

= The Sontaran Stratagem =

" The Sontaran Stratagem " is the fourth episode of the fourth series of the British science fiction television series Doctor Who , which depicts the adventures of a time @-@ travelling humanoid alien known as the Doctor . The episode was broadcast on BBC One on 26 April 2008 . The episode and its sequel , " The Poison Sky " , were written by Helen Raynor , who previously wrote the linked episodes " Daleks in Manhattan " and " Evolution of the Daleks " in the third series .

" The Sontaran Stratagem " features the first appearance of the alien Sontarans to the series since the 1985 Colin Baker story The Two Doctors , as well as former companion Martha Jones ( Freema Agyeman ) , last seen in " Last of the Time Lords " . The episode takes place on present @-@ day Earth , where Martha and UNIT summon the Doctor ( David Tennant ) for assistance concerning ATMOS ( Atmospheric Omission System ) , a revolutionary piece of green technology installed in 400 million cars worldwide . ATMOS is later revealed to be part of a Sontaran plot to poison the atmosphere .

Show runner Russell T Davies had considered making the Sontarans return since the revival of the series and wanted to show changes in Martha 's personality after her departure . The episode was viewed by 7 @.@ 06 million viewers after its original broadcast , with an Appreciation Index of " 87 " . Critics gave generally positive reviews , praising the return of the Sontarans , Christopher Ryan 's portrayal as Staal , and Raynor 's writing ; some stated Raynor improved from her previous episodes .

= = Plot = =

Martha Jones , a former companion of the Doctor , calls him to ask for assistance during an investigation by UNIT ( Unified Intelligence Taskforce ) . Minutes after the Doctor 's craft , the TARDIS , materialises in contemporary Britain , Martha authorises the raid of an ATMOS factory . The Doctor introduces his companion Donna Noble ( Catherine Tate ) to Martha and UNIT ; Donna instantly befriends Martha , but is concerned about UNIT 's ethics and asks the Doctor why he is associated with them ; the Doctor ambiguously replies he used to work for them in the " 70s or 80s . "

ATMOS is marketing a satellite navigation system developed by young prodigy Luke Rattigan ( Ryan Sampson ) . The system also reduces carbon dioxide emissions to zero ; UNIT requested the Doctor 's help because the technology is not contemporary and might be alien . UNIT are also concerned about fifty @-@ two simultaneous deaths occurring spontaneously several days earlier . The Doctor travels to Rattigan 's private school to investigate the system and discovers that the recent events have been plotted by an alien warrior race known as the Sontarans .

The Sontarans are part of a battlegroup led by General Staal , " the undefeated " ( Christopher Ryan ) . Instead of an outright invasion , they are taking control with a combination of human clones , mind control , and ATMOS ; Martha is captured by two of the controlled humans and cloned to provide a mole within UNIT .

Meanwhile , Donna returns home to warn her mother Sylvia ( Jacqueline King ) and grandfather Wilfred Mott ( Bernard Cribbins ) about the Doctor , having been advised to do so by Martha . Concerned about the implications of telling the truth , Donna decides against warning her mother . The Doctor investigates the ATMOS device attached to Donna 's car and discovers a secondary function : the device can emit a poisonous gas . Wilfred attempts to take the car off the road , but is trapped when Staal activates all 400 million ATMOS devices installed in cars worldwide . The episode 's cliffhanger depicts Donna shouting for help while the Doctor stares helplessly at a street full of cars emitting the gas , while on their ship orbiting the planet , the Sontarans prepare themselves for battle .

= = Production = =

### === Conception ===

The episode features the return of the Sontarans , who last appeared in the 1985 serial *The Two Doctors* ; a central appearance by UNIT ; and Martha Jones , who had last appeared in " *Last of the Time Lords* " and made special guest appearances in the *Torchwood* episodes " *Reset* " , " *Dead Man Walking* " , and " *A Day in the Death* . " The brief that executive producer Russell T Davies gave to writer Helen Raynor included the terms " Sontarans " , " military " , and " Martha 's back " .

