

Doctor Who: The Five Doctors Short Guide

Doctor Who: The Five Doctors by Terrance Dicks

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Overview

Intended to be escapist entertainment, *Doctor Who: The Five Doctors* is pleasurable reading for fans of the "Doctor Who" television show and for anyone who enjoys science fiction. Terrance Dicks is a skilled storyteller who keeps the adventure of *The Five Doctors* moving at a brisk pace while maintaining a clear plot line.



About the Author

Terrance Dicks was born in East Ham, London, probably in 1939. He attended the East Ham Grammar School and later Downing College, Cambridge. He then served two years in the army. After his discharge he became an advertising copywriter—a job that lasted five years. In 1968, after selling some free-lance scripts to radio and television shows, he became the script editor for the "Doctor Who" television series, replacing Derrick Sherwin.

Dicks worked on the last few Doctor Who stories that featured the second actor to play the Doctor, Patrick Troughton, beginning with "Fury from the Deep." When Troughton left the series, there was doubt about whether the BBC would renew it for another season. But the third actor to play the Doctor, Jon Pertwee, proved to be very popular, and the show stayed on the air.

Dicks remained as script editor for all of the stories that featured Pertwee, leaving when Pertwee did in 1974. The production schedule for "Doctor Who" during those years was frenetic, with shooting schedules that lasted throughout the year. Dicks remembers being in a constant hurry while a script editor; at any given time he was keeping track of scripts for episodes that were in production, for shows being edited after shooting, and for shows that had yet to go before the cameras. He brought in good new writers and cowrote a script with Malcolm Hulke: "The War Games," the last story to star Troughton (first aired as a serial of ten half-hour episodes in 1969). He later wrote the first story for the fourth actor to play the Doctor, Tom Baker: "Robot" (four episodes that aired in 1974 and 1975).

Since leaving the "Doctor Who" television series, Dicks has become a successful writer for children. His books include the "Goliath" and "The Adventures of T. R. Bear" series for younger children and "The Baker Street Irregulars" series for older children.

Dicks has also written many novelizations of Doctor Who stories, including Doctor Who: The Five Doctors, based on his screenplay that reunited the first five Doctors in a movie celebrating the series' twentieth anniversary. All the novelizations are intended for young adult audiences. Dicks presently works as the producer of the "BBC Classic Serial," which features television adaptations of classic books.



Setting

Doctor Who: The Five Doctors is set in a world inhabited by creatures called Time Lords. Time Lords can live for eons, because when one of their incarnations dies, its body regenerates into a new body that shares a personality with its past forms but has unique characteristics as well. A Time Lord is allowed twelve "regenerations" before he must die permanently. Living a dangerous life, Doctor Who is a Time Lord who has used his incarnations up alarmingly fast. He has already reached his fifth incarnation, known as Doctor Five; his earlier incarnations are known as Doctor One, Doctor Two, Doctor Three, and Doctor Four.

The action takes place primarily in the Death Zone on the Time Lords' home planet, Gallifrey, and in the Dark Tower that houses the tomb of Rassilon, the first of the Time Lords. The Death Zone is a bleak and blasted place. At one time, corrupt Time Lords had snatched warriors from their proper times and places, setting them in the Death Zone to battle to the end. The machinery of the old war games still works, and a "teleportation" device has seized Doctors One, Two, and Three—along with a few of their past companions and enemies—and deposited them in the Death Zone. A flawed attempt to seize Doctor Four has left him in limbo. Doctor Five has felt each seizure and senses his life fading out. In desperation he sets the controls of his time-and-space ship, the TARDIS, for the Death Zone, in pursuit of his other selves.

The Dark Tower is an imposing edifice.

Built as the legendary Rassilon's tomb, it looms starkly above one edge of the Death Zone. It is psychically alive and conjures up realistic images from the Doctors' pasts as they search it. Because the tower is booby trapped in many places, the Doctors have to be alert and clever to reach its inner sanctum, which holds the answer to why they have been captured and brought together in violation of laws forbidding different incarnations of the same Time Lord from meeting one another except in the gravest emergencies.

Social Sensitivity

There is little in Doctor Who: The Five Doctors that would cause concern for anyone. Unabashedly an adventure, the novel is not deeply concerned with social issues. Its villains are very bad, and the heroes try to overcome their own personal limitations to defeat evil. Good triumphs, and the principal villain receives a suitable punishment. Some readers might be irritated that the Doctor evades his leadership responsibilities and flees when informed that the Time Lords expect him to finally serve as their President. The Doctor is not a perfect person, and he prefers adventure to responsibility.

