In 1996 BBC Books ended Virgin’s licence to publish Doctor Who novels, perhaps anticipating a new audience on the back of the 1996 TV Movie. Despite no series materialising, they carried on anyway with a series of books featuring the first seven Doctors, and another, generally known as the Eighth Doctor Adventures, presented as the official continuation of the Doctor’s travels. The Eight Doctors by former script editor and prolific novelizer Terrance Dicks was the first of these.

What happens?
Beginning shortly after the events of the movie, the Eighth Doctor manages a whole page before the Master springs a trap on him. From having a dodgy memory in the TV movie, the Doctor now goes the whole hog and gains severe amnesia, forgetting everything about his and his previous incarnations’ lives. With the aid of a familiar voice, he manages to land the TARDIS. Where else would a new Doctor start than at the very beginning, in the yard of one I.M Foreman, which for some reason still hasn’t been built on despite being left absent for thirty-four years? And what else does a new Doctor need? A companion! After a quick fight and a trip to the police station, the Doctor takes his new companion, Samantha (Sam) Jones, aboard, and begins travelling again. Or not. Stumbling into the TARDIS, he disappears just as Sam is surrounded by a gang intent on silencing her...

The Doctor begins a journey to recover his memories, taking in some of the greatest hits of his previous seven lives. Taking in stories such as 100,000BC, The War Games, The Sea Devils and The Five Doctors, the Doctor ends up meeting his other selves, filling in his memories by linking minds with them, sadly without shouting ‘contact’. There are two distinct types of interaction with previous incarnations here. The stories involving the first two Doctors end up with the Doctor directly influencing the events of that story, which feel like a bit of an insult to Doctors One and Two. For example, The War Games changes so that the second Doctor gets the idea of contacting the Time Lords from the eighth Doctor. Now admittedly, the Doctor as an individual still came up with the idea, but surely the second Doctor is capable of thinking for himself, and it somewhat taints the idea that contacting the Time Lords was the Doctor’s last resort, giving his own
freedom up in return for the inhabitants of the games being transported home.

The other set of interactions are much better, featuring the eighth Doctor meeting himself offscreen. He goes full Buffy on some vampires after State of Decay, he finds the seventh Doctor captured on Metebelis III, and thwarts the Master along with the third Doctor after the events of The Sea Devils. These, as well as being a nostalgia fest, also allow some other fun moments. You wanted the backstory of the Raston Warrior Robot? You got it! You want the Master in Tartan? Have that too! You want Adric? Well too bad, he sleeps through his segment.

Meanwhile, in the background, some good old Time Lord political shenanigans play out. While it may not be The Deadly Assassin, it is still suitably entertaining and interesting. It sees the return of some familiar faces, with those from The Five Doctors featuring prominently. However, given that Terrance Dicks wrote that as well, it is not all that surprising. It also gives the opportunity to tie up some loose ends and plot holes from other linked stories, be they the Master’s change into a worm in the Movie, or some (but only some) threads from The Trial of a Time Lord. It also throws up an interesting point, when one of the Time Lords makes a sexist remark about President Flavia. Admittedly, whether the novels exist in the main continuity of Who seems to be up to the reader, but it is interesting given recent revelations about regeneration, with characters such as the Corsair in The Doctor’s Wife, the Master in Dark Water and the General in Hell Bent showing that regenerations can cause a change in gender. Surely such behaviour would not exist in a society where such changes are but a regeneration away, or is this unwitting commentary on some of the hypocrisy of the Time Lords? You decide.

Back, then, to the business of collecting a companion. The Doctor eventually finds the time to rescue Sam, vanquish the thugs and generally save the day, so the original ‘Smith and Jones’ (at least, in Doctor Who terms) begin their adventures together. Whereas a conventional companion, especially modern ones, normally get much more time in their first story, Sam barely features, this being much more the story of the Doctors. If you want to see Sam in action, you are going to have to read more of the books in the series.

**Conclusion**

If you are looking for a calm way to satisfy your Doctor Who cravings, look no further. There are no complex causal loops or paradoxes to get your head round, no complex story to get lost in, while still being perfectly entertaining. Admittedly, this may contribute to some of the low points, like most of the incarnations shown needing saving by the eighth, or the aforementioned meddling in the stories of other Doctors. While it may not hit the heights of what Doctor Who fiction can achieve, it easily misses the lows, so enjoy as Terrance Dicks weaves together a fun tale, with a healthy amount of nostalgia, action and intrigue thrown in for good measure, that serves as a perfect introduction to this series of books.