



Doctor Who: Scream of the Shalka

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When the Ninth Doctor lands in the town of Kennet, he finds that something is terribly wrong. The people are scared. They don't like going out at night, they don't like making too much noise, and they certainly don't like strangers asking questions.

Doctor Who: Scream of the Shalka Details

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From Reader Review Doctor Who: Scream of the Shalka for online ebook

Sean Homrig says

Perhaps it's a relief not to read a "Who" novel that doesn't contain some omnipotent god as its villain, but rather an old-fashioned alien invasion like in the Pertwee era. Perhaps I found this alternate version of the Ninth Doctor palatable and wished I could see more of him. Perhaps it's the small dollop of gritty violence.

Whatever it is, Paul Cornell's novelization of the web series is a good, solid yarn. Cornell doesn't ramble, and presumably adds just a little of his own touches that couldn't be used in the animated story (I haven't seen it yet, but I'm looking forward to it now). It isn't a perfect story - there's a bit of deus ex machina at the end that I famously find annoying - but is nevertheless recommended for fans who haven't seen the animated story. And for fans who have seen it, but are hungry for more.

Christopher Buchanan says

A wonderful what-if tale of the almost 9th Doctor. It's fascinating to get this glimpse into what might have been if RTD hadn't brought the show back.

Paul Cornell gives us a darker Doctor and a much more classic invasion tale with a gritty edge, a little harder sci-fi and some fantastically original baddies. It put me in mind of 'Inferno' in parts. Great story. I'd also recommend the web series this is based off of. Richard Grant would have been a fantastic 9th Doctor.

Michael Battaglia says

A strange town with strange happenings. The residents are paralyzed with fear, in a terrible danger that none of them can quite articulate. People are vanishing. Hope could be lost. And then out of nowhere comes a weird vworping noise and the arrival of a blue box. The door opens and out of it steps . . . the Doctor? Seriously? Who the heck is this guy?

Who is he is Richard E Grant and the what this is was an attempt by the BBC to bring the Doctor back into something resembling a moving picture, even if they couldn't do a full-on show. To that end they hired Paul Cornell to work with a production team to bring the animated adventures of this new "Doctor Who" to life, which resulted in exactly one story that was broadcast on BBCi on the backend of 2003. However, before this incarnation could gain any momentum, Russell Davies got the green light to produce a televised version of everyone's favorite Time Lord and with Mr Eccleston and his big ears being definitely set as the Ninth Doctor, this adventure got relegated into basically official fan-fiction, an intriguing little glimpse into a road never taken. The gods of canon giveth and taketh, as it were.

What it does mean is that we get to evaluate the story free from any ideas of what would come before and after, regardless of the expectations that might have stemmed from it. And on that level . . . it's not bad. It's clear from the start that Cornell was trying to give us a very traditional "Doctor Who" story, perhaps updated for the then-modern but now terribly quaint seeming year of 2003, with the new Doctor facing familiar

elements without any familiar faces. You have all the components in place, the besieged village, the townsfolk trying to find that heroes that lie within themselves, the scary aliens with the daft plan, a love-hate relationship with the military, all of it put together in ways that probably function as "Who" comfort food, close enough to our warm and fuzzy memories to placate old fans praying they didn't screw up this take, serious enough so that non-fans who were convinced that the classic series was all shoddy sets and over-the-top acting might give it a second glance and stripped of enough nods to continuity that it didn't seem like one big in-joke.

On that level, it does work. The story itself, surprisingly for Cornell, is no great shakes. It moves with the confidence of a professional but considering the depth he brought to the Seventh Doctor (and his Eighth Doctor story showed flashes of that), I was expecting a more grandly emotional experience. Which probably is where I miscalculated. Those other works were novels meant to be novels, with all the complexities inherent in a proper novel. This is essentially the webcast in book form, with some fleshing out but basically the story for those of us who didn't see the animated version. In that sense, it succeeds. Given the little space he does have to improvise, he acquits himself with typical aplomb. His Doctor is sketched in a matter of a few pages (sometimes too broadly so, he pushes the "intellectual snob" button a bit too hard in parts) and falls in line with portrayals we've seen in the past, out for justice, a little more emotionally icy than usual (but not manipulative, just distant) but still with a heartened exuberance. Having never seen the webcast, I can't say what Richard E Grant brought or didn't bring to the role (Russell Davies apparently didn't have too much good to say about it, and its telling he wasn't invited onto the TV show until another producer had taken over) but its certainly an interesting take on the Doctor, blending the classicist tendencies that longtime fans might have wanted with a more prickly modern edge. Still, the actual Ninth Doctor we got was probably a better (re)introduction to the world at large, as I can't see legions of new fans falling in love with this elegant and somewhat snooty Doctor, especially when compared with the fire in the belly Eccleston brought to the role. But then all those modern Sherlock Holmes shows are popular so what do I know?

