

**The Black Archive #29**

**THE IMPOSSIBLE  
ASTRONAUT /  
DAY OF THE  
MOON**



**By John Toon**

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So what are we to make of the end of *Day of the Moon*? Using a conveniently phrased recording of a Silent, and the property of the Silent's image to leave post-hypnotic commands in the human brain, the Doctor primes the contemporary television audience of nearly 600 million people<sup>1</sup> – and anyone watching the footage of the Moon landing at a later date – to kill all Silents on sight. He teases the possibility that he might accept the Silents' surrender and let them go in peace, but immediately admits that that's a lie; he also invites them to run and says that 'today's the day the human race throw you off their planet', but it would be naïve for him or us to suppose that the Silents will be able to withdraw without bloodshed. His action could potentially be defined as genocide under the third of the five categories listed above: he's created the conditions guaranteed to bring about the destruction of the Silents as a population, unless they stop living alongside humans.

Is his intent to destroy them or just to drive them away? As the UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect makes clear, 'an intention to simply disperse a group' does not constitute genocide: 'there must be a proven intent on the part of perpetrators to physically destroy' the group in question<sup>2</sup>. Leaving aside the naivety or otherwise of what he says to the Silents, there's a telling and troubling moment earlier in *Day of the Moon* when the Doctor describes them as 'superparasites', which suggests that he's already dehumanised them (or whatever the non-geocentric equivalent of 'dehumanised' might be) as a prelude to his later actions. This looks increasingly recognisable as an act of genocide –

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<sup>1</sup> Bustard, Bruce I, '20 July 1969'.

<sup>2</sup> 'Definitions: Genocide'.

many real-world instances have been preceded by the perpetrators describing their victims in terms of vermin in order to undermine public sympathy for them and to make their destruction seem more palatable.

The Silents don't even straightforwardly fit the pattern of aggressive invaders that we can see in other stories of science fictional genocide. They're undifferentiated and single-minded in their determination that 'Silence will fall', although at this point it's unclear exactly what that means. We will later discover – although at this point neither we nor our heroes definitely know – that they're involved in arranging the Doctor's death, but apart from that and gratuitously vaporising a White House employee in front of Amy Pond, they don't seem particularly interested in attacking anyone. They've already invaded the Earth, but their exploitation of humanity doesn't extend to mass murder or subjugation and seems to be limited to taking advantage of human engineering skills. We the viewers perceive them as malevolent because the prosthetic design, physical performance, music and camera angles all frame them as malevolent and because other sources routinely describe them as monsters; *The Time of the Doctor's* revelation that they're genetically engineered confessional priests makes all this seem ridiculous. There's more than enough reason for us to question the programme's depiction and our perception of the Silents, and the way the Doctor chooses to deal with them in *Day of the Moon*.

Did Steven Moffat intend us to question the story's resolution in this way? The answer would seem at first to be 'Yes': in a BBC press release just three weeks before Series 6 began transmission, Moffat was quoted as follows: 'Last year we reassured you – this year, to hell with that, we're going to worry the hell out of you. How well do we

really know that man, or what he's capable of?<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> 'Doctor Who: Interview with Steven Moffat'.



## BIOGRAPHY

John Toon is the author of the critically acclaimed *The Black Archive #15: Full Circle* (2018) and the maternally acclaimed 'Mr Tibbles Saves the World' (Kelly, Tom and Alysya, eds, *The Cat Who Walked Through Time*, 2000). In a brief but eventful career he has been a teenage Father Christmas (that's 'mall Santa' if you're American), the 'Exit pursued by' bear in *A Winter's Tale*, and an orchestral typewriter soloist. His favourite conspiracy theory is the one about Jean-Michel Jarre's Millennium concert at Giza being a diabolical Masonic plot. He lives in New Zealand with his partner of 18 years, a cat, an attic full of bumblebees and a large collection of **Godzilla** films.

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