



DOCTOR WHO

The War of Art by Paul Cornell

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‘Right!’ said the Doctor, locking the TARDIS doors. ‘This is the Paloma Centre, the biggest collection of art in the universe. We’ve arrived in the middle of the night, so we can sneak about, without anyone seeing –’

He turned and saw that bright green sunlight was shining in through a glass ceiling. Onto an enormous crowd of startled tourists of many different alien species. All of whom had stopped looking at the many different pictures and artworks that filled the hall. And were now looking at him.

‘Ah,’ he said. ‘So. Plan B.’

And he took a bow.

Which made the crowd start applauding. At first hesitantly, and then enthusiastically, and then wildly. Obviously, they thought that the arrival of the TARDIS had been some sort of artistic statement.

The Doctor stepped forward, acknowledging the applause. ‘Thank you, thank you. The TARDIS is a bit wonderful, isn’t she? She should get more of that, actually. Clapping, yes, bravo!’ And he turned and joined in, applauding the TARDIS himself as a group of small, spherical security robots, assuming this had all been planned, hovered quickly down and put a velvet rope on posts around the Doctor’s time machine.

The Doctor turned again and nearly walked straight into a slightly larger version of the robots. This one had a stern look, if it was possible for a blank metal sphere to have any sort of look. It had floated down to look him sphere to eye.

'Wait a sec,' said the Doctor, holding up a finger to postpone that confrontation. 'What am I missing. I'm missing an Amy, that's what I'm missing! Pond, where have you gone?!' But then he realised that Amy, for some strange reason, had been shouting to him when he left the TARDIS, that she didn't seem to have agreed with his course of action in coming out here, and that she had actually gone so far as to stay behind. So he shrugged and moved on. 'I'm looking for my favourite painting, you see,' he said to the sphere, taking it aside for a confidential chat, 'I think I left it somewhere in history, but her indoors-' he jerked his thumb in the direction of the TARDIS, 'she thinks I've just forgotten where I put it in there. As if! My memory's in perfect working order! Now, who might you be?'

'Hello, Doctor,' said the sphere, drily. 'How nice to see you again.'

'Do we -? I never forget a face, but you haven't actually, erm -'

'We *have* met.'

'Once across a crowded room? A ballroom? A room filled with balls? I'm clutching at straws here -'

'On several occasions.'

'When we -?'

'When we worked together to -'

'Run a mobile disco?'

'Save the universe.'

'Oh! Right! It's you! Armidagertaflex 333.9!' The Doctor plinked his finger chummily against the floating ball's casing. 'Just having you on there. No, really. Anyway. Good to see you're still in... the arts?'

'I am now chief robot curator sphere of the Paloma Centre.'

'Yes. Good. Just the sphere I need to talk to.'

'Indeed,' said Armidagertaflex 333.9. 'If you wish to find a painting, Doctor, then you have come to the right place.'

But unknown to the Doctor and his old friend, their conversation was being overheard. Orbiting the planet upon which the Paloma Centre took up an entire continent was a squat battleship of gun metal grey, inside the dark corridors of which menacing shapes marched and hissed.

A leathery grey finger jabbed at a screen, upon which the Doctor's face smiled, big and annoying. 'There!' snarled an alien voice. 'A Time Lord! We did indeed detect the landing of a space/time travel capsule!'

'The buildings below form some sort of archive, commander,' reported a second voice.

'And he's looking for something, he is consulting with what seems to be a curator,' hissed the first speaker. The curator is checking his archive computers, his list of items.' Urgent grey hands moved controls, trying to add sound to the picture, but it was not to be, the Paloma Centre's security countermeasures were too powerful. 'If the last of the Time Lords comes seeking an artefact, then it must be something of great power –'

'Something that we should possess!'

'Because we must possess all!'

The hissing rose in a great chorus all round them, making the dense atmosphere of the ship ring and squeal in unison.

'Prepare the landing craft,' declared the alien commander. 'Follow, discover, destroy and take!'

'As you may or may not remember,' said Armidagertaflex 333.9 as he led the Doctor through the halls of the Centre, 'the Paloma Centre is devoted to either collecting, or tracking the history of, every great work of art in the universe.'

'Yes, that's why I came here. Not a complete idiot. Only ever a partial one. Mostly.'

'This is our Andy Warhol collection.' They were moving through a hall lined with paintings of Marilyn Monroe and soup cans, popular images repeated many times in bright colours.

