

## THE DAWNOF TIME

Written by: John Gordon

Season 33/Story 9N

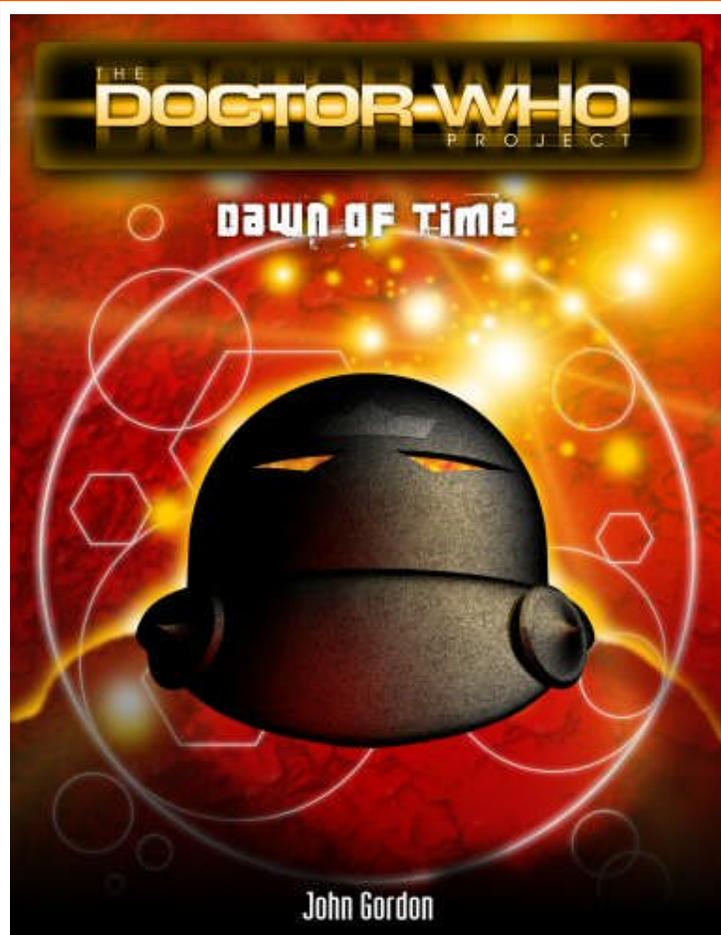
Reviewed by: Jez Strickley

John Gordon's *The Dawn of Time* tackles the three-way challenge of opening a new season of *TDWP* stories, dealing with the aftershock of a companion's death and bringing back one of the series' most popular monsters. Unarguably John Gordon's effort succeeds on all three counts, and certainly deserves full marks as one of the best examples of fan fiction currently available.

The adventure opens with the Doctor, Grae and Taryn each struggling with the emotional aftermath of Tamara Scott's recent death (see Duncan Johnson's *And The Clocks Struck Thirteen*). Each character faces their personal loss in a contrasting style, providing the reader with a privileged insight into the mental worlds of their respective heroes. In turn this creates a series of scenes which quickly mature into a triumvirate of fully fledged subplots, each one following a separate story thread until, inexorably, they join together to form the climax of the tale. In short, Grae is abandoned on a nameless world, the Doctor is thrown out into the Time Vortex and Taryn is taken prisoner by a group of aliens that hijacks the TARDIS as part of their plan to invade time – an invasion which echoes a popular adventure from the classic series. In handling these three subplots with a smooth dexterity John Gordon executes an out-and-out master class in story telling, methodically unpacking the events around each of the main characters and all the while keeping the reader's attention in a vice-like grip.

The overarching plot involves the Sontarans and their mind-reading stooges, the Vardans, once again intent on overthrowing Gallifrey and mastering time. Predictably, all this scheming and plotting is with a view to routing the Rutan Horde and transforming the Sontaran Empire into a universe-wide affair. What makes this tale stand out as more than just another alien romp, however, is the way in which the author seamlessly weaves together a complex series of happenings, set across different times and places and involving a variety of characters to form one all-conquering adventure.

Not satisfied with a superb line in plot writing, John Gordon delivers his story through a feast of imagery. His exploration of the interior of the TARDIS, the various landscapes of Varda Prime and the epic proportions of the Sontaran-Rutan battle are vividly laid out so as to form an immaculate vision in the reader's mind. In particular, the author takes obvious delight in writing about the TARDIS; not only does its role in the scheme of things prove pivotal, but it is also meticulously brought to life in a way which launches it far beyond the confines of a mere travel device. It is difficult to decide which simile or metaphor stands out the most whilst reading about the TARDIS, but special mention should be given to



***“Not satisfied with a superb line in plot writing, John Gordon delivers his story through a feast of imagery.”***

the Doctor's pottering around in the secondary console room, a scene which paints the perfect picture of the maverick Time Lord and his longest serving and most loyal companion – or, given the nature of John Gordon's story line, should that be senior partner?

In point of fact, this last question is precisely what *The Dawn of Time* hinges upon, prompting the reader to consider the relationship which exists not only between the Doctor and the TARDIS, but also between the TARDIS and the various adventures into which it throws its alleged pilot and his associates. This point is particularly well raised through the course of Taryn's subplot, which, although leaving plenty of room for doubt as to her verdict on the TARDIS and its abilities, presents the reader with a powerful premise from which to stage their own arguments on the qualities of the Doctor's mysterious time machine.

A further, and equally intriguing line of inquiry pursued by Taryn's part of the story involves her unconcealed resentment towards her Time Lord companions in regard to their apparently manipulative tendencies towards the wider world. Taryn's cynical, and yet arguably accurate observation of her travelling companions inspires yet more queries as to the true motives lying behind the actions of the Doctor and Grae, and John Gordon doesn't miss the opportunity of Tamara's death to emphasise the possibly muddy motivations of these two Time Lords. Taryn is very well portrayed, and her overall bitterness at the death of her friend and the lifestyle of her surviving comrades is carefully stoked without becoming overbearing or tired.

Beyond his adroit handling of the TARDIS crew John Gordon tackles the Sontaran and Vardan characters equally well. The utterances of Major Thyre and Marshall Vanx are spot-on in their typically militaristic tone, and the sinister Vardan

Commander Salvan cuts a particularly chilling figure, whose mind-reading interrogation of the Doctor furnishes him with a genuinely menacing aspect.

In what is essentially a sequel to the classic series story 'The Invasion of Time' this adventure takes the reader on a time travelling yarn which moves effortlessly between story threads, and serves up a perplexing chain of events which demands the reader's undivided attention. Its pace is solid throughout, and the quality of some of its descriptive passages is nothing short of superb. In fact, the scene depicting a planet-wide onslaught between Sontaran and Rutan is worth the entrance fee alone. Now, if only the new series production team would take a leaf out of this book...

**Rating: 10/10**