

## STRANGE MEETING

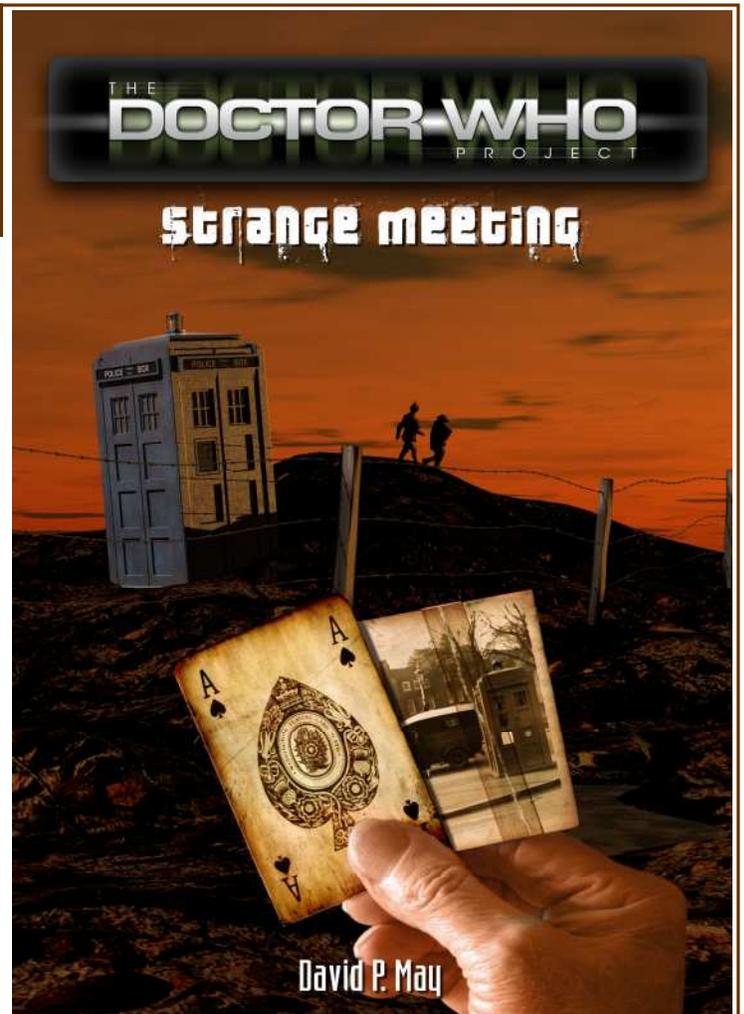
Written by: David P. May  
Season 35 ▪ Story 10P  
Reviewed by Jez Strickley

A poignant opening, in which the funeral of a much loved father is sincerely played out, begins David P. May's latest TDWP work *Strange Meeting*, an adventure deftly slotted into a series of time zones which takes the reader from late 1960s England, into the whirling Time Vortex and then smartly on to its focal point: the brutal, industrial killing fields of the Western Front.

After a sombre start May introduces his audience to one of the more mundane aspects of a time traveller's life: cleaning dirty laundry. Silver's domestic chores are hardly her top priority, at least in her view, and the wonders of the trusty Type 40's non-shrinking, non-colouring clothes washing facility have long since worn off for the restless teenager. In amongst this laundry-based penance Silver reflects upon her time with Seth (see Jack Rees' *Moonlight Part One* and *Moonlight Part Two*) and remembers a wound of the heart which is in need of healing. Soon enough Silver's melancholy recollections are broken by a fidgety Mortimer, shortly after which she is presented with the Doctor's invitation of a night at the opera, nineteenth-century French style.

Although Silver declines the offer, she quickly follows in the Doctor's muddy footprints when it becomes clear that the TARDIS has landed at least a hundred years off course. Of all the mistaken destinations to which the TARDIS could take its crew the mud-ridden battlefields of France in the First World War are amongst the most dangerous; and it is within this terrible crucible of static warfare that May proceeds to unfold the crux of his tale. Of no little importance is the manner in which this theatre of war is seen through a variety of perspectives. One of these viewpoints is a three-fold affair involving a trio of British soldiers: the optimistic Sewell, the pessimistic 'Lucky' Lunt and the rather more realistic, although still hopeful Peter Baxter. Of these three, it is Peter whose actions become central to the events which follow.

In amidst the horrors of No-Man's Land the Doctor and Silver lose sight of the TARDIS and become lost. Whilst trying to orientate themselves they meet another lost soul, Gunther Reisenmann, and it is here that May plays his most inventive hand: Reisenmann, a dutiful German



***Gunther sees the Doctor and Silver as friends, and the reader is reminded of the TARDIS' rare gift of tongues, a quality which tends to go unnoticed in the course of most adventures.***

soldier, is struck by the fact that this bizarrely attired duo speak perfect German (albeit in Silver's case accompanied by some unusual expressions). As a result Gunther sees the Doctor and Silver as friends, and the reader is reminded of the TARDIS' rare gift of tongues, a quality which tends to go unnoticed in the course of most adventures.

It is the confusing nature of this linguistic gift which then triggers the centerpiece of the narrative: an equally disoriented Peter Baxter stumbles upon the trio and cannot grasp how these three strangers, one of whom wears the uniform of a German soldier, speak excellent English.

Confusion is quickly followed by fear and in a sudden burst of panic Peter opens fire and shoots the Doctor. Recriminations and accusations abound, and the still wary Peter takes Silver, Gunther and the wounded Doctor prisoner, intent upon returning with his captives to his trench. Events take a drastic and unexpected turn when Peter falls foul of the treacherous quicksand-like terrain. In a moment of sheer humanity, not to mention extraordinary courage, Gunther risks his life to save Peter from a ghastly death. In the wake of such an existential shock Peter recognizes the futility of the war which has made them enemies and makes his peace with Gunther. It is a touching reconciliation and one which, considering the wider context of the story, May is absolutely right to touch upon.

Character-wise the regulars are well served. The Doctor is his usual inquisitive self, and Silver's letting slip her knowledge of future developments demonstrates that her time travel credentials have not yet matured – a point which reveals that there is still mileage left in this unconven-

tional companion. Mortimer's token appearance is nicely portrayed, and the fact that the wily *Über*-cat chooses to avoid the muddy landscape upon which the TARDIS makes landfall is wise indeed. Gunther is deftly sketched out as a humble clerk driven to fight through duty and patriotism, and Peter is ideal as the soldier who comes to see his enemy for what he truly is, a human being propelled into combat by the very same empty rhetoric and hollow propaganda as himself.

May's prism on the Great War, a German clerk and an English carpenter, drawn together by chance and given the opportunity to heal the wounds between their respective nations, is a craftily shaped and nuanced piece of story telling. May clearly cares about the subject matter he is dealing with, and his decision to look at the language confusions brought about by the TARDIS is simply splendid. This story, purely historical in nature, is a gem. **Rating: 9.5/10**