

# THE DOCTOR WHO PROJECT

## SIGNAL TO NOISE



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*With thanks to Paul Kerensa, whose British Broadcasting Century podcast reconstructed and re-enacted Arthur Burrows' historic 1922 BBC broadcast, and explores many other topics related to the BBC and their original mandate.*



**I**n the beginning, there was the news.

Looked at in isolation, the events of that day recapped in the news were little different from most other days. The headlines were a mixture of the standard and the sensational. Elections were hotting up, with candidates confident of their victory and deploring the tactics of their opponents. An air crash had killed three valiant French sportsmen, a guilty verdict had been returned in a fraud case, and a persistent sooty fog was in the air.

There was something unique, however, about all these events, something outside of their own significance that linked them and made them part of something momentous. They happened to have occurred in time to be reported on November 14<sup>th</sup>, 1922. As such, they were the stories Arthur Burrows reported across the English airwaves at 6:00 P.M., making up the inaugural transmission of the British Broadcasting Company.

The Company had been in existence since October 18<sup>th</sup>, and comprised six magnates in the radio field. Initially a private enterprise, the Company was granted a Royal Charter in 1927 and became the British Broadcasting Corporation. Though its avuncular presence at the shoulder of the nation was inherent from the outset (local radio producers were called ‘Aunties’ and ‘Uncles’), this change firmly established it as public property. From then, countless news broadcasts would be made to generations of listeners. In 1936, the first television programme was broadcast from London’s Alexandra Palace. The BBC’s contribution to the United Kingdom and to the world, as an institution and a trusted source for facts, is beyond calculation.

So, given the historical significance of Arthur Burrows’ first news report, it should hardly be surprising that the universe’s foremost time traveller would drop in to hear it. But the Doctor didn’t get to November 14<sup>th</sup> straight away.

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As Maggie stepped out of the TARDIS, she found herself hoping her small and freezing surroundings were only deceptively small and freezing. The groan of the time-ship's ancient engines was still echoing down the dark, low-ceilinged tunnel in which she stood. A low brace extended mere inches above her head, and the tunnel was barely wider than the police box disguise awkwardly wedged in under an 'A' frame.

"Anything interesting?" Kaylaar called as his head emerged from the police box's door.

Maggie sucked in a lungful of air and found herself frigid with cold. "Only if you're a fan of hypothermia."

"Nonsense, Maggie!" roared the Doctor, stretching his woollen toque across his shortly cropped scalp. "I can't believe this is any colder than a January night in Revelstoke."

"Or a July one," Kaylaar added with a smirk.

Maggie rolled her eyes and wrapped the sleeves of her puffer jacket tightly around herself. "Great. Two more people to spread that entirely unjust stereotype that Canada is an Arctic wasteland around the universe. And as a matter of fact, it *is* colder. What's the temperature?"

"Relatively nippy by Earth standards, I'll give you that." The Doctor paced up and down the metal gratings of the passage, his head craning to take in every inch of the surroundings and ducking against the wrought-iron bracings that jutted from intervals of the wall. Maggie saw a familiar bounce in his eyes. She instantly felt mollified: whereas she only saw their landing spot's discomfort and potential danger, he was absorbed and fascinated.

"I'm with Maggie, Doctor," Kaylaar said. "Are we really seeing anything more interesting up close than we could from inside the TARDIS?"

They remained resolutely in front of the blue double doors while the Doctor reached the far wall of this space. "Go on, you two. Think of how lucky we are to have gravity underfoot and air circulating."

"So ... we're in a spaceship?" Maggie guessed. She lifted a foot experimentally and found that, as the Doctor often advised her, she really could feel the difference of artificial gravity.

"Quite so, Maggie. Any thoughts, Kaylaar?"

Despite himself, Kaylaar was drawn into the Doctor's guessing game, as eager to impress as if he were a fresh inductee in the Frenazzi coming-of-age meditation ceremony. "Judging by the vibration on the deck plates, it's not moving anywhere near light speed, but pretty damned fast just the same."

The Doctor smiled his approval. "A ship of this type hails from your solar system, Maggie. Launched around the middle of the twenty-second century. And yet here we are outside your galaxy entirely. What a marvel." He gave the bulkhead an appreciative pat. "What does that lead you to conclude?"

"The Milky Way is 100,000 light-years across, I remember reading that ... so this ship has been travelling for way longer than that even ..." Maggie clicked her fingers. "They're ... thingies!"

