



Doctor Who: Tomb of Valdemar

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Millenia ago, the Vanir ripped a hole in reality and created a gateway to the Higher Dimensions. This resulted in the warping of vast areas of space, and anyone who perceived these Higher Dimensions went insane. The Vanier disappeared into the gateway and all that remains of them is shimmering, golden palace floating in the clouds...The Doctor inadvertently materializes on Ashkellia, where Valdemar's tomb lies. The Doctor must escape imprisonment by Neville, a debauched aristocrat, to save both the universe and himself from the Higher Dimensions.

Doctor Who: Tomb of Valdemar Details

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From Reader Review Doctor Who: Tomb of Valdemar for online ebook

James Bowman says

This book has some interesting concepts, and it's a fairly compelling read with a memorable cast. Plus lots of points for featuring the underused Romana I. However, the framing story wound up being a disappointment, just an occasionally confusing distraction (I'm still not sure what happened at the conclusion). And the plot only kicks into high gear when the Doctor does something remarkably stupid (there are hints he was being influenced but it isn't clear to me in the end). Not one of the better Fourth Doctor novels, but OK overall. (B)

Jamie Revell says

The Doctor has to prevent Cthulhu rising from R'lyeh.

Well, sort of. It's called 'Valdemar', not 'Cthulhu', and the tomb in which it's sleeping lies beneath a Venus-like atmosphere, rather than the sea. But that's basically the idea, and the parallels are not only intentional, but made explicit from time to time.

Obviously, there's rather more to the plot than that, and there are a number of clever ideas in it, but somehow the sum is less than the parts. Having come off the back of Stross's *Halting State*, I'm used enough to stories being written in the present tense. Here, unfortunately, it just comes across as pretentious. (Yes, Messingham lampshades that on p. 202, but it doesn't make it any less true).

It does rather improve towards the end, where it becomes clearer what Messingham is at least trying to do, but by then it's all rather too late. Romana isn't quite as convincing as she might be, either - although the Doctor is very well done.

So, while there are a number of good points, they don't really cohere enough for this to be worth more than three stars.

Daniel Kukwa says

Simon Messingham's best Doctor Who novel, without a doubt. An epic tale of mystical, ice cold darkness, with an astonishingly grand depiction of the Key-to-Time-era Tom Baker incarnation of the Doctor...matched only by the equally powerful depiction of the Mary Tamm incarnation of Romana. The final twist will leave you gasping.

Simon Curtis says

At first glance this is written in a very strange way, a sort of fourth person "The Doctor glances at the screen" almost script like in a way. Once used to it though, the story comes through very well.

David Layton says

Simon Messingham is definitely one of the more interesting writers of Doctor Who novels. It's the ambition that sets him apart from so many of the others. Tomb of Valdemar is probably his most ambitious Who novel, and for that reason alone most reactions seem to be either love it or hate it. My own feeling is that in this novel Messingham has tried to do too many things and probably should have taken more time than the publishers no doubt gave him to work it all out.

On the level of plot, at least for the main story, there is not really that much unusual. The Doctor and Romana are on their way to track down part 2 of the Key to Time, but get sidetracked by an anomaly onto a deadly planet where a mad cult leader is trying to resurrect an ancient superbeing known as Valdemar. The Doctor is quickly convinced that there is no such thing as Valdemar, but instead there is an ancient gateway or access to some "higher dimensions" that, if let loose, would rewrite the physics of the cosmos. To add to the troubles, the cult leader Neville is an upper-class fugitive from a new workers' revolution, and the ruthlessly dedicated Hopkins, a kind of witch-finder general, is on Neville's trail.

The ambitious part of the novel is the manner of the telling. This is a frame-tale novel in which the main plot is told by someone telling it to someone else. In this case, an old woman identifying herself as one of the chief figures of the adventure, the novelist Pelham, is telling this story to a group of barbarian fur traders on a far away planet. But, she is really telling it to just one fur trader, Ponch, who seems strangely affected by the whole thing. About three quarters of the way through the tale, the old woman dies, and Ponch leaves his life behind to discover the source of his meaningless existence and complete the tale in his own imagination. There are several discussions along the way of this frame tale about the power of storytelling to change people's perceptions, which it seemingly has done for Ponch, who never looks at his world in quite the same way.

One thing that may disturb the reader while going through the story is the level of detail that storyteller Pelham seems to know. There are far too many details that Pelham could not possibly know, especially details about Gallifrey and about what Romana in particular is thinking at any given moment. However, Messingham manages to resolve this problem at the end.

