

SÉANCE IN A TYPE 40 TARDIS

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Season 34/Story IOG
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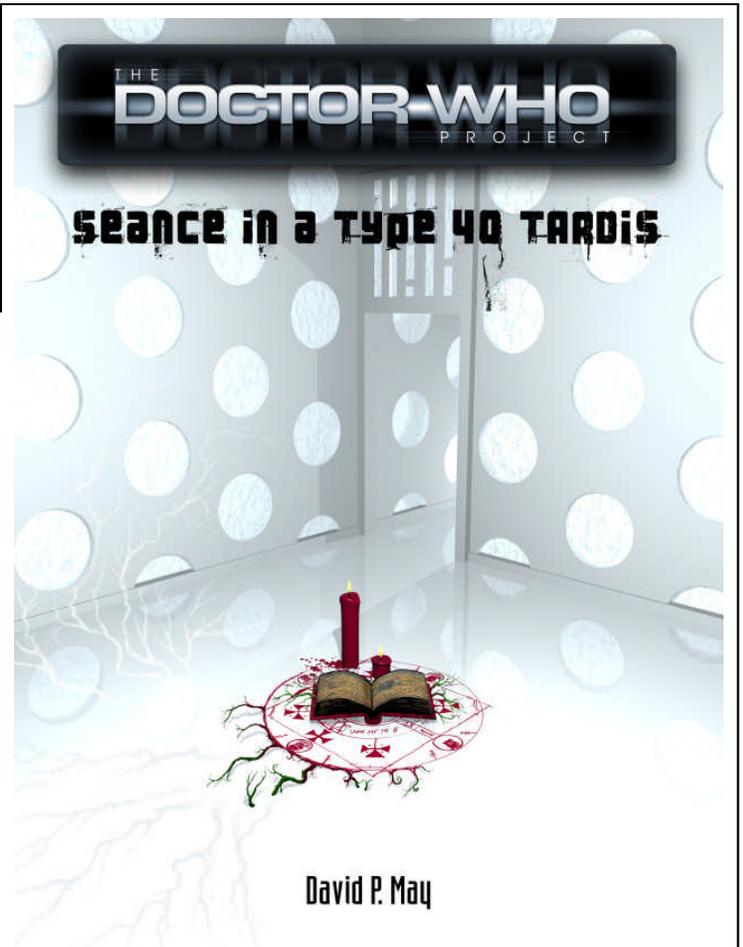
David P. May's *Séance In A Type 40 TARDIS* presents an intriguing combination of spiritualist rituals and alien menace, making for an exciting adventure which keeps the reader loyal from start to finish.

The story begins with the Doctor and Silver in a vast, labyrinthine library on the planet Hilomino, where they are returning one of the works stolen by the book-thieving time traveller Dexter Dean (see Duncan Johnson's story *The Librarian of Serapea*). With boredom fast taking hold of her Silver is encouraged by the Doctor to explore the library for herself, with the help of its creepily taciturn custodian, who takes her to the section on spiritualism. Silver soon finds a book on summoning the souls of the dead, which she surreptitiously 'borrows'. Back aboard the TARDIS Silver retires to her room and immediately embarks upon a rather foolhardy attempt at necromancy. The ritual appears to be working, until a sudden fall breaks her concentration as well as her spell, leaving her weak and shaken. An attempted séance with the Doctor's help meets with a predictable result, and it is only when Silver returns once more to her room and again attempts the mysterious incantation that she finds herself experiencing a psychic connection with potentially disastrous consequences.

Silver's psychic encounter is not so dissimilar to the disturbing nature of Tegan's first experience of the Mara in 'Kinda'. The description of Silver entering this eerie, nightmarish domain is spine-tingling stuff, and if you enjoy a vivid imagination you may want to avoid reading this story alone and after dark.

The narrative is split up into episodic segments which neatly fit together, avoiding any jarring or loss of momentum. In fact, the seamless movement from one package of events to the next gives the reader the chance to take stock of what has happened and consider what might come next. The beginning of the second episode is a case in point. After a tense conclusion to Episode One the second act opens with the Doctor and Silver engaged in a lively conversation over a meal which perfectly reflects their contrasting characters. Furthermore, it provides a useful breathing space for the author to develop the rapport between the story's protagonists, rather than simply rushing on to the next piece of action.

Another example of this last point involves the Doctor finding a book by an alien writer called Managananon, the mem-



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ory of whose death leaves the Time Lord pondering how, in spite of the TARDIS, he does not like to visit other beings once he has witnessed their passing. This pause for thought allows the reader to consider the Doctor's perspective on time, a notoriously difficult standpoint to convey to those non-time travellers among us, and yet one which equips the reader to properly empathize with the Doctor's motivations and actions.

In exploring apparently paranormal phenomena, *Séance In A Type 40 TARDIS* is of a piece with *Day of the Dead* and *The Legend of the Green Man*. Unlike its forerunners, however, it is the ominous subject of possession which becomes the hub of the tale. On this point the author proves his mettle by taking a largely misunderstood and frightening topic, and dealing it out in just the right doses to avoid making it the stuff of nightmares. The story's spiritualist motif inevita-

bly gives the character of Silver another opportunity to be stretched beyond the limits of the stereotypical rebellious teenager, and goes on to become the very centre of the narrative. Having said that, David P. May is careful to afford the Doctor proper attention, giving the curious Time Lord the serious task of unraveling what has happened to Silver and his TARDIS. In this way the threads of the story line move from one lead character to the other, much like relay runners exchanging a baton.

The plot moves along at a good speed and all the various pieces of the puzzle are nicely slotted into place by close of play. If there is one element of the predictable about this adventure, it is perhaps the way in which Silver's determination to find magic and mystery around every corner is routinely extinguished by the Doctor's scientific findings. To a large extent this is what makes the chemistry between these

two characters, but it would be nice to see the odd example of the Doctor's empirical mindset being given a shake now and again, and Silver learning that there is more to the universe than cause and effect.

Séance In A Type 40 TARDIS is an absorbing adventure given novelty by being largely set inside the TARDIS. Silver's mental battles, against a foe which proves highly adept at mind games, lend the tale a distinctly spooky edge, and the close relationship between the Doctor and Silver is well highlighted. And, in the same way that Robert Holmes' 'Terror of the Autons' made viewers look at plastic dolls and telephone cords in a very different light, readers of this adventure may find borrowing a book from their local library will never be quite the same again.

Rating: 8.5/10