

Steven Moffat reveals Sherlock Holmes is the unlikely inspiration behind his magical *Doctor Who*

Doctor Who

Christmas Day 7.00pm BBC1



Christmas is specific. You don't eat mince pies at any other time. Or wear enormous sweaters indoors, or decide that what your house really needs is a lot of multicoloured flashing lights, or erect a dead tree in your front room and mock it with comedy ornaments as if to say, "See how we have defeated you and all your kind - now wear these amusing bells!"

Or watch *Doctor Who* not on a Saturday.

It's amazing how fast tradition is, isn't it? Christmas, as we know it, only came along with the Victorians, Santa's outfit was popularised by Coca-Cola, and I remember only a few years ago Russell T Davies pointing out all the papers referring to the traditional *Doctor Who* Christmas special - "It's only the second one!" he laughed. Ah, was the world ever so young?

We're days away from *The Doctor, the Widow and the Wardrobe*, the Doctor's seventh Christmas visit, and I'm wondering just why this feels so right. I think, when I was little, the Doctor and Father Christmas lived in the same place in my head - kind, funny lunatics, who looked like grown-ups but definitely weren't.

There are relatively few punch-the-air moments in a telly writer's life, but when I thought of Matt Smith's first entrance in last year's special I could have decked a low-flying pigeon. "Down a chimney," I told my wife. "Down an actual chimney! On Christmas Day! The Doctor climbing down a chimney, on Christmas Day!" And if Sue wasn't quite so impressed ("Very nice, dear, very clever, what shall I do with that pigeon?"), that was probably because it was a hot summer day and Christmas wasn't exactly on her mind.

THAT'S THE PROBLEM with Christmas being so specific - how do you get into that frame of mind in July or August? Last time round I was stuck in roasting-hot LA, in a darkened hotel room with the air conditioning turned up and Christmas carols playing at full volume. I was going to head out into the streets to ask some urchins to sell me their chestnuts, but worried that conversation might spiral out of control.

This year, it was even madder, and I'll be honest, I almost completely lost it. There were 13 episodes of *Doctor Who* (well, 14, if you count the above-mentioned Christmas special) straight into three new *Sherlock* TV movies (if I'm allowed to mention *The Other One*) and then straight into this year's Christmas special. At which point, I made a terrible mistake - having handed in the first draft of the script, I did the one thing that no sane person on a difficult schedule should ever, ever do - I TOOK A DAY OFF. Now this might seem a perversely grim message to give you at

this time of year, but please listen - I exhort you, I plead with you, I grasp your shoulders, look you in the eye, and say these words: "Never take a day off!" Oh, I just collapsed! I got four colds simultaneously. I lost my ability to speak or reason or count my feet. I couldn't find the front door without being led by the hand by my children. And I was still in this state a few days later when Piers Wenger (outgoing executive producer of *Doctor Who*) and Caroline Skinner (incoming executive producer of *Doctor Who*) arrived on the Baker Street location of *The Other One*, to discuss the script I'd just handed in.

WE MOVED OFF to a hotel round the corner, and as ever they were incisive and brilliant and full of great ideas - and I couldn't actually form sentences. I was completely incoherent! I couldn't remember anything about the story, what I was supposed to be doing, or nouns. And I could see Caroline, looking at me, thinking, "I've agreed to work with this writer for ages, and he doesn't know any words at all." Now the script was in good shape

"When I was little, the Doctor and Father Christmas lived in the same place in my head"

(I think, I hope), but it did need that extra push, as they always, always do. And as I plodded back to Baker Street, I worried about how I could get that Christmas feeling back at a time of year that can only be described as late August.

And then help came from the most unexpected source and possibly the least Christmassy man in all fiction. It started to snow in Baker Street.

Not real snow (not even real Baker Street, if I'm honest), but really good pretend snow, for the Christmas Day scene in *A Scandal in Belgravia*. And as I stood there watching it fall, shivering with Mark Gatiss (because pretend snow gives you real shivers) at the magic and madness of television, I got it all back. Christmas carols in my head! Blazing shops on cold nights! Coloured lights and shiny presents and mince pies and "Come here, boy, let me buy your - no, never mind, move along!"

Phew! A few more drafts and we were there. And, nervous as ever, I so hope you all agree.

This Christmas the Doctor will try to save the hopes and dreams of the Arwell family, and possibly some trees, but between you and me, just this once and quite unexpectedly, the Doctor might have been saved by Sherlock Holmes!

God bless us, every one.

WINTER CHILLS
The Doctor (Matt Smith)
befriends the Arwells -
Cyril (Maurice Cole),
Lily (Holly Earl) and Madge
(Outnumbered's Claire Skinner)

Let it snow,
Let it snow,
Let it snow

MY CHRISTMAS

by Matt Smith, 29

What was your Christmas like as a boy?

