

Steven Moffat,
the man behind
Doctor Who, says
the BBC could never
kill the Time Lord...

AND THEN THERE WERE THREE
John Hurt, Matt Smith and David
Tennant play three incarnations of
Gallifrey's finest in the 50th
anniversary special

Doctor Who
Saturday 7.50pm BBC1



DID THEY KNOW, the day they invented Robin Hood, that when he fired his arrow in the air it would fly for ever? When Dr Doyle picked up his pen to write the very first Sherlock Holmes story, did the paving slabs of Baker Street rattle and heave? When Ian Fleming scanned his bookshelf for a name for his gentleman spy, and settled on James Bond, did that famous music echo faintly from the future?

Most importantly, 50 years ago, when the Doctor was created in dull grey rooms at the BBC, did a shiver of fear pass through the heart of every evil-doer in the universe?

Ah, 50 years. What can one say about 50 years of *Doctor Who*? Well, first of all, one can be pedantic. *Doctor Who* hasn't been on for 50 years – owing to the outright stupidity and unforgivable blindness of the BBC (sorry guys, it needs to be said), there was a 16-year gap. But seriously, you wouldn't expect the world's most famous time traveller to get here in a straight line, would you? That gap is important, though. It confers something very special on this most special of all shows: immortality. *Doctor Who*, for once and for all, is the show that comes back. Axe it at your peril, someone like me is going to call you a fool, and lots of people like you are going to read along and nod.

EVERYWHERE ELSE THIS November, we'll be talking about the 34 years that the show was actually on the air. I'll be popping up everywhere exclaiming, "This is the Christmassiest Christmas special ever – no, hang on, this is the 50th special..." On screen, Matt Smith will do battle again, David Tennant will return to the fray, and out of nowhere acting legend John Hurt will arrive in his very own Tardis as a brand-new version of television's number-one hero.

Everywhere you turn, those three faces will be looking back at you and *Doctor Who* will be – yet again – the biggest thing on television. So, just for the hell of it, let's talk about the years when it wasn't. Because, in a strange way, that's when the magic happened.

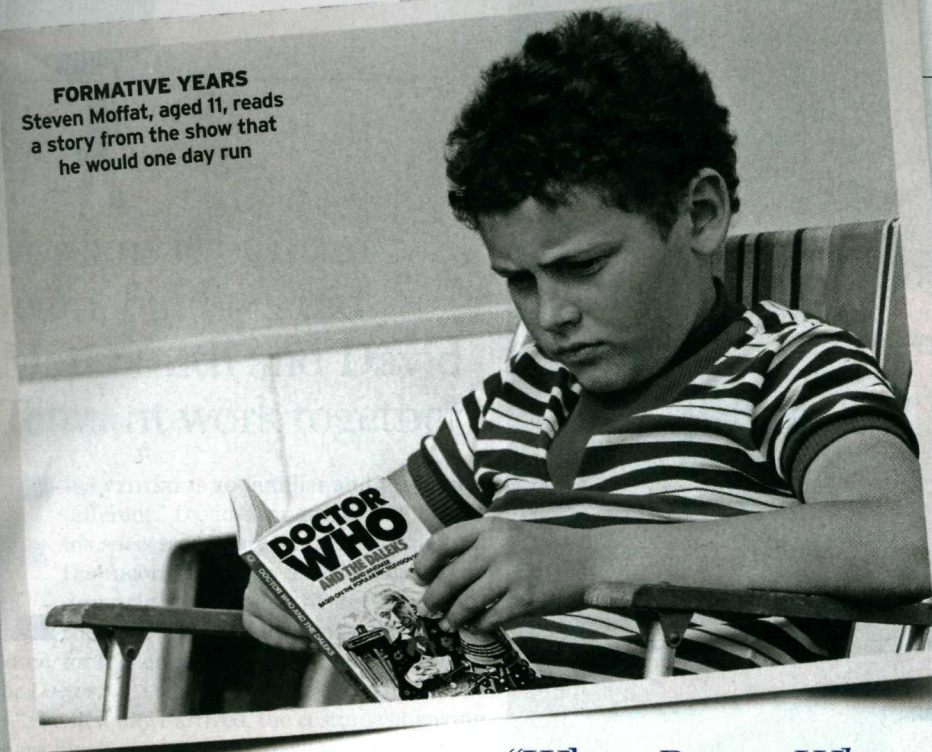
I remember it so vividly – it was back in the days when the news actually arrived in the papers. Glasgow, a rainy morning. I'd been >

