

From the classic era of Doctor Who

LETHBRIDGE STEWART



THE LAST DUTY



CHRISTOPHER BRYANT

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LETHBRIDGE-STEWART

THE LAST DUTY

Based on the BBC television serials by
Mervyn Haisman & Henry Lincoln

Christopher Bryant



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‘Fungus!’

Eileen Younghusband scowled at her hotel kitchen windowsill, which was displaying the tell-tale signs of mildew.

‘Annoying stuff. Just when you think you’ve got rid of it, up it pops again somewhere else.’

As she got to work on the offending mould, her cousin sat at the table with a freshly-brewed cup of tea, faintly amused by the force of her invective. He sipped at his cup, half-listening to the ongoing muttering that underscored the cleaning, almost drowned out by the background sound of her thirteen-year-old son, Clive, playing loudly outside with friends, enjoying their final days before boarding school resumed.

Derek had always found his cousin hard to pin down. She was one of those people who looked as though they could be aged anywhere between thirty and fifty-five and, as far as he could recall, always had been. Without warning, she swung away from the window and jabbed her sponge towards him.

‘Don’t go thinking I’ve got distracted. I still want to hear all about your new job.’

Derek sighed. ‘I’m sorry, Eileen, I simply can’t give you any details. It’s all very hush-hush.’

Eileen looked mildly scandalised. ‘Hush-hush? We’re family!’

‘Unfortunately, that argument doesn’t get very far under the Official Secrets Act.’

At this, Eileen shrugged and turned back to her work. ‘Oh, is that all? I signed that back in 1940.’

Derek sat up, startled. Eileen noticed his reaction and

suppressed a smile. 'You baby boomers think you know it all. But you missed the real excitement.'

'You really signed the act?' Derek asked. 'Why? What were you doing in 1940?' He knew she had been a WAAF officer, but she never spoke about what she did during the war. Even her husband, Peter, didn't seem to know.

'That's all ancient history,' Eileen responded, with a smile. 'Anyway, I asked first. Out with it. Tell me what you've been up to.'

She plonked a biscuit barrel on the table next to Derek's teacup, then sat opposite him, eyebrows raised inquisitively. Her cousin hesitated, then took a biscuit and thought for a moment.

'I'll give you an example,' he said. 'This was one of the first missions I took part in for the Corps. About two months after I was transferred, after a fair bit of additional training, I was told to report with my Company to a dockland warehouse in the North of England...'

Brigadier Alistair Lethbridge-Stewart depressed the trigger and propelled an impressive jet of flame towards the mound of quivering, beige fungus in the corner of the room. The fungus burned freely, turned black and disintegrated inside its inferno.

Lowering his weapon with one hand and using the other to wipe perspiration from his forehead, Lethbridge-Stewart looked sharply about the warehouse to see where his attention was needed next. The stink of fish mixed with the reek of burning. Black smoke was collecting under the high ceilings while the ashen remnants of fungi were trampled underfoot by the men of 2 Battalion, B Company.

At the sound of another flamethrower, he advanced into the next section of the warehouse to find Captain Derek Younghusband laying waste to an area of the floor covered by what looked to all intents and purposes like a scattered group of small toadstools. The captain stopped the gas flow and the two men watched as the fungi blistered and died.

‘This is the last section,’ Younghusband observed over the sound of the third flamethrower being deployed in the preceding chamber. ‘Looks like we’re about done here. No survivors after all.’

Lethbridge-Stewart nodded grimly. ‘Get the word out to Miss Travers. I’ll do a last recce before we move out.’ Leaving the captain to reach for his walkie-talkie, Lethbridge-Stewart turned back into the inner sections of the foul-smelling warehouse, keeping a close eye on the walls and floors as he went.

‘Two of them at least. We’ve got them pinned down in the chippy.’

‘Confirmed, Mayhem Two. Tread carefully,’ Anne Travers advised from the mobile HQ on Colonial Street. She frantically jotted down the key points from Bill Bishop’s report on her pad, wishing she could pass on some of the work to the assistant she didn’t have. Barely had she lifted her pencil before the radio spluttered into life again with Captain Younghusband’s report from the docks. Anne began making notes, but faltered as the meaning of his words sank in.

‘Worse than we’d hoped,’ she observed and Younghusband concurred. ‘Mayhem Two’s got two or three more pinned down in town. With any luck, they’re the last.’

Be careful, though, I'm still getting readings from inside the warehouse.'

'Thanks. Our fungometer's blown a fuse. Too much data.'

Anne could virtually hear his smirk as he paused for her inevitable response, so she didn't disappoint. 'Stop calling it a fungometer.'

'Anything you say,' he replied glibly. 'Out.'

Across town, 2nd Lieutenant Bishop was approaching a fish 'n' chip shop through the pouring rain with more trepidation than was usual. Fingering the trigger of his flamethrower nervously, he stepped through the smashed door, indicating to the two men behind him to follow. Not that their handguns would be any good in this situation, and both of them knew it.

The poky waiting area was strewn with cooling fried food and newspapers. President Nixon stared up at Bishop from the front pages and the soldier did his best to emulate the silent majority as he crept past the fryers and entered the staff area beyond. Automatically, he hefted his flamethrower and yelled, 'Freeze!'

The hideous creatures paused in the act of escaping through the back door. The shop owner's body lay awkwardly in one corner, an overtoppled table next to him and a radio on the floor still inappropriately playing Radio 1 into the room.

Bishop and his men stared at the fungus creatures. The infection was advanced and it was impossible to see any vestige of their original form. Bloated, vaguely bipedal, beige and rubbery, obscene to look at. Bishop realised that the

fungus had grown arbitrarily, but by this stage the creatures were virtually identical. Left unchecked, the area would be infested with indistinguishable, unreal, doll-like monsters. Humans and fungi faced each other unmoving, as modern rock music floated through the air between them: *I can't help about the shape I'm in...*

The impasse was broken by the creatures simultaneously launching themselves at the humans, emitting their now familiar guttural, croaking roar from some incomprehensible part of their anatomy. Flinching backwards, Bishop enveloped his attackers in flame as his men pumped pointless bullets into them. The roar became a screech, but momentum carried the creatures forward. Bishop leaped aside, allowing the first one to career through the interior door, but one of his men was less fortunate and found himself in a fiery, fungal bear hug on the floor. Before Bishop could react, the first creature collided with a fryer full of chip fat and a wall of flame began to spread through the shop.

Bishop extricated the screaming private from the rapidly disintegrating remains of the fungal creature and threw him through the rear door into the downpour. Following him, Bishop held the man down into a puddle and turned to see the other private standing dumbly in the rain while the chip shop burned behind him.

