

LAPLACE'S DEMON

Written by: Craig Charlesworth

Season 34/Story IOE

Reviewed by: Jez Strickley

A brutal and cold blooded killing is the dramatic opening to Craig Charlesworth's *Laplace's Demon*, a tale which centres upon the mysterious happenings and hauntings which are taking place at the heart of intergalactic academia.

The Doctor and Silver are holidaying on Aurora, a world dominated by one all encompassing purpose – education. As a university planet, Aurora's academics are fed and watered by a race of simple humanoid farmers, who, according to the Doctor, are quite happy to work every moment of their eighty-seven hour day in order to nourish their bookish neighbors. Whilst hiking to Sikylon, Aurora's most prestigious University House, the Doctor's curiosity is aroused by the apparent absence of the local population. Despite Silver's best efforts to keep to their holiday agenda, the Doctor's interest quickly overrides her protestations, and the two soon arrive at the cathedral-esque building of Sikylon where they meet Raphael, a student whose father is known to the Doctor.

In double quick time the Doctor uncovers the shadowy Project Idrael, run by the equally foreboding Avalon Corporation, an off-world company which has been dealing with the planet Aurora, and in particular Sikylon, for some thirty years. The corporation's ambiguous interest in the workings of Aurora's primary academic institute is lent a sinister edge by the Acolytes, Avalon's private army which has been deployed for the alleged purpose of safeguarding Sikylon's occupants. The leader of the Acolytes, Commander James Ives, is immediately shown to be the worst kind of soldier, and his unsavoury interest in Silver marks only the beginning of his depravity.

Ethereal visitors and messages from beyond the grave transform this adventure into something more than a simple case of missing persons. Irresistibly the Doctor is drawn into a dangerous confrontation with Mr. LeVay, the leader of the Avalon Corporation, whose underground base has all the makings of some serious censoring if it were ever to be transferred to the small screen.

Although the showdown between the Doctor and LeVay is routine, its overarching themes of universal domination and out-and-out insanity are refreshingly set out. LeVay's mental faculties have been seriously thrown off balance by tampering with those things which are better left untouched, and, although this is a fairly traditional state of affairs in *Doctor Who*, LeVay marks new heights in terms of his sheer breath of vision – a point which does not go unnoticed by the Doctor, creating a wariness which gives LeVay's menace



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more substance. In spite of LeVay's much vaunted intellect, however, his undoing looms large when he finds himself lured into a Chess match with the wily Time Lord, whose Chess antics are becoming something of a theme for *TDWP's* Ninth Doctor.

An interesting echo which is worth mentioning lies in the style of LeVay's plan: collecting only the very best minds for his obscene project, which in turn is housed away underground, brings back memories of the master madman Davros and his sepulchral schemes in 'Revelation of the Daleks'. Furthermore, the echo of Davros and his malevolent machinations has an irony to it when considering the motive which triggered off Project Idrael in the first place.

Silver is given a love interest in the form of the under confident Raphael, presenting her with the chance to be more

than just the Doctor's teenage enforcer and once again she acquits her well when dealing with danger whilst separated from the Doctor. Unfortunately, for the most part Raphael comes across as rather lackluster and dreamy, despite his heroic efforts to defeat LeVay's henchmen, and this tends to make the reader question what the time travelling Silver would see in a greenhorn student, regardless of his good looks and apparent courage.

The final climax is as bloody as the opening of the story, and it is this point in general which sinks what ought to be a solid piece of science fiction. The graphically detailed nature of the more unpleasant events in *Laplace's Demon* numbs the reader and smacks of sensationalism, spoiling what is an otherwise credible adventure with needlessly gruesome prose: the ruthlessly brutal murder which closes the opening scene, Ives' feelings towards Silver, the Doctor's final battle with LeVay and the attack of the undead in the closing stages are shamelessly overt and hardly suited to the world of *Doctor Who*. Of course there is a time and a place for death and destruction during the Doctor's escapades – these spectres have haunted his travels from the very beginning – but there really is no need to unplug the reader's imagination, and simply dish up the way these two dark forces go about their business in such explicit fashion.

Ironically, the nastier aspects of *Laplace's Demon* could be furnished with much greater potency given a less obvious style of delivery. Instead, the author's need to precisely explain what happens becomes so heavy that it rapidly loses its bite, anaesthetizes the sensibilities of the reader, and creates the sort of bland slasher film violence which smothers whatever subtleties might have cropped up earlier in the tale. Silver's private observation that some people "...*just need to be a bit more relaxed around extreme violence...*" epitomizes the cavalier manner with which death is handled, and produces a flippancy in her which is quite out of place in Silver's character. To add salt to the wound the Doctor's nonchalance at the death of the guard Dietrich has all the worst aspects of the Sixth Doctor during season twenty-two, which is hardly an accolade to which *TDWP's* newly arrived Ninth Doctor should aspire.

In the main *Laplace's Demon* has a sound plot and a solidly driven villain, but its lurid scenes of violence provide it with an Achilles Heel, that leaves an unpleasant aftertaste in the mind of the reader and virtually cancels out the adventure's more admirable qualities.

Rating: 6/10