

AND THE CLOCKS STRIKE THIRTEEN

Written by: Duncan Johnson

Season 32/Story 9M

Reviewed by: Nazim Ryall-Dincer

And so, the end.

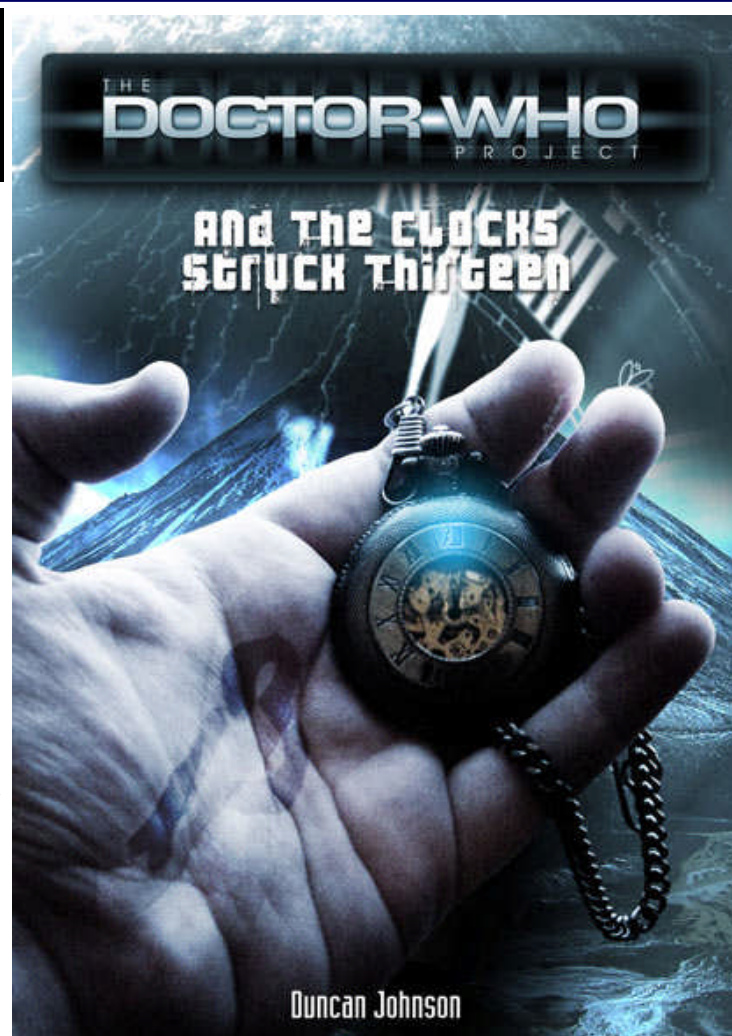
Spoilers will follow. Lots of spoilers. Of doom. Abandon hope all ye spoiler virgins who go past this point.

After the cliffhanger at the end of the last episode, the Doctor, Grae, Tamara and Taryn had been trapped in a collapsing TARDIS as the planet Gallifrey was destroyed around them. This leads writer, Duncan Johnson, to split up the TARDIS crew who each go on a separate adventures regarding the mysterious Section 13.

One could be forgiven for thinking that writer Duncan Johnson had been reading quite a lot of Kate Orman's work, particularly the novel "Set Piece". The start of this piece has very much in common with Ace's part of the novel – both Ace and Taryn are dumped in the middle of the desert, both try to interact with an ancient civilisation, both even go through some of the same experiences! (Interestingly enough, there are also some nice dream sequences later on, which are also reminiscent of Orman's books). Fortunately, their plots quickly diverge, though ***"And the Clocks Struck Thirteen"*** coming off weaker in this regard, possibly because of the parallels I've already drawn with Kate Orman's work. The Mesopotamian culture seen here feels under-developed (though it must be said that Duncan Johnson gets some major plus points for the fact that he bothers to write a pseudo-historical, a rare and precious thing in the realms of fan fiction). However, I feel that the prose doesn't quite have the gravitas needed for some of these scenes – scenes such as the destruction of the city come off rather flat, and some of the characterisation is a little one note, particularly the villain (the first one that is). However, major kudos go to Duncan Johnson who writes the character of Taryn well, even showing the character in an unsympathetic light at times, which, I think, deserves to be applauded, though her eventual creation of Section Thirteen seems in turns, a little rushed, then a little twee. Taryn's characterisation -- in fact, the characterisation of the TARDIS crew in this story is top notch.

The second plot strand, that of Tamara's journey, is even better than Taryn's, firstly because it doesn't rip off anything that I've read, and manages to bring a good grounding to the world of the Thirteen, as seen through the eyes of a brainwashed Tamara. The problem with the slightly flat prose has also been rectified, with the action scene at the rally coming across quite well indeed, as does the cliffhanger to Episode 4. The setting – that of a thought controlled future where everyone is though controlled, is evoked rather well – if at times a little extremely (the graffiti artist) -- I feel that there should have been more focus on the more subtle side of the brainwashing, as could be seen through the line about Romeo and Juliet, (which I feel was an outstanding touch. It really, really stood out.)

The characters are better drawn as well, particularly the resistance group, who, rather wonderfully, are all named after historical figures -- though I feel as if this has been done before somewhere. Added to that is the fact that they're lead by someone wearing a Colin Baker coat, and must say that I really cared for these – espe-



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cially the character of Losley, who is just saved from coming across as a cartoony version of Ace (you can tell the writer really enjoyed writing for her.)

The plot concerning the Doctor and Grae feels a little rushed at first, though after they're split up, the Doctor spends too much time steeped in exposition. Grae on the other hand, has some good moments in Episode 3, though then disappears for a inordinate period of time, in order to make way for the other characters.

Unfortunately, exposition is a big problem with this story. Much of the middle episodes are steeped in the stuff, and it really holds up the narrative -- I really feel as if some of this could have been edited out. Luckily things begin to pick up pace quite rapidly towards the end, which does have quite an explosive climax -- and a stunningly beautiful epilogue. But I won't go into too much detail here.

And just to top it off, that cover art is terrific.

All in all... **9/10**