'Find a phone!' Bishop yelled. 'Get fire and ambulance here at once!'

As the man ran down the road, Bishop checked the soggy, scorched soldier for flames and, finding none, reached for his walkie-talkie.

*

‘Thanks, Moreau. Mayhem One out.’ Derek pocketed his radio and trotted across to Lethbridge-Stewart. ‘Report from Miss Travers. Bishop’s taken out two more. Miss Travers says she can’t find any more traces beyond this warehouse.’

‘Maybe it’s over at last,’ said Lethbridge-Stewart hopefully. ‘Carry on, Captain.’

Derek went back to overseeing the retreat from the warehouse. He saw Lethbridge-Stewart striding off in the other direction, continuing to scout as he went. He paused, apparently noticing something on the floor, then bent to examine it. Derek’s curiosity was piqued, but right now he had a job to do.

It was a gun. Lethbridge-Stewart recognised the standard handgun allocated to all Younghusband’s men, lying abandoned on the ground by an internal door. Cautiously, he straightened up and pushed open the door.

Once inside, he hefted his flamethrower into position. In the small, sparsely-furnished, rudimentary office was a single window in the outside wall, now broken from the inside. Half way out of the window was, at first glance, one of the fungus creatures. Upon further inspection, Lethbridge-Stewart realised that the infection had not fully taken hold yet. Part of the body was undoubtedly fungal, including the right side of the head, but elsewhere on the body an army uniform could still be seen. The hybrid creature froze in the window and stared at the senior officer, clearly frightened. Lethbridge-Stewart prepared to loose a jet of flame, but as he tightened his grip on the trigger, the creature, with some evident difficulty, raised its fungal right arm to what remained of its forehead in an approximation of a salute.

Lethbridge-Stewart paused. The effort of saluting caused the man/thing to overbalance. It crashed down from the windowsill into an ungainly heap on the floor, where it stayed. Lethbridge-Stewart's face remained impassive, the aim of the flamethrower unwavering.

'Is... the mission complete, sir?' The voice came from the man's original mouth, twisted by the encroaching fungus, but its tone was more than a little reminiscent of the fungal beings' grunts and growls.

'What's your name?' Lethbridge-Stewart asked.

'Private Dockery, sir,' the hybrid replied. Lethbridge-Stewart noticed the flattened vowels in the distorted voice: the man probably grew up not far from here, he speculated.

'Can you help me, sir?' Dockery looked up at his superior officer beseechingly.

Slowly, Lethbridge-Stewart lowered his flamethrower. 'I'm sorry.'

The private stared at Lethbridge-Stewart unblinkingly. The silence led him to feel as though more was required of him.

'We don't know how to stop the spread of the fungus. Once you're infected...' Lethbridge-Stewart tailed off helplessly, disturbed by Dockery's unnatural stare. He realised that the gradual spread of the fungus across the face was responsible; it was now impossible for the young soldier to blink.

'Doctor Travers?' Lethbridge-Stewart was jolted from his examination of the mutating man's features by the unexpected mention of his head of science.

He was about to ask Dockery to explain, but recognised the pain in his voice – even these two words had taken a

massive effort. Lethbridge-Stewart quickly understood what Dockery was asking. 'I'm afraid not. Miss Travers has been able to locate and track the... life forms, and we were able to work out how to...' He hesitated, but Dockery finished the sentence for him.

'Kill them.'

Lethbridge-Stewart nodded. 'But she hasn't been able to find a cure for those already infected.'

Dockery gave a small jerk of the head, a vestige of the impulse to nod. 'How long have I got, sir?'

Lethbridge-Stewart winced at the honorific, still spat out by the increasingly unrecognisable Dockery despite his evident pain and discomfort. He focused on answering the question factually. 'Generally, once infected, full mutation takes up to twenty-five, thirty minutes.'

The private assimilated this information. 'And then I'll be one of them? A fungusman?'

Lethbridge-Stewart didn't respond to this. The term was used informally among the men, although discouraged by the officers. If one had to name an inhuman menace, Lethbridge-Stewart considered, one could do better than something quite so flippant. Besides, once you had observed a Yorkshire grandmother transform into a ferocious beast, neither 'fungus' nor 'man' seemed quite appropriate.

'I wish there was something I could do, Private.'

'Could I have... a cigarette?'

Lethbridge-Stewart was about to apologise and explain he was not a smoker, despite Sally's best efforts, before realising that smoking would be even more dangerous a vice for someone composed partially of fungus. The flamethrowers had been his own idea; bullets proved only

a setback to the surprisingly strong creatures, but fire reduced them to a kind of ash. The big problem had been requisitioning enough of the wretched weapons in secrecy with any kind of urgency. Four flamethrowers scarcely seemed sufficient to fight off an incursion, but it was as many as they had been able to source. He was about to explain to Dockery why he could not grant this last request when he saw a twitch around the human side of his face and realised he was being sent up.

Swerving east, Bishop's transport made its way back to the Colonial Street HQ. Dusk was settling over the city and as they drove through the unaffected areas of Hull, Bishop marvelled at the men and women going about their business, huddled under umbrellas, unaware of the supernatural terror sprouting from their own docks. Some of the civilians stared at him as the van passed by, as if offended by his presence.

Bishop was roused from his reverie by an insistent sound emanating from the machine at his feet. He scooped Anne's contraption up and stared at it. The fungometer hadn't chirped once since the chippy. He'd been so confident the warehouse marked the last of the menace. This new reading was a puzzle, though. He reached for his radio to see what Anne would make of it.

'We don't think the fungus evolved naturally in the Humber,' Lethbridge-Stewart explained. 'That's the official story, of course, and it was Doctor Walter's original assumption, but everything we've seen since suggests a less terrestrial origin.'

He tailed off as he glanced at Dockery. It was hard to

read his face, or what remained visible of it, but he looked decidedly blank. Lethbridge-Stewart mentally backed up a few more paces.

‘It’s alien, Private. The fungus came to Earth and we found it in the estuary and now we need to destroy it before it destroys us.’

Anne spread the map across the table, pinning its corners down with her notepad, her radio, the device definitely not called a fungometer and, despite his protests, Bill’s revolver.

‘Here is the mouth of the Humber where the first bits of the fungus were discovered. They were brought here,’ stabbing her finger at Hull, ‘where we are now. Several more clumps of the stuff were discovered here... and here... and as far north as Bridlington. All of them ended up right here.’

To punctuate the last point, she slapped a larger scale map of the city on top of Yorkshire and indicated a point by the river.

Bill noticed a marker towards the top of the original map. ‘What’s that?’ he asked.