Kaylaar blinked. "Thingies?"



Maggie waved her hands and danced on the spot to jog her memory. “Oh, I know this ... it starts with a ‘C’ ... ‘chiropractic suspension’ ... like Kaylaar was when you first met him ... the people on the ship are frozen for the journey ...”

The Doctor was halfway through a nod when Maggie blurted out, “Cryogenic! That’s the word!” so loudly, it made both her fellow travellers jump.

“Well done,” Kaylaar said under his breath.

“Judging by her current position, one of the Terran Sleeper Ships,” the Doctor explained. “T.S.S. *Inanna* headed out this way, if I remember correctly.”

At the same moment, the bulkhead slid open and confirmed Maggie’s guess.

“Considerably cruder than your people managed, Kaylaar—and none of the Bennett oscillator modifications they tried out before the solar flares, but the same general principle.”

Kaylaar ran his hands along the horizontally stacked pallets, recalling the sight of his own dear friends in their suspension as they embarked on a journey to a new home. It was a bittersweet memory, made sadder when he pondered exactly how long ago that had all happened, and whether this many aeons later his own race were just another footnote in cosmic history.

The Doctor breathed in again, his wonder undimmed. “I must say it’s impressive they made it out this far. Alloys made in orbit around one of the Jovian moons, I’d imagine—Earth had outsourced a great deal of production by this stage. The shielding’s jolly good though, to keep everything and everyone in such good nick ... but I’d imagine a small crew are revived from time to time to perform maintenance and handle the more challenging navigational tasks.”

His boots clanged against the grating as he walked through the chamber. He inspected the metres fixed to either row of sleeping astronauts, and nodded in approval. “Mm. Energy consumption a little low. All crew present and correct. Not a single casualty. All vital signs within normal parameters.” He stopped at the last pallet in the row. Behind its glass, Maggie noted, there was no face to be seen. “One cubicle empty ...”

“Probably the guy driving the rig?”

“Just so ...” The Doctor trailed off in a manner that suggested some worry had crept into his mind. He drummed his fingers against the empty pallet, looking back the way they came and then off ahead.

He tapped a code into the door-panel, and the compartment slid open. He and his companions crept out into another of the windowless, tunnel-like corridors. At the far end were three chunky bulkhead doors. The Doctor chanted a cursory “Eeny-meeny-miney-mo”, arriving at the middle door. Maggie suspected, as with any eeny-meeny-miney-mo player, that he had made his choice pre-emptively and had rigged the pointing to get it.

Within was a cramped space with a few token seats bolted into the ground facing instrument panels. The panels both below and above the height of the seats made the space resemble an aircraft. They were showing their age; panels hung loose and some were scattered on the floor grates, leaving whole panels as little more than exposed wiring, cracked control screens, and hanging junction boxes. Repairs had been conducted on the hop, and many of them looked

distinctly jury-rigged. It made the TARDIS console look like the bridge of the U.S.S. *Enterprise*, Maggie noted with concern. In contrast to the chill outside, this room was stuffy. It was initially comforting, but the metallic tang in the air had a burnt edge, as if a fire were moments away from breaking out.

Slumped in the front-facing pilot's seat was a long-faced person with hazel-coloured skin and a stretched, horsey face. A mop of tightly curled dreadlocks draped over the controls.

The Doctor felt the crewmember's pulse. "Everything seems all right for the time being, but not doing too well ..."

With a cough, the woman roused herself and looked with combined wonder and terror at her three visitors. "It's all right," the Doctor assured her, parting the dreadlocks in a fussy paternal manner.

"The crew?" she asked, her voice low and trembling with exhaustion.

"Still fine," Kaylaar answered.

"Are you the navigator?" the Doctor asked.

She nodded. "Sleeper Sonilakh. Thank you for dropping in. I only hope you're not pirates."

"Shouldn't someone else have woken up to help you?" Maggie asked. "You look exhausted."

"We're on emergency power. Can't wake anyone else up because too much of the power has to be rerouted to life support and shielding. We've overshoot our destination. Weren't supposed to be in flight this long." She flailed a hand at the blank screen. "Can't do anything. Bunch of systems copped out at the same time. Navigation's shot to perdition. It's all my fault ... don't know where we are going, but I *do* know we're off course. Anything I do could kill us all."

