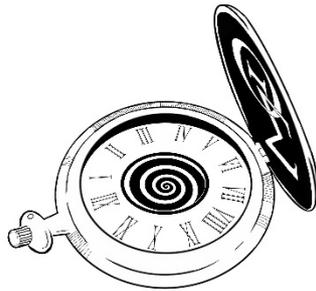


The Black Archive #13

**HUMAN NATURE / THE
FAMILY OF BLOOD
Sampler**



**By Naomi Jacobs and
Philip Purser-Hallard**

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Who is the Doctor?

As described, many fan texts enjoy exploration of central characters having romantic relationships that are absent from, or only hinted at by, the original text. The term 'shipping', as coined by fans of **The X-Files** (1993-2002) in the 1990s, is now in common parlance¹ to describe this practice of imagining or re-examining relationships between characters. In the case of the Doctor, while we can presume that he has had relationships (from, for example, the fact that he has a granddaughter), this aspect of the character was seldom a prominent feature of his stories prior to the introduction of River Song in *Silence in the Library / Forest of the Dead* (2008). He seems, as a rule, to have little interest in romance or sexual encounters, which means that to explore this one must put him in a different context and mindset. Both *Human Nature* [NA] and *Human Nature / The Family of Blood* therefore allow this most human of experiences to be given to the Doctor without disrupting the normal context, an exploration via 'alternate self' of something that would normally be unavailable both to him and to the readers and viewers².

The two versions of the story express these departures from normality in different ways, however. For an example, we can look first at a detailed comparison between the openings of the novel and of the television story. The television episode starts in medias res, with the Doctor and Martha being chased with undeniable urgency and the high energy representative of the season. However the scene then cuts to an apparent awakening, and we see the 'normal' life of John Smith and his maid Martha. This sets up a question for the audience: where is the reality in what we are being presented with? Is the 'dream' real – as the cumulative context of the series will lead us to assume – or the incongruous 'awakening'? Immediately we are placed in a state of questioning which is not fully resolved until almost 20 minutes into the episode.

By contrast, the book opens in a very different place, with both the Doctor and his companion Bernice Summerfield ('Benny') in a state of melancholy and grief due to recent events:

'He had that troubled look about his eyes, and wouldn't quite look at me.

'I wanted rather desperately to touch him, hug him or something, but everything about him said that that wouldn't be a good idea. He seemed embarrassed about seeing me, which wasn't really him at all. If I didn't know better, I'd say that he was thinking as hard about the last five minutes of Guy's life as I was.'³

'Guy' is Guy de Carnac, a medieval Templar knight with whom Benny had a burgeoning romance in the previous novel in the range, *Sanctuary* by David A McIntee (1995). Guy is left fighting, protecting Benny and the Doctor, in a battle that almost certainly results in his death. In the opening few pages of *Human Nature* [NA], the Doctor decides to travel to an alien market and make a purchase, which turns out to be the device that will transform him into John Smith: a character he has built out of the memories of previous companions.

In the book, therefore, the transformation to Smith is not presented as a mystery, nor as a result of conflict, but as a desirable state of change for the Doctor. We are not privy to his full reasons for

¹ It is used, for instance, in *The Lego Batman Movie* (2017).

² Cornell acknowledges this fact in the commentary to *Human Nature* [TV] when he notes, in relation to Smith and Joan's first kiss, that 'there'll be fanfiction about this out there.' (*Human Nature* [TV] DVD commentary).

³ *Human Nature* [NA] p2.

making this change, but we can speculate that he is looking for a way of understanding the human condition to appreciate Benny and her recent tragedy more fully, and perhaps for an escape from his routine existence to a fantasised version of himself who lacks the problems that he is currently struggling with. Paul Cornell suggests the former interpretation: 'In the novel, it's left unclear why exactly he's done this to himself, though there's a dirty great hint that it's to share and understand Benny's emotional state.'⁴

We will explore the idea of escape more closely later on.

The divergent openings not only place each story within the context of the ongoing narrative, but set up an appropriate catalyst for the story that unfolds. The seventh Doctor, who in the Virgin novels in particular is represented as a masterful strategist, is the agent of his own transformation. He appears to be looking for a means to create change, and the opening is an exploration of this state of mind. The 10th Doctor on the other hand is pushed into this scenario; though not fully without enthusiasm. 'Never thought I'd use this... all the times I've wondered,' he says, indicating that this is perhaps an excuse for something he has, for some reason, otherwise denied himself. Even the pain associated with it, something Martha queries, is presented almost gleefully: 'Oh yeah... it hurts.'⁵

(It is also interesting, given the urgency with which the Chameleon Arch transformation seems to be approached, to consider when the Doctor might have made the recording which he leaves for Martha with instructions on how to proceed. Was this made previously, with the implication that he always intended to use the Arch to become human at some point? This seems somewhat unlikely, given he refers specifically to their flight from those seeking them. Does it happen at some ambiguous moment in the pursuit, or before the change from the Arch fully takes hold? Or perhaps even at a future point, which brings up the question of why those specific instructions were issued?)

These differences highlight how the same story can be told effectively with significantly different characterisation for the protagonist. The lack of melancholia is not simply a consequence of the lighter tone required for a family-suitable television broadcast, though that is undoubtedly a factor. Unlike that of the manipulative seventh Doctor, the state of the 10th Doctor could be understood as one of denial rather than contemplation. The actions shown in each version of the story, as well as putting a different emphasis on the reasons for the change, are representative of the different character aspects in these two incarnations. As we will explore in more depth in the next chapter, the 10th Doctor's impulse to flee could be read as a reaction to his comparatively recent experiences in the Time War (and his loss of Rose), and as representing a means of repression rather than acknowledgement. Two different stories are being told here from a similar conceptual starting-point, and while both reflect on the necessity of conflict and war, it can be suggested that they come to quite different conclusions in terms of message and moral imperative.

Equally, when the Doctor returns to his true self at the end of the story, we see differences in how the respective characterisations affect his actions and behaviour. There are three key events which take place at the end of both versions: the Doctor's conversation with Joan about the distinctions between himself and John Smith; his defeat of the villainous family; and the coda with the elderly Tim. While the divergences in how these unfold are significant in regard to how they reflect the character of the Doctor, they are also highly tied to the differing roles of these supporting characters, as will be explored when we look below at how these are portrayed.

⁴ Cornell, Paul, 'Adapting the Novel for the Screen', *Human Nature* [NA], ebook, p360.

⁵ *Human Nature* [TV].

