

THE MIST

Written by: Jeff Taylor

Season 33 • Story 9X

Reviewed by Jez Strickley

A fast-paced prison break makes for an exhilarating prologue to Jeff Taylor's debut TDWP story, *The Mist*. The break-out in question involves one inmate: the Orpheid, a singular being who weighs in at three tons and moves around on no fewer than six elephant-like legs. Once free of its restraints the Orpheid affects its getaway aboard a stolen spaceship, hotly pursued by the innovatively titled prison transport pilot, Inertia Williams.

The Orpheid versus Williams space chase appears to finish in a draw when both of their vessels fall into the Earth's gravity well. Space then gives way to ocean as a fishing trawler off of the Cornish coast comes to a disastrous end by way of the tidal wave generated from the crash of one of the aforementioned spacefarers. As it happens, a tidal wave is not the only threat to inhabit the watery depths, and it soon becomes apparent which of spacefarers has survived. 'Survived' is perhaps not quite the right word since in point of fact the Orpheid's disembodied mental content has imprinted itself upon the ocean waters, and then drifted towards land in the form of a sinister mist. Desperate for energy to rebuild itself, the Orpheid-mist sets about enveloping the lifeboat in which the trawler's skipper has sought refuge; his spine-chilling demise is only the start of the horror.

A brief respite from this taught beginning is then found in the shape of a Cornish beach resort, where the Doctor is doing his best to introduce Silver to the delights of the seaside holiday, not to mention his not inconsiderable sandcastle-making skills. Their respite does not last long when, upon retiring to a nearby inn they discover that a massive psychic phenomenon is in close vicinity. Soon the inn is swallowed up by the nebulous mist and yet more hapless locals fall victim to the nightmarish entity inhabiting it. Strikingly, as the Orpheid-mist terrorises one poor unfortunate after another it is Silver who manages to rescue the Doctor, after he takes the dangerous step of investigating the fog-like substance at firsthand. As the narrative reaches its climax the Doctor's jerry-rigging of yet another solve-all contraption – in this case a Van de Graaff generator – forms one half of the solution, whilst Silver's training in Wicca provides the other. The final demise of the Orpheid is given a tragic edge as the Doctor recognises that only death can release it from its terrible condition; and Silver is able to draw her own conclusions as to how the day was saved in the end.

Although *The Mist* is certainly not the longest example of fan fiction Taylor's prose style lends it a density which belies its twenty-odd pages. The opening scene of the first episode is



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a prime example of this quality. The sinking of the *Macy Gray* fishing trawler is thick with understated menace, and the death of its captain makes for bloodcurdling stuff indeed.

The Doctor and Silver make for a very good TARDIS crew and Taylor is at home in catering for this latest Doctor-companion team. In particular, their brief time enjoying the Cornish seaside ticks all the boxes of the typical English holiday; and it's difficult not to smile when reading about the Doctor's sandcastle-making antics. In fact, conjuring up an image of the goateed Time Lord up to his knees in sand, busily sculpting away whilst surrounded by a crowd of curious onlookers, gives us a portrait of the quintessential British holidaymaker, intent on having fun come rain or shine.

Taylor's nuanced writing goes beyond deliciously served up scenery, however. Silver, for example, is given time to ponder the differences between British and US English, and admits to missing her father – perhaps for the first time since joining the Doctor. Still further, Taylor's splitting of his narrative into two episodic segments along with a prologue is a wise move, presenting an intriguing start which is smartly followed by an exciting climax midway. Of course, weak cliffhangers make a mockery of episodic writing, but in Taylor's case the reader need have no fear – the cliffhanger in question is well worth its place.

In all, *The Mist* is one *TDWP's* best stories thus far and manages to navigate the horror genre without resorting to needlessly graphic violence. The Doctor and Silver are portrayed with flair and the tragic tale of the Orpheid gives the reader a monster that is more than just another bug-eyed nasty. More, the imagery is nigh on tangible in some places, and Taylor's use of an eerie mist to evoke fear and trembling is shrewd indeed. Excellent doesn't quite cover it.

Rating: 10/10