Her self-recrimination trailed into a flurry of hoarse coughing. The beads of sweat dribbling down Sonilakh's forehead and the haze in her eyes told the time travellers that she was deeply unwell.

The Doctor tapped his chin in morbid thought. Maggie had seen that paralysed indecision before—he was sensing the timelines, weighing the cost of interference against his overwhelming sense of the right course of action. She had often tried and failed to appreciate the enormity of having that sense staying one's hand at every moment throughout eternity.

She sighed in relief when after seconds of this agonizing contemplation, he commanded, "Kaylaar, Maggie, give me a hand with Sonilakh. We don't have much time."

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Sleeper Sonilakh was barely through the doors when she collapsed into deep sleep in the TARDIS's nano-medical suite. The Doctor entrusted Maggie and Kaylaar to examine her, while the Time Lord stayed at the controls. After the Sleeper had been given a gentle bombardment of delta waves to return her (appropriately) to sleep, the trio compared notes over a steaming pot of tea. The challenges the Doctor listed were more than enough to consider.

“Quite simply, repairs to the ship are impossible. Sonilakh was right; the *Inanna* has been in space far too long. Even the few brief minutes we spent walking from the cryo-chamber to the cockpit stressed the integrity of the systems. We’ll literally be able to dump Sonilakh out the door and leave, nothing more. Secondly, I’ve had to fine-tune the precise moment of our dematerialization into the chrono-settings, so that the ship doesn’t list any farther than it already has. Third ...”

“Yikes,” Kaylaar sighed.

“Indeed, it’s a lot. Third, and possibly most pressing, that ship’s systems remain in ... what’s the technical term they use on Earth, Maggie?” The Doctor snapped his fingers.

“A shambles?”

“That’s it!”

“Surely the ship *has* to get to their new home, Doctor? Isn’t that what you were sensing when you were deciding whether or not to take Sonilakh with us? The ... web of time and so forth? It would have been open and shut if the ship were due to fall into a sun, wouldn’t it?”

“Fair point, Maggie. The problem is it’s not always obvious what the correct path forward is. That’s what you get when you travel with an excommunicated Time Lord like myself.” The Doctor’s fist clenched around his teacup, and Maggie braced herself for an explosion of tea. To her relief, he put it down and started picking at a cable-knit thread of his sweater instead.

“Don’t be so hard on yourself, Doctor. I don’t suppose one of your more powerful Time Lord buddies would have even considered helping that poor astronaut.” Maggie reached out to clasp the Doctor’s nervous hands. He received the hand and held it gratefully.

He turned to Kaylaar. “Anyway, what’s the patient’s condition?”

“Forty-eight hours of delta-enhanced sleep and a few immune system boosters and Sonilakh should be ready ...” Kaylaar held up an admonishing finger as he qualified, “Depending how much farther the ship has to go.”

“That’s the question. But I have an answer to that. It’ll be rather difficult to get the old girl to agree to this detour, but it may be Sonilakh and her fellow pilgrims’ only hope.”

The Doctor got to work, racing around the console and ducking under its instruments. To ensure the return journey to the sleeper-ship would occur at the precise moment he intended (and, as he insisted, there was absolutely no room for even a pico-second’s error this time), he had to input the coordinates manually. “Just as well we have two days to get it right,” he noted with a grin.

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Two days in the TARDIS could usually be filled with ease, but their passenger made it hard to take it easy. Maggie was in the middle of a lap in the pool, pouring her concentration into an overly aggressive breaststroke, when Kaylaar ran in. She knew before he opened his mouth that Sonilakh had awoken.

She changed and joined the two men in the control room, where the TARDIS was shuddering its way to a manual landing. The Doctor's usual mania was exaggerated tenfold: he raced around the six panels, sometimes having to fling a foot at a control while he got Maggie and Kaylaar to hold down a lever and activate one row of switches in an apparently random manner.

"And I thought my ship was in a bad way," Sonilakh observed wryly.

The Doctor sniffed. "As you're convalescing, I'll ignore that remark." He stood back and proudly displayed the outside world on the scanner.

For some reason Maggie had suspected they might be going on ahead to the sleeper ship's final destination. But that certainly was not where the TARDIS had put up. A coal-smoked street extended ahead on the scanner screen, above rough cobbles being run across by horses and carriages and sparse crowds of people.

"London?" she asked.

The Doctor nodded, his balmacaan around his shoulders as he sprinted through the opening double doors.

