

BACK IN 2003, when writer Russell T Davies was announced as the man who would reinvent *Doctor Who*, the TV world took a sharp intake of breath. Best known for writing *Queer as Folk*, Channel 4's late-night, taboo-busting drama about gay men in Manchester, Davies seemed an unconventional choice. As did the idea of reviving *Doctor Who*, which by then had become a byword for rubber monsters and wobbly sets. "The production team was cowering in the caves of BBC Wales," Davies told *RT* in 2005, "dreading a big, loud, public failure. It seemed like some grand folly – an old, dead sci-fi show, revived in primetime? Madness!"

Four series, two Doctors and a clutch of Baftas later, the regenerated *Doctor Who* has proved, resoundingly, that family drama can work on a Saturday evening – and more than hold its own against the likes of ITV light-entertainment big guns Ant and Dec. All that's left now is for Davies to provide a suitably thrilling swansong for the outgoing Doctor, David Tennant.

"The writing reflects David's performance," says Davies, who has now moved to LA and is currently working there. "He's so nimble and fast on his feet that the narrative twists and turns with him. There's great danger and there are terrible deeds in this story, and it's a sad time for the Doctor... but the next minute, June Whitfield's there, in one of the funniest scenes David's ever done."

The casting of Whitfield is one of the left-field surprises typical of Davies. His own career vaults from kids' TV via *Corrie* to *Casanova* and *Queer as Folk*. The forthcoming Christmas episodes have a veritable Royal Variety Show line-up of actors, including not just the star of *Terry and June* but also a former James Bond, Timothy Dalton. "He was lovely," says Tennant. "He had the panache and the skill of a movie star, without any of the alarming eccentricities or peculiar demands. At one point, he was singing the *Doctor Who* theme tune to me as I sang the James Bond theme tune to him!"

Whitfield and Dalton are just two of the cast list that embraces Claire Bloom, Brian Cox, Catherine Tate, Bernard Cribbins and John Simm. Simm, of course, is the latest actor to play the Master, fellow Time Lord and the Doctor's >

THE WHO CREW
Russell T Davies and Billie Piper (who played Rose) with one of the show's Bafta awards



THE FINAL CURTAIN

It's not only David Tennant calling time on *Doctor Who*; the writer who masterminded its triumphant return, Russell T Davies, is off, too... and they're going out with a bang!

ME AND MY SHADOW
The Doctor (David Tennant) is dogged by an apparently resurrected Master (John Simm). Get ready for a clash of the Time Lords!

◁ arch nemesis for nearly four decades. But Davies wasn't daunted by the inconvenience of having killed off the Master in 2007 – this is sci-fi, after all: “The stakes are raised so high with him,” says Davies. “It's personal for the Doctor. The Master is his enemy, his opposite, and yet so tantalisingly close to being his soul mate. There's something epic about their sheer existence – the last two survivors of an ancient race. It's a clash of the titans. Both of them heading for death, and yet both determined to survive – at any cost!”

Simm describes his character's latest incarnation as “emo Master”. Gone are the sharp suit and slick haircut of his prime minister persona in 2007, to be replaced by wild eyes and punk-white hair peeking out from a hoodie. He flashes in and out of “skeleton mode”. “This is a Master who's lived and died,” explains Simm, “and now lives again – although he's seen healthier days. He's desperate, and desperate means dangerous.” Just the thing for Christmas!

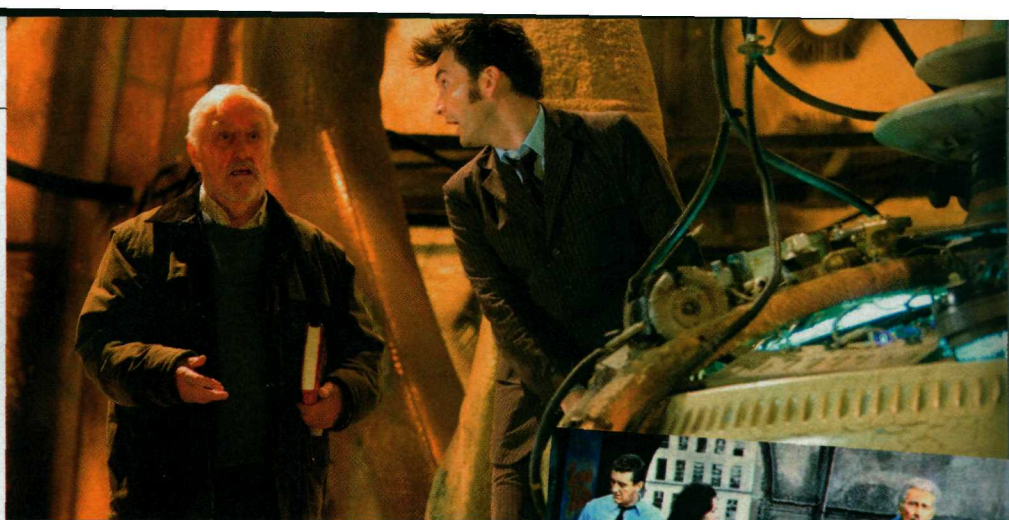
“It's funny to think back to 2005, when they first asked me for a Christmas special,” says Davies. “Monsters and spaceships on BBC1, on Christmas Day? Didn't seem very British at all. But now it's an integral part of the holiday. Just before writing my very first episode, I watched a remarkable cross-section of people – young, old, Welsh, Scouse – watching *Finding Nemo* together. All of us loving it. I thought, ‘I want some of that. I want that scale.’”

