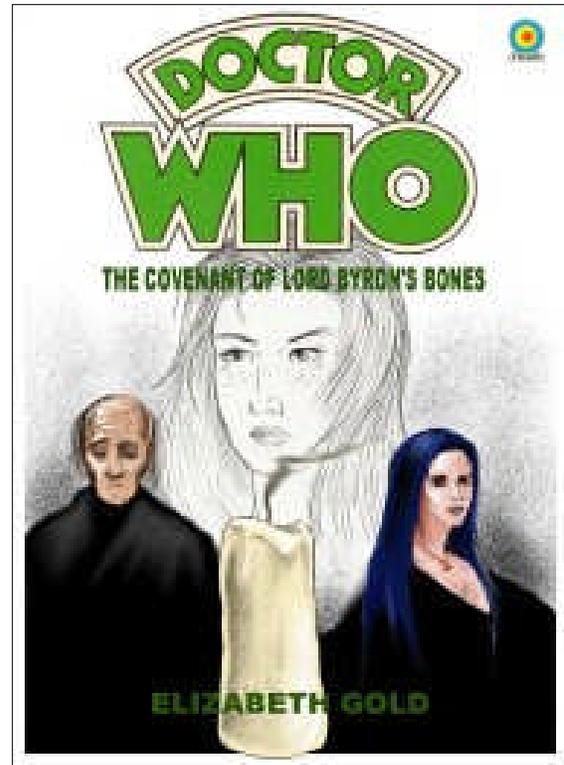


I must confess to not really being a fan of fan-fiction. Okay so the Virgin New and Missing Adventure novels often turned in a good, readable tale, as did the BBC New and Missing Adventure novels in their early days before the UK fan-clique ruined them and tried to impose their own image of what *DOCTOR WHO* should be on those of us daft enough to fork out £5.99 each month. Hence it was with certain trepidation that I accepted the offer from Bob to review a piece of TDWP fan-fiction.

This was my first encounter with the TDWP version of the Doctor who John-Gordon Swogger's superb artwork reminds one of a benevolent version of Jim Dale's character Doc Terminus from the 1977 Disney film *Pete's Dragon*. This Doctor is a gentle, Spiritual man with a warm personality, which makes him instantly likeable. Indeed incoming producer Russell T Davies could do a lot worse than to use this Doctor as a blueprint for the 9<sup>th</sup> TV Doctor. He is a joy to read about and if other authors treat him with the same respect I look forward to reading more.

One cannot help but wonder if the aforesaid Mr Davies has used the secret agent companion Tamara Scott as a blueprint for the new Doctor's companion, Rose Tyler whom we are promised will be an action woman. I was a bit wary upon hearing that Tamara was a secret agent as one immediately envisages a sort of female stereotypical James Bond, but Tamara is every inch a lady, kind, caring and thoughtful.

At this stage, I can't say too much about the Time Lady Grae. This young lady comes over as charming yet enigmatic and I can't help but wonder if, like Turlough, she has some sort of hidden agenda, yet the interaction between the Doctor is so warm and realistic that it holds your attention and doesn't let go. One assumes that Grae was very much a newcomer to Earth in 1998 as she doesn't know what a bus is, in which the same way Terrance Dicks told us in the novelization of *THE STONES OF BLOOD* that upon hearing that Vivien Fay used to be a Brown Owl Romana wondered if Miss Fay had the ability to change into a bird of prey!!!



Despite my initial apprehension the story of **THE COVENANT OF LORD BYRON'S BONES** is a very well written piece, which puts recent BBC efforts in the shade. Beginning with a meeting in 1998 in Salem (presumably the one noted for it's witch Trials and not the fictional one of *Days of Our Lives* Fame) between A high school girl called Allie and Grae. This scene is gripping and suitably eerie as Allie invites Grae to a Halloween party. Allie's warning to Grae that it is Halloween in Salem and if Grae wants weird she'll get weird has a very X Files sort of feel to it which borders well for events yet to come.

Sadly it is after this that the story becomes somewhat incomprehensible, although the TARDIS scene wherein the crew are again invited to a party may well relate to past events of which I have not yet read. After this, the story starts to jump backwards and forwards between 1998 and 2003 and back and forth again at a spanking pace which leaves the reader breathless and rather confused.

The story then jumps five years to Halloween 2003 and it seems that Allie is now living with her roommates, Jane and Crystal. Another Halloween Party is in the offering, one to which the Doctor, Grae and Tamara have been invited

after, apparently, Grae was invited after the 1998 party!!!

From what this author can make out, Allie's 'uncle', who is without a doubt, the best, and most intriguing and enigmatic character in the entire story is really the 'late' Lord Byron who supposedly died a century ago. The Doctor finds the old man who is at once charming and irascible somewhat familiar; "*Oh...it's you!*" proclaims the enigmatic figure in the darkened room upon seeing the Doctor for the first time. The story of the covenant of Lord Byron's Bones was unknown to Allie's family until a skeleton was delivered to her house five years previously.

As I have said the story has a gripping feel and is undoubtedly well written but yet it's short length and brisk pace means that its characters come over as little more than ciphers. That said, despite being *slightly* disappointed with this story, I am by no means discouraged by it and would urge anyone who has not yet made the acquaintance of The Doctor, Tamara and Grae to do so at once. They are a TARDIS crew of whom any BBC producer could be proud to work with and would offer Dr Who's incoming production team a wonderful template from which to work in order to bring the series back to the screen.

In conclusion although *The Covenant of Lord Byron's Bones* moves at such a brisk pace as to make little sense. It is written with panache and I for one look forward to reading more stories in the near future. Whatever happens with the BBC, Doctor Who's literary future is safe in Canadian hands.

**Reviewed by Gary Phillips**