

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



Doctor Who: Peacemaker

James Swallow

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About the Book

The peace and quiet of a remote homestead in the 1880s American West is shattered by the arrival of two shadowy outriders searching for 'the healer'. When the farmer refuses to help them, they raze the house to the ground using guns that shoot bolts of energy instead of bullets ...

In the town of Redwater, the Doctor and Martha learn of a snake-oil salesman whose patent medicines actually cure his patient. But when the Doctor and Martha investigate they discover the truth is stranger, and far more dangerous.

Caught between the law of the gun and the deadly plans of intergalactic mercenaries, the Doctor and Martha are about to discover just how wild the West can become ...

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Doctor Who: Peacemaker

James Swallow

BBC
BOOKS

For Colin Ravey

The sun rising over the top of the distant mountains made them shine like polished copper, and Matthew Belfield held up a hand to shield his eyes from the glow. He felt a grin tugging at the corners of his lips and let it come. Was this going to be a good day? He wanted very much for it to be so. Things had turned so hard and sorrowful over the past few months, but finally, after everything that had happened, after all the trials he and his wife had faced, Matthew was daring to hope that their lives were taking a turn for the better.

He blew out a breath, resting a moment across the top of the fence post he'd been fixing since the pre-dawn light. He stood there in the valley and listened to the quiet of the place.

It was the quiet that had made him pick this parcel of land to build their homestead on. Matthew remembered it clearly, climbing off his horse and wandering out across the plain for the first time, just walking. Just *listening*. It was like . . . Well, it was like he could hear the breathing of the earth itself, the gentle noise of the wind through the grasses. It was then he knew he was going to spend the rest of his life in this valley, carving a future out of the rough lands of the West.

He turned slightly and looked back at the house. Celeste moved past one of the windows, not seeing him, a water jug in her hands. She'd be making a draught of tea for them both once the stove was stoked, and then maybe some breakfast. Matthew was pleased to see his wife on her feet again, walking around and laughing like she used to. It was almost as if the sickness had never touched her. She was well and whole again; the woman he'd married back in Boston was with him once more. *It's a blessing, Matthew Belfield, she had said only the night before, we were touched by our own little miracle, right here in the middle of these here wilds.*

He found himself nodding. For a moment, Matthew thought of how sickly she had seemed, before. He saw it in his mind's eye; Celeste there on the big bed in the back of the house, lost in the crumpled sheets. Her skin as pale as milk, her breathing laboured and shallow. He shuddered and his throat felt tight. Matthew dared not think how close the good Lord had come to taking her away from him for ever, and he promised himself that he'd do whatever he could to make sure no harm befell his wife again, not as long as there was still a breath left in his body.

If not for *him*, if not for that travelling man, why then Matthew would be staring not at the woman he loved but at her grave in the shadow of his house. The stranger had come from out of nowhere, drawn, so he said, by word from the folks in the town up along the valley. Oh sure, he seemed a mite peculiar, and maybe there was a way about him that in other circumstances would have flagged him wrong; but he'd done what he said he would. The fella hadn't asked for much, not much at all when you weighed the price against the life of Matthew's wife. And in return, he'd brought about a cure that had healed all of Celeste's ills in a day. A single day! The thought of it still amazed Matthew; but he wasn't a man to question good fortune. If providence had brought the stranger and his companion to the Belfield homestead, then who was a simple farmer to argue against it? Celeste's life had been put to rights, and that was about East as far as her husband was concerned.

She glanced out of the window and saw him looking back, threw him a smile. He tipped his hat in a shallow howdy, but as he did he saw the smile slide away from his wife's face. She was looking out past him, off down the range.

Matthew turned and stared out the same way. He saw the sign immediately, the wispy curls of trail dust etching up from the dirt road. Horses, then. Two of them, if he didn't miss his mark, and they were coming at a pace like the devil himself was at their heels.