‘Robin Hood’s Bay Marine Laboratory,’ Anne explained. ‘That’s where Lloyd Walter works.’

‘Right, the scientist bloke,’ Bill said. ‘He tried to stop the authorities getting involved. Thought it was a new species of sea fungus or something.’

‘Marine fungus, yes. He wanted to take it back to his lab for further investigations and claim the credit, so we can be very grateful to the warehouse owner’s eye for a profit that this whole mess hasn’t been a whole lot worse.’

‘Alright,’ Bill said, impatiently waving at the maps, ‘but what’s your point?’

Anne rolled her eyes and she tapped again at the riverside spot on the map of Hull. 'This is the warehouse,' she explained. 'This is where Lethbridge-Stewart and Captain Younghusband are. Where it all began and where, we thought, it had all ended.' She picked up the fungus tracker, allowing the corner of the map to roll inwards and erase most of South Yorkshire. The readings were even more alarming. She made a decision. 'Get the Captain on the radio,' she instructed.

Bill grabbed the walkie-talkie and the whole of Yorkshire vanished from sight.

'The first we heard of it, it was already too late,' Lethbridge-Stewart explained. 'The fungus had started to infect the fishermen and they transmitted it outside. Suddenly, we had an outbreak of fungus monsters in Hull's docklands and pressing into the town centre. The report came to me, I came to Captain Younghusband and...'

'And here I am,' said Dockery with difficulty.

Lethbridge-Stewart cleared his throat awkwardly. 'I don't know if this will mean anything to you under the circumstances, Private, but your sacrifice will not go unacknowledged. Secrecy dictates that the exact particulars of the mission and your... unfortunate predicament... cannot be communicated to your family, but they will know you died honourably and you will receive a posthumous commendation.'

Dockery considered this a moment, gathering his strength for a comparably lengthy response. 'If the sacrifice... needed to be made to keep Britain safe... then that was my job.'

Lethbridge-Stewart was moved by the sentiments, and wondered who had enlisted Dockery into the Corps. Colonel Douglas probably. 'A very courageous attitude,' Lethbridge-Stewart affirmed.

The thing that had been Dockery shuddered suddenly, and let forth a rasping roar. Startled, Lethbridge-Stewart raised his flamethrower, took a step backwards and prepared to fire. Dockery's eye registered panic and he attempted to propel his unfamiliar body away from the danger area. Realising the noise and movement had been an involuntary spasm rather than a precursor to attack, Lethbridge-Stewart lowered his weapon in some incongruous embarrassment.

The incident underlined something both men already knew: whatever words were exchanged, this encounter was destined to end with Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart engulfing Private Dockery in flame and reducing him to a charred mess on the floor.

The slight shift in Dockery's position allowed Lethbridge-Stewart to see him quite literally in a new light, and he was curious about what he saw. Some of the fungal areas did not have the grubby beige colour or spongy texture usually seen on the creatures. Areas of Dockery's new form were dark grey, almost black, with a grainy appearance.

'Still no connection.' Bill put down the radio in annoyance, white noise continuing to emanate from it.

'Something's going on down there,' said Anne, staring at the readings.

'How's the spike?'

Anne shook her head. 'I've never seen one so focused and so intense. It's already gone so far off the scale that the

fungometer can't even register it. I didn't design it for this.' She caught Bill's smirk and didn't like it. 'What?' she demanded, sharply.

'You called it a fungometer,' he replied.

Anne gave him a withering glare, picked up his weapon and threw it to him. 'So I did. Now let's get this thing on the road.'

'Courageous.'

'What?' Lethbridge-Stewart was startled by this apparent non sequitur.

'You called me... courageous.'

Nonplussed, Lethbridge-Stewart nodded. Then, in case the body language was too subtle for Dockery in his impaired state, he clarified: 'I did.'

The private seemed to be considering the word. 'I was infected... by accident. Now I'm dying... on the floor.' The implication was clear.

Lethbridge-Stewart inwardly sighed. This was not the first time he'd had to comfort a dying man, but never before in these circumstances, let alone with the ever-present threat that the casualty could become a ravaging monster at any second. Nonetheless, he knew his duty. He aimed the flamethrower to one side and crouched down to be nearer Dockery's eye level.

'If you ask me, Private, simply stepping into this warehouse was a tremendous act of courage. None of us knew what we would find here and what we did know wasn't exactly encouraging. You're a member of Her Majesty's Armed Forces and you knew when you signed up that you might be called upon to risk your life. That says

courage to me.'

Dockery's remaining good eye stared manically at Lethbridge-Stewart. 'I'm scared,' he managed.

'You'd be a fool if you weren't,' Lethbridge-Stewart observed. 'To be honest with you, Private, I'm frightened myself. The important thing is how you deal with that fear. You've shown a terrific attitude. When my time comes to die in battle, I hope I can face it with half as much character.'

Dockery shifted forwards, exposing more of the discoloured, sandy areas. 'That's our job,' he stated. 'Dying. Not your job.'

Once again, Lethbridge-Stewart found himself on the back foot. He suppressed an instinct to reproach the man for insubordination. After all, he had to admit, right now, Dockery had a point. Only one of them was likely to climb into their bed tonight and it wasn't the private.

Lethbridge-Stewart stood up again and wandered to the window, thinking about Dockery's insinuation. Gazing through the broken glass, a remnant of Dockery's abortive escape attempt, he found himself looking at an incongruous area of long grass, doubtless some planner's attempt to locate a vestige of the countryside amongst the unforgiving warehouses of Hull's docks. Above ground level, the view was of blank walls, stretching up high enough that Lethbridge-Stewart had to strain to see a glimpse of grey sky. Rain fell, less heavily than before. Looking down again, he marvelled at this oasis of natural beauty, illuminated by the electric lights shining in the few nearby windows. Someone – perhaps a fisherman, a dock worker, probably a regular visitor to this warehouse – had made an effort to tend this small pseudo-garden. It had been trimmed, fairly

recently. By its side could be seen a fish crate, empty and upturned, obviously used as a chair by whoever had also left an ashtray on the ground by its side. With a pang, Lethbridge-Stewart realised that this quiet patch had probably been tended by one of the men who had transformed into a fungus creature and been incinerated by Lethbridge-Stewart's flamethrowers. His patch, his secret garden was his legacy and, before long, it would be overgrown and unremarkable. Lethbridge-Stewart turned around, his response to Dockery's accusation suddenly clear.

'You're right, of course. It's always been the role of the rank and file to die for their country, and the role of the officers to lead them to their deaths. But war can take anyone, Private. When you're fighting an enemy, rank won't protect you. War kills brigadiers and captains. Generals.' He paused, before adding with feeling, 'Air commanders.

