

Transmissions shot through my head like an angry school of fish. I remember the first time I felt them... untamed eels, electric eels, entwining until their tails knotted into a big ball of electric. It took months to untangle them. That was when I was a child but, though my fingers were more dextrous back then, these ropes were not material. They were simply code. Reams of figures were purple and luminous in my mind.

I like to think of programming as watching over a whole ocean of fish. It's difficult at first; you try to see beauty in numbers and figures but they're just purple lines seared into your mind. Gradually you become accustomed to the binary of it all. Zeros become elegant jellyfish which balloon upwards on a scrolling screen of black. Ones can be anything: on a slow day a one might be a tendril of seaweed that waves gently at me. However, some days are more frenetic and ones become whitebait. When I feel angry or confused the whitebait does its best to race away from my net. I despise those days.

I remember the day like it was yesterday. It was yesterday, in fact, and has been for a very long time now. I saw, in the incessant scrolling screens of programming, an irregularity.

## The Irregularity

by Jake Reynolds

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*One, one, one, zero, zero, one, zero, one. Then a four-zero-seven. Then a five hundred.* It was nauseating; after years of teaching the purple fish to swim in strict lines of fluid code, an eel returned. My stomach whimpered and I felt that pang of my own history which, like my eyes, I had felt slowly disappear into nothing.

The irregularity took me back to when those wires in my head had felt so rigid and the cascade of horrified vomit had felt so cold. The wires grew on me and I grew with them. They soon felt organic.

This jolt, though – this spark, like the ignition of a match after eons of darkness, took me out of the ocean depths for just a moment. I felt every number shudder as though I had created the irregularity myself. What I felt most, though, was that twinge of fear that never touched me directly but hovered about me like an enveloping fog. A fear that was not my own but which I sensed from those above. My masters were not angry, for this was not my mistake. The irregularity *scared* them.

How I wished to see my masters at that moment. I remember their domes reflecting bright light into my eyes like liquid bronze when I was just a little girl. I remember also the cobalt ebb of a pulsing eye.

I recognised through sound alone. The whirl of the eyestalk was different to the hum of a gun, for example. The two sounds were separate and meant different things. Then, sometimes, the eyestalk whirl changed pitch: a fast movement; recognition of the threatening, like how my head snapped back to look behind me as I ran from their screaming voices all those years ago.

I knew my masters better than they knew themselves. This irregularity, this simple intrusion of a few figures, terrified them to the core. Whatever they feared would either kill or release me. Neither bothered me; to strike fear into my masters, though, was in my mind the signal that there may be an end to their reign.

*The Woman requests access to Archive Six. Her pomposity grates on me still. I always assume she watches me with a condescending eye. I tell her Archive Six is out of bounds. This isn't good enough. I continue watching new tadpoles wriggle through wiring to escape her voice. I manage to unlock two hundred and nine blocks of programming at once. Moments like these make me wonder how proud mother would be to see me doing so well with maths.*

As far as I know, both mother and father were killed before I was taken. They were downstairs as I fetched my shoes from my bedroom. The shoes were bottle green. I wish they had been the last colour I had seen as opposed to that horrible sheen of metal. There were crashes and shouts and screams for a moment... then nothing. I remember deliberately stomping my feet around my room like an adult, hoping the presence of gargantuan

footsteps would terrify any burglar into fleeing. It is only now I realise the noise of those bottle green boots is what lured my masters to me. There was lots of smoke and dust as I ran; then everything went silent. I never had the boots long enough to show my friends, or to see if they gave me blisters.

*The Man speaks. The tone and breaks in his voice give me the perfect picture of a pensive face. He alerts me of the irregularity I felt just moments before. Not their problem. The irregularity is apparently wandering about... swimming freely and escaping the games. I try to picture him, humanoid in form, just waltzing into my map of coding. It doesn't work; my masters forbid imagination like that.*

*The point still stands: the irregularity is free. Free from the control and free from the games. Disguising my hope, I tell the Man the irregularity is no-one. Security measures denied. I am working.*

*Then, like an envelope graphic, I receive a message amongst the figures. Imminent solar flares. That should keep them dormant. As I speak, I wince at my own voice. It sounds so adult in a way that it doesn't deserve. I never noticed the transition the transition from childhood. It seems to me as though I am playing a long game with my own age. Nobody, certainly not I, will know how old I am if I am ever found and buried. I don't think it important; the transmissions take precedence.*

*Something happens on four zero seven. I shake it off in favour of vertical numbers. Fours are always sharp, like serrated knives. I despise them.*

*Archive Six opens and the solar flares ignite. It's a beautiful violation, and I am momentarily free. The numbers have gone. My masters are far away and cannot possibly hear me now. The fish have swum into someone else's care for just a moment and I am left with a blanket of darkness. My joints relax for the first time in decades and I feel weightless.*

It all made sense. It was like an epiphany. New information, all words, flooded my head. The irregularity had a title. It was 'the Doctor'.