This episode continues the pattern of having monsters from the classic series return in the new one . Davies commented that the Sontarans were " always on his list " of villains to resurrect . The time and location of the episode was chosen because every previous Sontaran story except for *The Invasion of Time* was set on Earth .

### === Writing ===

Martha 's departure allowed Davies to change the character 's personality . In her reappearance , she is more mature and equal to the Doctor , as opposed to the third series , in which she was in love with him . The writers debated several aspects of her character , her status and reaction to Donna in particular . Raynor elected to emphasise Martha 's medical career over her military career , and avoided a " *handbags at dawn* " scenario because she felt it would rehash Rose Tyler 's ( Billie Piper ) initial opinion of former companion Sarah Jane Smith ( Elisabeth Sladen ) from the second series episode " *School Reunion* " .

The episode is the first major appearance of UNIT since the show 's revival . Their name has changed from United Nations Intelligence Taskforce to Unified Intelligence Taskforce at the request of the United Nations , who cited the political climate and potential " brand confusion " as reasons for disassociation . The new acronym was coined by Davies after several meetings among the scriptwriters . The UNIT privates Gray and Wilson were specifically written as " alien fodder " . The episode refers to inconsistencies in dating UNIT stories when the Doctor is unsure whether he worked for UNIT in the 1970s or 1980s .

Raynor initially envisioned the poisonous gas would be emitted by factories , but changed it in later drafts to cars for several reasons : the episode would provide social commentary and the idea of an " evil satnav system " was " much more engageable " and " irresistible " . Davies thought the concept was " so very Doctor Who " . Because the series was produced out of order , the " *ATMOS* " subplot was seeded in the previous episode " *Partners in Crime* " . The " *fifteenth broken moon* " of the *Medusa Cascade* is also mentioned . The *Medusa Cascade* was previously mentioned in " *Last of the Time Lords* " , " *Partners in Crime* " , and in " *The Fires of Pompeii* " . In the episode , a system installed in a UNIT jeep undramatically explodes ; originally , Raynor wanted it to be a large explosion , but reduced the explosion to several sparks to reduce costs and to lampoon an action movie cliché .

The episode , like " *Aliens of London* " and " *The Lazarus Experiment* " , properly introduces the lead companion 's family . Unlike the Tyler or Jones families , both Sylvia Noble and Wilfred Mott had met the Doctor before ( in " *The Runaway Bride* " and " *Voyage of the Damned* " , respectively ) , providing Raynor with an additional subplot . Expository dialogue explains Mott 's absence from " *The Runaway Bride* " by the character having had Spanish flu . Wilfred 's positive opinion of the Doctor is different from Sylvia 's , who , according to Tennant , joined " a long line of mothers that don 't quite get the Doctor " ; Davies had wanted a family member who trusted the Doctor since the show 's revival .

### === Filming ===

The opening scene , which depicts the system driving reporter Jo Nakashima into the canal , was filmed at Cardiff 's docks . The scene was the first time a car @-@ cannon had been used since 2005 , and was required to be completed in one shot . The car fired into the canal was removed immediately afterwards to clear the shipping route . Scenes at the Rattigan Academy were filmed at

Margam Country Park , Port Talbot from 23 to 26 October 2007 . The London skyline and gas were added in post @-@ production by The Mill .

When interviewed on Friday Night with Jonathan Ross , Catherine Tate stated that she had been filming alongside ten actors playing Sontarans for two weeks before she realised that there were actors inside the Sontaran costumes . She had assumed the Sontarans " ran on electricity " . It was not until an actor removed his helmet to reveal his real face that she realised her mistake . She stated she was " freaked out " by this and said she " nearly died " .

Despite the Sontarans ' clone culture being asserted in the classic series , " The Sontaran Strategem " is the first episode to depict the cloning process . Originally , all of the factory workers were to be clones , but Raynor reduced this to only Martha to solve continuity problems with the second part . The template clone was portrayed by Ruari Mears , who wore a prosthetic mask that took longer to apply than any he had previously worn . The scenes involving the cloning tank were filmed in a Welsh shampoo factory and reused a prop from " The Fires of Pompeii " as the tank which contained the clone . Davies and Agyeman enjoyed the scenes set in the cloning room ; Agyeman liked playing an " evil companion " , who she and Davies felt made the real Martha " warmer " , and Davies thought Privates Gray and Harris discovering the tank in a darkened room was " classic Doctor Who " .