Literary Qualities

Doctor Who: The Five Doctors presents many characters, but the narrative is clearly written. Readers who have not followed the television series might have difficulty keeping track of the Doctors' numerous companions—even though each is quickly sketched when introduced—but the Doctors themselves are easy to track. They are unified in their purpose and therefore move toward the same objective. This makes for a clear plot line, with just enough subplots to maintain the mystery of who has reactivated the Death Zone.

The novel emphasizes plot over other elements. The characters have all been established in previous novelizations as well as on the television series, and they are not developed much further in Doctor Who: The Five Doctors. Extensive character exposition might even annoy dedicated readers of the earlier books, because they already know the characters well. The novel makes limited use of symbolism: the Doctors represent selfsacrifice for the greater good, and Borusa represents the sacrifice of the greater good to satisfy individual vanity.



Themes and Characters

Doctor Who: The Five Doctors has two principal themes: the definition of the individual and the quest for eternal life.

Neither theme is worked out in depth, but both are important for understanding the characters' motivations.

When Doctor Five's previous selves are wrenched out of time and space, he says, "I am being diminished. Whittled away, piece by piece. ... A man is the sum of his memories, you know, and a Time Lord even more so." All five versions of the Doctor face the same problem: the tearing apart of their identity as the Doctor, and death by the loss of the memories each incarnation represents.

A madman who seeks eternal life has put the Doctor into this dangerous predicament. Once a good if somewhat hidebound leader of the Time Lords, Borusa has become convinced that he is indispensable to the Time Lords. His dream of gloriously ruling Gallifrey forever leads him to seek entrance to the Dark Tower's inner chamber, where Rassilon has hidden the secret of eternal life. Aware of the Doctor's ingenuity, Borusa has endeavored to gather up the Doctor's five selves, hoping that they will figure out how to reach the Dark Tower's inner chamber. The Doctor is the rightfully elected Lord President of Gallifrey but has refused to serve, so it may be a kind of poetic justice that he falls prey to the Time Lord who rules in his stead.

Doctor Who: The Five Doctors resurrects many characters from early Doctor Who stories. Doctor One is accompanied by his granddaughter Susan Campbell (named Susan Foreman when she traveled with the Doctor before her marriage). Happily married with three children and far removed from her days of adventure, she nonetheless quickly adjusts to being with her grandfather in another dangerous situation. The retired Brigadier Alastair Lethbridge Stewart—once a companion to Doctors Two, Three, and Four—finds himself thrust into the Death Zone with Doctor Two; he is a stout companion, reliable in a fight. Doctor Three encounters Sarah Jane Smith in the Death Zone. Pretty and courageous, she is also a feminist and a journalist who takes little nonsense from anyone. Tegan Jovanka, an airline stewardess who began her adventures in time and space with Doctor Four, accompanies Doctor Five. Thin, small, with short red hair, she is temperamental and has good sense. She and Doctor Five are joined by the mysterious Turlough; at first an enemy of Doctor Five but now a companion, he has revealed little about his origins.

Lean, redheaded, with deep-set eyes, he frankly admits when he is afraid and prefers to avoid danger.

On the other hand, the Doctor, in whatever incarnation, thrives on danger. He is vain, argumentative, a know-it-all, often crabby, and deeply passionate about his desire to do good.



Doctor One is tall and elderly. He lived in exile on earth for many—perhaps hundreds of—years because he believed in using the powers of the Time Lords to do good, whereas the law of Gallifrey forbade interference in the affairs of other life forms. Cranky and stern, he is used to bossing people around and bosses Doctors Two and Three when he gets the chance. Doctor Two is a contrast to Doctor One. He is short, untidy, and shabbily dressed, and he manages to seem happy and sad at the same time.

Doctor Three is tall and elegant, with a great mane of white hair. He dresses like a fop, with frills on his shirt and cuffs and a cape across his shoulders. Doctor Four appears only briefly, when he and his Time Lord companion Romana are snatched while boating on the Thames and then trapped in limbo when the machinery's controls go awry. Doctor Five is the center of the story. The most recent incarnation of the Doctor, he could die if his previous selves are not returned to their proper places. Dressed in a Victorian cricket player's outfit, he is the youngest-looking of the Doctors, but he is given to serious thought about good and evil.

The Doctor's archenemy, the Master, appears in the novel. The Master is, like the Doctor, a renegade Time Lord. Unlike the Doctor, he has dedicated his life to self-aggrandizement, always seeking wealth and power. He has used up his regenerations at such a pace that, even though a contemporary of the Doctor, he has gone through all of his possible incarnations and now inhabits a stolen body. The leaders of Gallifrey ask him to help the Doctor; if he does, he will receive a new set of regenerations. The lure of eternal life infects him as it does Borusa. The Master is clever, but his desires always overreach his ability to think ahead. The Doctor has defeated him in the past by out-thinking him.