The farmer drew himself up and straightened. They weren't expecting any company, and out here in the wilderness it wasn't the manner of things to have a neighbour turn up at your door, not without good cause. Matthew tapped the pocket in his waistcoat where his Bowie knife was concealed. It never hurt to be prepared.

The riders slowed as they approached the Belfield house and for a moment Matthew thought he heard a sound like a swarm of flies buzzing; but the air was too cool of the morning for insects to be up and around, and he narrowed his eyes.

He studied the new arrivals and right away he felt unsettled. The horses they rode were of plain stock and he didn't know the brand upon them, but they were damp with sweat and both animals were breathing hard. He chanced a guess that they'd been ridden swiftly for miles and with little care or attention for their wellbeing.

The riders, though; they were men the likes of which Matthew had never seen. They were gaunt figures, the pair. Long coats all dark and tight upon them, with a faint air that hung around which recalled rotting meat, or old, dried blood. It wasn't a scent to be treasured. Under wide, flat preacher hats that cast deep, inky shadows over their faces, he could make out grim expressions and sallow skin.

With a quick flourish, one of the men dismounted and Matthew caught a glimpse of a long eagle feather trailing from the back of the man's hatband. He landed firmly with a clink of spurs and was still. For a brief moment the homesteader's gaze dropped to the finely tooled gun belt that rode low on the man's hips. A heavy iron-grey weapon sat there in a fast-draw holster. Matthew found it hard to look away from the pistol. Even at rest, the sight filled him with a cold fear.

He licked his dry lips and cleared his throat. 'This land is my property. Might I ask what it is you gentlemen want hereabouts?'

‘Looking,’ said the rider, after a long moment. His voice was thick with an accent that Matthew couldn’t place. ‘Looking for a thief.’

‘Is that right?’ Matthew moved slowly, putting himself between the house and the pair of longriders. ‘Well, you’re lookin’ in the wrong place. We’re law-abiding folks here, Mr, uh . . .’ He trailed off.

The man on foot seemed to think about it for a moment, as if he needed to draw the information up from a great depth. Finally, he pressed a thumb to his chest. ‘Kutter,’ he said, by way of introduction. He nodded at his companion on horseback. ‘Tangleleg.’

The farmer forced a smile. ‘Well, Mr Kutter, might I be correct in assuming you all are both regulators or of a like, in search of the bounty on a man?’ When neither one spoke, he pressed on. ‘I can assure you, there’s no outlaws in these parts. The wife and me don’t have any truck with lawbreakers.’

Tangleleg spoke for the first time, and his words were sharp and dry, like the sound of bones snapping. ‘Where is the healer?’

Matthew’s blood chilled in his veins. ‘Who?’

Kutter’s left hand brushed the grip of his pistol and the homesteader saw something glitter there on the weapon, like tiny glowing embers. ‘We know he was here,’ said the longrider. ‘We can see his track. Where is he?’

‘Where is he now?’ added Tangleleg. ‘Answer.’

His hands bunched into fists and Matthew took a breath. *Who were these two highbinders, to come on his land and make demands of him?* Anger took the place of his fear. When he thought of all the things he owed the stranger who had helped his wife, he was damned if he was going to give him up to the first roughneck who demanded it. ‘I don’t know no “healer”,’ he snapped, ‘and if you know what’s best for you, you’d be on your way, or else—’

Kutter's gun came out of its holster in a flicker of steel, almost as if it had leapt from the leather into his waiting hand. The weapon blurred toward Matthew and he recoiled. Kutter aimed the barrel at the farmer's chest, the muzzle never wavering even a fraction of an inch.

Matthew blinked, standing his ground. The gun was *huge*. Bigger than a Colt .45, thickset and cut from fluted sections of steel and brass and what might have been bone, it looked utterly lethal. Kutter held it without concern, but it seemed so dense and weighty that Matthew wondered how the man could hold it without using both hands.

'Answer,' repeated Kutter.

