

Chapter 26 ‘The *Doctor Who* Figurine Collection’ Ross Garner

Eaglemoss, Ltd.’s *Doctor Who* Figurine Collection (DWFC) launched in 2013 and consists of a fortnightly release of a die-cast, hand-painted figurine depicting a character from the show’s history in a 1:21 scale. Most retail at £13 (approx. \$15) and are accompanied by a short magazine exploring the character depicted and the story where they feature from a production and design perspective. Echoing Tim Holmes and Liz Nice’s comments on partwork magazines, the DWFC represents “a vehicle for delivering sets of collectibles” to a small niche of dedicated fan-collectors.ⁱ

The range began with a strong emphasis on contemporary *Doctor Who* characters: Matt Smith’s Eleventh Doctor launched the range, and early inclusions were the Weeping Angels, the revised Silurians from ‘The Hungry Earth/Cold Blood’ (2010) and Davros from 2008’s ‘Journey’s End’. However, Issue 15 expanded the range by depicting Omega from 1973’s ‘The Three Doctors’, acknowledging characters from the ‘classic’ series. Reflective of how commercial pressures guide the range’s development, the contemporary series – and newly released episodes especially – takes precedent. Nevertheless, ‘new’ characters linked to the recently-broadcast series have been supplemented by alien creatures like the Voord (1964) and the Borad (1985). To date, there have been over 200 releases in the core range, as well as additional supporting lines focused on aspects like TARDIS consoles and a continuing series of Special Editions, which continue the dual focus on contemporary and classic series but offer larger figures at a higher price point (retailing at between £25-40; approx. \$30-50).

This chapter examines the DWFC primarily in relation to its handling of the ‘classic’ series. Firstly, the discussion explores the collection’s difference to other forms of *Doctor Who* collectibles and intersections with discourses of transmedia remembering. I argue that the DWFC represents a democratization of the programme’s remembrance that challenges how fan canons and tastes have been co-opted and commodified by concurrent licensees. The analysis then reads the DWFC through transmedia historiography.ⁱⁱ This perspective allows for the DWFC to be interrogated for its areas of absence and how these omissions further demonstrate the relationship between canonicity, fan remembrance and commercial concerns.

Commerce, Canonicity and Transmedia Historiography

Doctor Who fandom has a long-standing alignment with material cultures of collecting, indicative of an enduring desire on behalf of certain subsections of fans to collect and own elements related to the show’s history. In terms of commercial merchandise, collector cultures date back to the mid-1960s wave of ‘Dalekmania’ⁱⁱⁱ and indicate how fans have sought out replicas of characters such as the titular Time Lord, their companions, and advisories.^{iv} The character-centric focus of these lines points to an enduring relationship between *Doctor Who* and commercial ideologies operating at the level of the show’s merchandising. John Fiske noted that television drama “is typically presented in terms of its leading characters” as this aids in promoting individual shows through appeals to discourses of consumer individualism and agency.^v *Doctor Who*’s focus on iconic and distinct characters such as the Doctor’s multiple regenerations and the Daleks, both ‘then’ and ‘now’, enables this form of engagement and so its alignment with commercial ideologies in terms of marketing and promotion.

The DWFC partly differs from other lines of collectibles, especially Character Options’ action figures, because of the material affordances that the figurines offer. That is, DWFC

figurines are *not* action figures: they offer neither points of articulation nor opportunities for (fan-)posing.^{vi} Instead, the figurines demonstrate *immobility* through being attached to a hexagonal base which encourages display by tessellating the bases of individual figures together (Figure 1).

[Figure 26.1]

Figure 26.1. Tessellated bases encouraging display (photo by author)

DWFC figurines, however, still demonstrate the potential for expanding *Doctor Who*'s narrative worlds through imaginative forms of transmedia play. As Jonathan Rey Lee argues, "story toys are constituted by a tension between *play* – the activation of the toy in dynamic, playful performance – and *dis-play* – the pacification of the toy into a static representational commodity."^{vii} DWFC figurines embody this tension by simultaneously providing material connections to specific moments in the *Doctor Who* storyworld through the character (and story) depicted, whilst also supporting the possibility for generating new, owner-created narratives that either complement or extend the storyworld's parameters.

