

OUROBORUS

Written by: Tim Jones

Season 32/Story 9H

Reviewed by: Gary Phillips

This review may contain spoilers.

Having greatly enjoyed Arnold T Blumberg's *The Soul Men*. I began to read *Ouroborus* with great enthusiasm. I was soon to be disappointed.

The story begins engagingly enough with Grae noticing that the Doctor isn't quite himself. As Grae recalls a recent adventure we are immediately drawn into a series of odd events, which do eventually make sense.

I was instantly reminded of a superb article written some years ago by Colin Dexter, creator of Inspector Morse wherein he compares the simplistic writing style of Dame Agatha Christie using her *DEATH ON THE NILE* as an example with the more complex style of Sir Kingsley Amis, by way of his 1986 Booker Prize winner *THE OLD DEVILS*. Comparing two paragraphs (one from each book) Mr Dexter upon concluding the paragraph from *THE OLD DEVILS* moans, "Only a page in and we're already confused as to who's who". I felt exactly the same way upon reading the early part of Tim Jones's story.

The major part of the narrative is set in an unnamed university. So accurate and life-like is Mr Jones's description of Student life that one suspects that he too is a graduate and is writing from his own experiences, as it is here that his writing is at its most vivid.

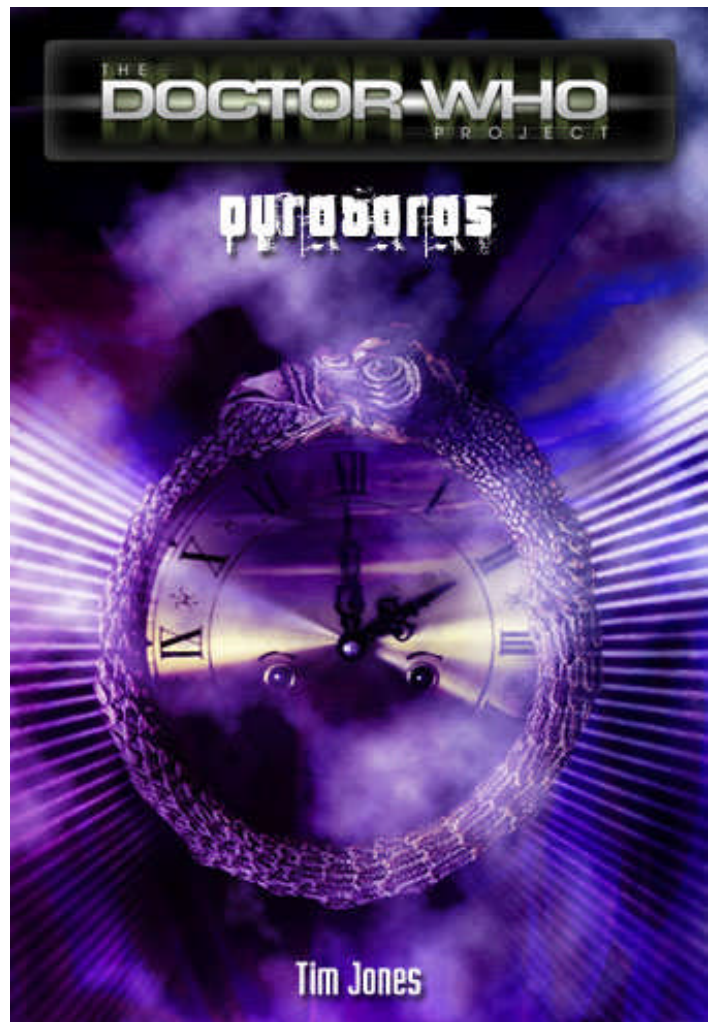
Before we reach that however, there are several other incidents to deal with. We have someone conducting an experiment which is obviously going wrong, a woman called Elsa Roberts who later becomes a major part of the narrative, the aforesaid university with a very shifty Arch chancellor called Saul and a man called Nathan who asks the Doctor to find his missing son Alan who has disappeared it seems, whilst the two were conducting illegal time experiments which incur the Doctor's wrath as much as the Karts-Reimer experiments did in *THE TWO DOCTORS*.

