

doctor who the daemons

Doctor Who The Daemons: An In-Depth Exploration of the Classic 1971 Serial

Introduction

Since its inception in 1963, **Doctor Who** has become a cornerstone of British science fiction, captivating audiences with its imaginative stories, compelling characters, and groundbreaking special effects. Among its many memorable serials, *The Daemons* stands out as a fan favorite, blending supernatural horror with science fiction elements. First aired in 1971 during the show's eighth season, **Doctor Who The Daemons** remains a quintessential example of classic Doctor Who storytelling, showcasing the show's ability to mix myth, mysticism, and extraterrestrial intrigue.

In this article, we will explore the background, plot, characters, themes, and legacy of **Doctor Who The Daemons**. Whether you're a seasoned Whovian or a newcomer interested in the series' rich history, this comprehensive guide aims to provide valuable insights into this iconic serial.

Background and Production of Doctor Who The Daemons

Context Within the Series

The Daemons was produced during the early 1970s, a period when Doctor Who was experimenting with darker and more complex storylines. Written by Robert Sloman and directed by Christopher Barry, the serial was part of the show's eighth season. It aired over four episodes, each approximately 25 minutes long, from May 8 to May 29, 1971.

Production Details

- Writer: Robert Sloman
- Director: Christopher Barry
- Producer: Barry Letts
- Companions: Jon Pertwee as the Third Doctor, Katy Manning as Jo Grant
- Location Filming: Primarily in Surrey, England, with some studio work at BBC Television Centre

The serial's production values reflected the era's technological constraints but also showcased creative use of practical effects and atmospheric sets to evoke suspense and supernatural themes.

Plot Summary of Doctor Who The Daemons

Overview

The Daemons follows the Third Doctor and his companion Jo Grant as they investigate strange occurrences in the small village of Devil's End, a location steeped in local legends and folklore. The story combines elements of witchcraft, ancient mythology, and extraterrestrial conspiracy, creating a layered narrative that keeps viewers engaged.

Detailed Plot Breakdown

1. Arrival in Devil's End: The Doctor and Jo arrive to investigate reports of strange phenomena. They learn about the local legend of the "Devil's Hump," an ancient mound said to be cursed.
2. Discovery of the Nestenes: The Doctor uncovers evidence of an alien species called the Nestenes, who have been masquerading as local witches and supernatural entities to manipulate humans.
3. The Return of Azal: The story reveals the awakening of Azal, an extraterrestrial entity from the planet Xoanon, who seeks to harness Earth's energies to restore himself.
4. Conflict and Resolution: As tensions escalate, the Doctor confronts the Nestenes and prevents Azal's destructive plans, utilizing both scientific knowledge and quick thinking.
5. Epilogue: The village is saved, and the Doctor departs, leaving the local legends intact but dispelling the supernatural myth that had been exploited by the alien invaders.

Main Characters and Cast

The Doctor

- Jon Pertwee as the Third Doctor: A charismatic and resourceful Time Lord with a penchant for dramatic flair and scientific expertise.

Jo Grant

- Katy Manning as Jo Grant: The Doctor's loyal companion, known for her bravery and curiosity.

Supporting Characters

- Professor Horace Boggis: The local archaeologist and expert on the village's legends.
- Captain Gilmore: Military personnel involved in investigating the phenomena.
- The Nestenes: An alien race posing as local witches and villagers.

The Themes and Symbols of Doctor Who The Daemons

Supernatural vs. Science Fiction

The serial blurs the lines between supernatural folklore and scientific explanation. While the villagers believe in witches and devilish legends, the true cause is extraterrestrial interference, illustrating how myths can mask scientific realities.

Mythology and Legend

Devil's End is rich in folklore, and the serial uses this setting to explore themes of myth versus reality. The ancient mound and local legends serve as symbols of humanity's fascination with the supernatural.

Good vs. Evil

The conflict centers around the Nestenes' attempt to exploit Earth's energies, contrasting their malevolent intentions with the Doctor's protective actions.

Science and Technology

The Doctor employs scientific knowledge and technological devices to combat alien threats, emphasizing the importance of rationality and innovation.