What interests most about this story are the avenues they would have gone down and Cornell was smart to start in the middle, peppering his script with references to past events for this Doctor that leave us puzzling what the heck happened. From the presence of the Master, to remarks about being ordered around to the hint that someone who used to travel on the TARDIS he was once close to died, it's a shame that we were never given the chance to learn the full stories. But, on the other hand, it's nice to come up with your own scenarios and sometimes the explanations aren't as exciting as the mystery itself (the new show could remember that every so often). It works because instead of going with the usual "regeneration" route and having us stumble in with the typical cliches of those stories, we basically get another day in the life of this new Doctor.

The Shalka are decent as far as aliens go, they never become quite as menacing as their bug forms suggest they might be and they suffer from the latter-day "Who" conceit of the entire race being basically evil and monochromatic (though there is a nod toward trying to see things their way, even if that's dismissed almost as soon as its brought up). The whole "sonic weapon" process was done back in the Missing Adventure "Invasion of the Cat People" (and no, that's not a recommendation) and as I said, their plan as a whole is kind of nutty. In a book as slim as this, its hard to get a grasp of the stakes when the whole world is in danger and the book does suffer for that here. But new companion Allison seems nice, if that helps.

But it is an interesting glimpse into the road not taken. I don't think this version would have set the world on fire (for one, it's so traditional it hurts) but for what it is, it's decent. It's also extremely slim, as the main story takes up less than two hundred pages and the rest is devoted to an essay from Mr Cornell about the making of the webcast and an outline of his original script. The former is kind of fun (and a boon to those process junkie people who like behind the scenes stuff) and the latter can be a fun party game where people play "Spot the Difference". But neither is essential. It seems like the BBC felt the same way about the whole

affair but ultimately I feel that anything Cornell does is worth a look.

Ellie says

I tried to watch the webcast of *Scream of the Shalka* once but was disappointed by the flat animation and the lackluster voice acting from its lead Richard E. Grant. So, I wasn't expecting much of this book, but I was really pleasantly surprised.

This is a fairly short book that hurtles along at a rapid pace with tons of action and plenty of snappy, humorous moments. The plot is your standard Doctor Who alien invasion story, and if this were just another Missing Adventure book I wouldn't give it such a high rating. However, this is notable among Doctor Who books because of how effectively Paul Cornell develops an entirely new incarnation of the Doctor. This alternate Ninth Doctor feels real and interesting and like a complete character. So does Alison and so does this version of the Master. The hints at a complex, unrevealed backstory of something that has damaged the Doctor are frustratingly tempting. You come away from this book wishing it was the start of a whole long series of the Doctor's adventures with Alison and the Master in the TARDIS. Sadly, it isn't - just a strange dead end in the big weird world of Doctor Who continuity. But it's still worth a read and you will have a great time.

Recommended for: Anyone who was interested in the webcast but didn't enjoy the animation style; all hardcore Doctor Who fans; anyone who is a fan of the Master and wants to see how he could be a "good guy" character.

Matthew Kresal says

The *Scream Of The Shalka* web-cast was intended to be the debut of the ninth Doctor played by Richard E Grant. Unfortunately for that Doctor, but fortunate for fans, this would turn out to be the Grant ninth Doctor's only appearance due to the announcement of the return of the TV series. In the meantime there was a novelization of that web-cast published. Written by the script's writer Paul Cornell, the novelization reads as an homage to the Target novelizations of years past in the form of the last Doctor Who novelization to date.

