

The Black Archive #7

**THE MIND ROBBER
SAMPLER**



By Andrew Hickey

THE THEMES

Notably, many of the characters we see in the Land are fictionalised versions of real people, behaving as they do in stories created long after the deaths of their originals. If, as Sherwin's additions to the script seem to suggest (although not outright state), we are looking at some sort of realm of ideas rather than a separate physical realm, it's possible that these characters have gone through the same fictionalising process which Zoe and Jamie get put through in this story. In this world, it seems, the idea of Cyrano de Bergerac is not, as Plato would have thought, a changeless, perfected version of the real man, casting a shadow into the real world that gives a distorted and imperfect view of the higher reality. Rather, the Cyrano of the Land is an impermanent, changeable figure, a shadow of the impressions the real man has left on others' imaginations. If the real Cyrano had a normal nose, but a playwright later portrayed him as having a grotesque proboscis, then the Cyrano of this realm will have a huge hooter.

And so the threat of becoming fictional is a threat to the idea of the self, of free will, and of identity. Jamie is changed in appearance at the whim of the Master¹, and when in episode 5 Jamie and Zoe are turned into fictional characters, they keep repeating a handful of lines over and again, unable to have any autonomy at all.

When the Doctor is confronted with the plan to fictionalise the whole human race, he is appalled: 'Sausages. Man will just become like a string of sausages, all the same.'² Whatever the fictionalising process does, the Doctor believes it removes any individuality from the people who go through it, turning them into little more than the clockwork soldiers we see throughout this story, going through the same motions without any real thought behind them.

(It has to be said, though, that this belief of the Doctor's doesn't appear to stand up when compared with what we see of the Land – the various fictional characters we see all have distinct personalities, with the exception of the toy soldiers, and while they're lacking in free will, they're not the identical 'string of sausages' the Doctor talks about.)

DANGEROUS TOYS

One thing that many writers have noted about *The Mind Robber* is its similarity to the story *The Celestial Toymaker*, a story from season three, which had featured William Hartnell's Doctor.

The Celestial Toymaker is a story whose reputation has lost a lot of its lustre in recent years, largely because the soundtrack being available has allowed people to hear that it is not, as fan memory had it, a fascinating and complex fantasy, but rather a tedious bore. While Cornell, Topping, and Day, writing before the soundtrack was widely available, say: 'Doctor Who's first stab at surrealism is an unqualified success, taking the symbols of childhood and turning them into a nightmarish prototype

¹This character is usually referred to in **Doctor Who** reference works as 'The Master of the Land of Fiction', to distinguish him from the character of the same name who appears regularly from *Terror of the Autons* (1971) onwards. However, the character is only referred to in dialogue or the credits of the serial as 'the Master', with no modifier, and will be referred to as such within this work.

²Episode 5.

of **The Crystal Maze**³, many later writers⁴ argue that at best the story has a kernel of a good idea, ineptly presented, and at worst that it is one of the dullest pieces of television ever created.

They're not wrong. Much like *The Mind Robber*, *The Celestial Toymaker* is a story whose production was beset with problems. The difference is that while the problems in *The Mind Robber* caused the production team to rise to the occasion, those afflicting *The Celestial Toymaker* seem at every point to have made the production team say 'Oh well, this'll have to do', and go for the easiest possible option.

³ Cornell, Day and Topping, *The Discontinuity Guide*, p56.

⁴ Notably Perryman, Neil, and Sue Perryman, *The Wife In Space volume #1: The Miserable Git* (2015), (p193); Sandifer, Philip, *TARDIS Eruditorum #1: William Hartnell* (2011), pp320-330; Shearman, Robert, and Toby Hadoke, *Running Through Corridors: Rob and Toby's Marathon Watch of Doctor Who - Volume 1: The 60s* (2010), pp146-151; and Wood, Tat, and Lawrence Miles, *About Time: The Unauthorized Guide to Doctor Who #1 - 1963-1966: Seasons 1 to 3* (2006), p256.