Maggie looked back, noting that it was one time the police box seemed to blend perfectly into its environs. As she breathed in the air, she felt rough abrasive particles sweep up her nose. She coughed in disgust. Kaylaar and Sonilakh too were covering their mouths against the harsh air.

Since the Doctor was already halfway down the alley, Kaylaar asked Maggie, "What year do you think it is?"

She peered out at the high-lapelled suits of grey and brown and the demure lady's dresses. The trappings of the nineteenth century were still apparent, but with a hint of the bracing modernity of the Jazz Age in the air. "After the war. Early 1920s," Maggie concluded.

"Well done!" called the Doctor.

Sonilakh's steps were a dazed half-step slower. "Old calendar ... you mean to say we've travelled back ..." When Kaylaar confirmed this, the Sleeper was curiously angry. "Forgive me, I'm sure this is a great miracle that few are privileged to witness. But why take me back? Why not go forward, and show me if my mission is to end in success?"

The Doctor overheard Sonilakh, but despite Maggie and Kaylaar staring at him expectantly (thinking the same thing themselves), did not respond to the rhetorical question.

"Is there any point in saving the Sleeper's life, only to kill her with smog?" Kaylaar asked wryly, as much to break the ice in the air as out of genuine concern.

"My companions are alarmists, Sonilakh. It won't kill you," the Doctor shot back witheringly. "Anyway, we shan't be outside long, I promise."

"I'm glad to hear it," Sonilakh averred.

The others were none the wiser about the Doctor's intent. He meanwhile was in full White Rabbit mode, dashing away and checking his pocket-watch against the timepieces nearby. Following him out onto the street, the others found the Londoners holding scarves and handkerchiefs against their faces in similar discomfort. Then the scene abruptly vanished, as a thick cloud patch

surrounded Maggie. She emerged to find herself on one of London's larger thoroughfares: the Strand, she remembered. But only the faintest outline of the Houses of Parliament was visible through the void. It was eerie to see the city so stark. It felt empty and haunted.

A city bus trundled its way up toward Trafalgar Square. The vehicle was moving at little faster than a walking pace. Looking closer, Maggie could see why: a man in the high-buttoning uniform of a conductor was standing a few feet in front of it, walking the vehicle down the road as if it were a spooked horse.

The Doctor had raced the opposite way, and beckoned his friends to a taller building wedged amid the Georgian, clubbable elegance of this metropolitan corner. "Marconi House," he explained.

Sonilakh looked to Maggie and Kaylaar for an explanation. "Don't look at us," Maggie said with a shake of her head. "Looks like we're along for the ride ourselves."

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Somehow Arthur Burrows had spent all day in a blur of tension, which his nerves fought valiantly to hold back from the threshold of panic. There was no rational reason, as he told his colleagues and the 2LO technicians, for this to be any different from the experimental transmissions that had become routine.

Yet the scale of this broadcast was another matter. While Station 2LO would only reach London and regions of Southern England—certainly, a fraction of the range of Guglielmo Marconi's transatlantic signal all the way back in 1901—the official stamp they had been given lent this occasion additional weight. Since that Marconi broadcast of twenty-one years ago, and despite himself and the newspaper magnate Lord Northcliffe, seeing and agitating for the potential of radio transmission as a medium and viable technology, the government had been slow to act. Broadcasting remained the province of amateur enthusiasts and official statements.

It had been a hard-won battle from the government to even allow the British Broadcasting Company. One of Northcliffe's recent programmes on June 15, 1920 sponsored by the *Daily Mail*, featured Dame Nellie Melba singing in English, Italian, and French. Arthur had enjoyed the programme and felt exhilarated by the glimpse it gave into the future of the wireless. Perhaps music and news could transmit around the clock, Arthur hoped, becoming a perennial backdrop to the lives of the country. This most cutting-edge technology could connect disparate people and providing them with a tapestry that drew them together. The last few years of conflict had shown a world intimidating and fearful in its size and scale, but Arthur saw the potential for unification and understanding.

One man who did not share Arthur's convictions was the Postmaster General. He deemed the Melba broadcast "frivolous", particularly concerned that such frivolity might interrupt important government communications. As such he had imposed a ban on any further wireless transmissions. Only the concerted



effort of Marconi, and a petition signed by sixty-three wireless societies, convinced the Postmaster General to lift this ban on January 13 of that year.