Fans of the original series of Doctor Who might know that almost every story of that was novelized by Target Books between the 1970s and the early 1990s. Keeping that in mind, it is perhaps best to read this book as an homage to that series of books. From the first page to the Doctor's introduction a few pages later, the entire opening of the book plays out an opening right out of a classic Target novelization. Throughout the entire book there are little moments like that including the Master's appearances, the chapter titles and even the final couple of lines of the novelization itself. The result is that it reads like a blast from the past.

The book has some nice additions to it as well, another hallmark of the best Target novelizations. It is these additions that Cornell's writing shines brightly. We learn some of the back-stories of various characters since as Alison Cheney and her boyfriend Joe for example. The book also fills in some of the gaps of the original web-cast including why UNIT doesn't appear as one might expect or just who the various groups around the world who play a large role in the finale are. The latter in particular is well done by Cornell who turns supporting characters with no names from the original web-cast into flesh and blood human beings in a

matter of pages. There aspects of the web-cast that Cornell doesn't expand on such as why the Master is in the condition he is in or what the mysterious event is effecting the Doctor throughout the story but that is perhaps because, at the time, there was the possibility of more stories where those things might have been revealed. The result overall is a pleasing expansion of the web-cast.

The novelization though is literally only part of the book. Unlike Marc Platt's novelization of the fan video Downtime where the story had to be padded out to fill the novel, Cornell's novelization only takes up only three-quarters of the book's length. The rest of the book is taken up by two items. The first is an essay by Cornell about the making of the web-cast from the commissioning process to the challenges of writing it (including Cornell having someone break into his house to send the scripts to the BBC while he was in New Zealand) right up to the recording of the audio for the web-cast with some sections written by others involved in the production. The second item is the original storyline for the web-cast. Originally titled Servants Of The Shalakor, the storyline is similar yet very different which makes this section perhaps the most intriguing part of the book.

Scream Of The Shalka is in book form exactly what it was in web-cast form. It is a traditional alien invasion of Earth style story told with a new Doctor and in modern style. The novelization expands that story with additional details while playing out as an homage to the Target novelizations of the past. Combined with a making-of essay and the original storyline, the result is a satisfying read. It also marks the last Doctor Who novelization to date and a proud one to go out on.

Austen says

After the Cosgrove-Hall animation of the series, the novelization was one of the best Doctor Who that I have had the chance to read. New enemies, new TARDIS control room, new Master, new Doctor. I'm very sorry that this Doctor did not have his own series, or become the official 9th Doctor.

(Don't get me wrong: I liked Mr. Eccleston's version very much. This particular Doctor, wounded in spirit, recovering from a tragic loss, traveling with the Master and under the control of a mysterious force (the Time Lords? the Guardians? Who knows.) was a very complex individual with a desire not to be involved again.)

My favorite character in the mix was the new TARDIS. The new control room with brass fittings, woodwork and muted roundels and mention of a zeppelin hangar somewhere, seemed like it - like the Doctor - had been through much in the years since Paul McGann's Doctor in the movie and was now more ready for a steadier existence.

Travis says

During the 'dark age' in between the cancelation of the original series and it's return, there were a couple of attempts to keep Doctor Who alive. This book is an adaption of a cartoon featuring a new Doctor.

The new Doctor, who dresses like a victorian gentleman, but has the attitude that Christopher Eccelston brought to his Doctor lands in a small English town that is scared to death of...something!

With the help of a local waitress, a robot containing the life force of his old foe the Master and eventually the

british army, The Doctor saves Earth from the villainous Shalka.

Great story, which captures the feel of a really good TV episode, plus a couple new twists and make it interesting (and were later 'borrowed' by Russell Davies for the new show) The new Doctor is a great mix of brilliant, eccentric and snotty, the Master-bot is a brilliant companion and the Shalka were a worthy foe.

Shame nothing more was done with this Doctor and he's is now stuck in limbo, just an entertaining footnote.

