Richard Scully, "Entry on: Doctor Who (Series, Season 15): Underworld by Bob Baker, Dave Martin , Anthony Read , Norman Stewart ", peer-reviewed by Elizabeth Hale and Daniel A. Nkemleke. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/94. Entry version as of September 14, 2026.

Bob Baker , Dave Martin , Anthony Read , Norman Stewart

Doctor Who (Series, Season 15): Underworld

United Kingdom (1978)

TAGS: Ancient Slavery Argonauts Heracles Hercules Jason Labyrinth Minoan Civilization Oracles Orpheus Persephone Underworld

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General information	
Title of the work	Doctor Who (Series, Season 15): Underworld
Studio/Production Company	British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	1978
First Edition Details	*Dr Who: Underworld* (Serial 4Y, Doctor Who Series 15): Part One (January 7, 1978); Part Two (January 14, 1978); Part Three (January 21, 1978); Part Four (January 28, 1978)
Running time	89 min 17 sec (Episode 1 – 22:36; Episode 2 – 22:27; Episode 3 – 22:21; Episode 4 – 22:53)
Date of the First DVD or VHS	March 2002 (VHS release 'Underworld'); March 29, 2010 (DVD release 'Underworld' with 'The Time Monster' and 'The Horns of Nimon' – in Myths and Legends boxed set [Region 2]); June 3, 2010 (DVD release 'Underworld' with 'The Time Monster' and 'The Horns of
Genre	Science fiction, Television series, Time-Slip Fantasy*
Target Audience	Crossover
Author of the Entry	Richard Scully, University of New England, rscully@une.edu.au
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This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

Creators

Bob Baker , b. 1939
(Scriptwriter)

Bob Baker (1939) is a highly-regarded TV and feature-film scriptwriter for the British market. As well as writing a number of stories and serials for D*octor Who* (between 1971 and 1979) – in which capacity he collaborated with Dave Martin – he also co-wrote the *Wallace and Gromit* films with the characters' chief creator, Nick Park: *The Wrong Trousers* (1993), *A Close Shave* (1995), *Curse of the Were-Rabbit* (2005), and *A Matter of Loaf and Death* (2008). Baker and Martin invented the Doctor's robotic dog K-9 (from 1977), and several of the series' other iconic characters. Beyond *Doctor Who*, Baker collaborated with Martin on the children's TV show *Sky* (1975) and *Into the Labyrinth* (1981–1982), as well as scripts for *Shoestring* (1979) and *Bergerac* (1981 & 1983). A K-9-themed TV series aired between 2009 and 2010, buoyed by the successful revival of *Doctor Who* from 2005; and co-wrote his autobiography – *K-9 Stole My Trousers* (2013) – with Laurie Booth. Yet another K-9-themed project – *The Essential Book of K-9* (2015) – is his most recent work to-date.

Bio prepared by Richard Scully, University of New England, rscully@une.edu.au

Dave Martin , 1935 - 2007
(Author, Scriptwriter)

Dave Martin (1935–2007) was a British TV and film writer who, notably, collaborated with Bob Baker during the 1970s on numerous *Doctor Who* serials (1971–1979). Martin and Baker invented the Doctor's robotic dog K-9 (from 1977), and several of the series' other iconic characters. Beyond *Doctor Who*, Martin collaborated with Baker on the children's TV show *Sky* (1975) *Into the Labyrinth* (1981–1982), as well as scripts for *Shoestring* (1979) and

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Bergerac (1981 & 1983). A *Make Your Own Adventure* book of *Doctor Who – Search for the Doctor* (1986) – also appeared under Martin's name. He was diagnosed with lung cancer in 2007, and passed-away within months.

Bio prepared by Richard Scully, University of New England, rscully@une.edu.au

Anthony Read , 1935 - 2015
(Author, Scriptwriter)

Anthony Read (1935-2015) was an English TV writer and script editor, who also wrote prose fiction – based on his 1983 TV series *The Baker Street Boys* (2005-2012) – and a number of popular history works (largely focused on aspects of the Second World War). Read's first TV credits were for the series *Detective* (1964), *The Indian Tales of Rudyard Kipling* (1964) and *Sherlock Holmes* (1965) for BBC1. Other works ranged from adventure stories (*The Black Arrow*, 1974-5), courtroom drama (*Sutherland's Law*, 1974), and crime thrillers (*The Professionals*, 1977-1980). Under a pseudonym, and while acting as Script Editor for the series, he wrote *The Invasion of Time* (1978) for *Doctor Who*. He oversaw the remainder of the 1977-78 and 1978-79 series, and was then instrumental in having Douglas Adams appointed as his successor for the 1979-80 series. He was then invited back to pen *The Horns of Nimon* (1979), which treated the labyrinth/Minotaur myth in similar style to *Underworld* (1978). With Bob Baker and Dave Martin, he contributed to the series *Into the Labyrinth* (1981), before perhaps his highest-regarded work: an adaptation of the Sherlock Holmes oeuvre, *The Baker Street Boys* (1983). Further iconic sci-fi work came in the *Chocky* series – *Chocky (*1984); *Chocky's Children* (1985); and *Chocky's Challenge* (1986) – as well as scripts for *Heartbeat* (1998) and his final credits came on *Revelations* (2002-3). A member of the Writers' Guild of Great Britain (and chairman, 1981-2), he was a strong mentor for many younger writers.

