Who's watching?

So how are the viewing figures?

Overnight ratings - the 'ones quoted in the press' - for the series could be down from the last series, 6.5 million viewers compared to an average of 8 million in 2010, but Steven Moffat has an explanation: "The audience is changing the way it's watching through iPlayer and Sky+," he says. "So the finished job of each episode of the interplanar, time-bending extravaganza that is Doctor Who is born in an upstairs room in a semi-detached house in leafy south London. There are even roses around the front door, for goodness' sake. The only clue to Moffat's genius lies in..." The Moffat day seems to be thus: Wake up. See children and wife - TV producer Sue Vertue - off to school and work respectively. Walk upstairs to office. Sit down and start conjuring up monsters for the greatest television show ever invented. Feel happy about it. "Just think," he says, warming to his favourite topic, "I just think, what is a great Doctor Who story? I write it to entertain me. You can't write to entertain anyone else, because then you are making assumptions about what other people would like." Given the massive success of the show, does that make Moffat himself? Being the showrunner - head writer and overall Time Lord is working out. "He is astonishing. And you haven't seen anything yet." We agree that Matt Smith's successor already? Moffat looks at me sternly. "I'm a monk!" yells Moffat Jr. His father regards him fondly. Apparently dressing up as monsters like the monks in a dressing gown and wig, waving a sword. Moffat laughs with delight. "It is very focused and serious, and got very cross with the few adults there who were laughing. They said, 'What are you laughing at? This is serious, and this is frightening.'"

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Doctor Who

Saturday & 6.40pm BBC1, BBC1HD

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THERE HAVE BEEN a few grumbles of late about the plotlines and their perceived complexity. “Well, you have to pay attention,” says Moffat severely. He sounds like a teacher, and then I remember he was an English teacher in his 20s. “You can’t watch it when you are doing the ironing. And you certainly can’t watch it when you are tweeting. You have to sit down and focus, and a child audience certainly does that. Are your children confused by it? No, they aren’t, I confess.

Might we see a moment where Moffat decides to relax a bit, and takes his brilliant imagination off to Hollywood? “Ha! I’m not short of movie offers to write,” he says gleefully. “But my heart is in television. Everyone prefers television, don’t they? Everyone says they prefer the movies but they don’t go very often. I love television.”

When the DW gig came his way, the story is that Moffat was comfortably ensconced in Hollywood, writing the first Tintin film for Steven Spielberg. But when the Tardis started making its calling noise, Moffat got on the first plane home. “Yep. That really happened. I left LA to come and do Doctor Who. It’s all true. I took a massive pay cut and the prospect of much harder work, all for the sake of British television. Why? Because I love Doctor Who.”

He really does. The character who was essentially invented as a way of bridging the gap between children’s afternoon shows and adult evening programmes has – according to Moffat – become a dramatic colossus, striding into our lives like almost no other character, televsual or otherwise, has done since the days of classical mythology. And this is a man whose BBC1 hit Sherlock, which he created with Mark Gatiss, has just notched up two Baftas, including best drama series.

“Doctor Who is the ideal television hero because he has the power to change. And what a great role model for children. His superpowers are that he’s incredibly bright, and learned, and he’s incredibly kind. When it comes down to it, the Doctor is simply and purely heroic.”

“We thought it was about time to give the Daleks a rest”

always stand his ground and fight danger.” And this week’s episode, A Good Man Goes to War, gives him just such a platform when, with Amy kidnapped, the Doctor and Rory go racing across galaxies to come to her aid. Will the Doctor face his most dastardly opponents? Moffat laughs. “Oh yes, the Daleks. Actually, they aren’t going to make an appearance for a while.” What? “Yes, we thought it was about time to give them a rest. There’s a problem with the Daleks.” How come? “I thought they were invincible. ‘They are the most famous of the Doctor’s adversaries and the most frequent,’ explains Moffat. “Which means they are the most reliably defeatable enemies in the universe. They have been defeated by the Doctor about 400 times. Surely they should just see the Tardis approaching, say, ‘Oh. It’s him again,’ and trudge away.”

WE SIT ON Moffat’s sofa, sniggering about the Daleks and their hopelessness. The comedy in the series is of course one of its key strengths. “The secret with Doctor Who is that the show laughs at itself. It’s not above pointing out its own limitations,” says Moffat. This is why it is a great family show. Suspense, shock, cliffhangers; it does seem to pack them in. He’s very proud of episode seven, which signals the moment the series takes a summer break. Having a couple of months’ hiatus will give Moffat the chance to bring back an important element to the show.

“The only thing that was missing when Doctor Who came back this time was that there weren’t enough cliffhangers. Do you remember in the old days? The music crashing in just as the Doctor finds out... well, I love that. Plus it encourages the audience to come back. I know that people dip in and out of the show, but I want more to watch it regularly. So we are bringing the cliffhanger back in force.”

So who are his favourite monsters? “Well I think the Weeping Angels stand me in good stead. And the Silence. You can’t remember them, so that’s good.” He loves the moments of high drama, too. “When the Doctor is standing at Stonehenge speaking to all the spaceships, that was good. Or when the Spitfires go into space to attack the Dalek spaceship.” He shakes his head. “It doesn’t half make Saturday nights a bit more fun.”

Weekly blog at radiotimes.com/who-blog

Doctor Who’s best cliffhangers

The Dalek Invasion of Earth (1964)
The Green Death (1973)
The Stolen Earth (2008)

London in the 22nd century lies in ruins and, after 25 minutes of suspense, the first Doctor finds out who the invaders are. A Dalek rises from the Thames...

The third Doctor (Jon Pertwee) and Jo (Katy Manning) are trapped when a Welsh coalmine collapses. Through the rubble emerge giant maggots, hissing through fanged mouths...

Running to be reunited at last with Rose (Billie Piper), the tenth Doctor (David Tennant) is shot by a Dalek. The Time Lord is carried back to the Tardis by his friend, where a completely unexpected regeneration begins...