'The thing is, anyone can give orders, make strategies, lead people to kill or be killed. That's not leadership, though. A leader – a true leader – is someone who can show others how to live their lives. Someone who leaves the country – the planet – better than it was before. Someone who tends the patch that they've been given and inspires those around them.'

'I just want... to defend my country... and my friends.'

Once again, Lethbridge-Stewart crouched down to look Private Dockery in the eye. 'You don't have to be Winston Churchill or Her Majesty or even a captain or a brigadier to be a leader, Private.'

The two men were silent for a moment. Then the twisted mouth opened again. 'I'm dying.'

‘I know.’

‘No... I’m really dying.’

Dockery lifted his fungal right arm by way of demonstration. Lethbridge-Stewart observed the grainy, blackened appearance of the limb, then realised that when he had first entered the room, this arm had had the same mushroom pallor as the rest of the creatures.

Private Dockery wasn’t mutating. He was dying.

The warehouse was sterilized and abandoned. Derek Younghusband stood at the entrance, staring out into the rain. His men were moving briskly around the otherwise deserted docklands, heavy boots pounding into puddles forming in the roughly-lain concrete’s imperfections.

This should have been the final moments of a successful mission. The captain’s instincts told him otherwise. He made one more fruitless attempt to contact Doctor Travers in the mobile HQ. No joy. Communications were down, Lethbridge-Stewart had yet to emerge, the fungometer was behaving very strangely and the atmosphere felt thick and heavy, even considering the climate.

Younghusband turned his attention to Corporal Bleaney, who ran up to him at that moment.

‘One of the men hasn’t reported in, sir. Private Dockery. Nobody seems to know where he is.’

After a moment’s consideration, Younghusband turned around and headed back inside the warehouse.

‘What’s happening to me?’ asked the helpless Private Dockery.

Lethbridge-Stewart could only shake his head, baffled.

‘I haven’t seen this before. It’s as if the fungus is rotting or decaying. This could be a good sign, Private.’

‘I don’t think so,’ Dockery said. ‘I don’t think there’s anything left of me underneath.’

‘Hold on,’ Lethbridge-Stewart urged. ‘I’ll see if I can get help.’ He whipped out his radio and barked into it. ‘Mayhem Leader to Moreau. Over.’

The only response was the harsh buzz of a lost connection. He tried a few more times, but without success.

‘It doesn’t matter,’ said Dockery. ‘It’s better this way.’

‘In what way?’

‘Given the choice between turning into a fungusman or rotting away in a warehouse, I’ll take ashes to ashes.’ Dockery’s face twitched in what was probably a smile.

Lethbridge-Stewart came to a sudden decision. He stood up and leaned his flamethrower against the wall. ‘Come along, Private,’ he ordered, and bent to help the man stand. Dockery was too surprised to question him and between them, with some considerable effort, they managed to get him on his feet, one of which was crumbling away, making the procedure even more challenging.

‘There isn’t far to go,’ Lethbridge-Stewart reassured the private. ‘But I don’t think this room should be your last sight.’

Slowly, painfully, the two soldiers shuffled towards the door. After what seemed like an age, they emerged into the main warehouse. Lethbridge-Stewart began to steer Dockery to the right, but as they started the next stage of their trek, Captain Younghusband appeared. He yelled out a warning at the sight of the fungus creature wrapped around Lethbridge-Stewart and raised his flamethrower.

‘Hold your fire!’ Lethbridge-Stewart commanded. ‘This is Private Dockery and he means me no harm!’

Younghusband remained with his weapon aimed at the curious twosome, his mouth hanging slightly slack, as Lethbridge-Stewart continued to manoeuvre the mutated private towards a fire exit in the nearby warehouse wall. Together, they barged through it and into the drizzle of the evening.

Private Dockery stared at the warehouseman’s secret garden. The two men stood on the grass, arms around each other, in silence, while the raindrops dropped on them unnoticed. Younghusband observed from the doorway. Nobody spoke for some time. Then, with obvious effort, Dockery extracted himself from his superior officer’s grip and turned to face him.

‘Thank you,’ he said.

Turning, he attempted to reach the crate, but was unable and fell onto the grass, twisting his head upwards to look into the rain as he did so. Lethbridge-Stewart moved to help, but was halted by a shout from Younghusband.

‘Look!’

Dockery’s leg dissolved as they watched. Simultaneously, the mutation seemed to have accelerated and all that had remained visible of the man vanished beneath fungus, which in turn blackened and decomposed. Was it the rain? The outside air? Privately, Lethbridge-Stewart was sure that Dockery had simply stopped fighting.

Within minutes, the creature that had been Private Dockery was gone, his ashen remnants hidden among the blades of grass or washed away by the rain. The surviving soldiers stood still for a while, before turning and re-entering

the warehouse.

‘Mission accomplished, Captain. Call HQ and report that the menace has been defeated.’

‘I can’t, sir,’ Younghusband said. The two men were approaching the warehouse entrance, flamethrowers by their sides. ‘That’s what I was coming to tell you. We’ve lost all radio communications and the fungometer’s gone berserk.’

Lethbridge-Stewart frowned. ‘My radio wouldn’t work, either. Something must be up. See if you can...’

The order went unfinished. They heard shouts from outside the warehouse, soldiers yelling orders. They exchanged glances, but before they could act, a man appeared in the warehouse entrance. Visually, he was unimposing: shorter than either of the soldiers, older, rounder around the middle, hair receding. He wore a tweed suit and looked every inch a scientist or academic. Sight could not account for the effect this man had on the troops outside; nor could any of the usual five senses explain why both Lethbridge-Stewart and Younghusband were stopped in their tracks by a feeling of immense power and malevolence.

Lethbridge-Stewart spoke first. ‘Doctor Walter?’

He peered at the marine biologist in the dim light and saw that the man was subtly changed. His complexion was pasty and pockmarked; his suit ill-fitting, bulging in unexpected places. His eyes were blank, pupils shrunk almost to invisibility.

Lethbridge-Stewart tried again. ‘Doctor Walter, what has happened?’

The scientist seemed to focus on him and opened his mouth. After a pause, he spoke, with a voice that sounded unused. 'You will not defeat us.'

'What are you talking about?' Younghusband began, but Lethbridge-Stewart waved him down.

Lethbridge-Stewart was reminded of a recent mission, and Miss Travers' story about Alan Scott, the Radio Crossbones engineer who had been infected by the fruit of the Grandfathers and how they, and the Ymir, had communicated through him. 'Who am I talking to?' he demanded.

There came no answer.

'Doctor Walter? Can you hear me? Are you in there?'