From behind him, Matthew heard the well-oiled click of a shotgun hammer; and then the voice of his wife. 'You heard my husband. This is Belfield land. You're not welcome here, so get yourselves gone.'

He used the moment to step back, turning. Celeste was at the door, the long ten-gauge shotgun at her shoulder. She was shaking slightly.

Kutter spoke as if he hadn't heard a word she had said. 'This is the last time we will ask you. Where is the healer?'

'He ain't here,' said Celeste. 'Been gone for a couple of weeks now.'

Matthew nodded. 'That's the size of it.' He put his hands on his hips, trying to show a little backbone. 'That there fella? We don't care what he mighta done to incur your displeasure. Fact is, the man saved my wife's life! We don't know where he's gone to, and if we did, then we sure as hell wouldn't tell you!'

Tangleleg shook his head slowly. 'You are lying. We can see it in your face.'

Kutter mimicked the other man's actions. 'We can hear it in your voice.' He moved again, another sudden rush of motion from complete stillness.

Celeste saw this and with a start she jerked the twin triggers of the double-barrelled shotgun. Thunder spoke

across the homestead and Matthew heard a cloud of buckshot whistle past him. Kutter was blown off his feet and into the dust. He dropped, but the big pistol never left his grip.

Matthew expected Tangleleg to draw, but he didn't. He remained motionless, sitting high in his panting horse's saddle, watching them.

And then Kutter got up.

Not without pause, but he got up unaided. The longrider brushed at his coat with his free hand and shook off the flattened specks of spent lead pellets. He paused, using his thumb and forefinger to pick out the odd piece of shot from the ashen skin of his cheeks.

Celeste gaped. The man should have been dead, or at the very least at the door to it. Instead, Kutter behaved as if she'd hit him with nothing more than a wet rag.

'You are a waste of our time,' said Tangleleg.

The rider's pronouncement was pitiless. Matthew saw Kutter move again, this time a blur of dark clothing, and then a bolt of lightning flew from the muzzle of his weapon into the wooden walls of the house. The blast knocked both the Belfields off their feet as a ripple of fire flashed out across the cabin, shattering the windows and setting everything alight. Matthew struggled to get back to his feet, lurching toward the porch where his wife had collapsed in an untidy heap.

On his horse, Tangleleg mirrored his companion's actions and drew a pistol, fired a spread of shots into the house. Unlike the flat crack of a bullet, each discharge came with a tortured scream of sound and the tang of hot ozone, acrid like the air before a storm front. Blazing blue-white beams stabbed out, ripping the house into pieces.

Matthew gathered his wife to him as both longriders found their marks. His last thoughts were of Celeste and of how much she meant to him; and of the man who had saved her, if only to give him these few more days in her company.

White fire ripped into them, turning their flesh into ashes.

The longriders remained for a while, enough to give the flames time to take purchase and ensure that nothing would remain of the Belfield homestead. The horses grew skittish and whined at being so close to the fires, but the men did not move at all. They stood, their heads tilted back slightly so that their mouths were open, allowing the fly-buzz sounds from deep in their throats to resonate through the air. It was a quicker and far more expedient manner of communication than the more clumsy use of teeth and lips and tongue. Together, they consulted maps made inside their heads, looking for new signs, for likely bolt-holes and targets of opportunity.

When their next destination was decided, Kutter went to get fresh horses from the stables beyond the ruined Belfield household, while Tangleleg killed their old mounts. After a meal of raw meat, the longriders rode on, heading westwards.

ONE

AS THEY WALKED down the neon-lit boulevard, Martha Jones looked up to see the hazy, glowing arc that bisected the night sky over their heads, twinkling against the alien starscape beyond it. It reminded her of a snowfall, but suspended in the air like a freeze-frame image. She blinked and laughed in delight as she realised that there were actually letters imposed on the shimmering band. She picked out a 'W', an 'O' and then another.

