



Doctor Who: Option Lock

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Landing in present-day England, all appears serene as the Doctor and Sam emerge from the TARDIS into the idyllic grounds of the Silver family's ancestral home. Only when they enter the house do they suspect things are not what they seem.

How far-reaching is the strange power of a secret society almost 700 years old, and how is it linked to the mysterious Station Nine? And what is the significance of a series of paintings that drove a man to suicide?

From thirteenth-century England to the former Soviet Union, from the United States to the cold wastes of space, the various strands of a complex plan come together and threaten to engulf the world in a nightmare of nuclear destruction...

This novel is another in the series of adventures featuring the Eighth Doctor and Sam.

Doctor Who: Option Lock Details

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From Reader Review Doctor Who: Option Lock for online ebook

Samuel Rooke says

Another fairly unmemorable entry in the series, no bizarre misguided lapses into the continuity (The Eight Doctors), the past (Genocide), logic and reason (War of the Daleks), but no truly strong characterisation and unique tone (Vampire Science) or sheer creativity (Alien Bodies).

It fascinates me how the highest of high stakes in this sort of series can feel so low, when the range is such an open playbox to storytelling that you know episode of the week/book of the month developments won't really stick plot-wise, but character development might. I'm more invested in Sam growing her hair out than I am byzantine conflicts over possible nuclear war. Not that a standalone story can't be great and engaging, just that it has to be pretty damn good to be, and this wasn't really that. Garygoles actually being based on aliens is a neat enough conceit, but not enough to justify countless chapters on political thriller developments that don't really come together.

The epilogue felt like the strong character material in the book, though I'm sure it's ambiguous nature and placement in the timeline helped its appeal. Some good lines about loss in it though. Judging by the amount of books Justin Richards wrote for this range, he must have been pretty keyed into its developments, so I imagine that epilogue will pan out neatly in future. For now, two gargoyles and some nuclear codes.

Michael says

This is a difficult book to rate. Although I did not mention it in my review for Kursaal, I felt that it fell kind of between three and four stars; I bumped it up for its fun factor. This book likewise fell between three and four stars in my mind, but its flaws outweighed the fun.

First of all, it is a novel that deals with the politics of Earth in the 1990s; and although it was a contemporary story, it felt the need to recast world leaders. Odd choice, but whatever. The first real flaw I have to point out though is that even though both the US and UK militaries, and the UN in general, were involved in the story... UNIT wasn't even mentioned. The Doctor vaguely mumbles something about having once worked for the UN in an advisory capacity [and by mumble I mean we weren't even given that piece of dialog precisely], but UNIT itself seems not to exist in Justin Richard's world. I have no idea *why*, either; it just doesn't. Disappointing.

Second of all, although it got interesting later on, the book starts off unforgivably slow. It wasn't until I was about two-thirds of the way through the book that I really started to care about what was going on. {By contrast, Kursaal began uninteresting, but gained traction by about a quarter of the way in.} I really like the alien species in this book [another invented specifically in this book] but I think the author tried to stay mysterious a little too long. In the same way that Kursaal aimed for the horror genre, I think Option Lock aimed for the mystery genre... and got lost along the way in the spy thriller shelves. The book never really settled on a single identity, and I feel like that detracted from the overall story.

Melyssa says

"Sam, at times you're a genius. Those times don't seem to last very long, sadly."

Et du coup avec cette réplique, le Docteur exprime un sentiment assez similaire au mien concernant Sam. Parce que je ne l'aime pas. Vraiment, je n'aime pas Sam comme compagne, mais... dans ce livre je l'aime bien. Dans Alien Bodies je l'aime bien. C'est pas l'amour fou, mais ça va. Et du coup c'est frustrant, d'abord parce qu'à chaque fois que j'en suis rendue à vouloir lâcher l'affaire avec elle et à faire comme si elle était pas là, je tombe sur un livre où ça se passe un peu mieux et je lui redonne une chance; et ensuite parce que du coup je m'aperçois que c'est possible de la rendre supportable sans la dénaturer.

Enfin, passons sur le cas de Sam qui pose systématiquement problème depuis que je me suis lancée dans ces EDAs. Le truc c'est que pour le coup, j'ai aussi le même problème avec la globalité de ce roman. Je ne sais pas si je l'ai aimé ou pas, parce que parfois je me suis régalée, parfois ça a été très long.