I could say the name aloud. *Doctor*. The Doctor. The way the C turned into a T like a gun reloading felt so powerful. The Doctor. I required him, here, in voice, for me to talk to. I perhaps murmured his name aloud a couple of times as I felt his presence growing larger and larger like an ink blot soaking into the tiny fibres of a page (I always remember this

image; when I was four I did just that in father's study. Later I noted how the same happened with blood on a carpet).

He arrived. The Doctor arrived and I spoke to the irregularity which had turned the bronze of my master's shells into trembling organs. His voice was kind and assured. Unlike the tinny monotones of the Man and the Woman, or the shrill screeches of my masters, his voice had melody to it. Soft vowels with accented consonants. The emotion in him sounded real and I deduced he couldn't have been from the Game Station. Then I recognised something else.

He was Northern; he was from England and I felt so comforted in that moment. Heroes were not always mythical figures from space. Sometimes heroes were ordinary. He sounded like the most ordinary hero one could imagine. I could have cried as I lost my thoughts and turned words back into programming:

*My masters, they fear the Doctor. My masters, they fear the Doctor. My masters, they fear the Doctor.*

They feared something; a single man had them screaming, and in an instant I trusted him with my life. So did, it seems, his companion: an American man, all guns blazing by the sound of it. He had the determination in his voice but not quite the softness of the Doctor. I was asked about Rose. Who was Rose? I never asked. The name meant nothing until he gave me figures to search for. I scanned through programming as the solar flares started to subside, trying to find the anomaly he spoke of so preciously.

I could have been this Rose. If only I wasn't in the wrong place at the wrong time I could be the stranded outsider the Doctor was looking for. He spoke of her differently... with the Man and Woman he spoke as if to an authority with jeopardised power. When he called for Rose, though, his tone differed. His voice cracked at one point. Perhaps he loved her. Perhaps Rose was his child – a little girl surrounded by all the noise and metal just like I had been.

He thought she was dead. My distant family might still speak of me like that. He thought she had been killed in the Games. I knew otherwise; they're not killed, the contestants, they're transported. His voice lifted with his heart and a faint smile made its way to my cracked lips. Then, like a localised time loop, I repeated my concern.

*My masters, they fear the Doctor.*

*Who are my masters? His question confuses me; they are my masters. Like a filter, I am programmed not to say their name.*

I felt useless. For a strange reason I felt compelled to impress him. I felt as though I was trying desperately to pass a test to win his affection. Maybe then, if he liked me, he'd unplug me and whisk me away with the ship he had tucked away in Archive Six.

Obviously now it is pointless to dwell on what could have been. All I hope is that he thanked me, if only in his head. I even hoped, selfishly, that my approaching death would sadden him. Maybe it did.

Then I heard the solar flare reaching its end. My masters would hear me. I would surely die.

I allowed all of this. I took it upon myself and I found the co-ordinates for the Doctor. It was my work: it was my duty as his could-have-been companion. I felt those co-ordinates not as the obedient nibbling fish but instead as sharks. There were two fours, like dorsal fins, and three sevens, like pointed teeth which could bite through bronze.

They reached my mouth and I screamed them. *Five, six, one, four, three, four, sigma seven-seven-seven.* I made programming into melody – a melody which matched the Doctor's voice. I gave it purpose and meaning like an artist does to colour. I triggered the downfall of my masters like a war strategist.

They had dominion over me yet had forgotten my title as controller. I operated for the Doctor, my irregularity, and for the lights that would unveil my masters and blind them instead.

In moments they seized me, and I felt cold metal on my cheek for the first time in my life. It was like drinking from a desert oasis. My fingers graced the smooth floor as I heard my masters approaching. I never said anything more to the Doctor. I never wished him luck or said goodbye. I never told him my story or asked who Rose was. I never asked who he really was. In a way, I didn't want to know; he was enough to terrify my masters, and I feared that if I found out too much my loyalty would be proven wrong. I knew the bare minimum, which was all I wanted.

A steady, low hum: movement. They were certain of my death, as was I; yet in that hum I sensed their uncertainty following what I had done. I relished it. The hum became deafening right by my ear. I looked to where that cold blue eye would be and smiled.

*Exterminate me, masters, for I have already sealed your demise. I have brought about your downfall.*

So they did. The shot was an immersion of ice water as I plunged back into the blackness of the ocean bed. This time, though, all my darting fish had died with me, and we lay together.

We felt the calming presence of that shark, my irregularity, floating away and ready to jump straight out of the water.

# DOCTOR WHO

CLASSIC DOCTORS - BRAND NEW ADVENTURES

## THE IRREGULARITY



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THE CCPS VOL III - LOGORRHOEA OF THE LOOKERS-ON

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