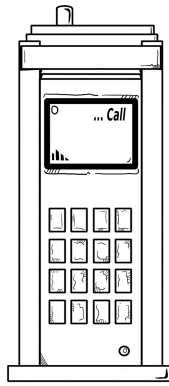


**The Black Archive #10**

**SCREAM OF THE  
SHALKA  
SAMPLER**



**By Jon Arnold**

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# 'OR ARE YOU JUST THE SAME AS ALL THE OTHER SHEEP?'

'Alison Cheney is an everywoman [...] someone for you and me to identify with while the Doctor is being mysterious and difficult.'

[Paul Cornell]<sup>1</sup>

The idea of the everywoman (or everyman) companion became somewhat lost from **Doctor Who** with the departure of Sarah Jane Smith. The show had veered between companions contemporary to the time of broadcast (Ian and Barbara, Dodo, Ben and Polly, Liz Shaw and Jo Grant) and periods where the companions had no relation to the time period (the period between Ian and Barbara's departure and Dodo's arrival and the Troughton era following Ben and Polly's departure<sup>2</sup>), but had settled on having a companion providing a contemporary point of view for all 1970s stories up to *The Hand of Fear* (1976). Following a single companionless story, there then wasn't a companion who could reasonably be called an identification figure for the main intended audience (the British viewing public) until the show's original run finished in 1989. Leela was a savage from the far future; Romana a Time Lord; Adric from another universe entirely; Tegan and Peri from different countries; Nyssa and Turlough were aliens and Ace, whilst contemporary, came with a convoluted backstory that meant she was first encountered on an ice planet light years from home. Grace and Chang Lee may be seen as attempts at giving the main (American) intended audience a viewpoint character, but given their appearance is limited to a single story and neither boards the TARDIS at the end of the adventure, it's tough to class them as companions in anything like the way it's applied to those who accompany the Doctor on his adventures<sup>3</sup>.

Alison is the first companion in 27 years who comes with a straightforward British background; prefiguring the **Doctor Who** of Russell T Davies and Steven Moffat, which has consistently prioritised the Doctor having a companion contemporary to broadcast accompanying him<sup>4</sup>. Like the other versions of **Doctor Who** proposed in the 21st century, much of what we see in *Scream of the Shalka* is a reaction to the perceived mistakes the makers of **Doctor Who** made in the 1980s<sup>5</sup>; there are few better illustrations of this than the role of the companion.

We first meet Alison working in a pub. Like Rose 14 months later this is intended as a deliberately archetypal profession: a relatively low-paying job indicative of someone uncertain of where they might want to go in their career, or who has become trapped in a mundane existence. Alison holding an ordinary job was always an important component of her character; even in the original outline she was working in a cinema.

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Cook, 'No One Can Hear You Scream', p16.

<sup>2</sup> From 'The Planet of Decision' (*The Chase* episode 4 (1965)) to 'Bell of Doom' (*The Massacre* episode 4 (1966)) and from *The Evil of the Daleks* (1967) to *The War Games* (1969), respectively.

<sup>3</sup> Plus, the small matter of Grace's profession, her love of opera and her conveniently sitting on the board of major scientific projects means she's not exactly designed for mass appeal.

<sup>4</sup> *Voyage of the Damned* (2007), *The Next Doctor* (2008), *The Waters of Mars* (2009), *The Snowmen* (2012) (where the real Clara Oswald appears briefly, but never interacts with the Doctor), *Heaven Sent* and *The Husbands of River Song* (2015) are the only stories not to feature the Doctor with companions from near-contemporary 21st-century Earth – although it's easy to argue, particularly with the Ponds and Clara, that the convoluted backstory which accrues around them makes them less successful as viewpoint characters as time goes on.

<sup>5</sup> For further discussion, see Chapter 4.