What keeps this novel from meeting its ambition is mainly the difference in quality between the frame story and the inner tale. So, while the attempt seems to be not only to validate the value of storytelling, but also to validate the value of Doctor Who as a storytelling mechanism, an explanation for why so many people keep reading and watching, this message gets undercut by the rather ordinary plot of the inner tale, the only one that the Doctor is actually in. A better Doctor Who story with more direct referentiality to the frame tale would have made the novel's structure more effective in getting across this key message.

Some stray observations: 1) Messingham writes a very good version of Doctor 4, a feat that few other novelists were able to master; 2) As I've said elsewhere, Messingham is very good at writing interior monologue, and quite good at portraying the mental states of deeply disturbed people; 3) The character Redfearn from straight out of two-bit American Westerns has no business being in this novel; 4) There is too much focus on mental powers that can destroy the universe; 5) The villains Neville and Hopkins are too much stock characters, baddies of little particular interest.

So, high marks for the ambition, but some demerits for lack of imagination in some core parts of the novel.

Andrew says

There is much about this book that makes little sense. It's told through the words of a narrator in a time and place that seems distant from the action in the book, and a narrator whose reliability might be questioned. Given that the book explores the boundaries of myth and history, madness and sanity, then it's fair to say that any weirdness and inconsistency is simply part of the storytelling. For me, that style of storytelling was just a bit too much. I took a while to get used to the present tense narrative, but when it worked best there was a script like quality to it that led me to imagine the sets and characters gloriously depicted in the conventions of 1970s studio television. The plot was reasonable, and the Doctor gets some very Tom Bakerish quips.

In all, this is a book trying to be cleverer than it actually is and although it doesn't quite hit the mark there's enough playfulness to just lift it above the average.

Sunshine Moore says

Painful. Why do I keep reading these awful Doctor Who stories? I keep hoping that there will be an enlightening episode shedding light on a beloved character. This one does not and I had to force myself to slog through it to the end. The TV shows are so light and silly, why do the novels try to be serious?

Derelict Space Sheep says

42 WORD REVIEW:

Messingham writes in the present tense, and with a framing device fit to discombobulate readers weaned on Terrance Dicks and the like. The result is a fully fledged SF novel that artfully showcases—rather than props itself up on—the Fourth Doctor.

Angela says

The Doctor and Romana 1 get drawn to a planet. The tracer won't work properly either. Someone is trying to resurrect an old god, and that is not a good idea. There's lots of elements to this story, a palace spaceship, a love struck teenager with major powers and a scientific explanation. The characters are well done, and I liked the idea of the framing story. A good read.

Travis says

A decent treasure hunt story hurt by the author's attempt to come across as really clever and force a 'timey-whimey' story thread through the book that has a weak payoff.

The Doctor and Romana are nicely written, and I liked the monster but the two story threads don't really mesh together well.

Annette says

The handful of officially published Dr. Who fiction I've read has primarily lead me to realize how really Good some of my fanfic-writing friends really are. :}

"Tomb" is no exception. Not only does it blatantly rip off the name of Mercedes Lackey's world for no apparent reason (I checked: it does post-date her series by a dozen years), but the plot is silly (hardly unusual for Who genera), the characters badly drawn, the humor lacking, and the prose unimpressive (Characteristics Not shared by the TV series.) I wish the powers that be of the Who franchise would wander around at Teaspoon and contract a few books to the better authors they find there. It would be nice to see some really decent Who-fic in print.

Jon Arnold says

Doctor Who's great strength is the way it allows genres to crash together to form entertaining mutant hybrids. Messingham combines Doctor Who's wonky brand of SF with Lovecraftian horror to provide a pleasingly bizarre tale of some very human monsters and madness. The concept of Valdemar itself is cleverer than you'd initially think, neatly avoiding the obvious explanation and instead providing one based on the mania of individuals and crowds. The framing story is a smart idea too, tying into the main tale in a way that doesn't become clear until close to the end. Not flawless by any means, the main tale is perhaps a touch too straightforward and the grotesques aren't quite grotesque enough to make this truly memorable. As an attempt to introduce some variety to standard Doctor Who stories though, worth a read.

Shane says

Very good. Tom Baker is always fantastic, and Romana II is undoubtedly his equal. Smart, funny and as sexy as Tom himself.

Read this, if only for the surprise ending.

Loved it... loved it... loved it!

Mark Swift says

A slow starter but a great story. Lovecraft meets The Doctor. A great twist at the end.