Nicholas Whyte says

<http://nwhyte.livejournal.com/2043008.html>[return][return]I was really surprised and pleased by how much I enjoyed this book, the novelisation of the webcast story starring Richard E. Grant as the other Ninth Doctor. Perhaps it is partly that, at least in the opening pages, it so consciously draws on the style of the Dicks and Hulke novelisations of the Third and Fourth Doctor stories which meant so much to fans of the same sort of age as the author and me. But also a lot of the sequencing that didn't quite work for me in the webcast seemed to me to be much better here: the Master's new situation, the reasons for the Doctor's emotional coldness, the back story to Alison's relationship. We do miss out on Conor Moloney's performance as Greaves, though. Perhaps the last week of work before the Christmas hols was a bad time to watch the webcast; I am certain that if I had read the book before watching it, I would have enjoyed both more.[return][return]Some of the similarities between Shalka continuity and New Who are even more noticeable here: that the Ninth Doctor is suffering PTSD after an awful war in which many people he cared about were killed, and that the new companion chooses to travel with the Doctor rather than remain in a (dull) interracial relationship. (As in Rose, there is also a monster leader underground controlling its minions who burst into the normal world to terrify humans, and the Doctor must descend to their lair to do battle, but those are fairly standard plot elements.)[return][return]The book also comes with a long afterword - a quarter of its total length - including the original story proposal and the author's account of how the story came to be made, told with Cornell's typical enthusiasm, but with first-hand accounts patched in from the production team as well. This may have turned out to be just a sidetrack in Who history but we are lucky that it is so well chronicled, including the story of how Cornell, on honeymoon in New Zealand, had to get a friend to break into his house to transmit the script to the BBC after an email went astray. It certainly adds to what is already a good book for fans to track down.

John Parungao says

Good pace for an adaptation of a previous script. Enjoyed the expanded version of the original story as well as the chapters at the end featuring the development of the storyline.

Shannon Appelcline says

The Doctor has always been largely embodied by the actor playing his role. Though the animated version of *The Scream of the Shalka* had Richard E. Grant taking that role, we readers of the novel don't have the same advantage, and that's the biggest stumbling block in this novel: figuring out who the new (alternate) ninth

Doctor really is. There's some interesting backstory that's hinted at, and it defines a9's character somewhat, but he also feels somewhat generic: as much as Six or a Twelve as his own person.

The rest of the story feels a little simplistic, in part because it gets off on the wrong foot by explaining everything as if it we've never read a Doctor Who story before. But even after that it's a classic Base-under-siege story. Still, Cornell ultimately makes it work, with an interesting TARDIS dynamic, an interesting new companion, and a fun new villain that offers a global scope of problem.

By the end, I was hoping to read more stories of this alternate nine, and granting it a 3.5 or higher rating.

Ken says

Originally released as a weekly animated web series to coincide with the 40th anniversary of the series in 2003, this alternative Ninth Doctor story is now no longer cannon after the show was revived in 2005.

It's a fun 'What If' alternative with Richard E. Grant as the Doctor.

N says

Nice to have a more detailed version of events and to read the elaborate making-of section in the back.

Richard Wright says

An alternate official ninth Doctor, played by Richard E. Grant, was launched online and then almost immediately cancelled with the relaunch of the BBC series on the tellybox with Mr Ecclestone in he role. This is the novelisation of that animated adventure, and incredibly refreshing it is too. Most interesting is that writer Paul Cornell makes very similar decisions on how to relaunch the character as Russell Davies did for the television. Forget about regenerating the character, and have him turn up well settled in his new body? Check. Give him a dark secret, a tragedy we don't know about, to drive his initial development? Check. Give him a companion who will show him how to be himself again, and make her the (seemingly) most ordinary person possible? Check. It's both very familiar, and very new. The story itself is a traditional 'base under siege' scenario given a global climax, and is perhaps darker and more drastic than the television series would dare for some time. It's recognisably the best of Who though, and an intriguing alternate reality for an enduring character. One of the most entertaining bits of Who fiction I've read this anniversary year.

Patty says

Although the Doctor remains a nebulous character throughout, this was still a fun read. I especially liked the Master as an android-like companion.

Kristina Brown says

This was a book I didn't want to end I was enjoying it so much. There's something of the more recent Doctors about this version - something inherently sad - yet he's still the eccentric rescuer of old. The idea of the Master uneasily travelling with him is one I'd love to have seen explored more. Some lines made me laugh, some made me hold my breath and some I'd take to my heart as philosophies. Not bad for an action packed book of monsters invading the Earth.
