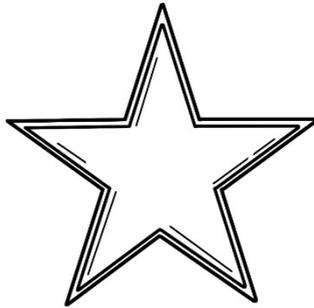


The Black Archive #15

**FULL CIRCLE
SAMPLER**



By John Toon

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For you. Yes, you! Go on, you deserve it.

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CONTENTS

Overview

Synopsis

Chapter 1: Squaring the Circle

Chapter 2: Hopeful Monsters

Chapter 3: A New Look at Life on Alzarius

Chapter 4: The Magic (Full) Circle

Chapter 5: Circular History

Chapter 6: Teenage Kicks

Chapter 7: The Creature from the Black Park Lagoon

Appendix: Poachers Turned Gamekeepers

Bibliography

Biography

The Bidmead Masterplan

We can get a pretty good feel for the character of Bidmead's vision of **Doctor Who** by directly comparing *Full Circle* with the more traditional *State of Decay*. Both feature a society restrained in its development by three rulers, a terrible secret those rulers are keeping from the general population and an ancient spacecraft that nobody knows how to pilot. But where *State of Decay*'s Three Who Rule are malevolent and ultimately answer to a bigger, nastier intelligence, the Deciders are well-intentioned and aren't under the control of a higher authority. The Three Who Rule and the Great Vampire personally embody the horror of *State of Decay* and prey on their subjects; *Full Circle* finds horror in the impersonal natural processes that have made the Deciders as much victims as those they govern. The Doctor's victory in *State of Decay* involves defeating the individual threat of the vampires; the victory in *Full Circle* is a small, hopeful one against a broader existential problem.

Similarly in *The Keeper of Traken* and Bidmead's own *Logopolis*, while the pantomime villainy of the Master is foregrounded, the real peril in both stories comes from the natural decay of a once-stable environment – an impersonal natural process (in those cases, entropy) to which all the characters are subject. Whereas **Doctor Who** in the 1970s drew on melodramatic literature and film as an inspiration and a backdrop for its own tales of heroism, in Season 18 it draws on scientific principles (broadly expressed, perhaps) for inspiration and finds heroism in the struggle to understand and withstand natural laws. This shift in emphasis may be what Bidmead is thinking of when he speaks in interviews of

trying to bring the science back to **Doctor Who** – giving the show a scientific ethos rather than literally foregrounding hard science¹. In his interview for the fan-produced documentary series *Myth Makers*, Bidmead talks more specifically about trying to put the scientific method at the heart of the show, giving the Doctor a spirit of rational enquiry and getting him to solve problems through observation and hypothesis rather than by using his sonic screwdriver or K-9. Nowhere in Season 18 can this more clearly be seen than in the scenes of the Doctor uncovering the Deciders' terrible secret with a microscope in episode 4 of *Full Circle*.

Reformatting

The three stories that form the central portion of Season 18 – *Full Circle*, *State of Decay* and *Warriors' Gate* – are often referred to as the 'E-Space Trilogy'², which implies, rightly or wrongly, that they form a single larger story with a narrative arc running through it. Bidmead had first suggested 'a trilogy of stories with a linking theme' to John Nathan-Turner early in 1980 and finally codified his linking concept of E-Space in a document dated 12 June³. By that time, filming had already been completed on *State of Decay*.

¹ See, for example, Bidmead in conversation at the start of the DVD extra 'E-Space: Fact or Fiction?': 'I think I was specifically hired to bring a scientific sense back into **Doctor Who**.' As we'll see in Chapters 2 and 4, he wasn't entirely successful at putting nuts-and-bolts science into **Doctor Who**.

² See, most obviously, the packaging of the VHS and DVD releases of the three stories, which were released on both occasions in a single box under that umbrella title.

³ Pixley, 'DWM Archive: Full Circle'.

Although Bidmead's linking theme would be worked into the three scripts of the trilogy, it would have relatively little impact on them.