"You wouldn't expect
the world's most famous
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in a straight line"

YOU CAN'T
DESTROY
THE DOCTOR



FORMATIVE YEARS
Steven Moffat, aged 11, reads
a story from the show that
he would one day run



Out the night before and I'd missed the news. And there it was, a headline in the *Daily Record*. *Doctor Who* was axed. In the end it was bit more complex than that, but the fact was the BBC was cutting loose the Tardis.

And then, the remarkable thing. The audience said no. Just, no. A nice, polite, terribly British, utterly final no. And the Doctor just kept on going. While the BBC folded its arms and shook its head, there were books by the likes of Russell T Davies, Mark Gatiss and Paul Cornell. There were audio adventures, starring all the old Doctors. There was an action-packed American tele-film, and endless rumours of Hollywood movies. *Doctor Who Magazine*, whose purpose was to document the making of the TV show, carried on perfectly happily without the TV show being made. Careers began, companies were launched and a show that should have faded away and been forgotten remained beloved and deeply missed, and the next generation of *Doctor Who* producers formed an orderly queue.

It's not supposed to work like that. You're not supposed to axe a TV show and find the next

"When Doctor Who was axed, the next generation of Doctor Who producers formed an orderly queue"

generation of producers forming an orderly queue. Ask the people who tried to cancel *Doctor Who* – it never works like that.

WHEN THE GRAND return was announced, there was instant joy and a bonfire of publicity. When the show hit the screens, it was like a long-awaited explosion. And now it seems like the Doctor was never away – because, in fact, he wasn't. What William Hartnell, Verity Lambert and Sydney Newman began all those years ago is a very rare kind of miracle. Heroes hardly ever become legends. Stories hardly ever become myths. But now and then, when you fire an arrow in the air, if your aim is true and the wind is set exactly right, it will fly for ever.

Happy anniversary, *Doctor Who*.

DAYS OF WINE AND ROSES

Our exclusive picture from *The Day of the Doctor* shows the Doctor (David Tennant) and Elizabeth I (Joanna Page). "We were on top of a mountain and it was freezing," says Page. "And then you've got to try to look romantic – I think our lips were turning blue."



'I KILLED THE B*****!'

DOCTOR
WHO
50



Michael Grade, Baron Grade of Yarmouth, former controller of BBC1, "axed" *Doctor Who* from BBC TV schedules in 1985

I cancelled it! I killed the b*****!

I just didn't realise it was immortal. There are these people who, wonderfully, live and breathe it and it's a cult. But you can't build a mass TV audience with a cult. I've never cared for science fiction, except for maybe *Quatermass* and *Close Encounters*. I never got *Star Wars* at all. I admired it but it did not engage me.

Similarly, *Doctor Who* was not for me, not my taste at all. (Mind you, if I'd exercised my taste as a channel controller over the years, a lot of shows would never have happened.)

I cancelled it. It was absolutely the right decision at the time. My argument with the producer was that the same audience watching *Doctor Who* was watching *Star Wars* and *ET*. The show was ghastly. It was pathetic. It just got more and more violent; they resorted to the most horrific hangings. It was just horrible to watch. It lost its way.

It was waiting for Russell T Davies. Russell brought such imagination to it. Now the production values are high, the scripts are witty, it's full of invention. And digital effects today enable you to do so much more. The only connection it has with its previous life is the title and the premise, but it's light years ahead.

So yes, I'm pleased that the show's back and in such good health – it was a brave decision to bring it back. But Russell is unquestionably a massive, massive, talent – if he'd said he was going to do it, and with such enthusiasm, even I would have commissioned it.

Extracted from *Behind the Sofa: Celebrity Memories of Doctor Who* by Steve Berry (Gollancz), priced £9.99 in hardback, £4.99 in ebook.



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