Legacy and Reception of Doctor Who The Daemons

Critical Reception

The Daemons has been praised for its compelling storyline, atmospheric setting, and strong performances. It is often regarded as one of the standout serials from the classic era of Doctor Who.

Influence on Popular Culture

The serial's blend of folklore and science fiction has influenced subsequent stories and inspired adaptations in other media. Its depiction of alien infiltration within familiar settings has become a recurring theme in sci-fi narratives.

Legacy in the Doctor Who Universe

The Daemons is frequently referenced in later episodes and remains a favorite among fans. Its portrayal of the Third Doctor's charisma and ingenuity helped cement Jon Pertwee's legacy as one of the most beloved incarnations.

Themes and Symbolism in Depth

The Power of Lore and Legend

The serial explores how legends can be manipulated for darker purposes, warning of the dangers of superstition blended with real threats.

Alien Infiltration

The Nestenes' disguise as villagers highlights themes of trust and suspicion, emphasizing that danger can lurk beneath familiar facades.

The Clash of Science and Superstition

The serial champions scientific reasoning as a means to uncover truth, contrasting with the villagers' reliance on myth.

Why Doctor Who The Daemons Remains a Classic

Strong Narrative and Atmosphere

The serial's suspenseful plot and eerie setting create a memorable experience that has stood the test of time.

Iconic Villains and Concepts

The Nestenes and Azal are compelling antagonists, embodying the serial's themes of deception and extraterrestrial menace.

Historical Significance

The Daemons exemplifies the show's ability to combine horror, folklore, and science fiction, contributing to its reputation as a pioneering series.

Conclusion

Doctor Who The Daemons remains an essential part of the classic Doctor Who canon, showcasing the show's creative blending of myth, science, and horror. Its engaging plot, memorable characters, and thematic depth continue to captivate audiences and inspire new generations of fans.

Whether you're interested in its rich storytelling, its cultural impact, or its place within the broader Doctor Who universe, **The Daemons** offers a compelling example of the series' enduring appeal. As a timeless serial, it highlights the show's unique ability to explore complex themes within an entertaining and imaginative framework, ensuring its status as a beloved classic for years to come.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the significance of 'The Daemons' in the Doctor Who series?

'The Daemons' is a classic serial from the 8th season of Doctor Who, notable for introducing the Master as a recurring villain and exploring themes of ancient alien influences on Earth.

When was 'The Daemons' originally broadcast?

'The Daemons' first aired from May 20 to June 10, 1971, as part of the show's seventh season.

Who are the main characters in 'The Daemons'?

The main characters include the Third Doctor played by Jon Pertwee, his companion Jo Grant, and the mysterious villagers of Devil's End, along with the villainous Master and the powerful entity, Azal.

What is the plot of 'The Daemons'?

'The serial revolves around the Doctor and Jo investigating strange happenings at a village where a supposed ancient stone circle is linked to an alien entity named Azal, who seeks to take over Earth using supernatural powers.

How does 'The Daemons' connect to themes of ancient aliens and folklore?

'The serial blends British folklore with science fiction by portraying the stone circle as an alien portal and incorporating mythic elements like witches and supernatural powers.

What notable special effects or scenes are memorable in 'The Daemons'?

'The serial features iconic scenes such as the explosion of the Martian-like creature Azal and the use of atmospheric effects to create a sense of ancient mysticism and suspense.

Has 'The Daemons' been influential in Doctor Who lore?

'Yes, 'The Daemons' is considered a classic story that helped define the Third Doctor era, introducing the Master as a recurring antagonist and popularizing themes of alien influence on Earth.

Are there any notable guest stars in 'The Daemons'?

'Yes, actor John Ringham plays the villainous magistrate, and the serial features memorable performances that contribute to its cult status.

Is 'The Daemons' available for streaming or purchase today?

'Yes, 'The Daemons' is available on DVD and various streaming platforms, often included in classic Doctor Who collections for fans and new viewers alike.