'Love a bit of Warhol. Hey, is that-?' The Doctor had stopped, and was pointing at a figure who was standing looking at a giant empty canvas, oblivious to the visitors that milled around him.

'We keep android copies of the great artists, each with the memories of the original.'

‘Andy!’ The Doctor waved. ‘It’s me! The Doctor! I popped back to see you every Thursday that Summer, and you painted me, all the different mes! Took a bit of organising. You said you loved how I changed, when everything else you enjoyed painting stayed the same.’

The Warhol android looked up and smiled shyly from underneath his silver mop of hair. ‘It’s over there,’ he said, his voice a whisper. And sure enough, on the opposite wall, there stood a large painting, with eleven faces of the Doctor, blazingly bright and distinct.

‘Aww, I’m glad that’s survived all these years,’ said the Doctor. ‘What year is this again?’

Armidagertaflex 333.9 sighed, as much as a robotic sphere could sigh, and led the Doctor through into the next hall, providing him with a short history of the thousands of years that had passed since he’d met Andy Warhol in the summer of 1966.

At that moment, several miles away, with an enormous crash, an alien vessel burst in through the glass roof of the Roy Lichtenstein display. It roared its retro rockets at the last moment, sending visitors screaming in all directions, and landed in front of the android version of the artist himself, who was looking at it with a calm, considering eye.

The door burst open and a group of grey, leather-faced aliens in combat gear rushed out. They looked around them at Lichtenstein’s colourful paintings of exciting scenes, with sound effects and thought balloons drawn on them: Lichtenstein had always been delighted by what he saw in comics, reproducing those panels on big canvases.

‘No tactical significance,’ decided the commander of the aliens.

One of his team raised his blaster, and with a boom of exploding metal, the android Lichtenstein’s head was blown from his shoulders.

The separated head stared after the aliens as they ran out of the hall, a delighted smile on its face, and said only ‘wow!’

‘Is Vincent in here?’ asked the Doctor, marching along beside his floating sphere guide. ‘You know, greatest artist who ever lived, bit *difficult*. Only, don’t know, how we left it, maybe that should be it, it was what it was, nothing much to add, don’t want to upset him, and if it’s just his memories in an android –’

‘We tried to put Vincent Van Gogh’s memories in an android,’ said Armidagertaflex, ‘but they refused to go. The nature of that man’s mind, it was...’

‘A bit all over the place, yeah. But beautiful. Brilliant. Good for him. So, I think, if you could just take me to your Van Gogh section, then either you’ll have my favourite painting

on your wall...TARDIS going bang, fond of it because it didn't happen, or *now* it didn't happen... you lot having collected it at some point in history, then at least I'll know where it is. I'll be able to pop back and look at it. Or if you don't, then if I could use your computer system, I'll look up when it was last mentioned as being seen, then I can pop back in the TARDIS and have a... you've stopped moving, why have you stopped moving?'

'Because of the alarms going off and the visitors running past us screaming. I thought you were meant to be very observant?'

'Well, I was talking!' The Doctor looked ahead, to where stark alien figures had just rounded the corner, driving screaming visitors before them. 'Right, you're going to have to block your exterior communications nodules, because any second now –'

A high pitched screeching sound reverberated down the hall, and a squad of robot curators, who had been rushing to defend the Centre, fell from where they'd been flying overhead and harmlessly bounced down the hall towards the invaders. The aliens kicked them aside like footballs.

'Because any second now they'll use their sonic lances on your mates,' said the Doctor, talking fast. 'They're the Arucha, grabbers of things, takers of things, they want stuff, and the last thing you need in a collection of stuff is someone who wants stuff. Why now? What's new?'

'Nothing has been added to the collection in –'

'Then it's me. They want me. No, better places to get me. They want what I want. Or what they think I want. We have to get them away from people, where they can't do any harm –' The Doctor spun on the spot, still concealed from the aliens by the mass of running people. 'They have trouble with the colour blue, blue blue blue, who does blue? Ah, there we go! Hoi!' He bounced up onto tiptoe and pogoed on the spot, waving his arms at the aliens. 'Here I am! Over here!'

'There!' hissed one of the Arucha, pointing. 'The Time Lord!' But just then the Doctor ducked out of sight amongst the fleeing crowds. The Arucha raised his blaster. 'Shall I-?'

'No!' The Arucha commander swatted his lieutenant's arm down from its firing posture. 'See?!'