'We have found him very useful.'

Behind the possessed scientist, Lethbridge-Stewart observed one of Younghusband's men silently advancing on Walter, weapon in hand. Before he got close enough to act, Walter flung one arm backwards and a long, fungus-like tendril shot out of it towards the luckless soldier. He screamed as the fungus lassoed him and fell to the ground, already visibly turning pale.

In the same moment that the men outside opened fire on the figure of Doctor Lloyd Walter, Captain Younghusband launched himself towards him in fury. Walter recoiled from the bullets as much as if the men had been throwing peanuts at him. Lethbridge-Stewart watched in horror as the pockmarks on his face opened up to release clouds of spores, which flew towards Younghusband and the troops outside. Lethbridge-Stewart flung himself to the floor and, looking up, watched as the captain was stopped in his tracks, a yell choked off as the spores entered his system. He fell to the

ground and immediately began to mutate.

Walter grinned down at Lethbridge-Stewart, who slowly got back to his feet and faced him. 'What is it that you want?' he demanded, while calculating the distance between himself and his dropped flamethrower. Walter stretched out his arms towards Lethbridge-Stewart.

'Brigadier! Stay away from him!'

Behind Walter, Lethbridge-Stewart saw the mobile HQ screech to a halt. Miss Travers was leaning out of the door, bellowing for all she was worth, and the thing that had once been Walter turned to face this new foe, who looked aghast at the sight of mutating soldiers all around her. From the driver's seat, Bishop pulled out his gun and aimed it through the window at Walter.

'Shut that door, Miss Travers!' Lethbridge-Stewart yelled. 'He's quite capable of getting you from there!'

'It makes sense now, Brigadier,' Miss Travers shouted back. 'He's the host. He always has been. That's why he tried to stop them from calling in the authorities, that's why he wanted to spread the contagion beyond Hull.'

Walter's apparently sightless eyes fixed upon Miss Travers. 'We need to grow.'

Miss Travers waved her tracker device. 'We registered an enormous spike in this area. It didn't make sense, but it was him. He's incredibly powerful, Brigadier, as much as all the creatures we've met so far put together!'

'You can destroy us,' retorted Walter. 'But we can always make more.'

'They're intelligent!' Lethbridge-Stewart realised. 'We thought they were mindless animals, but they're guided – by you!'

On this, he spun around to grab his weapon, only to find himself facing the fungus creature that used to be Captain Younghusband, aiming a flamethrower directly at Lethbridge-Stewart.

‘Your time is over.’ The host looked at Lethbridge-Stewart mockingly. ‘Our kind will spread across this country within days. Soon, the whole planet will be ours.’

The tracker gave a sudden loud screech; Miss Travers silenced it and stared at the readings in puzzlement. Meanwhile, Bishop chose that moment to empty his weapon into Walter, who barely flinched. Almost immediately afterwards, the window on Bishop’s other side exploded as one of his former comrades launched tendrils into the cabin; Bishop’s screams were brief, then muffled.

All around the warehouse doors, fungus creatures were getting up from the cracked concrete ground. Lethbridge-Stewart watched helplessly as two of them advanced on Miss Travers. ‘Shut the door!’ he yelled again, but instead she looked directly at Walter.

‘Before your creatures kill me, you might want to see this.’

The creatures paused. The host looked at the woman in the doorway curiously. ‘Why would your device interest me?’

‘Attack me and you will never know. I promise you, though, you need to know.’

For a moment, the world paused. Then, slowly, Doctor Walter’s cadaver emerged from the warehouse doorway and stepped into the rain. He walked purposefully towards the Mobile HQ, arm outstretched. The tracker started screeching again and this time she didn’t silence it, but

instead smiled at Walter, who hesitated.

The sequence of events which followed occurred so quickly that it was not until they compared notes afterwards that Lethbridge-Stewart and Miss Travers were able to compose a chronological record. First, the floor appeared to change colour as every little crack in the concrete, every available gap, was penetrated from below by a wispy tendril of fungus. The tendrils moved together, merged and became a mass of thick tendrils which pulled whole chunks of concrete out of the ground as they continued to rise. Within thirty seconds, the whole area was a writhing heap of angry fungus.

In the middle of the monstrosity was Lloyd Walter, composure lost. As he angrily yelled ultimatums at the fungus, it enveloped him and he disappeared from view. Instantly, the fungus creature behind Lethbridge-Stewart dropped the flamethrower and staggered backwards. The other creatures were similarly affected and all stumbled to the floor. As the enormous fungus growth began to sink back beneath the surface – leaving no trace of Doctor Walter – the infection began to retreat from the soldiers, the fungal matter decaying into dust as before. Miss Travers watched in delight as Bishop's features reappeared.

The whole spectacle lasted no more than three minutes. Lethbridge-Stewart and Miss Travers stared at each other across a vista of devastated concrete and unconscious soldiers. Captain Younghusband lay unconscious at Lethbridge-Stewart's feet, his features free from infection.

They met in the middle of the battlefield, two survivors. Lethbridge-Stewart spoke first. 'How did you know that was going to happen?'

Miss Travers indicated the tracker in her hand, which now registered zero. 'The first spike I registered was focused directly on Walter. When the second spike appeared, it was underground and rising. It seemed obvious that Walter knew nothing about it, so...'

'That was a very high stakes gamble, Miss Travers.'

She nodded, but smiled. 'What was it, do you think?'

'Not what. Who.' He explained his encounter with Private Dockery and the last he had seen of him, dissolving into the ground.

'That makes sense,' Miss Travers said. 'When the host was destroyed, all its recent conversions just melted away. They were lucky; the fungus had done a more permanent job on Dockery.'

'What do you think caused him to disintegrate?'

Miss Travers thought for a moment. 'Well, if he really was the last of the creatures, maybe it was the host drawing all the energy into himself – the spike I was tracking. Dockery was probably a casualty of that.'

Lethbridge-Stewart was no longer really listening. He was thinking about Private Dockery, doubting his own courage; about his own words concerning leadership.

'Extraordinary,' he mused. 'Even though he had had all his humanity taken from him, turned into an alien creature by an evil consciousness, he still wanted to defend his country and his friends. Could any of us guarantee we would show the same resolve?'

'It must have taken an incredible force of will,' Miss Travers agreed. 'We all wonder what will survive of us when we've gone. In Dockery's case, it was... duty? Patriotism?'

They stood in silence for a moment. *She is right,*

Lethbridge-Stewart thought. Everything physical that had been Private Dockery was gone, but what survived of him was love: his love for his patch.

