

NEW BEGINNING

Written by: John Gordon

Season 34/Story 9Z

Reviewed by: Jez Strickley

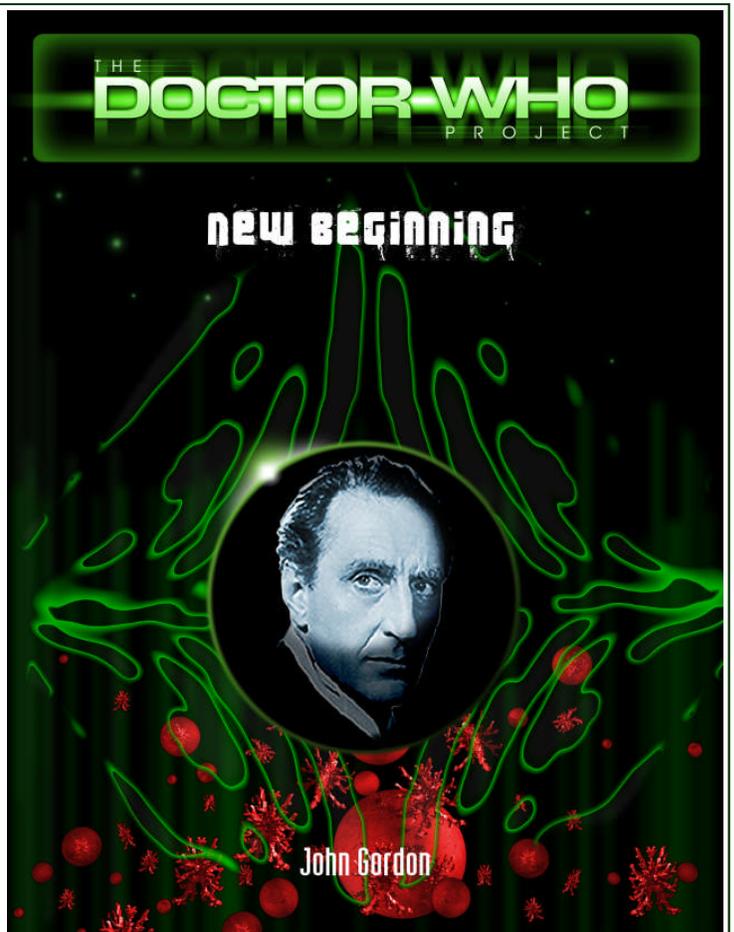
Once again John Gordon has shouldered the burden of opening a new season of *TDWP*. This time, however, he has taken on the additional and unarguably more serious test of writing the debut story for the newly regenerated Ninth Doctor. In much the same fashion as his previous effort the author admirably acquits himself, successfully meeting the challenges set and mustering up a superb piece of story telling in the process.

After a short opening scene, in which the reader is given a tantalising glimpse of a new race of aliens, the drama centres upon the aftermath of the previous story (see Duncan Johnson's *The End*), in which a seemingly deceased Doctor is dragged from a New Orleans swamp by a grieving Silver, and laid to rest in his beloved TARDIS. The way in which Silver 'rescues' the Doctor's body is certainly worth highlighting. The fact that the author explicitly draws upon the power of this act in a later scene further proves the extent of its significance.

Prolonged post-regeneration explanations and issues are dispensed with – which is all to good of the story at hand – and the Doctor and Silver quickly find themselves careering into a new adventure, which leads them from an abandoned alien facility inside a comet to the Icelandic island of Heiðarhöfnss in the twenty-second century. Very soon the time travellers are confronted by a distinctly unpleasant menace lurking on the island and an increasingly panic-ridden ornithological survey team, two of whose members have recently disappeared. No time is wasted in bringing the Doctor and Silver into contact with the survey team, and John Gordon chooses the moment of greatest tension to do it, creating an intense unraveling of events which glues the reader to the page.

Fighting an apparently unstoppable extra-terrestrial infection and encountering a water-based alien race with a vendetta takes up the remainder of the adventure, the end of which is both highly satisfying and free of plot contrivances and predictability.

