

# DOES IT MATTER?

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Season 34/Story IOF

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Over the years *Doctor Who* has delivered up the odd two part adventure to give the viewer a contrast and perhaps to offer a little breathing space to the production budget. Stories such as 'The Rescue', 'The Sontaran Experiment' and 'Black Orchid' present concise, fast-paced plot lines which avoid fatiguing the viewer, and help to break up what might otherwise be a rather monotonous dishing up of one four part offering after another. *Does it Matter?* gives us precisely the sort of two part adventure which is now the staple diet of the new television series. Padding is nonexistent, and every word and paragraph are made to count, forging a tale which moves quickly towards its conclusion and barely gives the reader the chance to come up for air.

The story line is relatively straightforward, although the way in which it opens and the occasional flashback are mysterious enough to leave the reader pondering how much of what is happening is actually real and how much of it is inside the protagonists' heads. In terms of the basic plot line the Doctor and Silver have embarked upon a mission to deal with D'Asquoin, an industrialist on contemporary Earth who has jerry rigged all manner of alien technology to create a virtual world. Inside this electronic dreamscape people live and work, and by successfully populating the program D'Asquoin grows increasingly wealthy on the labours of others.

The Doctor and Silver effectively manage to disable part of the program, but when a sleeper server which has avoided their sabotage kicks in, they are quickly captured and so begin the identity mind games for the Doctor and Silver.

The Doctor's memory is wiped, although given his unearthly qualities his conditioning soon begins to fail as his memories resurface bringing with them his true identity. In a nice twist the Doctor's captors confront him with a fake identity which consists in him being a dangerous terrorist. He is then presented with a drug which can completely erase his past, and enable him to start from scratch as a new man. It is an intriguing offer and one which leaves the Doctor with an important choice.

Silver is given the role of action-girl, successfully putting together and then executing an escape plan and following up her break out by freeing the Doctor. The pair then put pay to D'Asquoin's designs once and for all, with a little help from Silver's size nine boots, all of which brings to mind the daring antics of another Doctor-companion double act which came together at the end of the 1980s.



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Re-wiring the Doctor's memory is an interesting twist. The seemingly invincible Time Lord is portrayed as genuinely confused and at times appears almost fragile. Inventing a fake identity based on a wanted terrorist is highly salient given the events unfolding in the real world, and by weakening the Doctor we are given the chance to see what Silver is capable of without her mentor's guiding hands.

The overall story, however, feels somewhat rushed in places and the characterisation of D'Asquoin is minimal. In fact, he barely surfaces until the climax when he gives the regulation maniac's speech about wanting to help others. The virtual world motif has the makings of an exciting plot line, but it doesn't get given nearly enough space to bring it to life. Moreover, it also leaves the odd question unanswered, such as how did D'Asquoin find his workers in the first place? And what are the authorities doing whilst he is developing a

phantom reality to inflate his bank balance? Raising questions like these will usually fire up the curiosity of the reader, but in this case curiosity is replaced by frustration and the feeling that the author has simply forgotten to tie up the odd loose end.

Despite these criticisms *Does it Matter?* is a sound slice of story telling, which gives the reader an insight into how one

man's self-centred utopia is little more than a totalitarian dystopia for the poor souls caught up in it. Jodie van de Wetering's prose is very good and with a bit more meat on the bone this adventure could really take off; as it is it cruises along nicely and gives Silver the chance to shine.

**Rating: 7/10**