C'est que cette aventure est comme coupée en tranche, de manière un peu brutale. On démarre en touriste dans un coin bien sympa, en mode petite maison dans la prairie (et on passe un brave moment à cueillir des fleurs...), puis on a un passage A La Maison Blanche, un passage James Bond, un passage Armageddon... le saut est parfois un peu violent! Certaines zones n'en finissent pas, d'autres sont d'une tension folle - j'ai failli reprendre le boulot en retard parce que je n'arrivais pas à lâcher le livre lors de la première "simulation" nucléaire :shame et donc au final je ne sais plus trop quoi penser de l'engin dans sa totalité.

La bonne nouvelle reste que Eight est Eight. De manière générale, ça suffit à me rendre heureuse et je l'ai retrouvé à la fois grand gamin farfelu et puits de sagesse tout comme je l'aime. J'ai adoré ce petit moment typiquement Eight où il se met à déballer le futur de ceux qui l'entourent et définitivement je le prend en autostop quand il veut - ce passage où le conducteur ne s'inquiète pas plus que ça des meubles de jardin mais s'interroge sur le thé est priceless!

"I'm a firm believer that sometimes ignorance is bliss"

Colin Smith says

The TARDIS is losing artron energy, so the Eighth Doctor and his companion, Sam, make an unexpected landing, materializing on the grounds of the Silver family's ancestral home. As the Doctor and Sam spend time at the estate, they discover the reason for the power drain, and a dark family secret that could lead to a nuclear holocaust.

This is a good story, but Justin Richards tends to write the better books in the BBC range. Typically of Doctor Who, while the story is sci-fi, there's not a lot of sci-fi in the majority of it. Many of the mysteries and dangers in the bulk of the plot come from conventional weapons and regular people. Of course, there's the undercurrent of something other-worldly going on, and that occasionally comes to light, but for the most part this reads like a it could have come from the first couple of Third Doctor Earth-bound seasons.

I'd rate it PG-13 for violence. It's definitely not for a younger Who fan--not just because of the violence, but also the style. That is, it doesn't read as if it was written for kids.

Jacob Webb says

“In and out the shuttle goes...”

So the pattern goes on, another even numbered EDA, another keeper. I begin to fear that I'm becoming ill prepared for irregularity, what if the rhythm falls apart, how would I deal with a world where ok stories are sandwiched between classics, or where they run on to the point where I can't see their charms? What if a whole run of bad stories were somehow vital to the ongoing meta-plot...?

For now let us focus on the matter at hand.

I didn't have the highest of hopes for this one, as I'll freely admit. It was pegged by one review i read in advance as being dull and forgettable, and whilst I think that's rather harsh it is, I suppose, the least memorable of the good stories so far.

A lot depends, I think, on how you read it, certainly I can see how one could make an earnest attempt at this book and still find it wanting, I nearly had the same problem with Vampire Science, and I think the heart of the issue is not wanting it to be something it's not. They're understated stories, essentially, although this one does have more of a global scale, none the less it has no bizarre monsters, very little scifi stuff, and it's far from overflowing with mad characters and ideas. This is never going to be as thrilling then as Alien Bodies, but that needn't be that standard against which all things are measured, and next to the gaudiness of Kursaal it all felt refreshingly grounded, the characters were subtle (with the curious exception of General Kane), but there was never a sense that Richards didn't know how to write them, or didn't know how to write, for that matter.

The opening is slow, but I quite enjoyed the leisurely pace, the polite conversation, Sam and Pickering flirting in the garden, the days of library work, I see how some people might not but for me it was a nice breather. I rather liked Pickering as a character actually, he had an earnestness which rather undercut his otherwise Bond-like nature. (Pro tip, picture him as Hal from Being Human.)

Similarly Silver is quite a good baddie so long as you manage two things; firstly be sure to cast him in your mind as someone with a bit of charm, he's not the most original villain, and may flounder without a bit of applied gravitas. Secondly don't conflate that with taking him too seriously, ultimately he's second rate, and that could be a shot in the knee if you pin your hopes on him being a real Stavro Blofeld. But the saving throw is that the story knows it too, The Doctor doesn't take him seriously, his lair is a (not too shabby) wine cellar, and his henchmen are his house staff, even his plan isn't his own, he's a pawn, a patsy, a vessel. That in mind he's quite enjoyable.