Captain Younghusband started to groan and lift himself up from the floor. Miss Travers dashed over to help him to his feet; he looked around in disorientation, flinching from the memory of his recent possession. He was relieved to see the rest of his men beginning to return to consciousness too. Among them stood Lethbridge-Stewart, staring at the floor.

Considering the day he had had, it was a surprisingly cheerful and optimistic Alistair Lethbridge-Stewart who climbed into his bed that night.

The tea was cold. Derek looked at Eileen across the table. She had said little during the story and he was waiting for her to ridicule him, to dismiss the existence of alien fungus creatures out of hand.

Instead, she spoke softly. 'That must have been awful for you. I'd hate to go through a dehumanising experience like that. I saw enough of that during the war, and after.'

'You believe me?' Derek asked, surprised.

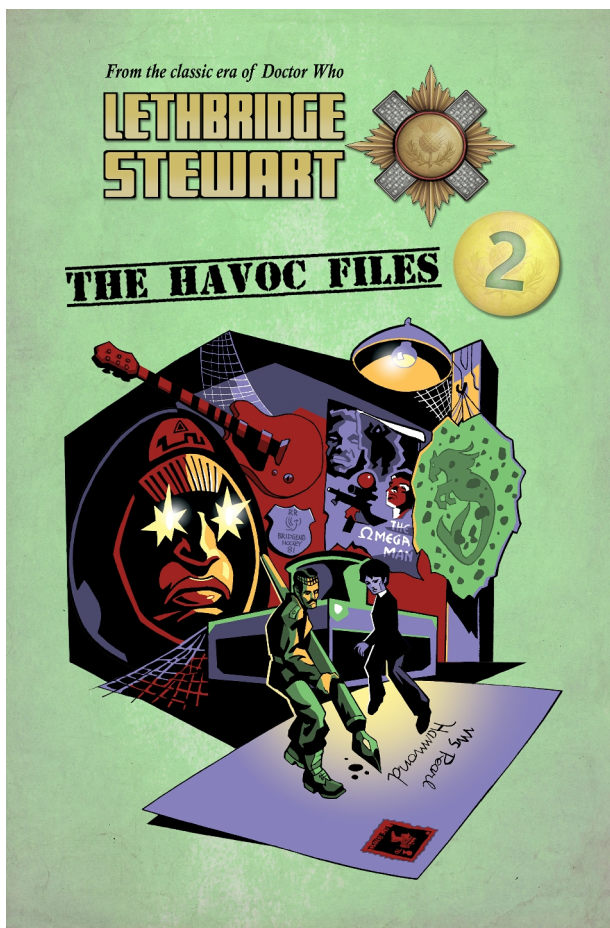
'Of course I do,' she replied. 'Frankly, I'm not surprised to see those little blighters are still out there.'

'Sorry?'

'Aliens,' Eileen said, taking their cups and crossing the kitchen to put the kettle back on the hob. 'You're not the first Younghusband to encounter them, you know.'

Derek looked at his cousin in shock as the kettle began to whistle and her grinning face became shrouded in steam.

To read more about
Captain Younghusband check out
The HAVOC Files 2. Available now!
Please click on the image below:



Eileen Younghusband
4 July 1921 – 2 September 2016



Eileen was born in London in 1921. In 1941, aged nineteen, she joined the Women's Auxiliary Air Force. Serving in the top secret Filter Room, the nerve centre of Britain's radar defence system, Eileen and her fellow Filter Officers collected and interpreted radar information, identifying incoming air raids.

In 1944, Eileen was sent to Belgium, where she and a small team of women pinpointed the positions of V2 rocket launch sites. After VE Day, she worked as a translator and guide at the liberated Breendonk concentration camp, informing RAF personnel of the horrors they had been fighting .

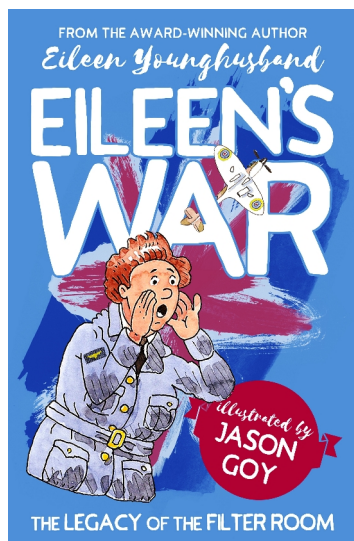
After the war, Eileen carved out a successful career in the hotel and catering trade. She had five books published, and in 2013 won the People's Book Prize for *One Woman's War*. She was a passionate advocate of adult education, having graduated from the Open University at the age of 87, and in 2013 she was awarded a British Empire Medal for her services to lifelong learning.

Eileen married Peter Young husband in 1944. They had a son, Clive, in 1946.

EILEEN'S WAR



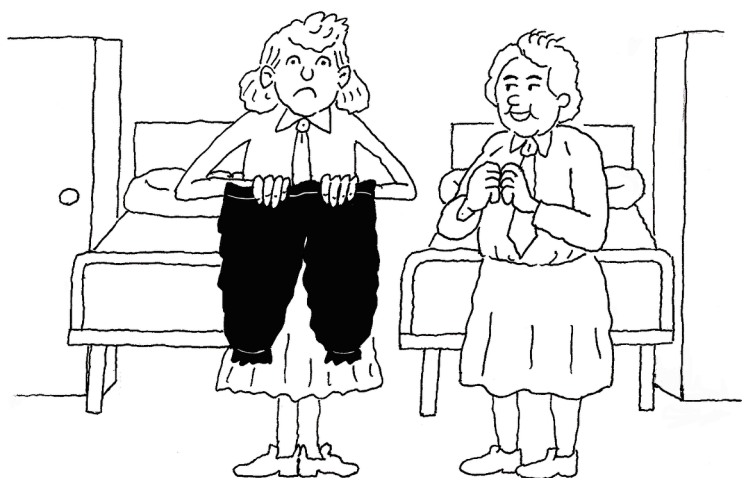
EILEEN YOUNGHUSBAND



We marched back to our hut, an unlikely group. By then the whole hut was full of girls, some as young as me, some much older, but all new recruits and wondering what they were going to do there. I soon found out what a mixture we were. My bed was between two girls who seemed to know each other quite well, called Peggy and Jean, both were from Devon.

One very quiet girl whispered her introduction, 'I'm Doreen and I'm from Southampton.' Then there was Nancy, a loud character who announced that she had decided to join up because she was fed up of men, and

Hettie, a Cockney girl who was very friendly. We got on immediately, and began chatting right away. As I attempted to keep up with the others to return to the hut, I tried not to giggle as she whispered to me: 'You won't get me wearing those black bloomers!'



