

FREEDOM FIGHTER

Written by: Jodie van de Wetering

Based on an idea by Arnold T. Blumberg

Season 33 ▪ Story 9T

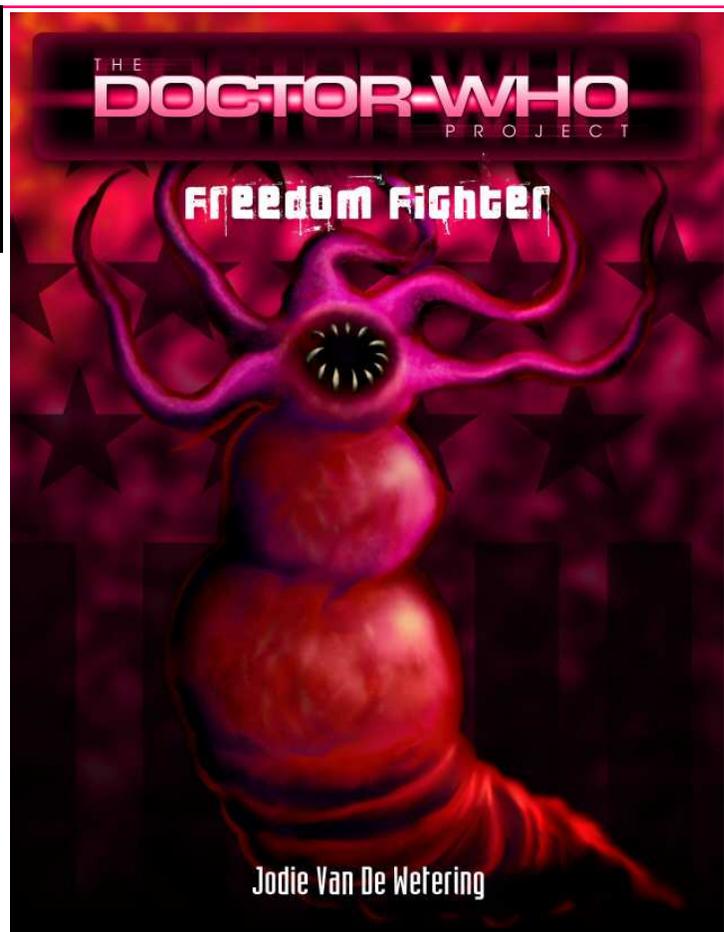
Reviewed by Jez Strickley

Based on an idea by Arnold T. Blumberg, Jodie van de Wetering's *Freedom Fighter* is a highly engaging story, which sees an increasingly restless Doctor entering a new chapter in his travels as he finds companionship in the midst of a disturbing new challenge, at the heart of which lies one of his oldest enemies.

The story opens in Washington DC in 1998, where a scientist by the name of Martin Silverstein is desperately trying to fathom the mystery of the grabbers: a recently discovered aquatic species with the disturbing habit of controlling, and thereby animating, the dead bodies of those unfortunate enough to get too close to them. Events soon fast forward to 2002, and then on to 2005 as the menace of the grabbers becomes a global threat.

What makes this adventure more than just a formulaic re-run of many a world-threatening alien invasion is the Doctor's conundrum-inspiring *Doppelgänger*, whose shunting of the time lines has enabled him to save the Earth and become the President of the United States of America in the process. The exchanges between the Doctor and his double – the identity of whom is not too hard to imagine – are well done indeed, especially the debate over whether the rearranging of the time lines has not, in point of fact, created a better world. However, when the grabbers rise up once again, it is the real Doctor who must find a solution to their deadly threat and deal with his dastardly side-changing double all at the same time.

Freedom Fighter is a finely written, pithy affair unburdened by needless verbiage and sidetracking. More, in spite of its being just twenty-odd pages in length, it still manages to deliver some priceless pieces of description, the choicest of which must be the comparing of the grabber-controlling Gisb to "...a ball of grey wool after the cat had been at it." Aside from choice descriptions, van de Wetering is also careful to spend time on her supporting characters. With this point in mind the first few pages focus on Martin Silverstein: his thoughts, his concerns and his young family. Silverstein's ponderings bring the narrative to life, lending us a glimpse of the perspective of a man trying to survive in an increasingly hopeless situation. Appreciating his character proves to be a fairly crucial exercise given that his daughter, Rachel, becomes the Doctor's new assistant at the end of the story. Rachel, or 'Silver' as she prefers to be known, is a very well sketched character, whose emotional anchor is raised up and then dropped right back down again as we learn of her mother's death, her father's remarrying, and



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then the death of her stepmother and finally her father. Tragedy is mixed with invention in her wheeler-dealer approach to her father's grabber specimens, and references to her former drugs habit give her a jagged edge beyond her years. In short, Silver presents a sharp contrast to the Doctor's previous assistants, and provides a much needed fresh start for a Time Lord who, after losing three companions in quick succession, could really do with starting over again.

In regard to the Doctor, van de Wetering's handling of the erstwhile Gallifreyan is excellent. His waistcoat indulgences continue unabashed, and the reference to the latest version's stellar pattern moving "...with a planned randomness" is just the sort of oxymoron that so perfectly sums up his eighth persona. Still further, the gradual revelation of the Doctor's time-shifting arch-enemy is nicely laid out, and gives plenty of food for thought for the inevitable unveiling when it finally occurs.

Rating: 10/10