

Writing Sample – Blog Writing – Program Review

Happy Wholidays! The Doctor Who Christmas Specials

The Internet likes making lists and ranking things, so let us participate in the tradition, shall we? Let me preface this by saying that I like all of the Doctor Who Christmas specials, so this list will go from uber fave to one I like but don't love and only includes the current incarnation of Who launching in 2005 from BBC. These rankings are also based on personal preference in terms of enjoyment and not necessarily on importance in relation to the Whoverse. I absolutely adore Peter Capaldi's Doctor and what they have done with him thus far, so I am bummed to not be able to include this year's (2014) Christmas special, as it has not aired yet. Also, while these are technically Christmas Specials and thus have Holiday themes in terms of the aesthetics, these can and are enjoyed by one and all regardless of religious and spiritual beliefs – Who is for everybody! This ranking doesn't have spoilers in it in terms of plot/endings, but references to a few characters that may be spoilers for you depending on where you are in watching Doctor Who.

Anyway, enough babbling, allons-y!

#9 – The Snowmen

Doctor Who Christmas While I enjoy how atmospheric this episode is, it gets too wrapped up in overarching plot, storyline hints etc. It tries too hard to push the Clara storyline and as a result, is clunky and way too self-aware. Too much of this episode seems like it is saying "Hey look, we're giving you a hint about something here!" and thus detracts a bit from the fact that it is a Christmas Special. But that said, big Victorian Christmas backdrop, tons of snow, and overt Mary Poppins-esque imagery/references, and voice talent from Sir Ian McKellen, so I was still entertained by it despite being frustrated by the storytelling and character development as it pertains to the running plot of the show as a whole.

#8 The Next Doctor

Who is back in Victorian England for Christmas, and I have no problem with that. Victorian England and Christmas are two great tastes that taste great together! Here we see a common theme in Who Christmas Specials: the Doctor has this adventure without his regular companion and engages with a character who ends up fulfilling the role of companion for the sake of the episode. Thus confirming the idea that the Doctor is not the loner he claims to be, he always needs people, he always needs friends. This is addressed at the end of this episode in an exchange with the Doctor. There is, as per usual, a mystery element to this episode that needs to be solved. The best part of this episode is the scrappy character of "Rosita" the pseudo-companion whose name I think is no coincidence (Rose Tyler), and the acting of David Morrissey who wonderfully portrays a distraught father. Overall, this is a fun episode, a bit mad-cap as the Doctor runs around with a feisty friend and gets briefly entangled with some mistaken identity issues.

#7 – The Voyage of the Damned

I really like this episode because it does something that Doctor Who does really well – it has wonderful, well-crafted, fabulously-acted guest characters. This Christmas Special excels in that, and you find that you really care when dire things happen to these characters. Also, for those that care, you get to see David Tennant in a tux. It does get a bit preachy, literally, towards the end about the Doctor and some over the top Jesus imagery. I don't have a problem with the imagery, I just don't want to be beaten over the head with a metaphor.

#6 – The Christmas Invasion

An extremely important episode in the Who-verse. The future relationships of the Doctor and supporting characters are hinted at here. Most importantly, this is where we meet David Tennant's Doctor. A crucial moment towards the end of this episode more than hints at some major character development with aspects of Tennant's Doctor in terms of who he is and his moral code. Tennant's trademark frenetic rants are fun to watch in this episode.

#5 – The Time of the Doctor

OK, so what I am about to say here will have a bit more of a spoiler element to it, so be warned. One of the things I love about Doctor Who is the fact that there is a bit of a Peter Pan element to him and his relationship to not only his Doctor Who Christmas Special companions but other friends he makes along the way; he literally flies in and out of their lives, not always aware of how much time has passed, never aging himself, and he is always left behind when they decide it is time to grow up and not fly off with him anymore. He still occasionally stops by for a visit, his face pressed up against a window as he watches their lives, a lost boy longing for family and pretending that he doesn't really need one. So what makes this episode cool in my opinion is that the Doctor is the one who stays, and it is his companion and friends who fly in and out. There are some great moments for Matt Smith in this episode. And of course, the setting of this episode in the picturesque town of "Christmas" is just what one needs for a Christmas special! Other fun things to note, I love the idea of the Papal Mainframe, a space church headed by Mother Superior, Tasha Lem (brilliantly portrayed by Orla Brady). This is a very, very plot heavy episode that taps in to the greater story of Doctor Who and his relationship with, well, the entire universe, so I am hesitant to talk about anything else from this special.

#4 – The Doctor, the Widow and the Wardrobe

I like this episode a lot for several reasons:

It is heartwarming

The obvious Narnia references

A heartwarming family

A beautiful magical winter forest

Sweet humor

But my three favorite parts of this episode are the motifs and metaphors based in ancient pagan winter holidays, the language of trees and the divine feminine.

#3 – The Runaway Bride

Arguably the funniest of the Christmas specials. We meet fan favorite character Donna Noble, played to perfection by Catherine Tate. The chemistry between Tate and Tennant is fabulous and thus makes this an exciting and hilarious Christmas romp. This episode ends up being very important as far as plot is concerned BUT the beautiful thing about that is that you are unaware of it. You are enjoying the episode so much, that later in the series when certain things that happen in this episode are referenced you're like "Wow!"

#2 – The End of Time: Part One

Arguably the most heartbreaking of the Christmas specials.

The acting in this is some of the best you will see in any Doctor Who episode. Actor Bernard Cribbins plays the grandfather of Donna Noble with such sweet subtlety and gut wrenching honesty – oh boy, bring out the tissues! None of the drama, pain, joy, and bond/relationship between the characters is forced. Thus the real human feeling in this show about an alien, is what makes this such a great and powerful Christmas special. This too is a major plot heavy episode.

#1 – A Christmas Carol

Doctor Who Christmas Dickens in Space! So yeah, I love it. I am a huge fan of Charles Dickens and slightly obsessed with the story of A Christmas Carol, so that paired with Doctor Who makes this my obvious fave of the Wholiday specials. It is also wonderfully acted by Dumbldore...I mean actor Michael Gambon. Music plays an important role in this episode and the song sung by Brit vocal star Katherine Jenkins is just lovely. This episode of course hits popular themes in Who episodes – family, the good of the many outweigh the needs of the few, or the one (yes I know that is a Star Trek reference, but it is applicable!), and some fun snapshots of the Doctor's adventures through time and entanglements with famous people. Also, this episode is visually quite stunning.

So that is it for now, I really look forward to the first Capaldi Christmas special.

May your Winter Holiday be warm and wonderful in every space and time!