I shan't be entirely charitable. There are three things that i'd say are to the story's detriment, and in order of severity they are:

One, the story sort of tried to sell it's self as a blend of alchemy and techno thriller. This is fine and all, but it wasn't. It was a techno-thriller which once or twice used alchemical terms and which featured the distant relatives of some people who may have practiced more literal alchemy. Not that i mind this, I don't think that it was a misrepresentation of what alchemy is about, but mostly because it barely touches on the subject except to add some Gothic grandeur to things.

Two, Richards clearly had a lot of fun with the (sir)names of the characters, indulging an obvious fondness for etymology and Old English words, but the game became tired before he tired of it to say the least, and some of the explanations were weak enough to make me roll my eyes somewhat, and there's a remarkable conceit to nobody seeming to have descended down the female line at any point (I thought this not-especially-clever trick was going to be pulled on us at one point, but no, it was a lead in to some rather shaky linguistic games.)

And three, it get's very... technical in places. This novel, at times, really puts the techno into techno-thriller, and i don't mean it's out on the rave scene. I think this is a thing with cold war type spy adventures, sadly to a degree which was rather detrimental to the more dramatic moments in the story. (pro tip, picture Pete Kellerman as Ntare Guma Mbaho Mwine. i really don't have a clue how or if the character would work at all if you don't do that)

So... Sam & Doctor Watch (diddle-diddle-deeeeeeeeeeee): Sam was pretty good this time 'round actually, it really stood out the degree to which she didn't spend the whole time thinking about her daddy issues. she got some moments where she seemed like a grown woman, which was nice, given how childishly she's written sometimes in spite of her age. The Doctor too was pretty much spot on (it's been a while since he was badly handled actually), nothing exceptional, but just good old Eight (if it's not too soon to talk about such things). there was a nice moment when hitchhiking, and a brilliant little bit when his old predicting-people's-futures habit crops up again.

So all in all a story with no iconic monsters or set pieces, understated characters, and some frustratingly fiddly bits, all in the English countryside, rather than glamorous and distant worlds. A cup-of-tea story, if you will. I'm fine with that. but this was the least enthralling of the good EDAs, and after the most bearable of the bad ones... the pattern breaks down, the falcon cannot see the falconer, surely now must be the turning point, for otherwise Legacy of the Daleks will be an under rated gem, followed by a poor effort from Paul Leonard, and this simply cannot be.

Nicholas Whyte says

<http://nwhyte.livejournal.com/1447467.html>

Option Lock takes us to the present day, where the inheritor of an ancient alien conspiracy happens to be playing a key role in international politics. Once you accept the rather implausible premise that the bad guy allows the Doctor and Sam to cultivate his acquaintance and enjoy his hospitality in the first place, the plot careers along at a great pace, with twists and reveals which were just the right side of keeping me wondering what Richards would think of next rather than being irritated with him for jerking the story around on a whim. The biggest problem with the EDAs so far for me is the inconsistent characterisation of Sam; it would be nice if this developed into a portrayal of a young woman's personal growth, but I am not holding my breath.

Michael says

Having really enjoyed Dreams of Empire I had high hopes for this book and at first I thought I wasn't going to be disappointed. It has a nice slow build up as the Doctor and Sam try to unravel a mystery while staying as guests at the Silver's ancestral mansion with international intrigue quietly simmering in the background. Then the international nuclear war scenario goes ballistic leaving the Tardis crew almost redundant from the plot and relegated to a series of captures, escapes, captures.... so on. At this point I was almost expecting Matthew Broderick to turn up and start playing naughts & crosses with the computers.

Peer Lenné says

Ich dachte ja fast, nachdem ich Kursaal gelesen hatte, dass Alien Bodies mir für immer sämtlichen Lesegenuss an Doctor Who Büchern genommen hätte, da an Lawrence Miles' Meisterwerk so leicht nichts rankommt, aber anfangs hatte ich wahnsinnigen Spaß an Option Lock. Am Anfang hatte das Buch trotz seines modernen Settings ein wahnsinniges Classic-Feeling. Der Landsitz, seltsame Vorkommnisse, "Dämonen"... das alles hätte auch Tom Baker gut gestanden. Nachdem die seltsamen Vorkommnisse allerdings aufgeklärt sind, wandelt sich das Buch mehr und mehr in

einen Politthriller, was der ganzen Geschichte leider nicht sehr gut tut, auch wenn die Story wahrscheinlich von Anfang an darauf ausgelegt war. Der Schluss ist nur noch leidlich spannend und ich hatte lange gar keine Lust mehr weiter zu lesen.

