

# The Convertible Bus

— W —

*“Have I asked you if you can twitch your testicles?  
Clearly I haven’t, as you’re making that face at  
me.”*

Mark and Elaine bought me a BBC Books *Doctor Who* novel, *Last of the Gaderene*, for Christmas. Normally I don’t read this sort of stuff – there are too many to keep up with, and I’ve little enough time for reading proper novels,<sup>1</sup> and don’t really want to get diverted into reading novels which will probably annoy me, because the author’s vision of the series differs radically from my understanding of what it was all about. At their worst, I feel these novels are trampling all over some of my formative memories. *Last of the Gaderene*, however, is written by Mark Gatiss<sup>2</sup> of the League of Gentlemen, is a story of the Jon Pertwee Doctor and UNIT, my favourite era of the show, and it has a Spitfire on the cover. As Mark said, it could have been written especially for me.

Reading Gatiss’ foreword, it was clear that I wasn’t going to think that this novel trampled over my memories. On the contrary, it’s clear that Gatiss and I had much the same experience of the show, both through the TV, and through the Target novelizations. Of these latter, he says they gave “glimpses into a strange and mysterious past where the Doctor had been *someone else*.” That’s *exactly* how I felt. I knew that the Doctor had not always been the tall elegant figure I saw every Saturday night. My mother tells me she used to watch *Doctor Who* in the ’60s with me on her lap. I can even remember a couple of snippets – Patrick Troughton’s face dissolving into the main title, the Doctor and Jamie in a corridor, a burning

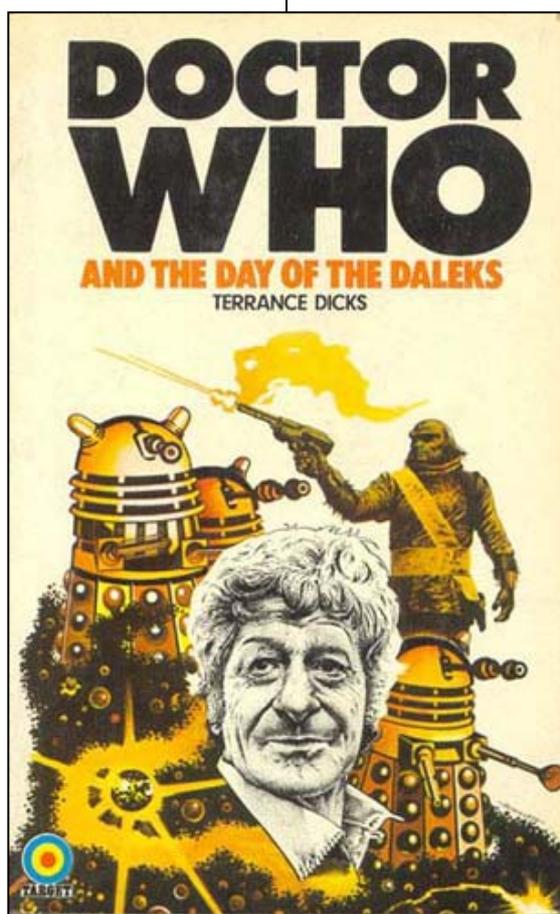
Dalek.<sup>3</sup> But I didn’t really have a detailed knowledge of what happened in the show before 1970, beyond the occasional hints dropped in the show itself (which could be confusing, as sometimes – e.g. in *The Talons of Weng-Chiang* – they would refer to adventures that in fact had never been on television) and the novels that were available. It was a vague, dark area. It was akin (to go from the ridiculous to the sublime) to how Tolkien fans felt about the history of Middle-Earth before *The Silmarillion* came out – there were hints of the existence

of such things as Gondolin, or Beren and Lúthien, but no-one (outside the Tolkien family) quite knew the full tales.

Later, of course, I became much more familiar with 1960s *Doctor Who*, and at one point I could probably reel off all the stories in order (I can’t any more – though I probably still could for 1970-77). So my curiosity was satisfied – but something of the mystery was now gone, never to return, and had to be searched for elsewhere. (Did Tolkien fans feel the same bittersweet feeling of mingled pleasure and disappointment?)<sup>4</sup> I’m not sure I’ve ever rediscovered it.

