



Doctor Who: Zeta Major

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In his fourth incarnation, the Doctor landed on the planet Zeta Minor, a world located on the edge of the known universe, the bridge-point for the opposite universes of matter and anti-matter. Now in his fifth life, the Doctor meets the same race he landed there before, and once again they are eager to harness its secrets — with terrifyingly dangerous results.

Caught up in a situation akin to a Jacobean revenge tragedy, the Doctor must fight his way through layers of court intrigue before he can try to stop the people really in control from allowing the forces of Anti-matter free reign to destroy every life-form in the universe.

Doctor Who: Zeta Major Details

Date : Published July 6th 1998 by BBC Books

ISBN : 9780563405979

Author : Simon Messingham

Format : Mass Market Paperback 288 pages

Genre : Media Tie In, Doctor Who, Science Fiction, Fiction, Tv

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From Reader Review Doctor Who: Zeta Major for online ebook

Jamie says

Really not the best of the Fifth Doctor tie in stories. I found it a hard slog throughout.

James Barnard says

As sequels to televised Doctor Who stories go, this is rather better than most.

By this time, BBC Books had made it clear that they were more willing than their predecessors at Virgin Publishing to try and re-tread some of the glories of the TV series. It's always a dangerous approach. Sequels to established classics, when not in the hands of the people who originally produced them, will always invite negative criticism from people keen to point out the ways in which the new works don't match the well-regarded originals. It's hard to strike the balance between capturing the 'feel' of the source material and finding new things to do with the worlds and characters depicted that moves things on convincingly.

The general consensus, when 'Zeta Major' was first published, was that the book not only failed to live up to the high points of 'Planet of Evil', but it actually undermined that TV story's key drivers by making travel to the titular planet, and removing the anti-matter which drove that story's plot, seem far easier than it was established to be.

I think what a lot of people missed at the time was that there's a series of solid, logical explanations for all this. And where Simon Messingham really succeeds is in giving a structure, logic and background to the rather one-note depiction of Morestran society as seen in 'Planet of Evil'. We all know that 'Planet of Evil' is based on the sci-fi classic 'Forbidden Planet', which itself drew on Shakespeare's 'The Tempest' for inspiration. That play's back-story sees Prospero overthrown by the political intrigues of his brother. In 'Zeta Major' we're shown a society where such behaviour is not so much highly likely as the norm – and even the characters' names reflect that play's Italian starting point.

And, in its well-thought-through examination of an empire we only got the barest hints about on screen, we have this book's strongest aspect: the events of the book happen in a society which feels far more three-dimensional than the source material in which it first appeared. I'd go so far as to say that, if this had been marketed as a standalone novel with links to a previous serial than an actual sequel, it would have been much more favourably received.

I'm not going to suggest this works better than the story that inspired it. However, it is considerably more imaginative in its use of its source material than 'Planet of Evil' was. Here, the overriding aspect isn't the anti-matter crystals to be found on Zeta Minor, it's the long-term consequences of an off-the-cuff remark of the Doctor's. We may have realised that his suggestion that Sorenson explore ways of harnessing energy from the movement of planets was unscientific nonsense designed to draw the scientist's attention away from his interest in anti-matter. But Sorenson couldn't have known that when he requested – and received – all the resources his society could throw at helping his vision become reality. The book is focussed on the consequences of this appalling financial decision – and for that reason it works well.

As a direct sequel, 'Zeta Major' doesn't work. As a novel which explores apparently throwaway aspects of

its source, it works very well. Unlike the shaky scientific – and religious – foundations of Morestran society, the book is far more solid than it appears, and is another example of where reading a book out of its original context does it no harm at all.

Nicholas Whyte says

"<http://nwhyte.livejournal.com/1311296.html>[return][return]The Fifth Doctor novels have rather a good strike rate for me (the audios even more so). This confirmed the trend: a sequel to the Fourth Doctor's TV story Planet of Evil, with the Morestran empire, centuries later, destroying itself by experimenting both with anti-matter and harnessing the kinetic energy of the planets, at the same time riven by internal conflict between church and state. Messingham's concepts of anti-matter and planetary kinetics are pretty disconnected from actual science, but faithful enough to the spirit of the story which he is sequelling (and improving on). We have, as so often in Fifth Doctor novels, a rather good Nyssa storyline as she goes off investigating with dire consequences; Tegan is less well served. The Doctor here is somewhat damaged from his previous encounters with anti-matter (including Omega) which also takes the story in interesting directions. The Morestran politics are somewhat improbable but well told. I recommend this one."

