



Doctor Who: Sometime Never

Justin Richards

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This Week: A hideous misshapen creature releases a butterfly. Next Week: The consequences of this simple action ensure that history follows its predicted path... Sometime: In the swirling maelstrom of the Time Vortex, The Council of Eight maps out every moment in history and take drastic measures to ensure it follows their predictions. But there is one elemental force that defies prediction, that fails to adhere to the laws of time and space... A rogue element that could destroy their plans merely by existing. Already events are mapped out and defined. Already the pieces of the trap are in place. The Council of Eight already knows when Sabbath will betray them. It knows when Fitz will survive the horrors in the Museum of Anthropology. It knows when Trix will come to his help. It knows when the Doctor will finally realize the truth. It knows that this will be: Never.

Doctor Who: Sometime Never Details

Date : Published February 3rd 2004 by BBC Books
ISBN : 9780563486114
Author : Justin Richards
Format : Paperback 274 pages
Genre : Media Tie In, Doctor Who, Science Fiction, Fiction

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From Reader Review Doctor Who: Sometime Never for online ebook

Nicholas Whyte says

<http://nhw.livejournal.com/1144412.html> [return] Well, if I'm going to read more of the 8th Doctor novels at all, I'm going to have to start doing it in sequential order. Dipping into the series - in this case because I was interested to see a different treatment of the Princes in the Tower than we got in The Kingmaker - tends to confront me with characters (in this case Miranda and Sabbath) who clearly have deep significance for the author and for followers of the series but who are unknown to me. There are some vivid bits of description, and a twist at the end which I would have appreciated more if the whole book had not felt rather like fan-fiction in a canon I don't know much about.

Livi says

Before reading this book you really have to read the previous books in the 8th Doctor series especially the ones containing the character Sabbath, without those previous books this story will be confusing and only half told and that would not do it justice.

The whole series of stories leading up to this story weave several threads and fine webs that this book expertly weaves into a tapestry far finer than the Bayeaux.

Michael Battaglia says

This is not one of those books that is going to stay with me for months at a time, lingering in the mind. I didn't want to run out and tell my utterly confused neighbor about it, but nor did I fling it out the window and threaten to burn my authentic TARDIS pillow (fluffier on the inside than out!). It just was kind of . . . over for me. Which is a bit of a strange thing, because it shouldn't have been that way.

Let me explain. Some books back the BBC decided to begin an arc in the Eighth Doctor range where it became clear that someone was altering time and creating parallel universes. A mysterious yet large man named Sabbath was involved, a man who was unspeakably brilliant at manipulating the Doctor. It turns out even he was working for some higher power behind this mess, collapsing all the parallel earths to a single universe (sort of like DC Comics' "Crisis on Infinite Earths" story, only with less punching and more meeting at pubs). This story went on for . . . we'll be gentle and say a tad longer than it should have, with no clear resolution or escalation of tension in sight. Now unto us, lo, comes an ending. And it's . . . underwhelming.

Now it's not completely surprising. The BBC line hasn't had a great track record of finishing storylines with a bang anyway. If "Ancestor Cell" proved one thing, trying really hard will get you my respect, but it doesn't mean you succeeded. Here, with some time to think about it in advance, they still aren't able to go the whole

mile and after all the buildup and mystery from the earlier novels we're thrilled to learn that the ultimate enemy that has caused all this trouble is . . . the Council of Eight. Wha? A bunch of what seems like old men made of crystal who sit around a table and argue about things like Rogue Elements with straight faces, you can almost picture the terrible costumes and bad special effects with every scene, as they debate stuff interminably that doesn't feel like it was written for fans of the show that grew up to be mature adults as much as them shoving bad SF down our throat that they think we really want. Thus the concept comes across as hackneyed and cliche, when a little bit of strangeness could have made them seem dangerous. Instead they seem run of the mill.

As an aside, this wasn't totally the author's fault as the original plan appears to have meant to include the Daleks. Presumably Terry Nation's estate gave them a hard time for one reason or another but given there hasn't been a decent portrayal of the Daleks in writing yet, this isn't as big a loss as it seems. Yet this story needed an enemy with a bit more flair and personality than these yahoos show here, coming across as creaky and staid when they should be quick and frightening.

Unfortunately this applies to the rest of the novel as well, with a temperature that never rises above "pleasantly tepid". The Doctor and friends once again discover that time is being changed (with a butterfly of all original things) and what's worse, someone seems to know their every move before they make it. What follows then is a cursory splitting up followed by revelations that aren't that shocking to a danger inside a museum that is experiencing the physical manifestation of a clock that is only right twice a day. Crystal skeletons appear, time shifts, Trix uses several disguises, it all feels very rote. By the time Sabbath shows up to add his two cents, it feels less like an event and more like making sure all the subplots are taken care of before we move on. Meanwhile, Sabbath, realizing what the rest of us figured out a long time ago, changes his motivation without seeming too broken up about it to the exact opposite of what he'd been trying to achieve the whole time (which is strange, even if his employers were lying about their goals, didn't he still feel the same about it). The book tries to make this feel like more of an Event by bringing back a character from his time living forward slowly, but she barely gets anything to do before being knocked off perfunctorily. There's threats to some of the old companions, but with the Doctor having no memory of them, it's more an abstract academic threat for us than for him.

The book does pick up steam toward the end, with a Douglas Adams lift (not a restaurant, alas) and a sense of a lot of things happening at once but the preceding has been so run of the mill that all the future science babble and rummaging around with the Council doesn't have the impact it should. Fitz remains the bright spot in this, but even he feels leashed and Trix has yet to distinguish herself as a character yet. It all feels far too old school for this type of era, one that Uncle Terrance would have given us from back in the old days. There's no menace here, no danger, even when the New Adventures did a similar storyline (with the Doctor's history being changed), there was a sense of urgency and risk. In this book, and the storyline as a whole in fact, we never got a sense of the stakes at play. The parallel worlds come across as more from the long line of random places they visited and nobody could seem to decide what kind of threat Sabbath really was (they peaked too early when he took the Doctor's heart, after that he seemed lost on how to top it). If the universe is going to end we don't get a sense of the emotional heft involved, as the universe seems to consist of the Doctor and his friends and a few other random people.

While the end result is pleasant by the end, it hardly redeems the rough going in the beginning with the endless layers of exposition from everyone, and when the chatter gives way to action all the tension has dissipated. If it ever existed. A stab toward strangeness pops up just at the end, with a tentative new past beginning and an out-of-nowhere reference to "Scream of the Shalka" but even that is too little too late. With only a few books left in the Eighth Doctor range chances are we won't be starting a long arc but given the track record thus far, maybe it's for the best. A conclusion if you need it (and we probably did) but at best it's

purely functional.

Simon Curtis says

Justin Richards does it again. He is the new Terrance Dicks.