'*Woo!*' she said, reading it aloud. 'Ha! Doctor, look! It says "woo" up there! That's funny.'

The Doctor halted and gave her a lightly mocking *can't-I-take-you-anywhere?* sort of look. 'Actually, we're only just seeing the end bit of it. The whole thing says "*Hollywood*", but the letters are a hundred-odd kilometres high and you have to be in polar orbit to read it all at once.' He made a circling gesture with his index finger. 'Rings, you know? Like Saturn has in your solar system. Made of ice and rock dust. The owners use photomolecular field generators to hold the letters in place. It certainly makes the planet easier to find.'

She smirked at him, raising an eyebrow. 'There's a planet called Hollywood? Planet Hollywood?'

'Yup,' He started walking again, hands in the pockets of his big brown coat, skirting through the thronging mass of variant life forms who were also out enjoying the warm evening.

Martha was still looking upwards. 'Oh yeah, the letters are moving, I can see it. Now it says "*Ood*".'

'That's an entirely different planet,' he said offhandedly. 'This one was terraformed in the late twenty-fifth century by

a consortium of entertainment businesses, right after the Incorporated Nation of NeoCalifornia was finally destroyed by a super-volcano.’ He pointed up into the sky. ‘There’s also BollyWorld in the next orbit over, a bunch of Celebra-Stations . . .’

‘What happens there?’

‘It’s like a safari park, except you get to chase no-talent android celebrities around instead of wild animals.’

Martha made a face. ‘Things haven’t changed much in 400 years, then.’

He went on. ‘This place is the movie capital of the Milky Way, and it’s got the best cinema anywhere, anywhen . . .’

She nodded, taking it all in. ‘When you said we could go to the movies, I had thought, y’know, we’d stop off at my local multiplex or something . . .’ Martha dodged to one side, to allow a pack of cheetah-girls in opulent holographic dresses to pass them.

The Doctor turned to face her, walking backwards. ‘Well, we could. But this place has really smart seats.’ He moved seamlessly, never once bumping into anybody despite the fact he wasn’t looking where he was going. ‘And I mean really smart, as in *intelligent*. They mould to all your comfort zones, but not so much that you doze off during the good bits. And there’s no sticky floors or people talking during the film. Free popcorn as well.’

‘Choc ices?’

He nodded. ‘Oh yeah. All the trimmings.’

Martha gave him a sly smile. ‘Ooh, cosy. It’s almost like a date.’

For a second, the Doctor was slightly wrong-footed. ‘No, not really. Just, uh, two mates, going to see a flick . . .’ He cleared his throat and pointed in the direction of a low dome made of hexagons a short distance away, changing the subject. ‘They copied the design from a place on Earth, the Cinerama on Sunset Boulevard.’ He waved at the roof. ‘I’ve had a soft spot for it for ages. Defeated an incursion of

Geomatide Macros there back in the 1970s. Nasty things, they used the angles of the ceiling tiles as a mathematical hyperspace vector generator . . .’ He trailed off and then clapped his hands. ‘Right! What do you want to see? They’ve got everything. *Pirates of the Caribbean VI? The Starship Brilliant Story? Casablanca?*’

She sighed. ‘I’m in the mood for a Western.’ The words popped out of her mouth without her thinking about it. ‘I haven’t seen one in ages.’ And suddenly, Martha felt a little bit sad. ‘When we were kids, me and Leo and Tish, we’d watch a cowboy film every Sunday afternoon. There was always one on, just before lunchtime. Mum would be cooking a joint and making these great roast potatoes, and we could smell it from the living room. We’d all get together, the three of us and Mum and Dad, and eat during the last half.’ She sighed. ‘Funny. It seems like that was a very long time ago. A very long way away.’ Martha thought of her family and if felt like there was a vast, yawning distance between her and them. A pang of homesickness tightened in her chest, and her eyes drifted up to the alien sky again.