Doctor Who had previously attempted arc storytelling in Season 16, in which the Doctor and Romana are given a mission to collect the scattered parts of the Key to Time and return them to the White Guardian. This is clearly a different case from the three E-Space stories, in which the backdrop of E-Space is a common feature but not a significant plot element. While the six stories of Season 16 clearly work as separate units, the quest for the Key to Time is foregrounded within them. Discovering the identity of each fragment of the Key and recovering it forms a central part of all stories except for the two scripted by David Fisher, *The Stones of Blood* and *The Androids of Tara* (both 1978), and even so in the latter his early sidelining of the quest for the Key is done in order to make a point about the protagonists' personalities and to move them into position for his own story. More to the point, the concept of the Key to Time as a driving element of the overall season was worked out well in advance⁴, and far from being grafted onto a set of pre-existing scripts as in the case of E-Space, it was incorporated into the stories of Season 16 at the commissioning stage.

By contrast, connectivity between stories in **Doctor Who** in the 1980s tends to be created through 'continuity references' that relate current stories to earlier ones, or through less tangible thematic elements carried across from one story to another. Fans

⁴ As early as November 1976, in fact, when a detailed pitch of the season-spanning concept formed part of Graham Williams' application for the position of producer. See *In-Vision* #38, p2-3.

often disparage this tendency in 80s **Who** as ‘soap opera’, but that would imply a greater degree of connectivity between episodes than was attempted in **Doctor Who** at this time. There’s a less centralised feel to 80s **Who**; rather than a preconceived overarching story, we have an assortment of unrelated stories that the script editor has attempted to fit together – thematically, narratively or on both levels – by introducing common elements at a later stage of script development.

This loosely connective approach, as well as the decision to expand the number of the Doctor’s companions to three over the course of Season 18, might suggest to us that Bidmead and Nathan-Turner were attempting to emulate the format of **Doctor Who** in the 1960s, but it isn’t quite that either. **Who** stories in the 60s would routinely end with a teaser scene that set up the story that followed, much in the manner of the cinematic adventure serials of earlier decades; this was down to the story editor (as the position was then known) adding linking elements to otherwise unrelated stories in order to create the feel of a continuing adventure across stories. Yet direct links between stories in this vein were made only infrequently in the 80s, most commonly during the period 1982-84, when Peter Davison was in the title role, and then only rarely using the cliffhanger format that had joined stories together in the 60s.

Instances of this in Seasons 19 to 21 include: Nyssa’s collapse at the end of *Four to Doomsday* (1982) setting up her absence from *Kinda* (1982); *Time-Flight* (1982) dealing briefly and half-heartedly with Adric’s death in *Earthshock* (1982); the TARDIS being pulled off course at the end of *Frontios* (1984) into what is revealed to be a time corridor at the start of *Resurrection of the Daleks* (1984); and the unavoidable carry-over of the regeneration from *The Caves of*

Androzani (1984) into *The Twin Dilemma* (1984)⁵. There's also the 'Black Guardian Trilogy' of Season 20⁶, which is more cohesive overall and makes more prominent use of its arc elements than the 'E-Space Trilogy'.

In Season 18, this type of connectivity between stories is very rare, with only the summons from Gallifrey at the end of *Meglos* and the Master's triumph at the end of *The Keeper of Traken* carrying over directly from one story into the next; the TARDIS' return to normal space at the end of *Warriors' Gate* is picked up on in the first moments of *The Keeper of Traken*, but there's no real carry-over of story content. The 'E-Space Trilogy' itself shows its roots as three unrelated stories rather than as a single planned sequence – the concept of E-Space barely impacts on *Full Circle* or on *State of Decay*, and while it presumably didn't take much wrangling to turn the surreal 'dream time' of Steve Gallagher's original story submission⁷ into the gateway/pocket universe of *Warriors' Gate*, that story refers only glancingly to E-Space and might as easily have played out on its own in another season. The arc of the perceived trilogy is formed by secondary elements that have been grafted onto these otherwise standalone stories.

These elements are only really resolved in *Logopolis*, when the origin of the 'charged vacuum emboitement' (CVE) that gives

⁵ Tegan's departure in *Time-Flight* and return in *Arc of Infinity* (1983), falling across seasons, probably doesn't belong in this list. We might perhaps view it as a precursor of the trans-season arcs of Matt Smith's tenure.

⁶ Consisting of *Mawdryn Undead*, *Terminus* and *Enlightenment* (all 1983).

⁷ *In-Vision* #50, p5.

access to E-space is revealed as part of the Logopolitans' efforts to prevent the collapse of the universe. Together with the Master's return in *The Keeper of Traken* and the foreshadowing in that story of *Logopolis* – natural entropy held at bay by something half-science and half-magic that the Master tries and fails to control – the narrative thread of the CVE forms part of a looser thematic arc that encompasses not three stories but five.