Beyond the basic narrative itself there are a number of points which merit praise. Firstly, the opening moments between the Ninth Doctor and Silver work very well indeed, auguring well for the future of this new Doctor-companion team. Their initial exchanges mark out a very different rapport to the one which existed between Silver and the previous Doctor, and the style of dialogue between them ably reflects their contrasting characters. The Doctor's technical explanations, for instance, are given an almost comical counterpoint in Silver's less sophisticated translations: her reference in one scene to the Pac-Man video game is just



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about perfect.

Secondly, the author pays careful attention to the environmental issues running through the story. In particular, the conflicting reactions of the Doctor and Silver to the effects of the Global Thaw make for an interesting debate. Of course there will be some who will simply see echoes of the classic series story 'The Seeds of Doom', and this is a fair point. What *New Beginning* gives us, however, is a fresh look at the Green debate which back in 1976 had barely registered on society at large. Still further, reading about the loss of the polar ice caps and the ironic rise of a plant-based menace has far greater resonance at the turn of the twenty-first century than in the last quarter of the twentieth. In this sense, John Gordon demands top marks for tackling an important matter at a time when saturated media exposure tends to make many authors shy away from it.

Attention to detail is another of John Gordon's strengths. Silver's wandering through the flotsam and jetsam of the Doctor's previous lives is an essential element of the post-

regenerative stocktaking process, and the subtle hints at past Doctors and past changes works to a T. This short scene performs the crucial function of reminding the reader that all this upheaval has happened before, encouraging them to give the new model a chance in the role before passing judgment.

Picturing is yet a further quality of John Gordon's writing, and *New Beginning* is loaded with examples. The transformation of the hapless ornithologist Daniel Guthrie, for instance, from someone into something is incredibly well described, serving up an instance of body horror which would certainly send many a younger reader scurrying for the safety of the sofa. The various members of the survey team are also very well drawn, and the history of the water-based alien Shoal takes on almost mythical proportions.

John Gordon's prose is a densely packed affair, his meticulous eye for detail lighting upon each and every facet of his story. Reading his work demands the reader's complete attention, and he rewards their effort with a brand of writing which deserves to go far beyond the realms of fan fiction. If you want a taste of his prose style you need look no further than the opening scene from *New Beginning*. The arrival of the alien Shoal is palpably gift wrapped in a raft of techno-imagery, signalling an author well versed in the lore and language of science fiction writing. And, what is more, the post-transmat conversation between the Doctor and Silver, which references a certain tale of galactic hitchhiking, is the icing on the cake.

In short, vengeful aliens, a group of desperate humans trapped on a remote island and a rapacious breed of plant life form a three-way knock-out blow which leaves the reader's imagination well and truly on the ropes. If you've read John Gordon's Season 33 opener *The Dawn of Time* it's safe to say that *New Beginning* is very much of a piece with

THE DOCTOR WHO PROJECT

NEW BEGINNINGS

JOHN GORDON

The End becomes a New Beginning.

Silver is now confronted by someone she barely knows - a complete stranger, but one with whom she now shares the deepest of connections.

It is a new Doctor, born from the blood and violence of the old one. Who is this new Doctor, so different from the one who plunged into the mud of the New Orleans swamp?

As the TARDIS lands on a mysterious asteroid orbiting Earth's sun, Silver realises she might have much more to learn about the true nature of her ever-enigmatic travelling companion.

The twenty-second century is a time of change.

In the aftermath of the second greatest climatic and environmental upheaval the planet has ever experienced, the planet is like a brand new Earth.

But something dark and terrible has come to this brave new world from a mysterious asteroid in orbit around the sun - something once imprisoned and now free.

On a tiny island in the Arctic Sea, under the shadow of an ancient lighthouse, Silver and the new Doctor unearth a millennia old saga of crime and revenge, and a newly awakened threat.

But just whose side is this new Doctor on?

This is another in a series of original fan authored Doctor Who fiction published by The Doctor Who Project featuring the ninth Doctor as played by Anton Robbins

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its predecessor, and with the same author in charge of Season 34's finale *Cradle of Death* reader's of *TDWP* should be looking forward to that offering with bated breath.

Rating: 10/10