

BBC

DOCTOR WHO



# Houdini and The Space Cuckoos

By Joseph Lidster

Part One

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*'Oi! You lot! Yes, you lot! Now pay attention, that's it, and look up. Yes up! Right up! Into the sky. That's it....*

*That's it. You see that mauve thing floating in space above the Earth? Looks a bit like an egg. It's not really an egg. There isn't actually a giant mauve egg floating above your lovely little planet. That would really be silly. It's actually a big mauve egg-shaped spaceship. Or is it indigo? Or maybe violet? Well, it's sort of a mauvey-indigoy-violet.*

*Oh, actually, let's just say it's purple. It's a purple spaceship.*

*Now, in that spaceship, there's this glass box. Of course, it's not an ordinary glass box. It's an alien glass box made from alien sand from an alien planet. And in the box – well, that's where I come in. The Doctor. Explorer, time traveller and wearer of fine hats. Hello there! Now, you might be wondering how I've found myself trapped in the box.*

*Well, I'll tell you who stuck me in here but you won't believe me. No. Really, you won't. There I am, minding my own business. Well, I'm saving the Earth but that's sort of what my business is. It's the year 1920 and New York City is under attack! These aliens, they're the ones who own this spaceship, have come to your marvellous little planet and do you know what they're doing? Do you? They're only transferring-*

*Oh.*

*Wait.*

*That's not good.*

*Did you see that?*

*Now that's just not fair! They've locked me up inside a glass box on their purple spaceship and here I am thinking it can't get any worse! And now they've gone and started pouring*

*some kind of gloop into the box! Do I look like a fish? I haven't got gills! I won't be able to breathe!*

*Stupid Doctor! When will I learn not to think that things can't get any worse? Things can always get worse! I'm going to drown! I'm going to drown and there's nobody to help me!*

*Because I'm alone, you see. I travel alone now. Mostly. That's why I'm talking to myself. That's why I'm pretending you're here with me. A friend. A companion. It makes it easier. Because explaining things to you helps it all make sense in my strange little brain. So, you're here with me. Sorry about that. You're going to drown alongside me and I haven't even given you a name. What about Bob? Short for Robert or Roberta so you could be a boy or a girl? Yeah, I like that. I like Bob. Bob, bob, bob. So, come on, Bob, any ideas? How are we going to get out of this one?*

*What's that? Why can't I just climb out of the top of it? Good question, Bob. Well, as you can see, there's an incredibly-complicated system of locks holding down the lid. What's that, Bob? Can't I use my sonic screwdriver? No. No, Bob, I can't. Because the lid of the box also has a deadlock seal. And there's practically no-one in this entire cosmos who can escape a deadlock seal without the correct key.*

*So, to summarise, we're trapped in a box that's filling up with some kind of icky gloopy gloop stuff with no hope of escape, on an alien spaceship miles above New York City.*

*And there's no one out there who can help! '*

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'Ladies and Gentlemen, allow me to introduce Mr Harry Houdini!'

An hour earlier, the audience at New York's Golden Horse Theatre started to applaud as the short man with bright blue eyes walked onto the stage. He smiled at them and held his hands up. Then, without a word, he turned to look at the object behind him. It was a large metal safe. It was one of his oldest tricks but it always went down well. A lady garbed in a tiny dress made of sequins followed him onto the stage and waddled over to the safe like a shiny duck. She opened the door and, with a dramatic flourish, revealed to the audience that it was empty. Harry bowed at her and then climbed into the safe. It was a small, cramped space and he had to crumple himself up, his head squashed between his knees. Then, with a loud clank, the safe door was closed. Harry was trapped inside. In the dark. Outside, the lady in the sequins turned to smile vacantly at the audience. The audience all

leaned forward to get a closer look. Some were looking at the lady in the sequins but most of the audience were looking at the safe.

Because they were waiting for the world-famous Harry Houdini to, once again, do the impossible. To escape from the inescapable. They were excited, even though they knew what was going to happen. In just a few moments time, he would burst free from the safe and they'd all clap and cheer. Then they'd all go home and tell their friends and family that they'd seen the actual Harry Houdini escaping from an actual safe.

But inside the safe, Harry Houdini, master of the impossible, was staring at something even he couldn't believe. Because, once the safe's door had been closed, the dark metal back wall of the safe had exploded into light. And beyond that light, a whole new world of metal and circles and machines and... a head! A man's head had popped through into the safe and before Harry could say a word, the man's head was talking. Not just talking, it was babbling. And underneath the head, a bow-tie was wobbling.