Toller Anfang, schwacher Schluss. Option Lock ist leider ein eher unterdurchschnittliches Buch.

N says

This book has an actual chapter titled "Melodrama in the Night". It's all a bit M.R. James meets John Woo, which isn't a sentence I ever thought I'd type.

The writing itself is quite nice, but the entire plot could have been solved at around 75% in if the Doctor had just called UNIT, which rather defeats the point of such an intricate military story. Instead, there's a lot of mucking about on moors and staring at mostly dead aliens who don't do anything.

Leela42 says

Eighth Doctor Adventure (EDA) with Sam. Might have been quite the thriller if it wasn't sooooo slooow and the Doctor so dumb. Every clue is obvious but it takes the characters dozens of pages to get there. Doesn't stand up to scrutiny.

Killeroinen says

Not bad. In the beginning I got Agatha Christie vibes. Old ruins, pretend to be archeologist, library and quest staying in country house. I really liked it. Then it turned to military planning and it lost me.

But anyway, I liked parts of the dialogue very much (Sam and Sargent asking Doctor if his ramblings are in anyway connected to what is happening) and enjoyed the book. I didn't wait to be blown away, I just wanted something amusing to read on plane, and the book provided.

Shannon Appelcline says

A meandering mess of a story that never knows where it's going and that scarcely requires the Sam and the Doctor to be around at all. The writing is decent but it's the structure of the book as a whole that's problematic. I was rather surprised, as Richards did quite well in his previous outing, for the New Adventures line.

I have a more extensive discussion of this book at RPGnet, as part of a thread discussing all of the Eighth Doctor literature.

Angela says

The Doctor and Sam land in 1998 in a ruined house. Hundreds of years before a spaceship crashed there, and influenced the architecture ever since with gargoyles. There's also a side plot with nuclear cold war.

I found the alien plot more interesting than the cold war. The Doctor researching the history of the house was very good. A slightly different style of book than the previous ones, a good read.

Tvrtko Bali? says

It's between 3 and 4 stars for me. There is a lot of good stuff in here, but there are 2 main problems with this: 1) The villain's plan is way too complicated (not the way I would have done it) and 2) I just didn't enjoy the story telling because it only really gets interesting in the second half and because of some other reason that I can't quite put my finger on.

I'd give it 4 stars mainly because of the ending (which is bloody brilliant), but I'm pretty sure I'll change my mind to 3 when the emotions fade away and when I start reading the next novel. So 3 it is.

James Barnard says

Strange, when comparing this to other BBC Doctor Who books, to realise that it's quite rare for a writer's literary ability to shine through more strongly than the story itself. For any series of tie-in novels, the reverse is almost always true, and was certainly the case after this book's author, Justin Richards, took over the range. 'Option Lock' is written with verve, vigour and a mastery over form and content. The snag is that the content – the story itself – just doesn't convince.

I am inclined to agree with other reviewers on this one, and for once the overall number of Goodreads stars fully matches my view of a book. The central idea of the descendants of a cabal of Masonic types continuing to wield influence to bring about a situation even they don't fully understand just doesn't ring true – although, again, it is to Richards' real credit that the reader will be so caught up in the telling of the story that this doesn't become clear until you go over it all in your head afterwards! This is the issue, though – there are so many great ideas in here (secret societies, the philosopher's stone, the nature of the threat posed by the aliens) that none are able to shine as well as they deserve to.

I wish – as observed by other reviewers – that unexplained aspects such as the passing of the society's inheritance through the male line rather than the female could have been incorporated as actual plot points rather than the 'stubs' they actually emerge as. These would have turned an undeniably 'good' novel into the 'great' one Richards' writing style should have allowed it to be. This isn't so much a missed opportunity as a lack of realisation at how much good stuff there is in here, and what a well-told story this really is.

Still, Richards' ability to tell a tale and really working hard on making it flow paid real dividends – two years later, he was appointed as editor of the BBC Books line, where he remains to this day. Eclectic, well-told and expertly crafted, 'Option Lock' is in some ways a microcosm of his future stewardship of the range – and it demonstrates why there are few to compare with him.
