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Tiger Bay, Cardiff, 1950: A mysterious crate is brought into the docks on a Scandinavian cargo ship, the Kungssangen. Its destination: The Torchwood Institute. As the crate is offloaded by a group of local dockers it explodes, killing all but one; a young Butetown lad called Michael Bellini. Fifty-eight years later a radioactive source somewhere inside Torchwood leads the team to discover the same Michael Bellini, still young and dressed in his 1950s clothes, cowering in the vaults. As they question the intruder, it becomes apparent that each of them has met him in the past. All of them remember him talking incoherently about terrifying "Men In Bowler Hats" and little more, but it's Jack who remembers him best of all...

Trace Memory Details

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From Reader Review Trace Memory for online ebook

? Irena ? says

In 1953, four men agreed to come late to the docks and take one crate from a Swedish ship. A huge explosion leaves only one, Michael Bellini, alive. The item that was in the crate ended up in Torchwood vaults. Present day: this same Michael Bellini ends up cowering in the Torchwood basement. He wears the same 1950s clothes and he keeps talking about men in bowler hats who seem to follow him everywhere. Soon all of them realize they have seen this man sometime in their past. The rest of the book consists of the memories each of the Torchwood team member has of Michael Bellini and Michael's own.

It is a sad story. You don't get that right from the start. Michael is one of those *wrong time, wrong place* people. The story is confusing only at first. The time travel aspect, how he ends up in a time line where either he knows a person, or a person knows him is pretty sad.

The story may be better for watching rather than reading. The time travel aspect of the story makes the plot a bit jumbled, but near the end most of the things are resolved. The origin of the threat itself stays a mystery though. All you get is a vague explanation, but it isn't crucial to the story.

Gwen being jealous of Ianto over Jack opening to him about how he knows Michael when there are more pressing things to worry about was very annoying and out of place.

Megan Kelosiwang says

I enjoyed this! My first Torchwood and my only criticism is that it was too short. I liked the characters and the storyline and could really have done with some more.

Sarah Theis says

This is the story of Michael, who was seen in different points of time, over the span of years, never in order, and every where that Michael went, death was sure to go.

This was a good story, sad but good.

My only complaint is it felt short to me though. The jumping between the pasts of different characters, explaining how they all knew this one man who, out of thin air, breached Torchwood and had no idea how or where he was, made it feel almost like those episodes of TV shows where they show you pieces of older episodes. Filling the present with the past instead of something new. I understand it was the best way to show how everyone knew Michael.... But then there wasn't enough going on in the present.

Obviously being Torchwood, people die. One of them being Jack, which isn't a spoiler at this point. He dies a lot. He actually dies more than once in this book. One violently, one Well. One is super sad, but sweet. You'll see when you read it.

Over all ??? for being a gruesome, sad, lovely and emotional ride.

I never did like bowler hats.

Jules Jones says

Fifth Torchwood tie-in novel, and the middle one of the trio released for the second season. This one has a couple of references which place it late in second season, but no spoilers, and you don't need to know anything but the basics about the universe to enjoy it.[return][return]Michael Bellini's a Cardiff dockhand, part of a workgang waiting to unload a ship late one night in 1953. A ship whose cargo includes a crate marked "Torchwood". A strange explosion leaves him in hospital, the only one of his mates to survive. But that's not the worst of his worries. There are the men who say they're from the union, but who are clearly government agents. They're not nearly as frightening as the men in black suits and bowler hats, who aren't men at all.[return][return]In the present day, a quiet Sunday in the Hub is interrupted by the intruder alarm. A young man has suddenly appeared in a locked room, and he's riddled with a strange form of radiation. It doesn't take long for the team to establish that he's a local boy, but out of time. Not so strange for Torchwood, but there's a twist -- they've all encountered Michael before. Owen was a junior doctor, learning the necessary art of forgetting about his patients at the end of the day. Tosh was a little girl in Japan. Gwen was on her first day with a new partner, and somehow feeling as if it was her first day in the police force. Ianto was in his second week at Canary Wharf, making friends with another recent starter called Lisa.[return][return]And Jack? Well, Jack's been with Torchwood a long, long time. His own encounter with Michael was out of hours, but he still knows something about Michael's first encounter with Torchwood, and the alien artefact that sent Michael leaping through time. And a few more things besides.[return][return]This is a beautifully constructed novel, which uses Michael's leaps back and forth through time to tell a solidly plotted story around Michael and the artefact, while giving some lovely backstory and characterisation for each of the main cast. Something I particularly liked is that we see the characters when they were younger, and in those scenes they feel like younger versions of themselves, before various things happened to them. There's also some good characterisation in the present-day scenes. The nature of the book means that all of the main cast get a good share of the word count. [return][return]This is my favourite of the novels so far. That's partly because it plays to things I like, but it's also because it's well written. And while the canonicity of the Whoniverse tie-in material is ambiguous, I think this one adds a little more depth to the Torchwood world, not just another monster-of-the-week story.

