

## THE SHADOW EMPEROR

Written by: Mark Simpson

Season 33 • Story 9W

Reviewed by Jez Strickley

Thus far Season 33 has given us vintage *Who* in the shape of Sontarans and Vardans, the Mara, Osiran traps and the dastardly Master. In amongst these returnees we've had a space plague, a whodunit, time lines under threat and an incorporeal lunatic who once enjoyed an angelic appearance. As we approach the end of the season it is Mark Simpson's turn to bring us another old favourite in the form of the occult mystery. Indeed, dark doings across space and time are very much the centerpiece of this commendable adventure.

Alongside occult dealings *The Shadow Emperor* also makes use of a past *TDWP* creation in the form of JADE, the military unit devised by Kyle Bastian and which first appeared in Bastian's Season 31 story *Lōkāhi*. This time around the Doctor's encounter with JADE is on a positive footing from almost the very beginning. This change in circumstances is due to Colonel Connor Downs, who formerly met the Doctor during the Time Lord's first experience of JADE. On this occasion Downs quickly engages the Doctor's expertise in order to solve the puzzle of Thomas Abbot, a man who claims to be from the year 1900 and who has somehow arrived in Essex in 2050.

The Doctor quickly ascertains Abbot's authenticity and returns him to late Victorian London, intent on learning how he was transported into the future in the first place. Very soon the villain, Jonathan Bartholomew, is revealed. Bartholomew, a notorious practitioner in black magic, has used his knowledge of the occult – and a vortex crystal – to gain access to future events and the rudiments of time travel. More, he has deliberately used Abbot to snare the Doctor in order to rid himself of the one person who could threaten his world-dominating scheme.

As Simpson guides us towards the climax of his tale he deals his best hand by having Silver willingly join Bartholomew in his grim ambitions. The young follower of Wicca is drawn in by Bartholomew's offer of tuition in the black arts, presenting her with an apprenticeship which threatens to realise her full potential, making her greater than even her dark teacher. Simpson's choice of turncoats is perfect. Silver has only recently joined the Doctor, and her grieving for her dead parents has already given one villain a foothold in her mind which threatened both her life and the life of the Doctor. Now it is a plain case of Silver being given an insight into those aspects of Paganism which she appears to delude herself into thinking that she will not discover if she remains with the Doctor. Of course, all is made aright in the end and Silver's betrayal proves to be unfounded. But, the way in



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which Simpson portrays Silver's apparent *volte face* has the taste of authenticity to it, making the closing scene against Bartholomew all the more potent. Moreover, when Silver later repeatedly affirms her loyalty to the Doctor, her insistent declarations have the ring of that much quoted line from William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in which the Queen observes "*The lady doth protest too much, methinks*" (*Hamlet*, Act III, Scene II). Above all else, this development adds something extra to the relationship between the two time travellers which may yet prove critical at some future juncture.

Our heroes interact very well throughout the adventure and both Downs and Abbot are also nicely sketched out. The villain of the piece, Bartholomew, is the stereotypical Victorian Satanist, whose megalomania is given some degree of invention by way of his colossal, yet almost understated arrogance. And, although this villain may well have an excep-

tionally strong and organised mind, his overconfidence in his own abilities proves to be his Achilles Heel like many a madman before him.

Simpson's prose style is strong and he keeps the reader's attention by moving events along at a fine speed. On the subject of writing style, Simpson also chooses to use a prologue and an epilogue in his story. These two narrative devices, if given meaning as opposed to being needlessly tacked on for the sake of appearances, can really add something to a tale. In this case Simpson makes wise use of these complementary writing tools, lending his adventure a polished, considered feel.

Also worth a mention is the first scene between the Doctor and Silver, which involves a birthday gift of a very special

timepiece for Silver, who has quite lost track of dates and days since joining up with the Doctor. Simpson is right to raise this point since most of us know what it's like to travel or change our routine, and to then find that the days blend into each other and a Saturday feels just like a Thursday and so on. For a time traveller, and especially a newly arrived one, this effect must be even greater, and a watch which instantly adjusts itself to display the time of whichever place you happen to be in is a pretty smart idea anyway.

*The Shadow Emperor* makes for a very good read which comes well recommended. Still further, it affirms the reputation of *TDWP* as one of the most readable and innovative collections of *Doctor Who* fan fiction around.

Rating: 8.5/10