

# Review - DOCTOR WHO: The Pilot

Kevin M. Johnston

The series 10 premiere of *Doctor Who* starts with a shot of the Doctor's desk at a university with two picture frames obscured by sunlight. "I bet the pictures on the desk are either River or Susan," I said to myself. "Maybe both." With twelve years of *Who* behind him, how could Steven Moffat possibly surprise us at this point? Well, I was right about the pictures but I was wrong when it came to the rest of the episode.

While Moffat has written solid intros in the past (Season 5's "The Eleventh Hour" shines particularly bright), there's an element of *Doctor Who* he's often missed: the Doctor as a mystery to his companions. Gone was the ornery unknowability of the First Doctor, the ancient enigma of the Seventh or the unspeakably dark memories of the Ninth. For too long, Moffat's Doctor has always been the one figuring out the big questions with the companions (Amy, Rory, River and Clara) as the source of the mystery.

But this time, our new companion, Bill Potts (Pearl Mackie), is just an ordinary girl. She's chatty, curious and ambitious and in "The Pilot", Moffat makes sure we see the world through her eyes. To Bill, the Doctor (Peter Capaldi) is an enigmatic professor with a strange butler named Nardole (Matt Lucas) and a 1960s police box in the corner of his office. He's apparently been at the same university for over fifty years and his lectures are legendary (what we see is equally engaging and meaningless). When Bill attends, despite just working in the cafeteria, he offers her the chance to be privately tutored. Between lessons, she follows the Doctor around and discovers that he's been protecting a massive futuristic vault underneath the university for all these years. Why? We don't know. The Doctor remains a mystery and the season arc becomes far more compelling because we enter it at ground level alongside Bill, rather than alongside the Doctor.

The actual plot of the episode, involving a love story for Bill and a sentient oil puddle, is well-executed but is essentially window-dressing for the character and arc work being done. In that regard, it's also echoing the revived series opener "Rose", where a plot about malignant shop dummies is there to draw Rose into the world of *Who* more than anything. That's not something you can get away with every week, mind, but in this case, it lands.

Peter Capaldi continues to dazzle and intimidate with only twelve episodes remaining in his all-too-short tenure as the Doctor, while Pearl Mackie hits it out of the park right away. She's instantly likeable and brings the same sort of nervous energy that Clara (Jenna Coleman) brought in her debut season. Even Matt Lucas is given a chance to thrive and as a result, a steady rhythm is established between the three companions and I'm left excited to see more Nardole (another huge surprise).

All in all, "The Pilot" is a breath of fresh air. It appears that both Stephen Moffat and Peter Capaldi will be going out on a high, and after twelve years, nothing could be more impressive than leaving the fans wanting more.