A further point of differentiation, and therefore significance, between the DWFC and other contemporary figure lines concerns the former's attitude towards *Doctor Who*'s history. Memory is essential to any processes of transmedia expansion as audiences are directed towards remembering previous encounters with the intellectual property through the characters and locations selected for inclusion.^{viii} At the same time, these processes of cross-media remembering are structured by commercial processes such as how licensing—the commercial use of intellectual property—grants access to specific aspects of the property.^{ix} Licensing deals thus set parameters concerning what established elements of an intellectual property can be used by the licensee.

This point can be demonstrated by comparing the DWFC with Character Options' engagement with the show's history. Character Options has been attempting to maximize financial returns on its license through foregrounding the period of *Doctor Who*'s history with the highest levels of audience recognition and therefore commercial saliency. For example, to date there have been nine different figures of the Third Doctor (Jon Pertwee; reflecting the character's flamboyant wardrobe) and fifteen of the Fourth Doctor (Tom Baker). In comparison, there have been four different figures of both the First and Second Doctors, six of the Sixth, and five of the Seventh.^x From a commercial standpoint, this selectivity makes sense as the 1970s saw *Doctor Who* achieve widespread popularity within the UK, cementing *Doctor Who*'s 'narrative image' by establishing the images and characters through which 'classic' *Who* endures.^{xi} Prioritising the decade when the 'classic' series achieved its highest levels of popularity is indicative of how commercial ideologies engage with and appropriate cultural memory.^{xii}

More than this, and highly appropriate given the small-but-valuable market that fan-targeting collectibles represents, Character Options' selective reading of 'classic' *Who* constitutes the appropriation and commodification of fan perceptions of aesthetic 'value'. The 1970s is regularly celebrated amongst 'classic' *Who* fans by constructing author functions around executive producers Barry Letts and Philip Hinchcliffe and script editors Terence Dicks and Robert Holmes. As James Chapman observes, Holmes' period as script-editor, working alongside executive producer Philip Hinchcliffe, "represents the 'golden age' of *Doctor Who*," and this point has been restated in numerous publications,^{xiii} both academic and scholar-fan

facing.^{xiv} Similarly, the ‘Barry Letts-Terrance Dicks’ era (1970-4) is often celebrated for developing “a particular type of story ...[and] tone” alongside the contributions that both made to the show’s wider history.^{xv} Cumulatively, these statements indicate fans “*power to gloss* and write the aesthetic history of the show” through hierarchizing particular decades, production teams, actors and/or writers.^{xvi} By demonstrating a similar attitude towards ‘classic’ *Who*’s history, Character Options’ strategies for selecting and releasing action figures indicates the co-opting of fan canons for the purposes of commodification and reflecting fan tastes back to their target market.

In contrast, Eaglemoss’s approach to character inclusion within the *DWFC* can be read as a democratization of the ‘classic’ show’s history. Since achieving a foothold the core line has recognized more niche-appeal and ephemeral elements from the show’s history such as the Monoids, the widely disparaged Nimon, and the Navarino. Although a few non-returning monsters (the Fendahleen from ‘Image of the Fendahl’ and Scaroth from ‘City of Death’, both Fourth Doctor monsters) have both featured in Character’s range, most figures have been incarnations of the Doctor, companions, Daleks, Cybermen and Sontarans. Certainly, when it comes to the ‘classic’ series’ progression into the 1980s, Character has shown no willingness to recognize stories such as ‘Arc of Infinity’ or ‘Dragonfire’. The *DWFC* therefore represents a challenge to, and expansion of, dominant fan canons and taste formations by acknowledging and accepting both the successes and perceived failures from the show’s history. By doing this, a more inclusive attitude towards the show’s history has been adopted, both motivated by commercial concerns (such as sustaining Eaglemoss’s market share) and recognizing a wider range of fan taste formations such as camp and kitsch.

In addition, analyzing *DWFC*’s magazine supplements invites debates concerning transmediality. *DWFC*’s magazine content exemplifies what Phillip Dominik Keidl names “transmedia historiography”, or “a subset of transmedia storytelling ...[that] describes the making of a storyworld’s production and cultural history across multiple platforms, with each medium making distinctive contributions to the audience’s understanding of the franchise’s past.”^{xvii} Demonstrating a different ‘logic’ to Henry Jenkins’s concept of transmedia storytelling^{xviii}, transmedia historiography “is less concerned with contributing new meaning to a fictional story than with guiding engagement with the franchise’s history”.^{xix} Relevant material for examining transmedia historiography constitutes “behind-the-scenes features, making-ofs, and other paraproduction materials”.^{xx} The *DWFC* contributes to *Doctor Who*’s transmedia historiography by introducing or reaffirming established narratives of the show’s production, whilst also taking individual costume or creature designs on their own terms and confronting dominant fan critiques by contextualizing the design, materiality, and performance style enabled by the costumes within the context of that story’s production.