'Hello, Harry! I'm the Doctor and I'm a big fan!'



Every sentence this Doctor said seemed to end with an exclamation mark.

'Sorry for bursting in on you like this but I need your help! I'm about to save the world from aliens!'

Harry just stared at him.

'I know, I know – it sounds crazy. Bunkum! The sort of thing you'd normally want to investigate and expose. Well, come with me and I'll prove it to you. A real alien invasion –



possession of the public – all in New York City! But I need your help Harry, because the problem with these aliens is that they're really good with locks. Excellent at imprisonment. Impossible to stop. But they've made one fatal error: they didn't count on the world's greatest escape artist being in town!

Harry stared at the man and at the impossible space behind him. He thought about his life. He thought about how bored he'd been recently, standing around on film sets in the long, agonising wait between takes. It had become one long show of escaping from safes and barrels and padlocked-chains night after night. He didn't know what was behind the Doctor but he knew that it was something new. Something different. And he wanted to find out. So, when the man's head pulled back, he silently pushed himself through the back of the safe and into-

'The TARDIS! It's a time-travelling spaceship! I promise you it's not all done with mirrors.'

Harry finally spoke. 'We're going to travel in time?' He turned to look back at the hole in the wall. It was a perfect circle, fizzing with electricity, and through it he could see the interior of the safe. And somehow, beyond that, was the stage of the Golden Horse Theatre and the world he'd left behind.

The Doctor did a strange little dance and ran down towards a set of double doors. He pushed through them, calling for Harry to follow him. Harry, staring at the amazing structure that surrounded him, slowly followed the Doctor through the doors and found himself in-

The lobby of the Golden Horse Theatre. He turned to the Doctor who was closing the doors of a strange blue wooden box. He pointed at a pair of doors leading through to the theatre itself. 'So, everyone thinks I'm still in there? On the stage? In a safe?'

The Doctor grinned and nodded. Harry found himself grinning back. He'd escaped from so many safes in the past but never like this. How had the Doctor done it?

'Couldn't you have just waited until I'd finished and met me out here rather than doing whatever it is you just did?'

'I used a complicated system of block transfer computation and wormhole technology to create a link from the TARDIS through to the back of your safe so we're connected and...' The Doctor's face fell. 'Oh. I never thought of just waiting out here for you. That would probably have made more sense. And I'd have had time for popcorn.'

Harry liked the man. He was different. And he wanted something different. For once, Harry wasn't the biggest showman in the room. He'd been doing the same act night after night and now, he was the one being surprised and impressed.

They turned to look out of the entrance to the theatre. The giant glass doors revealed the busy afternoon streets of New York City. The Doctor pointed outside at the large herd of newspaper reporters. 'Does that seem like a lot of attention to you? It's not even opening night' he asked, as the reporters began to take photographs through the glass.

Harry shrugged. He'd been followed by reporters all of his working life. He was more interested in wormholes and aliens and people being possessed by aliens.

But then the glass doors were pushed open and he and the Doctor were forced back as the reporters swarmed into the theatre. Harry put on his smile, hoping that they could get away with posing for a couple of photographs before rushing off to solve the Doctor's dilemma. Suddenly he felt a pointy elbow jab him in the ribs.

'What are you smiling at?' The Doctor hissed at him, looking worried.

'For the cameras! Let them take my picture and we can go and stop these aliens of yours!' Harry replied, his smile still plastered across his face. He almost laughed when he said the word 'aliens' but he'd seen the TARDIS so it seemed to make a strange kind of sense.

'Harry,' the Doctor continued to hiss. 'The aliens are invading by possessing people!'

Then he realised that the reporters were surrounding them, grabbing at them. And then he saw their eyes. Each of the reporters had glowing purple eyes.



'They're possessed!' he shouted at the Doctor.

'Yes – by those aliens I mentioned!'

Harry stared at the Doctor, alarmed now. 'Well, there's a lot more of them than there are of us. Any ideas?'

The Doctor shook his head as the possessed reporters started to shove them out through the glass doors and into the city streets beyond.

'Where are they taking us?!' asked Harry. He looked into the face of the nearest reporter and shuddered as the unblinking purple eyes stared back at him. The reporters started to push them towards a dark and secluded alley. 'Doctor!'

'I don't know,' the Doctor replied, 'But I'm thinking you'd have been safer if I'd left you in that safe!' Then, as the possessed reporters pushed them both down to the ground, the Doctor shrieked out. 'Harry!'

***Coming Soon: Part Two.***

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