Aricia Gavriel says

Fifteen Torchwood novels were produced in hardcover by BBC Books, and the quality seems to have been remarkably varied, from the intricate plot to the simple, from characters who felt instantly familiar to viewers, to others where it can be difficult to recognize them as the same Jack, Ianto, Owen, Gwen and Toshiko we saw in the spin-off from evergreen favorite Doctor Who. I've read ten of these tie-ins, and though some are good SF and others are great Torchwood -- and occasionally a novel would find a way to be both! -- in every instance, a key element was missing.

Trace Memory (2008) is the first where the character of Jack Harkness is written as a sensual human being with a romantic side, and where his "omnisexuality" is given more than a throwaway nod and wink, often in the form of a witticism, somewhere in the course of 250pp. In other words, getting down to brass tacks, Trace Memory is the first Torchwood tie-in I've seen where there's a gay element. In fact, after I'd read eight of these, I'd begun to wonder if Jack's sexuality was taboo in the tie-in novels, because it was

consistently ignored.

Surprise: Llewellyn had the courage and vision to give Jack a sensual and romantic side; moreover he had the courage (or publisher's permission? One wonders) to write a relationship between Captain Jack and "guest star" Michael Bellini, with implicit (not explicit), or implied sex, and a couple of tender kisses. There's just about enough to award this one the glbt tag.

Trace Memory is an excellent story involving a young man, Michael, caught in an explosion of alien technology and as a result being literally zapped, for want of a better expression, back and forth through the time stream from 1953 -- the scene of the original event -- to the present. The involuntary time-traveling is agonizingly traumatic. In this hell there's one common denominator: Torchwood Cardiff.

If you know the premise of the show you'll grasp at once, the alien tech at the root of these misadventures was labeled for Torchwood as it arrived on the docks at Tiger Bay in '53. Michael Bellini was one of a gang of cargo handlers: the only one to survive the explosion. The next he knows, he's miles and years away, shifting back and forth through time without warning, always pursued by an enemy right out of nightmare: the Men in the Bowler Hats.

Leave it to Jack to make sense of all this, because only Jack is savvy enough, old enough, and even alien enough himself, to just ... know this stuff. However, along the way the other members of Torchwood Cardiff play good parts in the unfolding mystery.

The story idea is the strongest part of Trace Memory; the gay relationship between Jack and Michael is the most poignant. The execution of the book is not quite what one would have hoped for, with a denouement feeling rushed to the point of needless brevity. I've a feeling the novel was developed from a scripted story not optioned for the aired show. It has the pace of a filmed episode, and the imagery one expects. However, whereas an episode can get away with the rush-rush pacing and narrative abbreviation, the model doesn't work so well in a book. When we read, we simply expect more reading, scenes properly staged and developed.

Working backwards from movie script to novelization of same, a writer always has to put flesh on the bones, whereas this flesh is deliberately stripped away when a novel becomes a movie. What's missing from Trace Memory is the meat on the bones of the script. To make 250pp, the print layout uses too much whitespace, a large font and wide line spacing. How I'd have loved to see this one filled out with fiction rather than blank paper! I estimate the length is ~65k words, max. It could easily have been half as long again, rendering a better-rounded, more satisfying book.

All this said, Trace Memory is still a very good read. The story idea is a beauty; the character of Michael is well done; the relationship between him and Jack is poignant and moving; and the ending is not "happy ever after." You'll taste the bittersweet quality you remember from the show itself.