Because of all this, I retain a deep love for those 1970s Target novels. My favourite remains *Day of the Daleks*, the first one I ever got.<sup>5</sup> It’s really rather well-written – in fact, it’s better than the TV story

it’s based on, so much so that I was a bit disap-



<sup>3</sup> The last of which leaves me to realize that I saw at least the final episode of the classic but now lost *Evil of the Daleks*.

<sup>4</sup> I remember a feeling of delight looking through *The Silmarillion* and finding out exactly who, and therefore how powerful, Gandalf was. Presumably the thought that there was more to find out has fuelled the selling of Christopher Tolkien’s assemblages of his father’s manuscripts, some of which contain more interesting material than is sometimes suggested.

<sup>5</sup> I was going to scan the copy of my battered, dog-eared, repeatedly-read copy, but in the end it was easier to use a scan off the web. And yes, the Daleks have their suckers on the wrong side.

<sup>1</sup> Ooh, you snob!

<sup>2</sup> Which apparently is pronounced ‘Gay-tiss’ not ‘Gah-tiss’.

pointed when, ten years or so later, I saw *Day of the Daleks* again, because my memory had been modified by the book. This stuff has been tremendously influential on what I've done with my life and writing since (as anyone who's seen my *Dr Who/Archers* cross-over piece<sup>6</sup> will realize). In fact, had it not been for *Doctor Who* in all its forms in the 1970s, I might not be an sf fan at all. I might have had an ordinary life.<sup>7</sup>

———— J ————

*"A sober but not bitter Tanya"*<sup>8</sup>

I write this the morning after *The Amber Spyglass* has won the Whitbread Book of the Year prize. Interestingly, all the emphasis is being placed on the novel as a children's book, and very little on it being a *fantasy*. Another sign of the "it's good so it can't be sf" syndrome? Or am I being too deeply cynical?

Apparently not. On rec.arts.sf.fandom, a radio debate was reported where it was said that the only thing *Harry Potter*, *The Amber Spyglass* and *Lord of the Rings* had in common was that they were all children's books. Well, I'd say that was one thing that these three books do *not* have in common.

———— M ————

*"This is why I'm a dog person ... this is why I'm a horse person ..."*



The Alison Freebairn lookalikes will rule the world!<sup>9</sup>

———— K ————

<sup>6</sup> No Lilian, I wasn't joking.

<sup>7</sup> Of course, what you really want to know is whether *Last of the Gaderene* is any good or not. Well, it's okay, and I enjoyed spending a few hours in the company of the Doctor and UNIT once again. But no more than that.

<sup>8</sup> It's a drink, okay? Orange juice and soda water in a pint glass, if I remember rightly.

<sup>9</sup> Actually, this is Zombina, of cool Liverpool goth-rock band Zombina and the Skeletones.

*"Ich bin im Zug. Im Zug!"*<sup>10</sup>

"Next Sunday sees the welcome return of our popular quotation quiz, *Quote Unquote*." No it doesn't! No it isn't! Lies! Lies! **Lies!**

———— T ————

*"Women don't strum, they pluck."*

What more can one say?

———— Q ————

**The Convertible Bus No. 9.** Send correspondence, fanzines, news of further Freebairn lookalikes, etc., to 'Swiss' **Tony Keen, 15 Heathbridge, Heathbridge Approach, Brooklands Road, Weybridge, Surrey, KT13 0UN.** I don't go the Croydon pubmeets, so how can this be a Croydon fanzine? ✉ [keentony@hotmail.com](mailto:keentony@hotmail.com). LiveJournal: [www.livejournal.com/~swisstone](http://www.livejournal.com/~swisstone). Kettering in '57 – because it makes sense. March 2002. If I were a *Rocky Horror* character I'd be Brad (no surprise there), if I were a *LOTR* character I'd be Celeborn (bor-RING!) or Frodo, and if I were a *B5* character I'd be Londo (huh?). And the animal that best portrays my sexual appetites is a gazelle? Oh, and my Rock Star boyfriend is Thom Yorke!<sup>11</sup>

———— X ————

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(or talk to me)

———— g ————

**Tobes for TAFF – why the hell not?**

———— L ————

<sup>10</sup> Honestly, I really heard this said into a mobile phone on a train.

<sup>11</sup> And the website was taken down before I could find what character I would be in a Kevin Smith movie. (Silent Bob, please!)