It had been ten months of scattered regional programming, leading up to this day. While Arthur Burrows saw the utopian potential, it was actually commerce that had dictated the formation of the BBC. Wireless manufacturers had realized their sales would never progress if there was nothing for people to listen to. The BBC had been formed with several such figures at their heads. Britain was keen to implement the medium in a more orderly fashion than America, where dozens of local radio stations had sprung up haphazardly, and any government organization had to be devised in hasty reaction to the chaos that ensued.

Arthur prided himself on the BBC's professionalism, even in its nascent form before one minute of its official programming had aired. A key aspect of the company's funding would derive from the licence fee, a necessary component to spread implementation of wireless sets. There was also an imperative, Arthur knew all too well, to involve these people and motivate them in order to provide a product worthy of the shareholders' faith.

All these thoughts cycled through Arthur's mind as he sat at his modest office in Marconi House, sifting through the day's script and pondering the—dare he say—more 'artistic' aspects. How should he speak? How fast could he read and still be understood by those masses in the dark? He was hoping to secure an audience not merely composed of the wireless buffs who assemble their own sets and keenly monitor the airwaves. Who could even predict how many would be out there? What would they make of his modest reading, and the items he would relate?

These were all more than enough matters to require Arthur's full concentration. And yet, as he knew from his career in journalism, all the way back to the *Oxford Times*, pursuit of a story required considering every aspect. There were so often factors invisible to the dedicated journalist, too narrow-minded in his quest for the headline and the scoop. Such he knew now, and he felt the need to put aside the memoranda and circulate his brain.

He set the sheaf on his desk, wheeled back his chair and strolled through the corridors of 2LO. The building too had gained a new vitality as this morning had approached. Where once it had seemed a meeting place for a handful of hobbyists, now it seemed a vital artery in a vast unfathomed new circulatory system.

Arthur climbed the steps all the way to Marconi House's rooftop. Here, he thought, he would be able to take in some fresh air, clear his head, and not be interrupted by yet another person with some new worry for him to work through. The solitude would be bracing.

He walked out onto the roof, the fog-swathed London landmarks an irrelevant frame to the sight dominating his vision: the spire of 2LO's transmitter. How this steep pyramid of wrought iron excited his imagination. When Arthur felt at a low ebb, somehow that awesome point, and the mental image it conjured of waves of sound pouring out into the world, always raised his spirits.

Today, of all days, he did not feel that. He was distracted by the sight of two men. The one, an anonymous man with a flat, forgettable face wearing a commissionaire's uniform and peaked cap, was bad enough. But Arthur quickly became even more irate when he saw the second man, at whom this first was looking up. He was dressed like some kind of sailor, a woollen ribbed watchcap on his head and a disreputable green coat flapping in the ashy breeze, and he was clinging to the transmitter as if a child astride a jungle gym!

Carrying through the gusts was an obnoxious whine from some clunky instrument the man had in his hand. Another, silver and tube-shaped, was clamped between his teeth.

The gormless-looking man in the commissionaire's uniform—whom Arthur could not believe worked for the BBC, and would not remain in his position long if he did—looked nervously back and flashed a queasy smile.

"May I help you?" the commissionaire asked with maximum effrontery.

Arthur stood on the spot, feeling his cheeks warm in spite of the cold gale. "I shall have to ask you and your *friend* the same question. Do I take it that you are an employee of the BBC?"

"I am." The commissionaire pointed up. "His name's Doctor John Smith, my name's ... Jeff Smith." The smile he flashed after this statement gave away the flimsiness of the pseudonyms.

"Is that a fact? Brothers?"

"Sure."

Arthur pushed past the idiot on the ground and called up to his friend. "Doctor Smith! I shall have to ask you to come down!"

"Would you be a gent and give me five minutes?"

"Certainly not! You may be aware we have a rather important broadcast underway in—" Arthur flicked his wrist, twitching in minute panic at the time. "Slightly less than two hours. I do hope you haven't tampered with the equipment. Also, you and your friend should not be allowed anywhere in this building without the recommendation of a BBC employee and a card granting you entry."

"Yes, yes, yes," the Doctor called down impatiently from the cage. Arthur could scarcely believe the arrogance of this intruder, dragging his feet down the frame and groaning like a child being marched off to bed. And yet he radiated a natural authority, such that Arthur felt slightly impertinent asking him what the devil he was doing up there.