Additional Resources

Doctor Who: The Daemons - A Classic Adventure in the Whovian Universe

"Doctor Who: The Daemons" stands as a quintessential serial in the long and storied history of the British science fiction series. First broadcast in 1971 as part of the show's eighth season, this serial has garnered lasting admiration from fans and critics alike for its intriguing plot, atmospheric setting, and compelling characters. As a quintessential example of classic Doctor Who storytelling, "The Daemons" combines elements of horror, folklore, and science fiction to create a captivating narrative that continues to resonate decades after its original airing. In this review, we will explore the serial's plot, themes, characters, production quality, and its place within the broader Doctor Who mythos.

Overview and Plot Summary

"The Daemons" follows the Third Doctor, played by Jon Pertwee, as he investigates strange occurrences in the rural village of Devil's End, a setting steeped in local folklore and superstitions. The story begins with the Doctor, along with his companion Jo Grant, arriving in the village to investigate reports of strange phenomena, including sightings of a mysterious figure known as "The Master" — a recurring villain in the series, here portrayed by Roger Delgado.

The narrative quickly deepens as the villagers are revealed to be under the influence of an ancient power awakened beneath the village church. An alien entity, the Nesten, has taken the form of the legendary "Bentil," a demonic figure in local legend, and is attempting to open a portal between Earth and its home planet, the Nesten, to bring destruction and chaos. Amidst the unfolding chaos, the Doctor uncovers a plot involving a secret base, ancient rituals, and extraterrestrial technology, culminating in a tense showdown that combines folklore with sci-fi innovation.

Key Highlights of the Plot:

- The juxtaposition of traditional folklore and science fiction elements.
- The use of a rural, atmospheric setting to create suspense.
- The involvement of the Master as a sinister antagonist complicating the plot.
- The theme of ancient evil versus modern science.

Themes and Symbolism

"The Daemons" explores several recurring themes that make it a rich text for analysis:

Folklore and Superstition

The serial cleverly intertwines local legends, such as witches and demons, with the science fiction plot. The village's superstitions are depicted as both genuine beliefs and potential dangers, blurring the line between myth and reality. This theme emphasizes how folklore can serve as a mirror to societal fears and anxieties.

Good vs. Evil

The story features a classic battle between good, represented by the Doctor and his allies, and evil, embodied by the Nesten entity and its human collaborators. The idea that ancient evil can be reawakened if not properly contained is a potent motif.

Science and Mysticism

The serial juxtaposes scientific inquiry with mystical rituals, questioning whether ancient practices have a basis in reality or are mere superstition. The Doctor's scientific approach contrasts with the villagers' superstitions, but ultimately, both are intertwined in the narrative.

Power and Corruption

The character of the Master exemplifies the theme of power corrupting individuals, willing to use ancient evil for personal gain. His manipulation of the villagers and the alien entity demonstrates how power can be misused.

Characters and Performances

The Doctor (Jon Pertwee)

Pertwee's portrayal of the Third Doctor as a resourceful, action-oriented hero is fully realized in "The Daemons." His scientific expertise, combined with a touch of charm and wit, makes him a compelling protagonist. His interactions with Jo Grant and the villagers add depth to his character, showing both his intelligence and humanity.

Jo Grant (Katy Manning)

Jo continues to be a lively and brave companion, often acting as the audience's surrogate. Her curiosity and courage help drive the story forward, especially during moments of peril.

The Master (Roger Delgado)

Delgado's portrayal of the Master is a highlight of the serial. Charismatic and menacing, Delgado's performance adds gravitas and complexity to the villain. His schemes and manipulations keep the tension high throughout.

Supporting Characters

- Magister (Professor Horace Boggis): The local astronomer and a key ally to the Doctor.

- Sergeant Arnold (Talfryn Thomas): The village policeman, providing comic relief and a grounded perspective.
- Villagers: Their superstitions and reactions create a believable and immersive setting.

Production and Atmosphere

Setting and Location

The serial is renowned for its atmospheric rural setting, filmed largely at the classic BBC studios and on location in the village of Aldbourne, Wiltshire. The stark contrast between the peaceful countryside and the underlying sinister forces enhances the suspense and mood.

Special Effects and Design

While lacking modern CGI, "The Daemons" employs practical effects and makeup to depict the alien Nesten and the demonic figure. The use of shadow, fog, and lighting effectively creates a sense of dread. The design of the alien entity and the "Bentil" demon is memorable, with a blend of practical creature effects and costume work.

