



Doctor Who: History 101

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Barcelona, 1937. The Doctor has been trying to introduce Fitz and Anji to the vibrancy of pre-war culture, but anomalies in that culture are puzzling them all. How can Picasso's 'Guernica' emanate both impassioned protest and clinical detachment at once? What really happened when the city was bombed?

There is a strange presence in 1930s Barcelona, determinedly twisting reality to a set pattern, desperately trying to make events make sense. Which, as the Doctor knows, is precisely what they don't tend to do. Not when you add human subjectivity into the equation.

As the observer becomes increasingly frantic in its manipulations of the timestream, everyone involved in the Spanish Civil War is affected. A certain Eric Blair finds himself using advanced torture techniques on his old anarchist comrades. The Doctor has to find it, and understand its deranged meddling, before it drags the whole of history into its madness.

Doctor Who: History 101 Details

Date : Published October 6th 2003 by Random House UK (first published July 2002)

ISBN : 9780563538547

Author : Mags L. Halliday

Format : Paperback 288 pages

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

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From Reader Review Doctor Who: History 101 for online ebook

Nicholas Whyte says

<http://nwhyte.livejournal.com/2354547.html>[return][return]It's just as well that I read Orwell's Homage to Catalonia a few months back, or I would have felt a bit unmoored in this Eighth Doctor story of the Spanish Civil War. There is a time-changing entity plot, but I found myself instead appreciating Halliday's recreation of the awfulness of the 1930s, with one Eric Blair wandering in and out of the story too. The time-twisting bit ties into the wider Sabbath narrative which has so far failed to really interest me, but I liked the rest.

Kathy says

Don't be fooled by the "Doctor Who" in the title -- the Eighth Doctor novels are for adults. This is a richly detailed, sometimes violent, sometimes frightening, story of a period in Earth history, not for the squeamish. Yes, it's the Doctor, and yes, there's a TARDIS and time travel, but there is also a very graphically detailed scene of the bombing of Guernica; the horror of war and the fallout of revolution. There are monsters and it's detailed and convoluted and it's a hell of a ride. It took me forever to finish simply because I mislaid the book for a while; once I found it and started it again, I ripped through it in a week.

Very good story.

Daniel Kukwa says

The first 100 pages of this novel are intricate, engrossing, evocative, and exotic. It was on its way to a five-star rating -- a slow and sensual read, posing interesting questions about history and perception. Unfortunately, it didn't know when to quit. The novel continues to be intricate throughout its final 160+ pages...but it ends up feeling like the crisis, climax, and resolution are indefinitely delayed, until the author has judged that every last ounce of atmosphere has been milked from the setting. In the end, a potentially magnificent "Doctor Who" novel is reduced to being merely a solid & diverting novel, by delaying the gratification for far too long. Anji (one of my least liked novel companions) remains especially irritating to me throughout. Luckily, Fitz is much more engaging & amusing.

Em says

While the inside look at Spanish/French history was intriguing, it was very confusing for someone who hasn't spent much time studying that pre-WW2 era. If you're not a WW2 buff, make sure you read this one with Google handy so that you can look up what the heck is going on. Maybe research May Days before you start: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barcelon...>

Once I got past the general confusion of history, I got frustrated with the French and Spanish. Sadly I only speak German and English, and I was horribly upset with the TARDIS for not translating everything for me.

There are several important moments for the plot arc in this book so definitely do not skip it. Ideally, go to Barcelona and sit in a hotel and read it. There is an important moment for Doctor Who: Time Zero.

The Doctor is pretty useless throughout the whole thing, but I think that's the point, given Sabbath's strange involvement. It's an interesting new situation for the Doctor--not being the cleverest (or maybe just most conniving) man in the room. The way the Doctor trusts Fitz, and the way Fitz himself behaves, is back on track after the awkward hiccup that was Doctor Who: The Book of the Still.

If you love the Doctor and Fitz, read it (but for gosh sakes keep Google handy).

James Barnard says

One of the interesting things about re-reading these books, 12 years later, is the opportunity it gives for me to compare my views on them with the ones I held at the time, as well as more general critical opinion, and in light of the stories we've been treated to since. And I think people didn't quite know what to make of this. Doctor Who is no stranger to key historical events. What makes the eighth Doctor, Fitz and Anji's involvement in the Spanish Civil War, so memorable, is the examination of how perception can alter things.

This, in Halliday's hands, is far more interesting than simply throwing our (decidedly non-heroic) heroes into the midst of the conflict and watching them interact with real historical figures. Hence the fact that, although one Eric Blair is an important character, he actually doesn't appear very much at all.

This is a highly inventive tale, in conception and in the telling, and it serves as a neat precursor for the story arc which would begin the following month. At last, we begin to get a sense of Sabbath's agenda, and what may be at stake as events move on.

I'm undecided about whether to unreservedly recommend it – I don't think it quite works as a standalone novel and although I enjoyed Halliday's treatment of history I suspect this may be an acquired taste. But it's good to reflect that BBC Books were prepared to experiment a bit – with a small but reliably consistent audience there really was little reason to bring out crowd-pleasers every time.

And let's face it, it's worth it for the "homage to Catatonia" line alone!

