

The Black Archive #9

**THE GOD
COMPLEX**



By Paul Driscoll

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Paul would like to thank:

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Dedicated to the six wonders of my world, Daniel, Becci, Oliver,
Hannah, Sophie and Luke.

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OVERVIEW

Serial Title: *The God Complex*

Writer: Toby Whithouse

Director: Nick Hurran

Original UK Transmission Date: 17 September 2011

Running Time: 47m 52s

UK Viewing Figures: 6.7 million

Regular Cast: Matt Smith (The Doctor), Karen Gillan (Amy Pond), Arthur Darvill (Rory)

Recurring Cast: Caitlyn Blackwood (Amelia Pond)

Guest Cast: Sarah Quintrell (Lucy Hayward), Amara Karan (Rita), Dimitri Leonidas (Howie Spragg), Daniel Pirie (Joe Buchanan), David Walliams (Gibbis), Dafydd Emyr (PE Teacher), Spencer Wilding (The Creature), Rashid Karapiet (Rita's Father), Roger Ennals (Gorilla)

Antagonists: The Creature

Responses:

'I'm feeling the rapture. That's because *The God Complex* by Toby Whithouse is one of the best **Doctor Who** stories ever.'

[Graham Kibble-White, *Doctor Who Magazine* #440]

'By adopting a surreal tone to the episode, it did help camouflage the fact that the plot made very little sense and apart from the scene where the hotel illusion rolled back and the monster died there was not much concrete in the way of real explanation of what was going on.'

[Gavin Fuller, *The Telegraph*, 17 September 2011]

A SHINING EXAMPLE

Standing directly between the mythical and supernatural Minotaur strand, and the psychological and political 1984 strand, Stanley Kubrick's 1980 adaptation of Stephen King's *The Shining* (1977) is the third major influence behind *The God Complex*. The film tells the story of struggling writer Jack Torrance's descent into madness inside the mysterious and haunted Overlook Hotel. Jack becomes the live-in caretaker of the isolated hotel, moving in with his wife and psychically gifted son Danny. Danny's visions and voices are channelled by his imaginary friend, Tony, 'the little boy who lives in Danny's mouth'. Danny is able to see physical representations of ghosts and demons that haunt his father.

One of the more plausible interpretations of *The Shining* covered in the documentary movie, *Room 237* (2012), is that the movie is a reworking of the Theseus and the Minotaur myth. At the end of the film Jack dies inside a hedge maze, a location that Kubrick added to King's novel. The association of Jack with the Minotaur is foreshadowed elsewhere in the movie: there are moments when Jack appears taurine-like – as if he's a bull about to charge; there is a poster of a skier who looks like the Minotaur beside another of a cowboy riding a bull; and in another scene, Jack's wife, Wendy, makes a comment about leaving a trail of breadcrumbs, reminiscent of Ariadne's thread. *The God Complex* is far more explicit in its mining of the Minotaur myth, but its association with *The Shining* extends far beyond this shared mythical inspiration.

The seminal film sets the stylistic tone of *The God Complex*, with both pieces deliberately provoking questions about what is real. Together, Whithouse and director Nick Hurran capitalise on the

themes, location and techniques used in the movie to ensure that the story falls firmly in the horror genre. At the time, Kubrick's work was atypical of horror-movie conventions, but the genre has branched out largely because of his influential work, and his techniques are often repeated, in combination with more staple horror elements. The horror elements in *The God Complex* are not solely derived from *The Shining* (Hitchcock's influence is also noticeable in parts), but the links with Kubrick's film are explicit.

The ship's hotel form calls to mind the Overlook Hotel with its numbered nightmare rooms. Both 'hotels' resist any attempts to escape them. They have been deliberately created to entrap and break their occupants by triggering primal fears and psychological trauma. The usual rules of time and space do not apply, giving them an air of transcendence and sentience. And just in case the viewer thinks it might still be coincidental, both the Doctor and later Rita note that the hotel looks like something from the 1980s.

Aside from the obvious similarities in setting, a number of thematic links are also made. The automatic writing of Lucy ('Praise him') links to Jack's typewriter ('All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy'), which like Joe's bonds and the muzak operates with no apparent human agency. That the Doctor is comparable to Jack, both through similarity and dissimilarity, is made clear by the way the two characters are repeatedly seen through mirrored surfaces¹. They are both driven to a point of uncontrollable rage (for quite different reasons and with quite different outcomes). The two

¹ The Doctor's face is reflected in the reception bell, the cassette player, water, and multiple mirrors.

characters are forced to respond to the futility of their work and their lack of success (Jack as a writer and the Doctor as a saviour figure). Jack's and the Doctor's lifestyles and psychological state present risk to their closest allies.

There is also a clear association between young Amy and Danny, who both talk to 'imaginary' friends. The pre-credits introductory sequence which accompanied all the episodes of the season, including *The God Complex*, on international broadcast (and is now used for the same purpose on Netflix), ends with Amy narrating her story of how she met the Doctor, with flashbacks to young Amy. Unlike Danny's Tony, her friend is real; at least in a physical sense. The Doctor is not a means of accounting for her powers. However, the hero figure she imagines him to be, is no more real than Tony. Even more incidental images, such as the photographs on the wall² and the man in a gorilla suit, call to mind iconic moments from the 1980 film³. The contrast between Danny's ESP and the non-working telephones is individualised in *The God Complex*, with the Doctor successfully interpreting the grunts of the Minotaur, yet unable to reach Rita on the telephone.

² Displaying characters who have died in the respective hotels.

³ C.f. The man in a bear suit in *The Shining*, despite its more adult themes and associations.

BIOGRAPHY

Paul Driscoll, an Oxford University postgraduate in theology, currently lives in Greater Manchester.

Paul has written of his love for **Doctor Who** and other classic British cult TV in the **You and Who** series of books, including *Contact Has Been Made*, *Blake's Heaven*, and *You and Who Else* (Watching Books).

His published short fiction includes 'Storage Wars' and 'The Time Lord Who Came to Tea', in the charity anthology, *Seasons of War* (Chinbeard Books), and the Iris Wildthyme adventure 'The Story Sorters', in *A Clockwork Iris* (Obverse Books).

He has also written about his experiences in setting up a homelessness charity in *Volunteering and Giving Back* (Chicken Soup for the Soul), and is currently working on his first novel, an alternative take on the origins of Christianity.