The Doctor had ducked into a hall the signs to which, had the Arucha's translation devices been quick enough to deal with their owners' urgent commands, would have been revealed to read 'Picasso Hall, Closed for Repairs'. And now the Doctor had his head

poked out of it, looking in their direction. The head ducked inside again.

The Arucha ran in that direction.

‘Where we say “closed for repairs”,’ Armidagertaflex was urgently telling the Doctor, ‘what we actually mean is –’

‘What are you doing in here?!’ yelled an angry voice.

‘Oh no,’ sighed the Doctor.

Approaching them was a bald man in a white shirt that was covered almost entirely in splashes of paint. The hall was filled with canvasses covered in angular, multi-dimensional, drawings and paintings, that seemed to show the insides of things at the same time as their outsides.

‘We’re having a bit of trouble with the Picasso android,’ whispered the curator.

‘Pablo!’ cried the Doctor. ‘Now, I know when I met you we got off on the –’

‘You?!’ bellowed the android, recognising him. ‘*You?!*’

‘- but you really shouldn’t have pursued Amy round and round your workshop, I was getting very dizzy, and don’t you look like you don’t know what I’m talking about. Love the new work here, glad they’ve let you go for it, nice to see you, to see you nice, now, where’s the room with your blue period paintings, ’cos they’re what we really want to see right now.’

The Picasso android looked suspiciously at the Doctor.

‘And,’ said the Time Lord, ‘did I mention that we’re being pursued by a bunch of military... gits?’

Picasso’s expression hardened.

The Arucha burst into the Picasso hall, blasters at the ready –

And found themselves facing an angry android artist, painting knives in hand. ‘Militarists!’ he yelled. ‘Fascists! Destroyers!’

His knives sliced through the air, and for a moment the aliens leapt back, fearing that he was trying to harm them –

But, as they discovered a second later, paint was flying from his knives, paint which, wherever it landed, made pieces of their armour and weapons seemingly vanish.

This was the thing they had often heard of, and only sometimes experienced. The terrible colour that others could see and they could not. The thing lesser species called... *blue*.

‘Fire!’ yelled the Arucha leader. ‘Destroy the wielder of blue!’

The aliens opened fire at once.

The Picasso android’s limbs were splintered into a broken shape. One eye was twisted around onto the wrong side of his face.

He fell to the ground, unable to continue the fight.

‘You have only made me more interesting!’ he yelled after the aliens as they ran on.

‘An entire room, devoted to blue art...’ the Doctor mused, as he and Armidagertaflex stood very still amongst a vast array of blue paintings, statues and installations. ‘Handy.’

‘Visitors find it relaxing. There are works here by Matisse, Zoirarghhh, Monet, and of course Picasso himself. How is it that these Arucha cannot perceive the colour blue?’

The atmosphere they evolved in blocks those wavelengths of light. Not so odd. The eyes of humans can’t see infra red or ultra violet. They’re so missing out.’

‘And won’t the Arucha just look in here and see us standing amongst nothing?’

‘But they don’t know what’s behind all that nothing.’

‘You say they want things-’

‘They evolved in a very competitive environment, several sentient species, all encountering each other at once, then fighting for survival. They won, wiped out all other intelligent life on their planet. They’re now the most acquisitive, selfish civilisation in the universe. If something’s important, if it’s valuable, they must have it.’

‘But all the valuable artworks here... why haven’t they tried to take them?’

‘Not their idea of value. They’re really practical. If it can’t provide power or zap something or make something, they’re not interested. They don’t get art. They don’t understand that it just exists for fun, to make you go ooh. Now, must get on, in here, we should be completely hidden, giving me a few moments to use the old sonic...’ the Doctor plucked the sonic screwdriver from his pocket and started to fiddle with its controls, ‘to get us some help. That is, unless they have some sort of, I don’t know, sensor device for perceiving the colour blue.’

The Arucha leader stood at the entrance to the Hall of Blue, trying not to show his horror at the mere concept that such a building could exist, that so-called civilised beings could have built it. ‘Deploy,’ he hissed, ‘the sensor device for perceiving the colour blue.’

He was looking through the doorway of the hall at an assault on his own senses, a mass of confusing blank areas that overlapped and intersected –

Which, when his lieutenant placed the blue filter visor in front of his eyes, resolved itself into a group of perfectly ordinary grey shapes, between two of which he could glimpse the shadow of a tall figure. ‘Time Lord!’ he called. ‘We see you! Do you want me to target our weapons there and flush you out?! Or perhaps we should just start destroying all this “art” and all these “people” who come here to see it?’