And, marvel of marvels, Jack Harkness himself is written well. Llewellyn has the character spot-on, from Jack's smart, acid tongue to the deep melancholy that comes from being so very old, and so very alone. Given the richness of performance by John Barrowman, one would have imagined Captain Jack should be easy to write. In fact, few Torchwood tie-in authors managed it. Kudos to Llewellyn.

Recommended as a very good SF story with a mildly, tastefully crafted gay relationship; but recommended first for Torchwood fans. You really need to know the show to get the most out of this. It's a quick read which will keep you guessing till the midpoint. I want to give it 3.5 stars because it's so abbreviated, but we'll

round this up to 4 since there's a lot about Trace Memory to like.

KM says

I haven't been impressed with the Torchwood novels, but I really enjoyed this one. The story is cleverly written, and the characters are true to their TV form. The author didn't forget that one of the reasons people love Torchwood so much is due to the characters' complex relationships, not just the action scenes and goofy innuendos. It was a good blend of all.

Also, this book was properly edited! Can't say that for its predecessors.

Shelley says

Oh, I really liked this. A lot. It was just quiet and haunting and sad and lovely. I liked the way the narrative was set up, floating in and out of time. The look at Torchwood 1 was terrifying, honestly. The characterization was exactly spot on, and the Jack/Ianto moments were perfect. I love their relationship, and love that Ianto is the one he confided in. Oh, and Jack and Michael. Those boys broke my heart. I really liked the glimpse of Jack in the past, and all of the main character bits, especially Owen. This feels like it was written by someone who understands what makes this show tick. I really hope he writes more.

Lisa Emmerson says

An easy read which I totally enjoyed.

Ken says

A mysterious creature is brought to Cardiff in 1953, whilst being unloaded it explodes and kills everyone except Michael Bellini.

The Torchwood crew discover Michael in the hub and all realise that they have seen him before... The story has plenty of flashbacks and wonderfully explores the teams backstories.

Keri Payton says

(From my blog: Quill Café)

In accordance with the FTC, I would like to disclose that I purchased this book. The opinions expressed are mine and no monetary compensation was offered to me by the author or publisher.

Michael Bellini is just a local docker doing his job, until the crate he is meant to be retrieving explodes and kills his three co-workers. Soon he is transplanted into different places in time, with one particular memory. The label on the crate read: Torchwood.

In present day, Torchwood is a secret organisation that deals with the strange and the...alien. The members of Torchwood are all bored out of their minds – for a change – when Michael comes blundering in, scared and confused.

It isn't long before all five members of Torchwood realise they have crossed paths with Michael before. How is this possible and what is the reason for Michael's random time travel? The answer lies in the mystery of the crate but what will become of Michael and who are the men in the bowler hats that seem to be following him?

I'm a sucker for intertwined storylines and I love me some time travel. Do you know what I love most? Well-written books. This one had me.

This book comes packed with a lot of science fiction goodness but it is more than anything an interesting exploration of characters. Not just a further insight into the members of Torchwood but a look at the life of Michael Bellini, whose world is torn apart and stitched together as an array of broken puzzle pieces, never quite connecting in the right order. It was fascinating to observe time in such an alternate fashion and witness the toll it took on Michael.

'Trace Memory' is one of many Torchwood novels but the first I picked up and read. You do not need to read any of the previous novels in order to read this one, although it does focus on the members of Torchwood, taking place near the beginning of the second season of the UK original series.

I picked this up because I wanted *more* from Torchwood. I wanted to know more about the characters I love and to see them all in action together again. It was a fandom craving but my prior interest in the series and the characters wasn't the only reason I loved this book. Like I said, I am a sucker for well-written fiction.

When I went to the science fiction section in the Strand bookstore, I think a wall of it was just Star Wars novels. That's how I thought of television-to-print sci-fi stories. Although I'd never read one, they seemed so mass produced. I thought, *Could this really be any good?* I don't know about the rest of them but 'Trace Memory' was.

I loved seeing into the character's pasts - for instance, Ianto's early experiences at Torchwood One - and getting glimpses into their lives before they joined Jack at Torchwood Three. Back story, while usually tedious, when tied in with current events and Michael's forever in-the-moment time stream, is very captivating.

Michael is a wonderful character. So vulnerable and tortured and confused. I liked seeing things as they were from his perspective as well as how he appeared to the other characters. It fleshed out his character so well and he became so much more than the fleeting moments in time he inhabited.

