

THE WAX MUSEUM

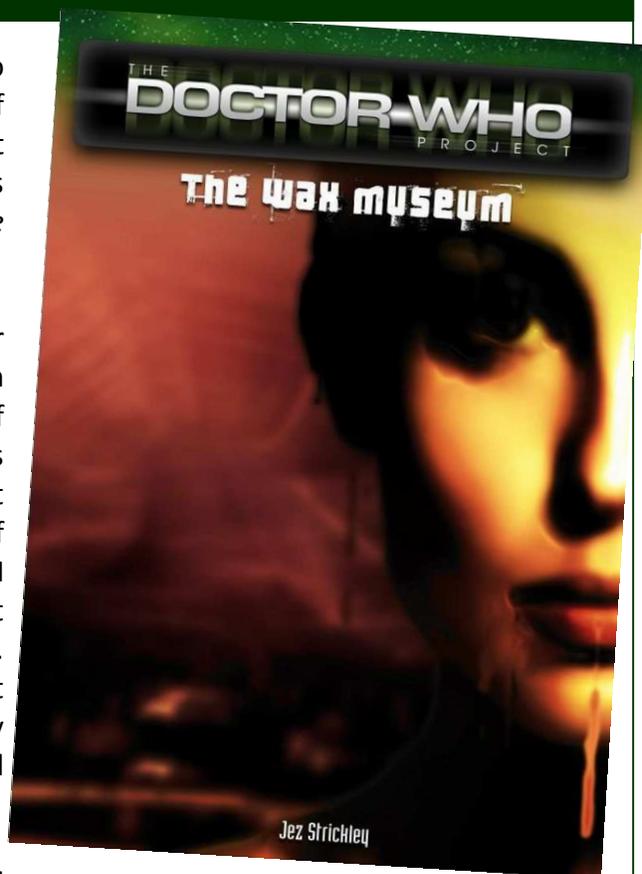
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Season 36 - Story 10W
Reviewed by Gary Phillips

As regular readers of my contributions to *Whotopia* will know, I am not a great fan of fan fiction. But, in saying that, I have never yet read a piece of *TDWP* fiction which has disappointed me and Jez Strickley's debut *The Wax Museum* is no exception.

As the story begins we find the Doctor companionless and alone for the first time in ages. As I say, not being a regular reader of fan fiction I can't claim to be au fait with this particular incarnation of the Doctor who, it must be said, seems to have all the charm of his *TDWP* predecessor. However, that is all I can ascertain as Jez provides us with no great physical description of this incarnation. Instead he works on the assumption that anyone reading *The Wax Museum* is already familiar with this Doctor and thus a full description is scarcely necessary.

The story line is pure Hammer horror – and what a superb television story it would make in the vein of a Philip Hinchcliffe-produced adventure. The narrative positively crackles with atmosphere and suspense from start to finish. It would, however, be unwise for me to divulge too much of the narrative for anyone reading this review who hasn't yet had the pleasure of reading the story itself.

The Doctor, currently travelling alone, visits the famous Celestial Exhibition in the Sirius System in the year 2780, where galaxy-renowned waxwork sculptor, Nanos Mortich, is about to receive his third Grand Primo Award, a sort of intergalactic Turner Prize for



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his latest work ‘The Scream’. But Mortich is no Tracey Emin as many famous people who have visited his waxwork museum are never seen again, and people have started to notice that fact, including detective Lillian March-Reynolds and her underling, Eva Girvan. The Exhibition's head attendant and trainee curator, Istria Hum, also has her misgivings about Mortich's professional practices and

along with this gentle, shrewd and ultimately likeable incarnation of the Doctor, sets out to discover what is going on at Mortich's personal gallery, the Wax Museum.

Jez Strickley's great strength as a writer is in his superb powers of characterisation and description. It would not be unfair to say that in this area he rivals the crime writer, the late Margery Allingham (1904-66) whose descriptive powers were second to none. Jez's description of the Wax Museum with its 2000-step staircase, daunting stairwell and red delvix corridors are superb and would present a challenge to any production designer.

Characterisation in the story is superb. Nanos Mortich is a villain to rank with the best of them, right up there with the likes of Mehendri Solon, Magnus Greel and Morgus. Indeed, as I was reading the story I had visions of Philip Madoc playing Mortich in a television story. Mortich's assistant, Onus Grieg, does come over slightly as a cliché but with so strong a villain, it's hard for an underling to come over as anything else; but Grieg is still a nasty piece of work and very much his

master's protégé.

The aforementioned investigators March-Reynolds, Girvan and also Hum are superbly characterised and one lives in the hope that at least one of them will join the Doctor on his adventures at the end of the story. Feisty females are a mainstay of modern television *Doctor Who* and these three ladies put Rose Tyler, Martha Jones, Donna Noble and even the newly reinvigorated Sarah Jane Smith in the shade.

Mortich's way of creating his waxworks is presented in a gruesome yet not disturbingly graphic manner. And yet, although *The Wax Museum* is a superb horror-based page turner it is still family friendly and, for a first-time writer, a truly superb effort well worthy of the likes of Robert Holmes and Steven Moffat. One looks forward to more *TDWP* adventures from Jez Strickley soon.

The Wax Museum is gripping, exciting, mildly horrific yet glowing with warmth and a subtle humour. I can't recommend it highly enough. Superb. **10/10**.