The Doctor called out as he kept working on the sonic screwdriver. ‘No, no, don’t do that, I beg of you, I beg of you, no please don’t, etc!’

‘What did you come here seeking?!’ called the alien voice.

‘My favourite painting!’

‘Hah! You expect us to believe that?! The last of the Time Lords, who keeps the name of his species known throughout the universe by his actions alone, whose words make the great races tremble, who could have any bauble or trinket he wished, he is interested in a mere... annoying splash of colour?!’

‘It’s not annoying. It’s very good! And it’s by someone who made my friend cry.’

‘You think it good that your comrade was upset?’

‘Yes, because that’s something else that art does, it makes you feel. How do I persuade you that I’m telling the truth?’

'You cannot!'

'All right then.' The Doctor finished his work on the screwdriver with a decisive tap of his finger, then raised it to his mouth and spoke into the device like it was a microphone. 'Art...' he cried, 'attack!'

They came from every corner of the Paloma Centre: Pre-Raphaelites and Post Modernists; Pointillists and Cubists. They put down their brushes and chisels and grabbed whatever was at hand to help them.

The android artists of the ages were on the march.

The first thing the Arucha commander knew about it was when a finger tapped him on the shoulder. He swung round to find himself facing a theatrical looking Spaniard with an enormous moustache.

'I am Salvador Dali,' the figure declared. 'These,' he gestured to the small army of artists with him, 'are my brother and sister surrealists from the surrealism hall, just over octopus –'

'What?' said the Arucha commander. 'Did he just say -?'

'-and we are here to announce that we have already defeated you!'

The Arucha commander grabbed the artist by the lapels. 'How?!' he hissed.

'By inflating a tortoise.'

'Explain! How will this activity achieve your aims?!'

'Margarine!'

'I suspect,' hissed the Arucha lieutenant, 'they talk nonsense. That their art is about surprising people by putting things together strangely.'

'But sometimes,' said a voice from behind the aliens, 'it can be surprisingly concrete.'

The aliens turned just as the surrealist René Magritte swung an enormous concrete pipe at them, knocking two of them off their feet. '*This*,' he bellowed, '*is a pipe!*'

'Yes, we've got all of them,' said the Doctor, smiling at the output on his sonic screwdriver. 'They're all on their way. Though Michelangelo's moaning, asking if he has to. Yes,' he raised his voice into the device, 'you *do* have to, Mikey! The more of you lot get in the way, the less chance there is of the Arucha hurting anyone. You lot are androids with backed up memories, they zap one of you, a new version just wakes up tomorrow. And, being made to only hear what humans can hear, you're not so vulnerable to sonic lances. Which gives us time to sort out the endgame. You –' he pointed at his spherical companion.

'You've forgotten my name again, haven't you?'

'No, of course not, a bit of my brain's remembering it as I speak, it just hasn't told the rest of me yet. Now... tell me you've got a modern art section!'

'We've got a modern art section.'

'That's... not just you telling me that 'cos I *told* you to tell me –?'

Armidagertaflex sighed again. 'Would you like me to show you the way?'

The Arucha had survived the assault of the Surrealists (apart from those that insisted they were fighting by doing things like folk dancing and running away), blasting androids aside left and right. The attack had forced them away from the door of the hall of blue, and they were attempting to regroup when a passionate charge of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, collars unbuttoned, shirts flying open, had sent them reeling back along another corridor. The Pre-Raphaelites had pushed them into their own territory, where the walls were lined with their paintings of heroes in armour and beautiful maidens.

There, the aliens were set upon by a newly arriving army of Impressionists, with the Post-Impressionists right behind. Pierre-Auguste Renoir, his moustache bristling, led them. 'You monsters can't even appreciate art for its value!' he yelled, smashing a new canvas over the head of one of the invaders. 'Many of us worked in poverty, for art's own sake!'

'There are so many of them!' yelled the Arucha lieutenant. 'You can't see the whole army up close, but when you fall back –'

'You get the picture, yes,' said his leader, ducking a blow from Henri Rousseau, who was growling like a tiger. 'And they're trying to make us head in one direction! But are they trying to push us into a trap, or -?'

'They're trying to keep us away from something!' yelled one of his troopers, pointing behind them, down one of the corridors, all of which were now filled with angry androids, running in to attack.