The problem is that Tim Jones relates these incidents so blandly that it is an effort to carry on reading in order to discover what their ultimate significance is. That said, I'm glad I did, as I'm pleased to say that my expectation that the Master was back yet again wasn't borne out.

What we have is a nod to the classic series, illegal time experiments being conducted on the university campus. The Doctor appears to be there incognito as 'Dr Smith' and Grae is present as a student. The TDWP Doctor and Grae remain one of the most endearing TARDIS teams, far better, dare it be said, than any of the five most recent TV Doctors. Indeed, heavy handed as Tim Jones narrative is, it wouldn't do RTD any harm to read a few TDWP stories to gauge an idea of how to form a cohesive narrative.

Meanwhile back on campus. Elsa Roberts returns home to find her husband Greg dead. The Doctor is investigating the time experiments by posing as 'Dr Smith' and seeming to help with them and Grae has befriended a student in the Department of English Studies called Cassandra 'Cassie' Newton.

'Saul' is controlling Elsa Roberts and almost manages to turn her into a knife-wielding psychopath. It is a great shame that 'Saul'



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in point of fact turns out to be Nathan's lost son Alan visibly aged by the time experiments he and his father were conducting (shades of Pinder from the Blake's 7 story *ORBIT* here). Indeed he had vanished into space rather like the Androgums who travelled in the Kartz-Reimer module in the *TWO DOCTORS*. He also has a huge chip on his shoulder blaming Nathan for not being there when he was a child and using his new-found powers has built the university campus solely to conduct his experiments and extract his revenge upon his father.

Saul/Alan is obviously quite insane and in a way, he brings to mind Sharaz Jek from *THE CAVES OF ANDROZANI*. The difference being that Jek was a tragic figure with whom we could sympathise. Saul is just an arrogant brat of about 15 though his experiments have aged him to nearly double that, with whom the reader feels absolutely no sympathy at all. That is basically the story's major fault. Tim Jones is obviously highly intelligent, but his writing is so heavy handed and pretentious at the beginning before we get to the story's gripping and magnificent climax that the reader cares not one jot for any of the characters in the story other than the Doctor and Grae and even their usual charisma is much reduced by Tim's narrative style.

I won't say much about the story's gripping conclusion as that will spoil what is by far the best part of it for those yet to read it, but the Doctor's motivations are questioned; his reasons for doing what he does the way he does far more forcibly, frankly and ultimately more successfully than Margaret/Blon did with the ninth Doctor in *BOOMTOWN*, to such an extent that the reader does begin to question the Doctor's motives and it is because of this rather more than anything else that we find the Doctor in so subdued a mood as the story opens. One character's happy ending, having forced the Doctor into it, pricks heavily at his conscience.

OUROBORUS promises a great deal but ultimately doesn't deliver. It lacks clarity in the early part of the narrative and too many incidents are related far too quickly and in a particularly boring manner. Here Tim should take note of the subtle and successful way Arnold T Blumberg interrupted the main core of the narrative of the *THE SOUL MEN* in order to show us The Soul Men at work. Where Arnold succeeded brilliantly with brevity and simplicity of narrative Tim sadly packs in rather too much detail into too short

a space as he describes these events.

Ultimately though he does successfully swap tedium for pace and suspense. The finale of *OUROBORUS* is gripping and exciting. All in all *OUROBORUS* is an interesting story but its odd pace in the beginning and too much emphasis upon plot rather than character development spoils what in other respects is an intelligently written and gripping narrative. Although not specifically to my taste I would not be discouraged from reading a further Tim Jones story and I hope that I shall have the pleasure of doing so. **5/10**