The Doctor slapped a shiny plastic card in Arthur's hand. "As you can see, a visitor's pass. I'm an invited guest."

"Who invited you? Your brother?"

The man in the commissionaire's uniform looked shamefacedly down the Strand. If Arthur didn't know better, he'd have said the man's skin was turning waxy, fading somehow. Perhaps it was the smog.

Arthur snatched the Doctor's card away. It was synthetic, slippery and shiny in his hand, not the stout card of the genuine article. "I don't know what kind of forgery this is, but it isn't a very good one. I don't know who"—He read

the name disdainfully— “Lorraine Heggessey is, but I know of no one by that name who works at the BBC.”

The Doctor shrugged. “We’ll be on our way, Uncle Arthur. But before we go ...” He licked his index finger and held it skyward. “Yes ... excellent. I believe the Perseus Dwarf is due that way.”

Fitting, Arthur thought; clearly escapees from a circus.

The Doctor lowered his hand and clasped it around that of Arthur Burrows. “I know it isn’t my business to tell you how to use your time, but you have better things to do than standing around on the roof, I’m sure. You really should get back to your work, old chap. Important broadcast today. We’ll be on our way. But break a leg!”

“That seems a rude thing to say,” the man in the commissionaire’s uniform muttered as they left.

“It’s an Earth expression Kaylaar. They’re a superstitious lot ...”

Arthur Burrows remained on the rooftop, looking up at the grey sky, and feeling it likely that these two had come from it.

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“I suppose I’ll have to ask Lorraine for another visitor’s pass next time I see her,” the Doctor grumbled. “They’re worse than UNIT.”

The time travellers were now aboard the Underground, on the Bakerloo line. They alighted at Edgware Road, and trudged uphill into London’s version of suburbia—those houses, all squatting in their identical cramped squares of land up and down the narrow streets.

A red-faced, merry young woman answered the door, jollier still when the Doctor mentioned his title and the name ‘Henry Gordon Jago’. Maggie and Kaylaar quickly inferred this Jago person was her aged uncle. Though he sounded in robust health: the woman (who introduced herself as Nellie Benson, née Jago, to the companions and Sonilakh with a hug) spoke of his latest escapades to raise funds for an expedition to some Pacific island. He was in America meeting with P.T. Barnum at the moment.

“I don’t suppose you have a wireless set we might listen to?” the Doctor asked innocently.

“Of course! Philip is in there now, tinkering with it to get ready to listen in. Built it himself, you know.”

After loitering around the BBC, Maggie found the comforts of Nellie and Philip’s sitting room most welcome.

Nellie quickly returned with a hearty pot of stewing brown tea. Philip, meanwhile, was around the back of the radio set, a notably non-sonic screwdriver in his hand, and wires sticking out. Maggie realized how much of a hobby it was at this time: by her time, the radio was a barely considered piece of furniture, and its successor the television was equally taken for granted. But to these people it was fascinating and cutting-edge, combining the appeal of mechanical and technological innovation. The balding man poked his head out, his brow furrowed in fascinated confusion at his ministrations. Unusually, the

Doctor did not interrupt him, instead sipping the powerfully strong tea while savouring the unusual peace and quiet.

Only Sonilakh seemed uncomfortable. Indeed, she looked almost ridiculous in her armour-like spacesuit, slumped sullenly in the Bensons' floral-patterned settee. Neither Nellie nor Philip gave her a second glance, which made Maggie infer that they must have met the Doctor and seen more alien sights than a futuristic space traveller. Sonilakh nodded only cursory greetings to the couple, looking out at the waning light of the grey day with a gloomy expression. Maggie and Kaylaar tried to console her, but since they could offer no explanation for the Doctor's thoughts or course of action, they sensed she was growing frustrated with them too.

A sharp fizz of static burst from the radio, causing Kaylaar to spill tea over his purloined BBC commissionaire's coat.

"Don't worry," Philip assured them. "It's meant to do that."

And ultimately it was. After one last burst, a human voice—ghostly and disembodied at first, but then ultimately resolved and clear—sounded through the sonic mists.

"Hello hello, this is 2LO calling, hello hello, this is 2LO calling, on the three hundred and sixty-metre waveband from Marconi House, the Strand, on behalf of the British Broadcasting Company. This is Arthur Burrows, Director of Programming at 2LO."