Wake up, open presents, go mental for about four hours, wear and play with said presents, have food, and then watch a Christmas movie like *Mary Poppins*, *The Goonies*. I love *Home Alone* and the Dudley Moore *Santa Claus*. And *Elf* – that's amazing! I will definitely watch that this year. When I was a kid, there wasn't really anything we'd all watch regularly like *Doctor Who*, so it was mostly about films.

And now?

The core family is the five of us – me, my mum and dad, my sister and my granadad. I don't get to spend much time with my family, so two or three days together is great.

Do you all watch *Doctor Who*?

I'm afraid so – but my sister usually gabbles on in the middle of it and my mum and dad will be “ssshhh-ing” her... I like Christmas much more than New Year, which just isn't as magical. It doesn't have someone crawling down a chimney, for a start. From going for a pint with my mates and family on Christmas Eve to the football on Boxing Day, it's just ace.

What's your favourite comedy to watch at Christmas?

Blackadder II is my favourite series of all time. I'd love to see them do another one. If they do another one and Richard Curtis is reading this, can I be in it, please?

What were your most treasured presents as a child?

I got a mini snooker table that I loved, lots of football-y things, and I once got a Sega Mega Drive, which I loved. That was pretty epic.

Is it better to give than to receive?

Absolutely! That's another great thing about Christmas: even when you're five, you can save up £1 a month to buy your mum a present. And it doesn't matter what you give as long as you give it with love. Unless it's your girlfriend.

What's your fail-safe present?

Books make great presents. There's a line I love from *The History Boys* [in which Smith starred at the National Theatre in 2005] about knowledge and how you should “Pass it on, boys”. That's how I feel about

great books. My favourite book of poems is *Rapture* by Carol Ann Duffy and I have given that to many people, having been given it myself by Lindsay Duncan. It's a belter.

Do you think the Doctor likes Christmas?

It's the day you catch him on fire, really. Although weirdly – and this is what I love about him as a character – he's quite removed from it. He'll stand outside the window watching others eat their Christmas dinner and not quite be able to be part of it and yet, whenever he lands in the middle of it, he goes, “Aaaahhh!” Because it's that great thing about the Doctor: he's able to be the kid without any apology or cynicism. Interview by Gareth McLean

“Christmas is the day you catch the Doctor on fire: he's able to be the kid without apology”



YOUNG AT HEART
The Doctor (Matt Smith) leads Second World War evacuee Cyril Arwell (Maurice Cole) and his family into a new world

MY CHRISTMAS

by Maurice Cole, 8

What would you like for Christmas?

I'd like a remote-control helicopter that I first came across in a film I was in. It was called *Foster* and set in a toy factory, which was awesome. Also I would like a new rugby ball. I used to be obsessed with football – I kind of still am – but rugby has taken over a little bit ever since the World Cup.

What was your favourite ever present?

My godfather lives in Australia and one year he sent this huge spotty box. I had no idea what was inside. When I opened it – “Whoah!” – it was the biggest box of chocolates you've ever seen. I couldn't stop staring at it for about ten minutes. It took my whole family two months to finish them because my mum wouldn't let us scoff them all at once!

Who will you watch *Doctor Who* with this time?

My mum and dad, my sisters, my cousins, my aunts and uncles, my granny and my great-aunt Margaret. Every year we go to my granny's house for Christmas Day. It's really fun because my dad is the youngest of seven brothers and sisters so there are loads of us. The first thing I do is see which presents are for me and shred the wrapping paper.

Will you be embarrassed at seeing yourself?

It's just really weird. My mind thinks: that's not me – it's my double or twin or something.

What do you like best about Christmas?

Probably the turkey. But if I could have a wish for Christmas it would be a white Christmas, like in *Doctor Who*, so I could go sledging. Interview by Claire Webb

RT Is this a fine-vintage Christmas special? Read RT's preview and see more photos: radiotimes.com/doctor-who

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Doctor Who Christmas Specials

BBC3
Catch the Doctor's previous festive outings: *Voyage of the Damned* (17 December); *The Next Doctor* (19 Dec), *The End of Time* (20, 21 Dec); and *A Christmas Carol* (22 Dec).

Merlin

17 December, Christmas Eve **BBC1**
Camelot is under siege, Merlin and King Arthur are on the run... it makes a spellbinding finale.

FILM The Chronicles of Narnia

Christmas Eve **BBC1**
The 2005 movie version of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. (There's also a three-part Radio 4 Extra dramatisation from 23 Dec.)