The greatest character insight next to Michael, was Jack Harkness: the immortal man. Jack has lived countless lives and is such a mystery. It was amazing to see more into his past and how one man's broken existence could affect him in such a small period of time.

I would recommend 'Trace Memory' by David Llewellyn to any Torchwood fan who wants more from the

series but just as a good science fiction read. The author manages to take the extraordinary and materialize it in the reader's mind. I look forward to reading more of the Torchwood novels.

Craig Andrews says

An excellent book that would have made an awesome episode featuring a man who becomes unstuck in time (very similar to Babylon 5 plot).

Leila Anani says

in 1953 3 Cardiff dockworkers are waiting for a mysterious crate labelled Torchwood. It explodes. 2 of the men are killed but the third, Michael gets laced with Tachyon radiation which causes him to randomly time shift into the pasts and presents of the Torchwood crew. Mean while two very freaky aliens in Bowler hats chase Michael through time always seeming to arrive too late to catch him....

This one reminded me a bit of the Tommy episode - 2.3 to the last man - however instead of Tosh getting a tragic romance with an time shifting hero it's Jack who falls for Michael in the 1960's - I like the use of time in this one because it's not linear so when Jack meets Michael in the present he of course recalls their past and knows how things end but for Michael those events have yet to happen. I also like some of the flashbacks particularly Tosh's childhood and the Japanese fairytale.

As Torchwood novels go I thought this was pretty good. It's decently edited and fits into the spirit of the show. Wish there'd been more emotion/jealousy from Ianto and maybe a little more fun but over all not bad at all - story unfolded well with a good pacing to it.

Cornerofmadness says

Expect a few spoilers in this review of the TV tie-in. I did enjoy it, however I thought there were some issues. In 1953, Michael Bellini is working the docks with some friends as they are expecting a shipment (probably not legal) and when the ship gets in, it explodes. Michael is doused with a strange energy that sends him pin-balling through time until he ends up in the basement of Torchwood.

If that wasn't odd enough, Michael has met all the Torchwood members throughout time which was both interesting (Much of the beginning of the book is dedicated to each character's meeting with Michael) but also very problematic for me. I found it very unbelievable that every last one of them met Michael without some reason for it. Maybe because much like River Song and the Doctor, they are in moving in different directions in time. However, much of it has yet to happen to Michael so maybe meeting them in Torchwood's basement somehow linked them? I don't know and that bothered me.

Michael's alien energy is attracting an ancient speices, the Vondrax, who eat the energy. They appear as terrifying men in bowler hats. They are chasing him in time as are several men with different government agents. And in a 'surprise twist' that will surprise no one he and Jack were lovers in the 60s, at least briefly and Jack knows how this story ends.

The story itself is interesting. However, there are real structural problems with it. So many times I had to flip back to see what I missed because it flips back and forth between the various characters with no apparent chapter/scene breaks. It was very confusing. All the ping-ponging made it occasionally hard to follow. I really wish they had done a scene break thing. it would have made for a nicer, easier read (I'm not sure who to put that on, the author or BBC Books).

And the ending...well, it's also a bit problematic because frankly the Torchwood crew are mere spectators. They have no impact on the final outcome so the story falls a bit flat there. And being a Torchwood book, you can imagine what kind of ending it will have in the happy or not department. Still, it was a fun read for all its problems. I did feel a bit sorry for Ianto though. Jack is a bit of a jerk in this, unsurprisingly.

Andrew Butcher says

Love a bit of time travel. With all the flashes of white light and jumping through time, this book reminded me of Season 5 of Lost. And I love Lost, so enough said.

Daniel Kukwa says

Now this is the type of story I really enjoy. My favourite "Torchwood" trope -- the flashback -- is used to wonderful effect. Glimpses into everyone's past, more insight into Jack's long journey through the 20th century, and a beautiful sense of melancholy and love that permeates the best "Torchwood" stories, both televised and in prose. Extra bonus points for preempting Steven Moffat's idea of the Whiptermen...except these aliens are more terrifying. This is easily my favourite of David Llewellyn's literary dips into the expanded "Doctor Who/Torchwood" universe, and one of the best novels in this range.