We all were called to tea at the Mess, which was thick corned-beef sandwiches, a slice of *yellow peril* – a solid rock of cake – and strong tea.

After the meal, and while the girls were trying on their uniforms and laughing at Hettie parading around in her blackouts, I managed to slip off to call my parents.

I could only talk for a few minutes as there was a long queue forming behind me, but I just had time to ask my father to send me a bath plug.

‘What on earth do you want that for? Are you going to be a plumber?’

‘No,’ I explained. ‘I have seen the baths and none of them have plugs in them, so I thought it would be a good idea if I had my own.’ I could hear him laughing down the phone.

The following days were a jumble of marching in time, left right, left right, learning the ranks of officers, how to salute and who to salute. Then we were told the history of the RAF, how much leave we might get, how much pay we would get, what to do and what not to do, but I still didn’t know anything about my role. I asked around what the others were hoping to be trained for. There were girls who would be trained as drivers and cooks, parachute packers and telephone operators, but no mention of Clerks Special Duties.

The two weeks of training flew by and my last day at Innsworth finally arrived. We were called in to the office one by one to find out where we would be posted. Finally, I was given another rail warrant and told to report to RAF Leighton Buzzard, where my special training would begin.

I stood with my RAF members for the pay parade and waited for my name to be called out – ‘445020 *le Croisette*’ – and came forward to receive my pay. I was growing more and more excited – finally I would know what Clerk Special Duties meant! We spent our last night in hut seven packing the things we had brought from home, along with our uniforms, our irons, and our black bloomers.

One Woman's War

Eileen Younghusband

“The Work carried out by the WAAF on Radar Operations during WW2 was a major contribution in the defence of our country. This book is a testament to their valuable work.”

Dame Vera Lynn



There was much speculation amongst all of us at 33 Wing as to how we would be deployed, where we would be sent and what we would do. Already many RAF personnel from units in Belgium had returned to Britain for reposting, perhaps to the Far East. In the meantime Belgium needed help to regain peacetime stability.

In the days following VE Day, 33 Wing was gradually closing down, our job done. Some airwomen and a few Filterer Officers had already been sent back to Fighter Command for duties there. Those who had joined the WAAF earliest would now receive training towards helping them back to civilian life and would be the first demobilised. The rest of us were given various admin duties – compiling records, arranging postings or working with the Town Major's department.

I was anxious to know what my fate would be. When I

was told what I was to do, it came as a total surprise and a considerable shock. Exactly a week after VE Day I was called into the C.O's office and told that as I was able to converse adequately in French, I was to act as a guide and interpreter. For what? To where?

Only twelve kilometres from Malines near a town called Willebroek was a fortress. It had been built in 1909 on an original Roman site, as part of the fortifications encircling Antwerp in preparation for any German attack. At the beginning of World War Two it was used as an office for King Leopold, but when the German army invaded neutral Belgium in 1940 they had taken it over for a much more sinister purpose.

At first it was used as a holding camp for Belgian Jews, prior to their being transported in railway wagons from Malines to Auschwitz. A particularly cruel and vicious SS officer, Lager Commandant Philipp Schmitt, took over and changed it into a concentration camp not only for Jews but homosexuals, gypsies and above all, captured Resistance fighters. Treatment there became harsher, more stringent, and much crueller.

Some Belgian youths formed their own SS. Many of these men were employed there and put in positions of authority over their fellow countrymen. Fort Breendonk became notorious and greatly feared. Despite being a small camp, many people considered it as terrible a place as Auschwitz or Bergen-Belsen.

There was one guard for every ten prisoners. Few were ever freed. Nearly 500 died there, many from starvation. The rest perished after being sent to the other death camps. In August 1944, as the Allies made their way through

France, the Germans closed the camp and the remaining prisoners were despatched to Auschwitz. This Belgian hellhole was where I was being sent.

The local RAF commander in Belgium decided that as many personnel as possible should be shown this camp and learn of the terrible events that had taken place within its walls. My grim task was to escort these groups each day and tell them what had taken place there. And so it began – an experience I had never expected to undergo and the beginning of memories that have stayed with me to this very day.

On the first morning the RAF driver picked me up at the Mess at 0815 hours. We drove for about half an hour through pleasant countryside and villages to the small town of Willebroek. I sat silently wondering what I would encounter. Fort Breendonk lay on the outskirts.

As we approached I could see high earth mounds concealing the camp. The driver dropped me there. I told him to return three hours later. I turned and walked over the stone bridge to the front entrance. I saw the whole site was surrounded by a wide moat, filled with murky water. My heart was beating rapidly; I could already feel the menace of the place.

Entering the archway I was stopped by a guard. I showed him my letter of introduction and my RAF pass and he fetched the Head Warder, a man in his mid-forties. He told me he had been expecting me. We spoke in French, although I imagined from his accent that he normally spoke Flemish. He explained that prior to the war he had been in the prison service. He had joined the Resistance during the occupation and fortunately was never discovered.

We crossed the main courtyard. It was filled with prisoners, men mostly in their late teens and their twenties. They stared at me with what I took to be animosity. The prison officer took me on a tour of the camp, explaining the main points of interest – and cruelty. He said that when I was taking the airmen around, he would be with me in case they wished for any further information. He seemed amiable enough although he showed little expression.

As we began the tour my first question was: ‘Who are the men exercising in the courtyard?’ He explained that they were Belgian collaborators who had actively helped the Germans during the occupation. Many had joined the Belgian SS and had worked as guards in the camp. They had been as vicious as their paymasters. They would go on trial very soon and many of them would pay the penalty of their treason with execution.

As the tour round the prison camp continued, the stories I was told chilled my blood. Initially it was used to round up Belgian Jews before they were transported by cattle truck from the holding station at Malines. They lived in concrete bunkers that had no heating. Their sleeping quarters, designed for 30, were accommodating double that number. The bunks were three-tiered and they slept on straw mattresses. In the daytime their toilet facilities consisted of two trenches in the main courtyard. They were only allowed to stay there two minutes, otherwise they were beaten. I could imagine the consequences.

Food for the Jews was less than for other prisoners and many died of starvation. During the years of the German occupation, more and more members of the Resistance would be imprisoned there, especially the Communists. In

order to make them talk, they would first be put in solitary confinement cells. The ceilings of these cells were open grilles, giving them a cage-like appearance. Some of the prisoners would be manacled, with their hands secured above their heads to the wall, and their feet chained. They had two meals a day served through a cat-hole in the door. In order to eat, their hands would be freed but they had to lie on the floor to reach the food, like animals. Those destined for special punishment were softened up with the harshest treatment.