The ‘Your Figurine’ article accompanying Mestor from ‘The Twin Dilemma’ (1984) demonstrates this point. Readers are informed that “BBC costume designer Pat Godfrey had never worked on any sci-fi series, let alone *Doctor Who* ... Godfrey revealed that the budget for Mestor had been a mere £200 to £300.”^{xxi} Elsewhere in the article, Godfrey is also quoted concerning the materials used for creating the costume and the constraints these produced during recording:

It consisted of three layers of material mounted on calico, the top layer being organza to give it a shiny look. The back was covered in a textured latex, with a fibreglass carapace which was also covered in textured latex on them ... Edwin Richfield, who played

Mestor, wore the costume only for short periods at a time, but whenever we removed it he and the costume would be soaked in perspiration.^{xxii}

The article thus encourages readers to re-evaluate aspects of this frequently panned story by inviting reconsideration of the story's production circumstances and conditions. Moreover, detailing the costume's materiality and construction encourages fans to reconsider how these aspects inhibited and encouraged performance styles. However, these historical narrative constructions represent "cultural memory management" in that they are 'top-down' impositions by licenses that regulate what aspects of a franchise are deemed worthy of remembering alongside how the tone of those remembrances should be conducted.^{xxiii} As the case of Mestor demonstrates, the suggested tone is one of appreciation and reconsideration which works in service of BBC brand management by silencing 'bottom up' fan critiques.

Another way that the *DWFC*'s performs 'cultural memory management' concerns its contributions to reinforcing what constitutes the show's 'proper' history. For example, the *DWFC* positions the broadcast *Doctor Who* television series as the primary site of storyworld canonicity. To date, only one release in the core range has acknowledged *Doctor Who*'s other transmedia iterations. This was Issue 167, which featured a figurine of the Sixth Doctor (Colin Baker) in a light blue version of the character's outfit from the 2002 BBC animated webcast 'Real Time'. Alternatively, Big Finish's audio dramas have only been included in a satellite manner, appearing infrequently and outside of the main fortnightly range. There have been two separate three-figure sets, each including a variant of both the Eighth Doctor (Paul McGann) and a Dalek alongside a figurine of companion that is solely tethered to the audio dramas (Lucie Miller and Liv Chenka respectively).

The absence of Lucie or Liv from the core range, alongside the omission of other popular Big Finish-originating characters like Dr Evelyn Smythe or Charley, speaks to another inflection of how licensing exerts power regarding how the *DWFC* constructs and commodifies the show's history. The *DWFC* is produced under license from BBC Studios, as are Big Finish's audio dramas. To what extent, then, do the terms of Eaglemoss's license cover access to characters created by Big Finish? Answering such a question requires access to confidential documents like licensing contracts that are frequently not made accessible to either cultural studies researchers or the public. However, the infrequency with which Big Finish-derived sets have been released, as well as their status as stand-alone sets outside of the core range, suggests how commercial-industrial practices like inter-corporate licensing agreements install boundaries concerning how the *DWFC* can construct the show's history. Although Big Finish audio dramas are acknowledged in some magazine articles alongside other non-televised transmedia expansions like comics and official novels (e.g., the *New Adventures*), these mentions are only ever brief and so demonstrate the primacy of televised *Doctor Who* over its extension in other media.

Conclusions

In summary, the *DWFC* continues to be a significant addition to *Doctor Who*'s cultures of collecting and processes of transmedia expansion as its longevity has allowed fans to collect figurines of characters that have hitherto been viewed as commercially unviable due to concurrent licensees prioritising the commodification of dominant fan canons. The range therefore represents a challenge to established fan hierarchies and tastes by granting visibility and materiality to the entire span of the show's history, recognizing both the beloved and the disparaged, the fan-friendly and the often overlooked. However, the transmedia historiography constructed by the range remains subject to commercial pressures including the re-evaluative

attitude that magazine articles encourage towards fan appraisals of the show's aesthetic history and the primacy afforded to televised *Who* over other transmedia iterations. The myriad relationships between merchandising, memory and commercial interests are therefore elements that analyses of any forms of merchandising – *Doctor Who* or otherwise – should address.

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ⁱ Tim Holmes and Liz Nice, *Magazine Journalism* (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2012), 27.