This approach to long-form storytelling in TV shows comprised of shorter stories is familiar to us in the 'season arc' structure in common use today. Notable prior examples of arc storytelling of this type in British television include the fourth series (1969) of **Public Eye** (1965-75), which sees its hero – a down-at-heel private investigator – gradually recovering his life and career after a year of wrongful imprisonment; and a number of storylines in secret service thriller **Callan** (1967-72), culminating in a trio of episodes that pit Callan against his Soviet opposite number. Although a successful and widely-used device in British television generally, the 'season arc' is a rarity in **Doctor Who** during the 20th century; Season 8 (1971), with its sustained focus on the newly introduced character of the Master, could also arguably be considered an example of the form. Since 2005, however, it has become a routine feature of the show.

In these cases the season comprises a mixture of stories that are essentially standalone, linked by background and thematic elements, and episodes that exist largely or entirely to serve the arc story. The clearest example of this in 21st-century **Doctor Who** is probably the 2005 series, in which the setting of Satellite Five, mid-series companion Captain Jack Harkness, Margaret Blaine's extrapolator and concepts such as Dalek-human hybridisation and

opening the TARDIS console to access the power within it are seeded across the season⁸ and then drawn together in the final episodes, *Bad Wolf* and *The Parting of the Ways* (both 2005), along with an explanation of the recurring phrase 'Bad Wolf'. Season 18 is much closer to this format than it is to the more straightforwardly-planned format of Season 16.

All Change

Full Circle also marks the start of John Nathan-Turner's overhaul of **Doctor Who's** regular cast. By the end of Season 18 all the leads would be replaced and the show would have a new Doctor, three new companions and the return of the Master as a recurring villain. That process begins here with the introduction of Adric; moreover, it's *Full Circle* which signals the imminent departure of the old companions. Romana's response in episode 1 to the order to return to Gallifrey sets up a clear expectation that, either by obeying or evading the summons, she'll be leaving the TARDIS soon; her story threatens to come full circle. A line of dialogue from the Doctor reminds older viewers and informs newer ones that the Doctor's previous companions – Leela and the original K-9 – had been left on Gallifrey, and those viewers might have expected a similar send-off for Romana and K-9 Mark Two. As it turns out, both will remain in E-Space at the end of the trio of stories that starts with *Full Circle*.

Notions of circularity are echoed elsewhere in Season 18, notably in the concept of recursion that Bidmead briefly explores in *Logopolis* and will revisit in *Castrovalva* (1982). We get a foretaste of this

⁸ In *The Long Game*, *The Empty Child*, *Boom Town*, *Dalek* and *Boom Town* again respectively (all 2005).

concept in *Full Circle*, although it isn't identified as such in the script, in the form of the Starliner. The Starliner is a foreign space within the world of Alzarius, an environment in itself that occupies the wider environment of the planet. Alzarius in its turn occupies the environment of the Starliner through the form of the Marshmen. There are definite echoes of this, conceptually if not narratively or visually, in the mutual occupation of the Doctor's and Master's TARDISEs in *Logopolis*.

The cyclical nature of **Doctor Who** itself as an episodic series is reinforced at the end of *Full Circle*. At the conclusion of the story, as at the start, we see the Doctor, Romana and K-9 at liberty to explore the universe together; it's a different universe, but the fact that they've been relocated to E-Space seems as much an opportunity for adventure and discovery as a problem to be solved. It's almost a wiping of the slate for the show, a new universe and a fresh start, even though at the same time it's a reaffirmation of the status quo that was threatened by Romana's summons to return to Gallifrey in episode 1 and by K-9's apparent destruction in episode 2.

BIOGRAPHY

In 1980, John Toon was a child maths prodigy with a dodgy haircut; today he is a bearded science mystic. He was one of the founding contributors to *The Professor X Programme Guide*, an online **Doctor Who** parody in the 1990s, but he's learned his lesson and he's very sorry. He celebrated **Doctor Who's** 50th anniversary by blogging about the electronic soundtracks of the 50 stories broadcast during the 1980s (<http://doctorwhoelectronica.blogspot.co.nz/>). He and his partner emigrated from the UK eight years ago to New Zealand, where he has become a prominent participant in the science fiction fan community. He likes comics, Godzilla and expressing himself through the medium of cosmetics. This is his first book.