the door, which is suddenly enveloped in both eerie blue light and abstract flames patterns that only she and Steel can see. With Sapphire's behind-the-door consciousness not responding to his telepathically calling her name, Steel begins to panic.

²⁴ E.g. on PJ Hammond and Shaun O' Riordan, DVD Commentary *Assignment One*, Episode One: 11m23s

²⁵ Transuranic elements are those with a number on the periodic table above 92, they decay radioactively and are usually synthesised or isolated in laboratory conditions, rather than found in nature in the way lower numbered elements, are. See Schell, Cody, **Silver Archive #2: Sapphire & Steel Assignments Three and Four** for further discussion of the elements.

²⁶ Houghton had written for the 1970 series of **Doctor Who**, which had a regular character Doctor Elizabeth Shaw, who was usually referred to as 'Miss Shaw' onscreen. The reference may be deliberate or unconscious.