= = Broadcast and reception = =

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" The Sontaran Strategem " was the most @-@ watched programme in its timeslot , with 7 @. @ 06 million viewers . The episode was the second most @-@ watched programme of the day , beaten by Britain 's Got Talent , and was the seventeenth most @-@ watched programme of the week . The episode 's Appreciation Index was 87 ( considered " Excellent " ) , the highest figure recorded on its airdate .

= = = Critical reception = = =

Mark Wright of The Stage commented overall that the episode as " about as deliciously old @-@ fashioned as new Who gets , " stating that the script was " a deftly simple premise that makes you wonder why you didn 't think of it yourself " , and that Tate 's character moved away from the caricature in " The Runaway Bride " . Wright also praised Agyeman for " effortlessly " portraying Martha and her evil cloned counterpart . A fan of the Sontarans , Wright reacted positively to their return and redesign . Ben Rawson @-@ Jones of Digital Spy rated the episode four stars out of five . Rawson @-@ Jones felt the narrative was well plotted and paced , and felt Helen Raynor 's writing had improved from " Daleks in Manhattan " . Rawson @-@ Jones also praised the reintroductions of UNIT , Martha , Donna 's family and the Sontarans , the interaction between Donna and Martha , and Christopher Ryan 's portrayal of Staal , but felt Skorr 's voice was " distinctly lacklustre . " The episode 's direction by Douglas Mackinnon also received criticism , particularly the scenes in the clone room . In the end , Rawson @-@ Jones felt that the first part 's effectiveness lies on how much the viewers wish to tune in to see " The Poison Sky " .

Matt Wales of IGN rated the episode a " good " 7 @. @ 9 out of 10 , stating that despite the episode 's premise , it came " perilously close to greatness , " and praised Raynor 's " crackling script which graciously walked the tightrope between balls @-@ out farce and affectionate sci @-@ fi pastiche " . Wales noted that Tennant and Tate " relished " the perpetual swings from " square @-@ jawed serious " to " faintly sadistic subversion " , to mess with audience expectations . Ryan 's performance as Staal was again praised , but Wales felt Agyeman still displayed " the charisma and range of a dead fish , despite Martha 's transformation from lovesick sap to Ripley @-@ esque super soldier . " Wales summed up that the episode " did pretty much everything a two @-@ part opener should ? swiftly shifting the pieces into place for next week 's inevitably bombastic

showdown . " Alan Stanley Bear of Airlock Alpha called " The Sontaran Strategem " an " exciting and nostalgic adventure " , and said that the episode lives up to the show 's reputation for transforming a normal object , in this case the car , to a " global killer " . Bear praised the episode for Donna and Martha 's introduction being opposite to Rose Tyler and Sarah Jane Smith 's in " School Reunion " , for providing a human element in the subplot where Donna visits her grandfather , and for the episode 's cliffhanger . However , Bear wrote that it took too long to " get to the point " , and criticized the " bland Sontaran dialogue and the cliched simplicity of mind control " , which he felt " reduced what could have been a fantastically intricate story piece into Saturday morning cartoon material . "

John Beresford of TV Scoop thought the episode lived up to many of his expectations , with sharp dialogue and some humour , a well @-@ plotted story , and a good pace overall with a " heap of action " , despite the episode 's slow start . Beresford also praised the reintroduction of UNIT from the " old , tired UNIT " to a " newly revamped and spiffy UNIT with lots of cool gadgets " , the Doctor 's meeting with Rattigan , calling the scene " an inspired piece of writing " , and the episode 's cliffhanger , calling it " the best yet " . He also believed the ATMOS idea worked well . The only weak spot Beresford noted was that the Sontarans appeared to have been softened from their previous appearance , stating that Staal would " shoot first and ask questions later . "

= = = Reviews = = =

" The Sontaran Stratagem " / " The Poison Sky " reviews at The Doctor Who Ratings Guide