Michael Battaglia says

Ah well, it was good while it lasted. After a run of truly unusual and at times extraordinarily fascinating Eighth Doctor books, we take a turn back to more ordinary circumstances, although some fragments of the brief "let's try anything, no matter how crazy" era still linger, clinging to the heels like very stubborn toilet paper. Yet it's not bad. It's a first effort from a new novelist, which can sometimes lend itself to the experience of reading someone's amazingly enthusiastic fan-fiction but the author here has better concerns beyond trying to show up the latest bug eyed alien of the week. Which is where the book both succeeds and fails.

The TARDIS crew wind up stranded in Spain circa the era of the Spanish Civil War and before too long do what they normally do, which is become embroiled in local events beyond any sane measure of safety. In Barcelona a bunch of political factions are squabbling and about to start killing each other, which would be

reason enough for everyone to keep their heads low. Except that the perceptions of history are being altered, with subtle shifts to reflect each side's personal beliefs and biases. Sensing a problem, the Doctor and company attempt to get to the bottom of it, including sending Fitz to the town of Guernica to watch it become firebombed, a job that has "short straw" written all over it. But because he arrives months off schedule from the rest of them, Anji and the Doctor must wait around and gather information without the benefit of the TARDIS, as events gradually get stranger and more violent.

An interesting note about this book is that the back cover copy makes you think it'll be written in the style of a textbook, which so soon after Lawrence Sanders' "Adventures of Henrietta Street" would have come across as a combination of overkill and returning to a well so recently tapped. Instead the story is told in a more or less straightforward fashion. Sometimes too straightforward, as the author clearly did a good amount of research into the Spanish Civil War, indicated by the somewhat extensive recommended reading list at the very end. Unfortunately, as often happens with well researched books, that research doesn't always come across in a way that resonates with the people who are reading the book, causing a lot of scenes to lack context beyond generic "this is bad" sensations.

I'll be honest, my knowledge of the Spanish Civil War extends to what I saw in "Pan's Labyrinth" and I highly doubt that movie was masquerading as a documentary. But it's not a big enough event in world history to assume that everyone has a passing knowledge of it, and before long all the various factions (anarchists, Communists, fascists, etc) begin to blend together and it becomes difficult to remember who is on what side, or even what the stakes are. We're a little too close to ground level here and as such the bigger picture becomes difficult to see, turning into people arguing and eventually towns becoming bombed, without any larger sense how this fits into history. The focus of it becomes both too wide and too narrow, attempting to probably tackle too much at once. The bombing of Guernica is a fairly significant emotional event, one that deserves to be the centerpiece of the novel. Instead it becomes just another plot point, a puzzle piece in the quest to figure out what the mystery alien is doing this time out. A far better approach might have been to narrow the lens further and focus on Barcelona in the days leading up to the fighting, giving us the tense feel of First Doctor story "The Massacre" where the trapped TARDIS crew knows what's coming and has to race to either get out of Dodge or head off the alien at the pass before all heck breaks loose and they get caught in the middle.

But here, matters merely plod on. It doesn't help that the alien this time out (the Absolute) is an attempt to portray a truly alien intelligence that almost exists in the abstract. However that winds up robbing its presence of a lot of power, and it becomes so disconnected from the plot that it's hard to see what effect it's even having, dropping in long enough for some confused narrative passages before we get back to rebels fighting rebels. Meanwhile, sort of Doctor foe Sabbath figures into all of this, with his agents in place for mysterious reasons as well, but a lot of the impact of this becomes drowned out.

What we're left with is a novel that feels very grey. There's nothing awful or terrible about any of it but nothing very exciting either, except for maybe the setting. As others have pointed out, the central idea of the story, that notion that the perception of history depends on a certain dominant point of view that can be shifted or broken, is a rich vein and not something "Doctor Who" has really delved into. But here it's just another fluttering idea amidst all the others, lacking the essential strangeness and power that has formed the core of previous novels. The Absolute never coheres into a true threat and the setting feels both lived in and detached. It's certainly not all bad, but probably needed another go in Draftville. It's a brutal novel in parts and does a good job showing the passages of time (for once the crew hangs around an area for months, instead of bopping in for a day or so, causing trouble and then leaving again) but there's so much being stuffed into it that the fine parts get lost in the merely okay parts. Which makes it worthy in its own way but not real memorable.

Simon Curtis says

Any book you can lift a sentence from to use in a History essay at University works for me! Fascinating look at how history is viewed. And taught me about Guernica.

Andrew says

Another Doctor who novel featuring the eighth doctor..these books kind of bridges the gap when Who was off television and expanded on the idea and personality of the eighth Doctor beyond the one off film.

I do think as T.V. Wasn't pulling in a new audience for the Doctor due to him being off screen these books take into account the demographic was getting older and as such these books are maybe more gritty and punchy than the current spin off books despite sometimes sharing authors.

Anyhow this book is set whilst the Spanish Civil war is being undertook and looks at the anomalies in some of the factual elements and explains this in a time anomaly kind of way..anyhow it's an enjoyable enough take on a historical Doctor tale though I found it didn't grip me as much as some of then other fiction does...not bad but for me not essential.