His was the archetypal BBC voice, a shorthand that Maggie could still imagine defining the organization in her own time: plummy, avuncular, jolly. Perhaps he was a tad more enthusiastic than a newsreader ought to be. Understandably: he was as exuberant about the novelty of this format as people like Nellie and Philip Benson were to hear it. She could not help smirking at his entreaty for 'listeners-in' to write to tell him at what speed they would prefer him to read the news. By 1994, no broadcaster would so earnestly request their audience's input.

The Doctor sat, equally rapt, his face frozen in a childlike, distracted smile. Maggie shared it. These were the moments that were perhaps the most unique privilege of a time traveller: those once-in-a-lifetime, where-were-you occasions where everyone of a given place and time could share in the momentous touching all their lives in unison. Perhaps it was all the more bracing for him to experience it in the Bensons' cramped and cosy living room, not out on a battlefield or at sea, or on some distant planet.

Kaylaar gamely listened along, but Maggie knew the mentions of Andrew Bonar-Law and Winston Churchill's election speeches, a murder and fraud trial, and an air crash in France were sailing clear over his head.

Their guest, Sonilakh, twitched and shifted on the settee, sipping Nellie's tea with distaste and looking either around or at her hands at every opportunity.

"As seven minutes have elapsed, I will now cease transmission for three minutes to listen for government messages as per the terms of our licence."

Arthur Burrows was as good as his word, and silence descended on the airwaves.

“Thrilling, wouldn’t you say Doctor?” Philip asked. He had stood from his crouching position behind the radio, and paced up and down the room at various points. Here was a true devotee, who wanted to savour every detail of the transmission as it came in. Maggie nodded in agreement.

The Bensons easily filled the three minutes with chat over their last encounter with the Doctor, which had involved their uncle Henry and a haunted opera house he had acquired in Paris. It seemed they had paused at the most exciting part when the broadcast resumed.

With another “Hello, hello, this is 2LO calling,” Arthur Burrows coaxed them back to his attention. More fascinating snapshots of an ordinary day in November 1922 filled in Maggie’s head as he read the other news stories: a theft of £4,000 in an attaché case during a train journey from Marylebone to Leicester; an auction at Sotheby’s of the first four folios of Shakespeare (ultimately sold for £5,900). Burrows told of thick fog and conductors guiding buses, and Maggie recalled their first sight that afternoon as they emerged from the TARDIS. However, not even the significance of this moment could compel her to pay attention to the sport: as she always did back in Revelstoke, she tuned out during the billiards.

Maggie’s attention had wandered to recalling an early date when Ollie had abruptly stopped passionately kissing her, to turn up the radio to hear the results of a hockey game between the Canucks and the Maple Leafs. She thus heard a probably imagined note of sternness when Arthur Burrows’ voice declared, “This concludes the first broadcast. As stated earlier, 2LO welcomes correspondence from listeners-in to advise us as to which speed the news should be read. I am interested to discover whether listeners-in prefer the news to be read once slowly, once fast and once slowly, or twice fast.”

Maggie felt one last moment of charm as Burrows blurted, “You know, this ‘broadcasting’ is going to be jolly good fun,” before silence returned to the airwaves.

As he switched off his set, Philip was mulling over Burrows’ options for the speed at which the news should be read. “Twice fast, surely,” he opined.

“Why ‘surely’, dear?” Nellie piped in.

“You could get twice as much news in.”

“You may be surprised, Philip,” the Doctor warned as he rose. “When those talking heads come in ... but then, I’m getting ahead of myself.” He slapped Sonilakh’s shoulder in faux-camaraderie. “Come along, soldier. Time we got you back where you belong.”

“Are you sure you can’t stay, Doctor?” Nellie asked. “At least wait until the 9:00 broadcast?”

“I’d love to, but time, believe it or not, is pressing. This was all for the benefit of the pilot here. I think she’s heard enough.”

“That’s putting it mildly,” the Sleeper bitterly retorted.

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Their journey back to the TARDIS was quiet. Even more fog seemed to have cloaked London. Maggie felt her understanding of the time and the place richer for having heard it through Arthur Burrows' voice, and indirectly seen it through his eyes. Burrows reported on riots in Churchill's election speech. The spectres of the Depression, Nazism, and World War Two were all out there on the horizon. This was a comparatively peaceful moment in the twentieth century, but that peace would not last for long. Already embedded in that peace were the embers that would light the whole world on fire.