ⁱⁱ Philipp Dominik Keidl, "Between Textuality and Materiality: Fandom and the Mediation of Action Figures," *Film and Merchandise* 42, no.2 (November 2018):

<https://doi.org/10.3998/fc.13761232.0042.207> and Philipp Dominik Keidl, "Franchising the Past: Transmedia Historiography, Cultural Memory Management, and the Fanboy Historian," *Journal of Cinema and Media Studies* 61, no. 5 (2021-22): 159-182.

ⁱⁱⁱ For an academic commentary on 'Dalekmania', see Jonathan Bignell, "Space for Quality: Negotiating with the Daleks," in *Popular Television Drama: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Jonathan Bignell and Stephen Lacey (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 76-92. For a fan commentary on this phenomenon, see Christopher Hill, "Toy Stories," *Doctor Who: Chronicles 1965*, February, 2021, 44-51.

^{iv} See Victoria L. Godwin, "By Any Other Name: Gender and *Doctor Who* Barbie Dolls, Adventure Dolls, and 1:6 Scale Figures," in *Doctor Who – New Dawn: Essays on the Jodie Whittaker Era*, ed. Brigid Cherry, Matt Hills and Andrew O'Day (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021). See also Panini Comics, *Doctor Who Magazine – Special Edition #60: Action Figures – The Essential Guide 1963-1996*, April, 2022.

^v John Fiske, *Television Culture, 2nd Edition* (London: Routledge, 2011 [1987]), 150.

^{vi} Jason Bainbridge, "Fully Articulated: The Rise of the Action Figure and the Changing Face of 'Children's' Entertainment," *Continuum* 24, no. 6 (2010): 829-842.

^{vii} Jonathan Rey Lee, *Deconstructing LEGO: The Medium and Messages of LEGO Play* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2020), 159.

^{viii} Colin B. Harvey, *Fantastic Transmedia: Narrative, Play and Memory across Science Fiction and Fantasy Storyworlds* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

^{ix} Avi Santo, *Selling the Silver Bullet: The Lone Ranger & Transmedia Brand Licensing* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015), 7.

^x The figure of four Second Doctor action figures excludes the 'Androgum' variant from a box set themed on 'The Two Doctors' story. It is difficult to pin down the exact number of Fifth Doctor action figures as variants have pivoted around whether the character's hat and stick of celery are included, as well as the stripe design employed on both the jumper and trousers.

^{xi} See, for example, Matt Hills, *Triumph of a Time Lord: Regenerating Doctor Who in the Twenty-First Century* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 204.

^{xii} John Ellis, *Visible Fictions: Cinema, Television, Video* (London: Routledge, 1982), 145-160.

^{xiii} James Chapman, *Inside the TARDIS: The Worlds of Doctor Who* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 98.

^{xiv} See Alan McKee, "Which is the Best *Doctor Who* Story? A Case Study in Value Judgements outside the Academy," *Intensities: The Journal of Cult Media* 1 (December 2001):

<http://intensities.org/Essays/McKee.pdf> and Kim Newman, *BFI TV Classics: Doctor Who* (London: BFI, 2006), 62, 78 and 80 for evidence of this discourse in academic publications. See

Laurence Miles and Tat Wood, *About Time 4: The Unauthorized Guide to Doctor Who, 1975-1979 Seasons 12 to 17*, (Illinois: Mad Norwegian Press, 2004) for evidence in fan-facing material.

^{xv} Chapman, *Inside the TARDIS*, 83.

^{xvi} John Tulloch and Henry Jenkins, *Science Fiction Audiences: Watching Doctor Who and Star Trek* (London: Routledge, 1995), 145.

^{xvii} Keidl, "Franchising the Past," 160.

^{xviii} Henry Jenkins, "Transmedia 202: Further Reflections – Henry Jenkins," Confessions of an Aca-Fan, last modified 31 July, 2011,

http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2011/08/defining_transmedia_further_re.html.

^{xix} Keidl, "Franchising the Past," 162.

^{xx} *Ibid.*, 164.

^{xxi} Simon Gurrier, Eddie Robson, Jim Smith and Tom Spilsbury, "Your Figurine: Mestor," *Doctor Who Figurine Collection – Part 196: Mestor, Leader of the Gastropods*, 2021, 4.

^{xxii} Gurrier, Robson, Smith and Spilsbury, "Your Figurine: Mestor," 6.

^{xxiii} Keidl, "Franchising the Past," 162.