

THE WHITE DEATH

Written by: Miles Reid
Season 33/Story 9M

Reviewed by: Jez Strickley

A plague-ridden twenty-second century Earth – just years before a full-scale Dalek invasion – and a desperate search for a cure form the cornerstones of *The White Death*, a pithy tale which taps into an age-old time travel paradox to fuel its telling.

The adventure begins with a short prologue, revealing how the Space Plague was triggered, and it introduces the reader to Professor Jay Falstead, the scientist who ultimately finds a vaccine against the deadly virus, and whose seemingly hopeless quest is driven by a hellish combination of drug stimulants and the loss of his family.

The story then continues aboard a tense TARDIS, in which Taryn's decision to leave makes for a heated exchange with the Doctor. In the meantime the TARDIS lands in London in 2157, and very soon the Doctor, Grae and Taryn come face to face with Falstead and his battle against the plague. To complicate matters Falstead is aware of the Doctor's reputation, and predictably seeks the Time Lord's help in finding a cure. It is at this point that the story's central premise is unveiled: Taryn reveals Falstead's future to him as the saviour of humankind, and in so doing creates a dangerous situation in which the burden of his future may paradoxically lead Falstead to reject it.

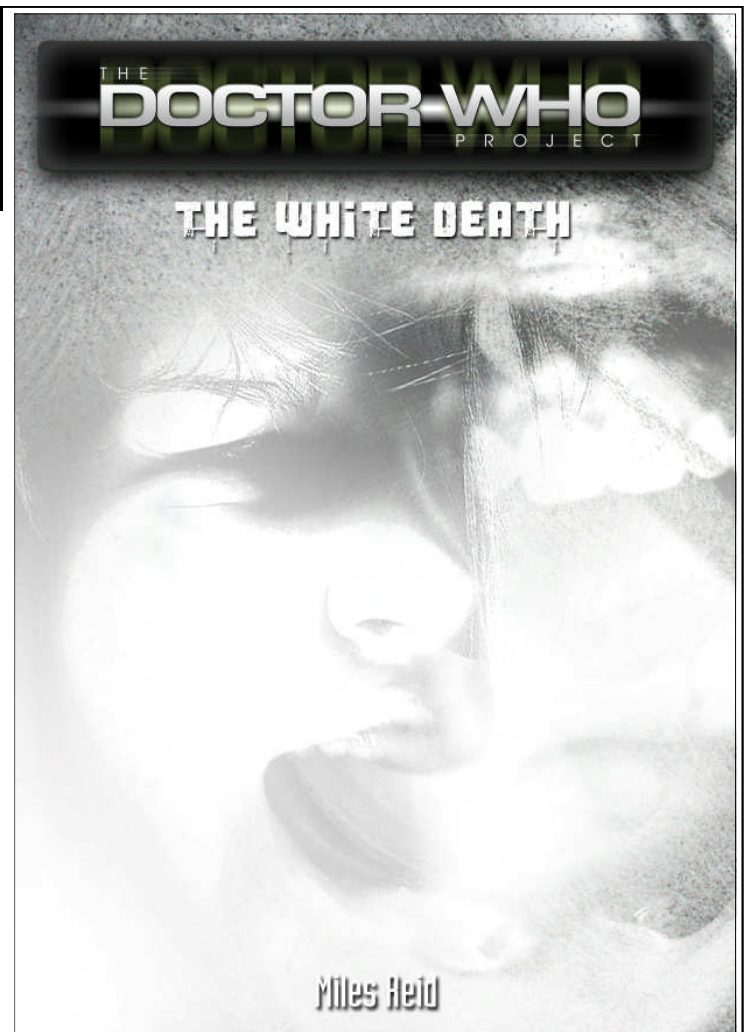
In short, *The White Death* presents us with the knotty time-travelling conundrum of the much vaunted principle of non-interference versus the harsh reality of mass suffering. In delivering up this meaty dilemma Miles Reid encourages the reader to consider what they would do in just such a set of circumstances, thereby making good use of a popular story telling device.

With no other characters involved in the plot, the spotlight squarely falls upon Falstead and the rapidly decaying dynamics between the Doctor and Grae on one side and Taryn on the other. Falstead is well fleshed out, and his flashbacks to his family help to give substance to his obsession with beating the plague. The Doctor and Grae are given a largely routine job to do in terms of saving the day, and therefore it is left to Taryn to give the plot a bit of friction.

Inevitably, perhaps, it is the luckless – or should that be thoughtless? – Taryn who creates the very problem which the Time Lord's must go on to solve, reinforcing her Adric-esque profile and emphasising her position as little more than a spare part amongst the other crew members of the TARDIS. To be fair, the character of Taryn can work very well (see John Gordon's *The Dawn of Time*), but her growing resentment towards the Doctor and the lifestyle he has given her requires careful handling. In this case she seems to flick between the petulant child and the seasoned time traveller depending on the scene; and her ignorant blunder regarding Falstead is simply breathtaking when considered alongside her experience of time travel and its dangers. Arguably some of Taryn's thoughtlessness stems from Miles Reid's interpretation, but to be fair to the author her all too limp personality makes for easy pickings, especially when it comes to deciding how to create a problem for the Doctor to remedy.

The plot is shunted along at a fair old pace, dispensing with heavy descriptions and overlong dialogue, which makes for a rapidly told narrative that barely gives the reader a chance to breathe. Although this approach is largely beneficial it does leave some scenes feeling a little rushed and it would have been nice to have explored the effects of the Space Plague from beyond the narrow focus point of Falstead.

The climax is tense and well written, and the final departure of Taryn is well told. Her leaving is hardly the greatest loss to the world of *TDWP*, but in giving her a proper send off, in which she can at least attempt to give her side of the story, there is the sense that she is finally leaving behind the petulant child and moving closer to the mature time traveller. With respect



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to the way in which the Doctor and Grae respond to her absence, there is the distinct feeling of smugness between these two Time Lords, who come across as lofty and condescending – traits which do not do credit to either of them.

In conclusion, *The White Death* rolls along nicely, and gives a fair account of itself. Its bare bones approach in terms of characters and plot line generally works well, and the smart twist at the end gives the reader further temporal food for thought.

Rating: 8.5/10