As originally envisaged there would have been a further parallel with Rose; she would be yet to leave home, although in her case she would have been taking a year out to be in a better financial position for university. The latter point leads to an important distinction between the viewpoint characters of Cornell and Davies; Cornell's character sees education as a route out of the small town of her youth ('waiting for someone amazing to come along at university; she's set her sights on the unobtainable'<sup>6</sup>); she knows there are opportunities to realise her potential and works towards them. She has either a good general knowledge or an appreciation of art: she knows who Gaudi is<sup>7</sup>. Rose doesn't even know that these opportunities exist; she doesn't know or look for a route out of a comfortable but unsatisfying existence of living at home, drifting along in a relationship both partners seem to take for granted; muddling along in a retail job which seems not to provide obvious career development opportunities. In short, Alison is designed as an aspirational middle-class character, whereas Rose is working-class (in *New Earth* (2006) the snobbish Cassandra goes so far as to term her a 'chav'). In this sense Alison is more of a forerunner of Rose's successor Martha: she shares her higher level of education, and the main difference in character appears to be Martha's focus on her medical career as opposed to Alison becoming distracted by a relationship. Both Rose and Alison offer broadly recognisable situations to an audience; both are designed to appreciate the wonders of the universe but it's Davies's character who, in retrospect, is better designed for mass appeal.

The shift from having Alison live with her family to living with her boyfriend was simply a decision of economy in terms of narrative and budget<sup>8</sup>, yet it renders her a stronger character. As initially conceived she's waiting for something to happen; as she appears on screen she's made a decision to give up on the opportunities promised by education in pursuit of the potential happiness of a long-term relationship<sup>9</sup>. She ends up in Llanet of her own volition; this gives her a degree of agency. It also gives her a reason to remain with Joe; she's staked a lot on this relationship even though tensions are apparent from their first scene (the muted argument about the TV remote). This is a relationship as rotten under the surface as Rose and Mickey's is; it takes the arrival of the Doctor and the promise of seeing the wonders of the universe to make both women see that the situation they have ended up in isn't particularly attractive after all. The difference is that Alison is aware of this, but not admitting it to herself, whereas Rose's horizons are limited. This ultimately leads to very similar climactic scenes where they decide to board the TARDIS; both women explicitly reject their lovers to travel with the Doctor.

This is another example of how *Shalka* is what Cornell described as 'kind of like [...] John the Baptist'<sup>10</sup> for Davies's version of the show; previously the most that any companion willingly

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<sup>6</sup> Cornell, *Scream of the Shalka*, p211.

<sup>7</sup> As originally envisioned, her heroes would have included the unlikely figures of Napoleon and Churchill; perhaps this is a tad less likely than Clara's claim in *Deep Breath* (2014) to have had a pin up of Marcus Aurelius on her wall.

<sup>8</sup> 'It took Muirinn to say that the family, including a small child who had two lines, were a waste of resources, and that Alison could just as easily talk to a single character...' (Cornell, *Scream of the Shalka*, p215).

<sup>9</sup> As stated in the contemporary **Doctor Who** reference book *Doctor Who: The Legend*: 'Alison gave up her degree to live with her boyfriend, Joe.' Richards, Justin, *Doctor Who: The Legend*, (2003) p392.

<sup>10</sup> DVD commentary for episode 1. Whilst this may seem egocentric, he does also acknowledge on the commentary that much of this is simply to do with the model of writing drama at the time.

gave up to travel with the Doctor was a job.<sup>11</sup> The idea of the troubled relationship came from James Goss, with the suggestion that Alison's boyfriend (originally named Dean)<sup>12</sup> accompany her and the Doctor in the TARDIS; however Paul Cornell resisted this on the basis that the audience wouldn't care for 'unhappy, miserable people, constantly bickering'<sup>13</sup>, and resolved this by having Dean die by being covered in lava and taken over by Prime, the leader of the Shalka. Perhaps Joe should be grateful that in the final version he eventually got off lightly with a broken heart.

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<sup>11</sup> Jamie forgoes his role as piper; Zoe boards the TARDIS rather than continuing in her role on the Wheel, and Sarah seems to have a very understanding editor – the rest are a mixture of kidnaps and situations where their first meeting with the Doctor has ended with an irreversible upheaval to their previous domestic situation. The choice of giving up family or lovers to travel with the Doctor is never made in the original series; instead it's more common for companions to reject the Doctor for domestic contentment (Jo in *The Green Death* (1973), Leela in *The Invasion of Time* (1978)).

<sup>12</sup> Infotext for episode 4.

<sup>13</sup> Cornell, *Scream of the Shalka* p213. This does, however, prefigure the scenario briefly played out in *Asylum of the Daleks* (2012) where the Ponds are on the verge of divorce. That they quickly resolve this suggests Steven Moffat also considers it problematic for an ongoing series.