When the Master learns that Borusa seeks eternal life, he wants it, too. But four Doctors are too much for him to overcome.

Borusa is a sly villain. He pretends to be as puzzled as everyone else about why the Death Zone has been reactivated. He stirs the Doctor up with the appearances of the Master and the Cybermen, men turned into robots who live for killing and conquest. These appearances convince the Doctor that he must break into the Dark Tower and learn why the Death Zone is importing such dangerous beings. Borusa redirects the suspicion of the other Time Lords to innocent people. Even so, Doctor Five manages to see through his subterfuges. Although Borusa seems to triumph, he is in for a surprise, because the Doctor has figured out what the prize of eternal life offered by Rassilon really means.



Topics for Discussion

1. Why are the different versions of the Doctor able to appear together in contradiction to the laws of time? Why don't disastrous consequences ensue?
2. Why doesn't Rassilon punish the Master? How does Borusa's punishment fit his crime?
3. Is Rassilon really dead? Why does the Doctor seem uncertain at the end of the novel when he says, "He was—he is—the greatest Time Lord of all"?
4. Which of the companions is the most helpful to the Doctors? How?

Which of the companions creates the most difficulties for the Doctors? How?

5. Terrance Dicks was faced with a difficult task when he wrote *Doctor Who: The Five Doctors*. He needed to include as many of his audience's favorite characters as possible while creating an enjoyable and easy-to-follow story. How well has he succeeded? What would you change to make the book better?
6. Why would Dicks have the Master, instead of Doctor One, figure out the solution to the chessboard trap?



Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. How common is the theme of eternal life in science fiction? Is eternal life generally regarded as undesirable, as it is in Doctor Who: The Five Doctors? Does Dicks do anything original with the theme, or does he follow a typical pattern?

2. Why must Doctor Five continue to be a renegade? Could he have adventures while President of the Time Lords?

Would he make a good President? Why or why not? Do you feel that he is shirking his responsibilities by refusing to be President?

3. Read several of Terrance Dicks's Doctor Who novels. Which is the best?

Why? Are his novelizations generally better than those by other writers? Are they worse? In what ways?

4. What is the history of the "Doctor Who" television series? How did it start?

Was it ever in danger of being cancelled?

When did it become internationally popular? Why has it remained popular?

5. If you can see the television movie of The Five Doctors, watch it and compare it to the novel. Which is better?

Why? What changes has Dicks made to adapt the story to novel form?

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Dicks, Terrance, and Malcolm Hulke.

The Making of Doctor Who. London: W. H. Allen, 1976. Hulke was one of the writers Dicks brought in to write for the "Doctor Who" television series while he was script editor. They provide a history of the series, with descriptions of what goes into making a "Doctor Who" story.

Related Titles/Adaptations

Dicks has written many novelizations of stories from the "Doctor Who" television series, including ones of shows that he did not originally write. In each he follows the original story line and tries to capture the personalities of the characters as portrayed on television.

When he wrote the script for *The Five Doctors*, he found that Tom Baker, the actor who had portrayed the fourth Doctor, would be unavailable, hence the device of having Doctor Four left in limbo. The original actor for the first Doctor was William Hartnell, an older man who portrayed his character as someone who was mysterious and arrogant. Hartnell began the show in 1963 but left in 1966 because he was suffering from multiple sclerosis. Hartnell died in 1975, and his part in *The Five Doctors* was taken by Richard Hurndall, who successfully captured Hartnell's voice and mannerisms.

Patrick Troughton portrayed a soulful and irritable second Doctor from 1966 to 1969. Troughton's aptitude for physical comedy added humor to the role.

Unpunctual and free-spirited, the second Doctor captured some of the temper of the late 1960s. Jon Pertwee starred as the third Doctor from 1970 to 1974. A showman, Pertwee played the Doctor with flair. Tall and topped with large head of white hair, Pertwee retained the sly humor of Troughton while adding a dashing sense of adventure. His Doctor was athletic and fond of gadgets. The fifth Doctor, Peter Davison, was starring in the television series when *The Five Doctors* was filmed.

Davison's portrayal was more earnest than those of his predecessors; he was compassionate, even toward his enemies. Part of Dicks's task in the novelization was to capture the individuality of each actor while still making the Doctor a believable personality split into four different forms.

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