Score and Sound

Music by Dudley Simpson complements the eerie atmosphere, with haunting motifs underscoring moments of tension. The sound design effectively amplifies the supernatural elements and alien presence.

Pros and Cons of Production

Pros:

- Atmospheric rural setting enhances suspense.
- Practical effects are creatively used within budget constraints.
- Strong performances, especially Delgado as the Master.
- Effective blending of folklore and sci-fi.

Cons:

- Some effects may seem dated by modern standards.
- Pacing can be slow in parts, especially in the middle episodes.
- Limited scope for large-scale action due to budget constraints.

Legacy and Impact

"The Daemons" remains a beloved serial among classic Doctor Who fans for its combination of horror, folklore, and science fiction. It exemplifies the show's willingness to experiment with different genres and tones, making it stand out as a quintessential example of 1970s Who.

Influence on the Series

The serial's themes of ancient evil and rural superstition have been revisited in later stories, emphasizing the show's enduring interest in blending myth and sci-fi. Delgado's portrayal of the Master set a standard for villainy that continues to influence subsequent incarnations.

Fan Reception

Critics and fans praise "The Daemons" for its engaging plot, atmospheric setting, and memorable performances. It is often cited as one of the best serials from the classic era, showcasing the show's creative potential.

Conclusion: A Classic of the Series

"Doctor Who: The Daemons" stands as a shining example of the show's ability to craft compelling stories that blend genres and explore complex themes. With its atmospheric setting, strong performances, and inventive storytelling, it continues to captivate audiences and remains a must-watch for fans of classic Doctor Who. Its enduring legacy is a testament to its quality and the timeless appeal of the Doctor's adventures.

Overall Assessment:

- Strengths:
 - Engaging blend of folklore and science fiction
 - Memorable performances, especially Delgado's Master
 - Atmospheric rural setting
 - Iconic moments and quotable lines
- Weaknesses:

- Some effects aged poorly
- Pacing issues in parts
- Limited scope for large-scale action

Final Verdict: A quintessential serial that exemplifies the best of classic Doctor Who, "The Daemons" is a must-see for enthusiasts and newcomers alike, offering a rich tapestry of horror, myth, and science fiction woven into a compelling narrative.

In summary, "Doctor Who: The Daemons" remains a standout story in the series' history—an atmospheric, thrilling, and thought-provoking adventure that captures the spirit of the show's golden era. Whether you're interested in folklore, sci-fi, or character-driven stories, this serial offers a little bit of everything, making it a timeless piece of television history.

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Doctors—including Third Doctor Jon Pertwee, exiled to Earth and targeted by the Master—and see how the program reflected the feminism of the 1970s while gaining mainstream popularity with Fourth Doctor Tom Baker . . . until declining support from the BBC eventually led to cancelation. Fan outcry saved the series only for it to suffer a repeat cancelation. Yet many continued to enjoy the Whoniverse in syndication, novels, audio dramas, and Doctor Who Magazine. Paul McGann impressed many as the Eighth Doctor in a 1996 TV movie, but it failed to reignite the series. A new age dawned in 2005 with Ninth Doctor Christopher Eccleston and a serious special effects budget before Tenth Doctor David Tennant helped rocket the series to international popularity and a new era of spinoffs. With Eleventh Doctor Matt Smith, the show became a bona fide success here in America. Following the program's fiftieth anniversary, Whovians will meet the Twelfth Doctor, ushering in yet another era for the unstoppable Time Lord. Featuring discussions of concepts and characters, with insights from producers, writers, and actors from across the years, here is a rich, behind-the-camera investigation into the dazzling multiverse of Doctor Who.

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resituated, but transformed into new works. Harmes considers what this approach reveals about adaptation, television production, the art of storytelling, and the long-term success and cultural resonance enjoyed by Doctor Who. Doctor Who and the Art of Adaptation will be of interest to students of literature and television alike, and to scholars interested in adaptation studies. It will also appeal to fans of the series interested in tracing the deep cultural roots of television's longest-running and most literate science-fiction adventure.

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