Angela says

The Doctor is having visions, and the TARDIS lands on a strange tower that has anti-men on it. It has been hundreds of years since 'Planet of Evil' and a religion has formed around those events.

This is a very good book, all the characters act like you would expect. The world and politics are very well thought through. Nyssa and Tegan play a major role in the plot in a world that sees women as second class citizens. This could have been an episode if they had a huge budget. It really was unputdownable. A very good read.

Simon Curtis says

Heavy going.

AJ says

2.5 stars

Daniel Kukwa says

One of the most under-rated of the Past Doctor novels...and certainly the most under-rated 5th Doctor book. The most unlikely sequel imaginable -- a follow up to 1975's "Planet of Evil" -- is given a treatment worthy of the likes of William Peter Blatty. This is dark and terrifying material...yet utterly in keeping with the tone

of the 5th Doctor/Nyssa/Tegan era. A novel that deserves another look-in.

David Layton says

This novel, for the first 3/4 of it, reads like a political thriller. I happen to like political thrillers, so I enjoyed that part of the book immensely. One of the previous viewers remarked on the strengths of the villains, and I agree with that statement. Even the most evil of them, Krystian Fall the Zero Man, is not made out to be a raving nut bent on universal conquest. I also agree that the companions get very strong parts in this story. I would have liked to have seen this Tegan in the TV series. She is much smarter in this book.

Here are my knocks against the book. First, its premise is another of the "it's all the Doctor's fault" ideas. That idea was done well in "The Face of Evil," but it is now time to move on, and I am getting quite sick of its showing up again and again in the BBC novels and Big Finish CDs. In this case, it turns out that the Doctor's proposal to Sorenson in "Planet of Evil" to harness the kinetic energy of planetary motion was a blind alley. As a result, the Morestrans have wasted 2000 years (interesting number there and more about it later) building a gigantic "Energy Tower" to make that possible. In the process, Morestran society has split into an Imperial faction and a Church faction. This society is apparently based upon Renaissance Italy, principally, and Messingham does an interesting job of converting the historical society into a future society. This offers Messingham the opportunity to take some swipes at organized religion, particularly those based on prophecy, hence the 2000 year number. As I said, this part of the book works well for me. What happens, though, is that now that the deadline for the Energy Tower to be switched on has come up, the entire society falls apart into civil war. At this point, Messingham loses control of the story, mainly because he has too many things going on for a novel of this length, too many characters, too many motives. If the novel were twice as long, and much more detailed, these complications could have been worked out. As it is, the novel ends in a great bloody mess of bodies, and so many names thrown out that it becomes impossible to keep track of them in a single reading. Tighter control of the story would have made the last 1/4 as good as the first 3/4.

Michael says

The Fifth Doctor, Nyssa & Tegan. Between Arc of Infinity & Snakedance. Sequel to Planet of Evil. Two millennia have passes since the Doctor's casual remark set Morestran technology and society off along an ultimately dead end track. The Doctor arrives to find that his former incarnation has become a saviour figure to the Morestran church. Sprawling epic story that tries desperately to squeeze itself into 282 pages. I had trouble separating the various baddies, all with a sideline hobby in sadism, as the plot advanced, simultaneously tying it and myself in ever more complicated knots.

James Bowman says

Featuring the Fifth Doctor, this novel is a sequel to the Fourth Doctor story Planet of Evil, where the Morestrans from that story took the Doctor's offhand suggestion to harness the "kinetic force of planetary movement" as gospel. 2000 years later, an interstellar Catholic-esque church has monopolized all technology in the service of this goal, dominating the once-great empire. The Doctor becomes involved when certain

shortcuts they take - once again involving anti-matter - threaten the whole of existence.

This was an entertaining read, and fans who enjoyed Planet of Evil should certainly appreciate this follow-up. The theocratic society was played a little too heavy at times, but it did keep things interesting. Villain Kristyan Fall and ally Ferdinand both made for interesting characters. The only real weakness of the novel was that it relied too much on the reader's familiarity with the original story. Which is fair, as it is an explicit sequel, but it would have been nice had they tried to keep it more self-contained. (B)

Travis says

Nice characterization of the three leads (Nyssa actually gets to do something this book!) and some nice bits expanding on the TV show 'Planet of Evil' to which the book is a sequel, but otherwise kind of blah.

Nearly everyone the Doctor and company meet are up to something and the planet is just very dreary and oppressive.

Aside from a decent monster I just felt tired and depressed by the time I'd finished it.