She did not dare ask Sleeper Sonilakh what she was thinking. Her large forehead had corrugated into a permanent frown, and she angrily pushed to the front of their line by the time they turned the corner to the alley in the Strand and sighted the TARDIS.

"A time machine—all the places you could have taken me—and *this* is how we spend the time?"

The Doctor beamed at her as he thrust the police box's door open. "If that's how you see it, Sonilakh, that's your choice. Better get you back where you belong, eh?"

She pushed past him. He shook his head. "Those space pioneers could be a bit cranky. Do you know, I wonder if the cryo-sleep has some mood-altering side effects? Something to investigate another day."

"So that's it?" Maggie asked. "Drop her off on her ship and go on our way? Are you sure there isn't anything else to do?"

"There's nothing else I *can* do, Maggie. The T.S.S. *Inanna's* progress is as much a part of history one hundred thousand years hence as November 14, 1922 is a part of yours." He ushered them inside. "Come on then—I do hope the old girl isn't late."

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The TARDIS materialized back on the sleeper-ship. The Doctor ran across the deck on the balls of his feet, virtually shoved Sonilakh into her pilot's seat, and dashed back inside, not even looking back or pausing to say goodbye. Hardly more than ten seconds after it had arrived, the ship's mighty engines sounded up again. As the police box faded into the vortex, a pipe ruptured over its roof to underline how untenable the T.S.S. *Inanna* had become. Sonilakh turned back to her controls, feeling revived but no more certain of her future.

Despite herself, she still carried a trace of hope that the Doctor's trip had some secret purpose she could not fathom. As another readout went blank and faded to static, she was no closer to understanding that purpose.

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The TARDIS reappeared in the sector of space above the T.S.S. *Inanna*. The effort of getting the ship back to the precise moment of her departure had made the Doctor a touch sluggish, and now he stood back from the console, his arms folded confidently, breathing with the slow relief of someone who has finished an

arduous marathon. Maggie and Kaylaar stared at the ship wending its way through a purple-hued patch of space.

The console fizzed to life, and they stared back. The Doctor's brow was furrowed, but they could tell he knew what was going on and wanted them to ask. They refused to take the bait, merely staring expectantly at the speaker grille currently belching out these burbles and fizzes.

The Doctor frowned. "Hmm, what do you make of that? We're picking something up? A signal."

"A signal," repeated Maggie. Suddenly the purpose of the trip dawned on her.

The voice of Arthur Burrows, only minutely degraded from its initial broadcast over one thousand centuries ago, resounded around the TARDIS.

*"Hello hello, this is 2LO calling, hello hello, this is 2LO calling."*

As the BBC inaugural broadcast continued, the Doctor cranked a lever on the console. The view resolved to the *Inanna* and a large green planet ahead.

"They're practically on top of their new home. By the time they hear the 9:00 broadcast they'll be in orbit." The Doctor folded his arms, beaming with hope as much as delight. "All they needed was someone to show them the way. A friendly voice from an old uncle back home."

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*"This is 2LO calling on the three hundred and sixty-metre waveband from Marconi House, the Strand, on behalf of the British Broadcasting Company. This is Arthur Burrows, Director of Programming at 2LO."*

Sonilakh grasped the Doctor's purpose, and a smile crossed her face. She looked out the cockpit's nearest porthole, and smiled. She thought she could see the police box behind her, and was sure he could see her somehow.

The voice of Arthur Burrows warbled across the decks of the T.S.S. *Inanna*. The beginning of this new chapter of humanity's great journey was assured. And in that beginning, there was the news.



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More than one hundred thousand years in the future, the T.S.S. Inanna is bearing a cryogenically suspended crew from Earth to a new home in a new galaxy. But when the TARDIS drops in, the journey is not going well. The ship is off its course, its navigation and other critical systems are not functioning, and its pilot, Sonilakh, is at her wit's end.

The Doctor agrees to take Sonilakh aboard the TARDIS. But his next move can be allowed no margin for error. To the bafflement of his fellow travellers, the Doctor takes them back in time to November 14 1922, to allow Sonilakh, Maggie, and Kaylaar to listen in on a moment in history.

Though their journey seems routine, it holds a vital connection to the far future.

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This is another story in a series of original fan authored Doctor Who fiction published by The Doctor Who Project featuring the Eleventh Doctor as played by Winston Adderly