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Bio prepared by Richard Scully, university of New England, rscully@une.edu.au

Norman Stewart (Director)

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Additional information

Casting	Tom Baker – The Doctor, Louise Jameson – Leela, John Leeson – Voice of K-9, James Maxwell — Jackson, Alan Lake — Herrick, Jonathan Newth — Orfe, Imogen Bickford-Smith — Tala, James Marcus — Rask, Godfrey James — Tarn, Jimmy Gardner — Idmon, Norman Tipton — Idas, Jay Neill — Klimt, Frank Jarvis — Ankh, Richard Shaw — Lakh, Stacey Tendeter — Naia, Christine Pollon — Voice of the Oracle.
Sequels, Prequels and Spin-offs	Dicks, Terrance, *Doctor Who and the Underworld*, London: Target, 1980.
Summary	‘Underworld’ was typical of mid-1970s *Doctor Who* (1963–1989; 2005–present), in what is still regarded as its most successful period. Scripts in the era of the Fourth Doctor (played by Tom Baker) – with

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his enormous, multi-coloured scarf, and the ability to switch between high comedy and serious drama – delved regularly into mythological, historical, and literary themes that were already well-known to the family audiences. These were often transposed from their original, Earth-bound settings, to science-fiction contexts. While primarily a space-age retelling of the Jason and the Argonauts myth, the setting of 'Underworld' is also a labyrinthine maze, and the race of people encountered by the Doctor and his companions, Leela and K-9, are called 'Minyans' (a direct reference to the Minoans). The names of the main characters are corruptions of Ancient Greek originals, from various contexts (Jackson = Jason; Herrick =- Herakles; Orfe = Orpheus, and so on…). The quest that forms the main narrative of the serial, is that to locate (deep in the 'Underworld' of the title), the 'P7E' (Persephone): a lost starship that contained all the genetic 'race banks' of the Minyan species. There is also a deliberate engagement with the Orpheus myth, and the conflict between mortals and the gods: many centuries earlier, the Minyans encountered the Doctor's own race – the godlike Time Lords – and worshipped them as deities. The Minyans acquired higher technologies from the Time Lords (including the near-immortality bestowed by the ability to 'regenerate' at the point of death), but their society was riven by war and conflict as a result. Slavery is also featured, as the subjects of the Oracle at the centre of the P7E (around which a small planetoid has formed over the millennia, turning the ship into a literal 'Underworld'), are all compelled to work to provide sustenance and resources in a command economy.

Analysis

'Underworld is a key example of mid-1970s British TV entertainment. The episodes of *Doctor Who* featuring the Fourth Doctor (played by Tom Baker) – with his enormous, multi-coloured scarf, and the ability to switch between high comedy and serious drama – garnered huge audiences, both in Britain and worldwide (notably in the United States and the British Commonwealth contexts). Between 8.9 and 11.7 million viewers (in Britain) watched the 'Underworld' episodes when first broadcast. The time-and-space travelling theme of the program was a handy device for justifying the incursion into an interstellar reimagining of mythical contexts; and the Doctor and his companions serve as useful avatars for the young audience-members as they are introduced to and familiarised with the mythical context of the storyline (or, rather, reacquainted with matters with which they may

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	have been familiar; with such themes only slowly being phased-out of British elementary-level schooling in the 1970s). Such themes were also familiar to audiences acquainted with Ray Harryhausen's *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963) – a significant stop-motion fantasy film co-produced by British and the American partners, which saw multiple re-screenings throughout the 1960s and '70s.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Ancient Slavery Argonauts Heracles Hercules Jason Labyrinth Minoan Civilization Oracles Orpheus Persephone Underworld
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adventure Humour Intertextuality Travel
Further Reading	BBC Online, *Doctor Who – The Classic Series*: 'Underworld' [Archived website], at www.bbc.co.uk (accessed: August 17, 2018) [comprises analysis and details from: Paul Cornell, Martin Day & Keith Topping, The Discontinuity Guide, 1995; David J. Howe & Stephen James Walker, Doctor Who: The Television Companion, 2003]. Harmes, Marcus K., *Doctor Who and the Art of Adaptation; Fifty Years of Storytelling*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014, esp. pp. 68 ff. Howe, David J., Mark Stammers and Stephen James Walker, *Doctor Who: The Handbook: The Fourth Doctor*, London: Virgin Publishing, 1992. Howe, David J., Mark Stammers and Stephen James Walker, *Doctor Who: The Seventies*, London: Virgin Publishing, 1994. Keen, Anthony G., "It's about Tempus: Greece and Rome in "Classic" Doctor Who", in David C. Wright, Jr., and Allan W. Austin, eds., *Space and Time: Essays on Visions of History in Science Fiction and Fantasy Television*, Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2010, 100–115.

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Keen, Anthony G., "Sideways Pompeii! The Use of Historical Period to Question the Doctor's Role in History", in Ross P. Garner, Melissa Beattie, and Una McCormack, eds., *Impossible Worlds, Impossible Things: Cultural Perspectives on* Doctor Who, Torchwood, *and* The Sarah Jane Adventures, Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2010, 94–117.

Addenda

Recorded viewers:

Part One – 8.9 million

Part Two – 9.1 million

Part Three – 8.9 million

Part Four – 11.7 million

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