

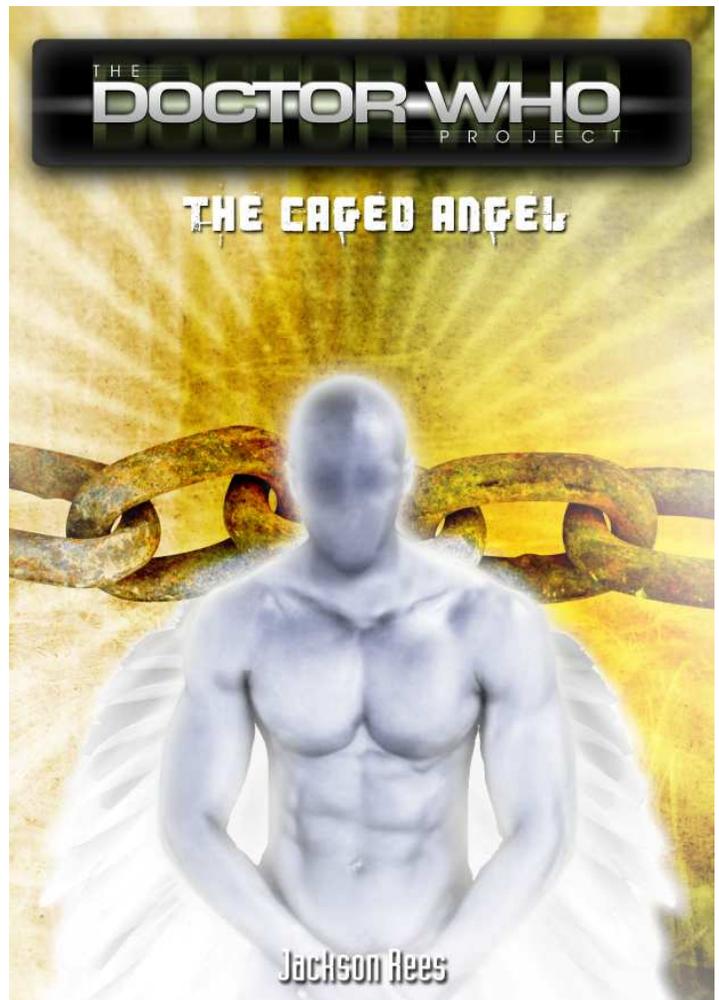
THE CAGED ANGEL

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TDWP Special
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A traditional serving of *Who* wouldn't be quite complete without the TARDIS going off course whilst under the influence of an unknown force. In Jackson Rees' *The Caged Angel* we're treated to precisely this story telling staple, as an exhilarating opening witnesses the TARDIS spectacularly dragged through a "spatial bruise" and its crew is attacked by an ethereal agency, intent upon release from its age-old prison.

After passing through the aforementioned 'bruise' the Doctor and Silver find themselves in a completely featureless environment – reminiscent of Peter Ling's 1968 adventure *The Mind Robber* – whereupon the TARDIS promptly vanishes, immediately followed by Silver. Losing the TARDIS shortly after stepping foot outside it, and moments later his newest companion as well, is becoming something of a habit for the TDWP's Eighth Doctor. In fact, this is the second consecutive adventure in which our heroes lose sight of their time vessel and then each other within just a handful of pages. On this occasion their apparent separation involves a subtle realignment of their molecular structures, so as to render them unable to see or touch each other, or the TARDIS, in spite of all three being in the same blank, white room.

The room in question is the prison of an alien scientist, Demetrius Acoda, whose discoveries threatened tyranny for his less progress-obsessed race. Deceived by his would-be subjects and then trapped, Demetrius' body has withered away over time, leaving behind it only his vengeful and unbalanced mind. His snaring of the TARDIS is the latest in a long line of space traps, intended to bring about his release. And, with freedom finally within his grasp, he soon begins using his not inconsiderable mental powers to pressurise the Doctor and Silver into cooperating with him. The narrative then smartly moves into its endgame as the Doctor evades Demetrius, retrieves the TARDIS and embarks upon rescuing Silver, who is caught up in an ee-



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Delving into Silver's damaged upbringing lends substance to her newly arrived character, and Rees' imagery is particularly potent where her murky past is concerned. Blackmailing drug dealers and abandoning parents litter the landscape of her barely begun life, and her dread of the bogeyman – or more specifically the fictional monsters in her parents' cellar – becomes the centerpiece of Silver's battle against Demetrius and

her own inner demons. In comparison to this dark mental excursion the Doctor's nonsensically-cloaked mindscape makes for a jocular diversion, and one which proves to be considerably more difficult to penetrate for his mental foe.

In spite of it being generally well put together there is, however, something lacking about *The Caged Angel*. Certainly, the psychic battle scenes work well and Demetrius' background is interesting enough to avoid him being just another megalomaniac. But the plot's resolution is somewhat predictable and a touch weak in places. Take, for example, the soft manner in which the Doctor sidesteps his seemingly invincible gaoler. The plain fact that Demetrius is possibly older than the Time Lords, and has had countless millennia to concoct an escape plan, makes his initial dispatch at the hands of the TARDIS' temporal grace fields both too easy and uninspired. Of course, all that time cooped up in a blank space with only the odd snared spacefarer for company would dull anyone's reflexes, but to build a villain up to near omnipotent status and then thwart him with a quick-fix solution looks like tired writing. Still further, although the climax offers the chance for some great rapport-building between the Doctor and Silver, the final end of Demetrius, largely

at the hands of a teenager with an unexpectedly strong will, does not match up to either the story's or its villain's early promise.

On a more positive note the angelic appearance of Demetrius' people, juxtaposed with their faceless visages makes for an exceedingly creepy look to say the least (and is strongly reminiscent of some alien beings who appear in the French-Hungarian 1982 cartoon *Les Maîtres du temps*). Rees also has a good grip on the Doctor's zany approach to life and portrays the Time Lord well. On a point of continuity, in Silver's first adventure her father is named Martin and her mother Lisa, whereas this time around her parents become Aaron and Deborah. The reason behind this change is not made immediately clear, although the new names may be due to the fiction which Demetrius conjures up when he invades Silver's troubled mind.

Finally, to Rees' credit he does not rely upon gadgets and gizmos to solve his story, and Demetrius' demise is given a poignantly sympathetic edge. However, although *The Caged Angel* presents a promising idea it falls down in the nature of its finishing, leaving the reader with the impression that what might have been a great story is sadly sold short in the end. **7.5/10**