The Arucha commander managed to haul his head out of the grasp of Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, a little hobbling artist who'd started thumping him with his stick, and saw what his soldier was indicating. Nearly hidden at the other end of the corridor, getting further away all the time as the androids pushed his troops back by sheer numbers, there was the Time Lord again. He was doing something quickly, desperately, something involving moving a huge object that was covered in a dust sheet. 'There!' he bellowed to his squad. 'That must be what the Time Lord came here to find! Advance, investigate, discover and take!'

The Arucha all trained their blasters in one direction and fired at the newly arrived masses of the Romantics, with William Turner at their head, an angry young man who vanished into a cloud of mist as many shots struck him at once. The Romantics put up a hard fight, shouting about love and beauty and truth, but the Arucha marched through them, mowing them down with blaster fire, deadly now that they had an aim in sight.

The Doctor looked up from the shape he was seemingly trying to push through a side door, and stared horrified as the aliens rushed towards him, blasting aside the last few androids. 'This is just a piece of modern art!' he yelled. 'It's nothing practical, nothing that would help you! Nothing at all like that. At all.'

The Arucha commander glared at the Time Lord, and, shaking with a sense of achievement, made all the sweeter by how hard his foe had played the contest, he seized the dust sheet and hauled it away from what lay beneath.

What was revealed was a glass case, inside which, in a clear fluid, was suspended... some sort of dead aquatic animal.

The Doctor looked awkwardly at his spherical conspirator, as if still hoping to fool the Arucha commander. 'See?'

But the Arucha commander could not be fooled. 'This is not art,' he said. 'I know art when I see it, and this is not it. This is not... pretty or colourful.'

'It may be a biological weapon of some kind,' said his lieutenant. 'The animal looks very dangerous. Look at those teeth.'

'It's not,' said the Doctor. 'It's by a Venusian artist called Radico Harstel, who copies art from earlier artists, only using scenes and animals from his own planet and it's called...' he seemed to have to think a moment to make something up. '*The Physical Impossibility of Getting a Shanghorn into a Glass Tank*. No, really, it is.'

'Hah!' said the Arucha commander. 'You are as transparent as a sunny day on Earth. This is the great artefact that you came here seeking. But it is ours now! Ours!' He gestured to his troopers, and they grabbed the case, lifted it between them and ran off

along the corridors, back towards their shuttle, firing their blasters in the air in celebration.

The Doctor lifted a hand to stop the artist androids from trying to detain them.

‘So...’ said Armidagertaflex slowly, ‘your plan... was to give away one of our most valuable pieces of art.’ Beside him, the Radico Harstel android stumbled to a halt, blinking from behind his six pairs of glasses in abject horror, a tentacle pointing vaguely in the direction his most prized work had been taken.

The Doctor smiled at them both. ‘You get it back in two years time when that lot can’t find a use for it and leave it behind on an asteroid,’ he said. ‘I read about it at the time. Not just a pretty face, you see. Now...’ he noticed a speck on the surface of the sphere and rubbed at it with his hankie, ‘about my favourite painting...’

An hour later, the Doctor stood watching a video display of material from the Paloma Centre’s archives. The Arucha shuttle had blasted off the way that it had come, and their battleship had departed the Centre’s solar system. Several visitors were being treated for minor injuries, repairs were being made to injured androids, and full scale memory downloads into new bodies were beginning for those who had fallen in battle.

‘Is that me?’ said the Doctor, pointing to the screen. ‘It’s always weird seeing yourself on video. Oh, look, and that’s the Musée d’Orsay in the year 3110, run by a Silurian then, I see, and... oh, I remember! That’s when I saved the place from that giant amoeba that liked the taste of paint, and they said I could have any one picture in return, and so I picked my favourite one, the one of...’ He watched on the screen as applauding officials handed him *Blue Box Exploding* by Vincent Van Gogh. ‘And this is the last place anyone ever saw this painting?’

Armidagertaflex bobbed in the air, his version of a nod.

‘So that means... I’ve probably still got it. Somewhere in the TARDIS, I should think. I must have forgotten where I put it. You know, it might be in the vault. I think it is!’ He turned to head back towards the TARDIS. ‘Good to see you...’ He clicked his fingers in the air, as if he’d forgotten the name again.

But Armidagertaflex knew full well his old friend was pretending.

The Doctor broke into a grin. ‘Armidag! You know,’ he said, as he went on his way back to his space/time machine, ‘Amy is going to be so surprised when I tell her where that painting is...’

The End

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