As I entered these cells I saw how some had scratched messages on the walls with their fingernails. One Resistance fighter had written: *Trahi par ma maitresse, Leonardine Boissons de Courtrai*. Betrayed by my mistress, Leonardine Boissons from Courtrai. One inmate had drawn the face of Christ, another had marked the days of his imprisonment in the cells by scratched lines in rows of seven.

The most horrifying place of all was the torture chamber, a large bare room with high ceilings and no windows. The only things in the room were a large stand bearing a butcher's block on it, scarred and stained, and a small wooden slatted bed. The warder told me that as well as beating the prisoners and torturing them with hot irons, electric current would be applied to all the orifices of the body to induce them to talk, to betray their comrades. When they collapsed or fainted, they were thrown on the bed and the jack-booted guards would stamp on their legs to bring them round. The broken slats bore witness to the force used and the many broken bones suffered.

To let the next poor creature destined for this treatment know what was to happen to him, he was made to stand

behind a short partition and hear the cries of anguish of the one being tortured.

Outside in a hidden corner I saw the gallows and nearby the posts stained brown with blood where the executions took place. In another area was a huge empty piece of tilled ground. Here Jews would be buried up to their necks, often suffocating. Over four thousand captives were incarcerated in this camp during those dreadful years. Many more were brutally tortured before being sent to their death in other concentration camps. Those not tortured were subjected to forced labour, building the huge earth wall surrounding the camp and hiding it from view. They had the minimum of tools and sometimes had to dig with their bare hands.

Very few prisoners were ever released but I was to meet one of those lucky few, a man who lived locally and had been incarcerated as a homosexual. He told me how those already ill were encouraged to die. They were sent to the bath area, stripped of their clothes and made to wait in the open air whatever the weather, then plunged into baths of scalding water. After emerging, once more they had to stand naked for a further time outside. Many died of pneumonia within a few days. He described how he had been tied with others to a large wheel and for hours had to push it round to draw water from the well. He had a comparatively easy time.

After that first visit I returned to my waiting transport emotionally drained. I was unable to talk about it for the whole of the return journey even though the driver asked me. For the next two weeks I continued to take parties of RAF personnel, about ten at a time, and show them of the horrors of Breendonk. Many were already hardened by war

but had tears in their eyes as they listened.

I had to steel myself daily to relate these horrors. Until they saw the torture chamber and heard the warder's descriptions, many said they could not have believed that so-called civilised people could think up such atrocities. And every day as we walked through the courtyard, the Belgian traitors exercising there would swear at us in Flemish and even urinate at me. I would walk past and hold my head high and tell the airmen these men had betrayed their friends and their country.

The memories of those two weeks will never leave me. Often at night, I awaken and see again those messages scratched with bloodied nails, by the doomed prisoners on the walls of the cells. There are still many people who will never forget the horrors of Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen and Treblinka. I will never forget Fort Breendonk.



To read more about Eileen:

Not An Ordinary Life (Kindle)
One Woman's War (Book, Audiobook & Kindle)
Men I Have Known (Book & Kindle)
Eileen's War (Book & Kindle)
Life Musings (Kindle)

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by Andy Frankham-Allen

For Colonel Alistair Lethbridge-Stewart his life in the Scots Guards was straightforward enough; rising in the ranks through nineteen years of military service. But then his regiment was assigned to help combat the Yeti incursion in London, the robotic soldiers of an alien entity known as the Great Intelligence. For Lethbridge-Stewart, life would never be the same again.

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What connects these strange events to the recent Yeti incursion, and just what has it all to do with Lethbridge-Stewart?

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Fang Rock has always had a bad reputation. Since 1955 the lighthouse has been out of commission, shut down because of fire that gutted the entire tower. But now, finally updated and fully renovated, the island and lighthouse is once again about to be brought back into service.

Students have gathered on Fang Rock to celebrate the opening of the ‘most haunted lighthouse of the British Isles’, but they get more than they bargained for when the ghosts of long-dead men return, accompanied by a falling star.

What connects a shooting star, ghosts of men killed in 1902 and the beast that roamed Fang Rock in 1823? Lethbridge-Stewart and Anne Travers are about to discover the answer first hand...

“With a story of ghostly recordings much in the style of Nigel Kneale’s Stone Tape, Anne Travers rather steals the story and becomes the key character. Overall a good tale. Worth a read.” – Starburst Magazine

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It's the summer of '69. Flower power is at its height, and nuclear power is in its infancy. Journalist Harold Chorley is out of work, and Colonel Alistair Lethbridge-Stewart is out of sorts. Dominex Industries are on the up, promising cheap energy for all. But people have started going missing near their plant on Dartmoor. Coincidence, or are sinister forces at work?

Join Lethbridge-Stewart and uneasy ally Harold Chorley as they delve into the secrets behind Dominex, and uncover a plan that could bring about the end of the world.

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LETHBRIDGE-STEWART: MOON BLINK

by Sadie Miller

July 1969, and mankind is on the Moon. Both the United States and Soviet Russia have lunar bases, and both are in trouble.

Back on Earth, Anne Travers has learned she is about to be visited by an old friend from America, Doctor Patricia Richards. Lance Corporal Bill Bishop is aware of the visit, and is on hand to meet Richards.

She brings with her a surprise, one which the Americans and Russians wish to get their hands on. But the only man who can truly help Anne, Colonel Lethbridge-Stewart, is away in Scotland.

It's a game of cat and mouse, as Anne and Bishop seek to protect the life of an innocent baby – one that holds the secrets to life on the Moon.

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by Jonathan Cooper

‘Nuzzink in ze world can schtop me now!’

There’s a new TV show about to hit the airwaves, but Colonel Lethbridge-Stewart won’t be tuning in. With the future of the Fifth Operational Corps in doubt he’s got enough to worry about, but a plea from an old friend soon finds Lethbridge-Stewart and Anne Travers embroiled in a plot far more fantastical than anything on the small screen.

Can charismatic star Aubrey Mondegreene really be in two places at the same time? What lengths will ailing entertainment mogul Billy Lovac go to in order to reach his audience? And is luckless journalist Harold Chorley really so desperate that he’ll buy into a story about Nazi conspiracies from a tramp wearing a tin foil hat?

There’s something very rotten at the heart of weekend television, and it isn’t all due to shoddy scripts and bad special effects.

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by John Peel

The late 1960s and pirate radio is at its height.

Something stirs in the depths of the North Sea, and for Radio Crossbones that means bad news.

Lethbridge-Stewart and his newly assembled Fifth Operational Corps are called in to investigate after the pirate radio station is mysteriously taken off the air, and a nuclear submarine is lost with all hands.

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