

Handlebars

Flummery

Honorary Award 2008: Bradcpu's choice

The review below may contain spoilers for new Doctor Who up to season 4.

Brad: How good is this vid? I've seen it dozens upon dozens of times since it was released last year, and I still get chills *every single time* I watch it.

And I've never seen Doctor Who.

That's how good it is.

Nicky: I've watched every episode of new Who with rapt attention and yet my reaction is exactly the same: dozens of rewatches since the vid's release, and I think it gets *more* intense each time you watch it. I see your chills and raise you some truly undignified fangirl flailing.

Brad: I see your undignified fangirl flailing and raise you some sweeping generalisms.

In many ways when I try to define the goal of vidding, I'm describing Handlebars: A vid that's immensely entertaining to watch, perfectly reflects the music, and makes a statement about the fandom in such a transparent way that it gives chills to people who have never even seen the show.

Nicky: I love that it comes through so clearly to someone who doesn't know the source. We all know how difficult it is to get a viewer with no context to engage on an emotional level, and the fact that it works so well for you really speaks to the accessibility of this vid.

Brad: It's positively scary to imagine it being even more effective if I was a Doctor Who watcher. I might just keel over from a heart attack halfway through.

I think a big part of its brilliance is how, in its first half, it's so playful and fandom-friendly. From happy shipper moments to truly hilarious lyric ties, it just charms you in a way that sets you up so beautifully for the impact of the second half.

Nicky: I feel that this is very much in line with the show itself. For a show that possibly has the bleakest heart of any show that I've ever watched, it sure is shiny and irreverent on the surface. One could say the same thing about the Doctor himself. The first half of Handlebars sets that up beautifully and shows him in such a playful, charming light.

I remember that when I saw this vid for the first time, I really enjoyed the editing and music use in the first half while simultaneously thinking, "I really hope the vidders take this through to a darker conclusion, because that would just be *perfect*. And then they did, and it was.

Brad: On a first view, I totally did not see even the possibility of the darkness developing and was completely blindsided by it. But it was gradual, so you don't realize you're into it until you're neck-deep into it.

That's the other thing: It's so skillful in the progression of the narrative and how it peels away the layers until you see the Doctor for who/what he truly is. It's a very smooth ramp-up that's so beautifully executed, starting with the hints at 1:05, when he's oblivious to the pleas for help. Then it quickly builds into a statement about his power starting at 1:30 with "me and my friends understand the future" and into the military shots at 1:34.

Nicky: I would say *especially* the military shots at 1:34. Up until that point you feel like there's something vaguely wrong with the power structures shown in this vid (for example, the "I can do what I want" at 0:53), but you still get the feeling that it could continue to be fun and flippant through to the end. But as soon as the salute comes in at 1:35 with the expression on the General's face, then you really get the feeling that this was a point of no return. Everything that came before this was just icing; the true terror is yet to begin.

Brad: By 1:48 you're already seeing the whimsy from the beginning differently. It's *all* subject to his whim. Happiness, sadness, pain, joy, solitude, even life and death.

Nicky: One particular segment that stood out for me was around 2:06, the various shots of the aliens that he has to face. There's just something so *evil*, so telling in that. I find myself unable to articulate exactly why, but suffice to say it really worked for me.

Brad: By the time it gets to 2:27, you're breathless. How could anyone make me afraid of this guy?!?

Nicky: I *love* the lyric matches of "my reach is global, my tower is secure, my cause is noble, my power is pure." Because at a surface level canon reading, that's *exactly* what the show is. It's about the security of the TARDIS, the fact that Doctor is here to protect the Earth, and that his power is first and foremost used for good. But the vid digs deeper; it raises the question whether *anyone* should be allowed to wield this much power. Absolute power corrupts, and it's hard to make any other assertion when we watch the Doctor make all these calls with far-reaching consequences that are not within his jurisdiction to make. In doing so, this vid reveals a mind-blowing level of hubris on the part of the Doctor. Have we seen this coming prior to having seen the vid? Some say yes, and others say no. In any event, Handlebars makes us see it in such a hard, logical light that it's hard to argue otherwise.

Brad: Exactly. I've seen others attempt it, but this feels less like an argument and more like a missive from God.

The remote control at 2:55, followed by the shots of destruction and the tear at 2:59, is I think what makes the message so... effective for me. The nonchalance at 3:03 really drives it home, but what really gets me - every single time - is that smile at 3:19. Creepiest clip ever.

Nicky: On a more contextual level, my absolute favourite clip connection is the telescope beam from Torchwood House at 2:51 which transitions into the Torchwood beam that destroys the Sycorax. It's out of sequence in episode chronology, but makes perfect sense in terms of linear time because the former directly led to the latter across time and space.

This really gives us an indication of the scope of the Doctor's power: he's not just a powerful entity at a fixed point; he is capable to arrive at any event at any point on the timeline, and to interfere to any extent that he wants to. The only reason that he doesn't do this all the time is

because of certain self-imposed rules. He is ultimately judge, jury and executioner in one, a sentiment succinctly expressed by his treatment of the Family of Blood around 2:32 - 2:36. That level of power, when viewed in this context, is completely shattering. The Jesus pose at 3:05 encapsulates that perfectly as the world is consumed by fire. And then, as you said, it ends with that cheeky, boyish smile that permeated the whole first half of the vid. Except now it's not charming and it's not flippant; it's *terrifying*.

Brad: But here's the thing: At the end, *he* hasn't changed - it's only your perspective of him that has changed. That's what makes it the best vid I saw in 2008.



THE FOURTH WALL