By scale, he doesn't just mean the special effects (“although we've got some glorious sights this Christmas”), but the heart of the thing. The passion. “That's where the size comes from, in how much you feel when watching it – how much you want the Doctor to triumph, how much you fear for Donna [Catherine Tate], how much you dread the Master, how much Bernard Cribbins can make you laugh one minute and cry the next. It's all about those wonderful actors, filling your screen and making you care.”

BERNARD CRIBBINS'S first appearance in the *Doctor Who* universe was in the 1966 film *Daleks – Invasion Earth 2150 AD*, as a companion to Peter Cushing's Doctor. He had a cameo role in TV's 2007 Christmas special (*Voyage of the Damned*) that worked so well he was made a regular character as Wilfred Mott, the grandfather of companion Donna. “He's not just there for the comedy,” insists Davies. “Bernard can break your heart with a look, a gesture, a smile. That's why he's the perfect companion for the tenth Doctor's final tale – two wise old men, fighting the good fight. But every old soldier must give up the battle in the end, and poor old Wilf has some terrible reckonings to come...”

“If you've emotional stuff to do, you put a hell of a lot into it,” says Cribbins. “If it sticks in people's minds, then that's lovely. Especially kids. They call out to me in the street, ‘Hello grandad!’ It's been a smashing time.”

Unsurprisingly, though, the vibe on



ADVENTURES IN TIME

Bernard Cribbins with David Tennant's Doctor and, right, with Peter Cushing's incarnation in the 1966 film *Daleks – Invasion Earth 2150 AD*

set was bittersweet. “There were a lot of ‘last’ scenes for us all,” explains Davies. “The last day with poor old Wilf, Donna's final words, the last day on the Tardis, the last time David used his sonic screwdriver... you name it! There was a lot of emotion on set. The most awful moment came with the four knocks...”

Last Easter, in *Planet of the Dead*, the tenth Doctor was given a prophecy: “It is returning through the dark. And then, Doctor... ohh, but then... he will knock four times.” Who will? “No one knows what that means, or how, or when,”

“Timothy Dalton was singing the *Doctor Who* theme to me as I sang the Bond theme to him!”

DAVID TENNANT



teases Davies, “but the knocks are getting closer.”

Like the biggest of Hollywood blockbusters, these Christmas episodes are being promoted to within an inch of their lives. A trailer campaign, BBCidents, Radio 2 documentaries, *Who*-themed editions of *QI* and *Never Mind the Buzzcocks*. “We've been planning this Christmas for 12 months, right down to those lovely idents,” says Davies. “I watched the Wallace and Gromit idents last year, then walked into the office on 2 January and said, ‘I want that!’ Maybe it is a bit of a takeover this year, but of all the things to flood your screens, why not *Doctor Who*? It's not a soulless merchandising yarn, like *Transformers*; it's witty, heartfelt, exciting and truly deserves this. It's adult and cynical to roll your eyes and mutter about hype. Look at a six-year-old at this time of year, eyes filled with delight at the Doctor and his friends, and enemies. Nothing could be more hyped than a child's imagination, and it's our job to match that ambition.”

“David has surprised and dazzled and inspired me every day for four years. Frankly, I wrote my heart out on these specials, because I wanted to give him everything. When we get these stories right, they're modern legends. They're the myths of the schoolyard, and the nightmare, and the storyteller. Together, we've loved pushing the Doctor further than ever before, and this Christmas is David's final time to fly. You'll see him firing on all cylinders. He's left an extraordinary legacy for a whole generation, and thousands of children will be able to say, for evermore, ‘He was my Doctor.’” Benjamin Cook

RT Direct

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