‘A Western it is, then,’ said the Doctor gently. ‘*Rio Bravo. A Fistful of Dollars. Dances With Wolves* . . .’ He fell silent as they approached the box office. The kiosk was dark and lifeless. ‘Hang on. This doesn’t look right.’ He fished in his pocket and aimed his sonic screwdriver at the booth. The slender device buzzed, and the door hissed open. He glanced inside and gave a pained groan, returning with a moment later with a sheet of electronic paper in his hand.

‘What’s wrong?’

‘Cinema’s closed,’ he replied, showing her the paper. ‘It seems that last week they were having a disaster film festival, using virtual-environment simulators. Apparently, someone set the dial too high when they were screening *Earthquake!* and, well . . . The floor caved in.’ He sighed. ‘Still. Better that than *The Towering Inferno.*’

She turned and walked back the way they had come, back toward the TARDIS. 'It's OK. Never mind.' It was odd; after all, it wasn't as if they were talking about anything serious, right? It was just a *movie*, wasn't it? And yet Martha felt cheerless, as if something as simple as being able to watch some creaky old Wild West film was the only way she could feel close to her family, out here in the depths of space-time, so far away from all she knew.

The Doctor trailed behind her, stepping up to unlock the door of the police box as they returned to the alley where it had materialised. He seemed to sense her change of mood. 'I'm sorry, Martha.'

She tried to make light of it. 'Oh, who wants stale popcorn and runny ice cream anyway?' But she couldn't keep the disappointment from her voice.

They entered the wide, domed chamber of the control room, stepping into the thrumming heart of the TARDIS.

All at once, the Doctor's expression changed. He grinned. 'You know what? You're right. And I have a much better idea.'

He bounded past her to the console that ringed the crystalline central column. Without any apparent order to his actions, the Doctor skipped from panel to panel, flipping switches and spinning dials.

He paused, chewing his lip, and then worked a crank handle.

Martha's momentary melancholy faded before his burst of excitement. She had to smile; the Doctor had a way about him, as if he took each piece of sadness in the universe personally, like he had sole responsibility to banish the gloom from things. 'What are you up to now?'

He peeked at her from around the column. 'Why bother *watching* the Wild West?' he asked her. 'Why bother watching it when we can, well . . .'

'Go there?' Her smile widened.

The Doctor grabbed the TARDIS's dematerialisation control. 'Martha Jones,' he said, slamming the lever down, 'Saddle up!'

Jenny hitched up her skirt an inch or two so she could cross main street without getting more than a speck of mud on her. She picked her way around the trestle tables and makeshift chairs set up along the boardwalk outside the Bluebird saloon.

A couple of the bar girls gave her a respectful smile and a wave, pausing in their work. They were putting up some bunting to string along the storefronts, in preparation for the street party that evening. Jenny smiled back and kept on her way, stepping up past Vogel's General Store. Held in a bundle by a leather belt, the books she carried were an awkward burden, and she had to keep stopping to adjust them so they didn't fall. They were a precious cargo; there was little enough reading matter hereabouts, and Jenny felt like it was her duty to keep as much of it safe and secure as she could.

As she passed the jail, the sheriff stepped out, taking a draw from a thin cigarillo between his lips. He saw Jenny and tipped his hat. 'Good morning, Miss Forrest.'

'Sheriff Blaine,' she replied, bobbing her head.

'And how's the day been treatin' you, might I inquire?'

She showed him the books. 'I've had a minor windfall. After Mr Toomey's passing, his widow donated these to the schoolhouse library.'

Blaine nodded. 'The sour old fella was good for somethin', then.' He eyed the books. 'Myself, I never been blessed with an over-abundance of schoolin', but I see the merit in it.'

'His passing was a sad matter.' She sighed. 'I suppose we must thank providence that more didn't follow him.'

'Toomey was never a fit man,' Blaine noted. 'If the sickness was gonna take anyone, I would have wagered it'd be him.' The lawman took another drag on the cigarillo and