

Doctor Who
Sunday 7.00pm BBC1, BBC HD

WITH ITS TERRIFYING army of zombified creatures sporting cracked veins and white pupils, *The Waters of Mars*, the first of David Tennant's final three episodes, might also be his scariest yet. "Doctor Who can be funny, wise, whimsical, exciting, heartbreaking, you name it," says Russell T Davies, the series' showrunner and, with Phil Ford, co-writer of this episode, "but I suppose the scary ones linger, because fear is such a vivid emotion, and very little stuff on TV is actually frightening. Good old-fashioned fear is *Doctor Who's* domain. It's what the viewers come for, especially kids."

"*The Waters of Mars* is certainly one of the scariest episodes," continues Davies. "It's the intensity – it's trapped, claustrophobic, desperate – which really ups the stakes. Towards the end, the monsters aren't the scary things: it's the humans and the Doctor who really give me a chill." For once, even the Doctor is unsure what to do. "It's full of powerful moral problems, such as when to do the right thing, and does the end justify the means? The Doctor makes some remarkable decisions, which might surprise the audience. It's like the safety net is taken away. Who knows what he's capable of?"

"I was utterly thrilled when I read the script and saw where it was going," says David Tennant. "The Doctor is more fallible than we've ever seen him before. It was such a brilliant notion, and very bold." How will younger viewers respond? "I don't know, actually. It'll be interesting to see. To challenge children with that is great – to show that their heroes can be conflicted. It's good to see the Doctor wobble. Only when this Doctor's story is coming to an end can you be as bold. We couldn't have done it at any other time, and Matt [Smith, Tennant's successor] and Steven [Moffat, showrunner from 2010] can't do that when they start. It's only *in extremis* that you can allow the character to unravel a bit. Fantastic to play."

Any suggestion that *The Waters of Mars* puts *Doctor Who* firmly in the "no longer a children's show" category is vehemently rebuffed by Davies: "Tough moral dilemmas are meat and drink for kids. It's exactly the sort of stuff we should feed them with. We're failing them if we don't." Even in a story with scary monsters and a fallible Doctor? "The darkest scares come from children's stories. Our fear of the dark, of forests, strange noises and empty houses – that's all the stuff of childhood. It's healthy stuff. It's the stuff we love, both at the time and in hindsight."

"Childhood isn't a time of eternal smiles; when you're a kid, you cry as much as you laugh. The best children's literature demonstrates this. What Harry Potter goes through with his own mum and dad is more intense than anything the Doctor encounters with a bunch of Martian colonists. It's the parents who worry. The kids will be holding mum's hand, saying it's going to be all right!"

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Too scary for kids?

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< comes to scaring viewers? "Well, I'm sure it can," reasons Tennant, "but we're careful. And often the things that keep kids up at night, you never quite saw coming. It's Miss Evangelista, with her warped face, walking through a playground [in the 2008 episode *Forest of the Dead*], because that was unexpected and weird. That gave one kid I know nightmares. But it wasn't something horrific tearing somebody's head off. Of course, we must be responsible, but we don't always quite know what will freak people out, and freak out kids in particular."

After the first couple of days' filming, certain aspects of *The Waters of Mars* were reined back, at Davies's request. At first, Tennant was unhappy. "That was just me being a spoilt kid," he admits, "going, 'Oh c'mon, let's scare them all.' I shouldn't really comment on whether it needed to be toned down or not, because I didn't see the rushes; Russell did. It was his decision."

MY JOB IS to monitor the scares, in every detail," explains Davies. "We all kept an eye on the monsters – are they too weird, too drooling, too relentless? We've behaved responsibly, without neutering a brilliant concept. Out of 57 episodes [since *Doctor Who* returned in 2005], and with the highest children's audience in the land, we've barely received any complaints. We've certainly never had a single complaint upheld. I'm proud of our vigilance. We've taken out small details, like bone-crunching sound effects on the gas-mask transformation in *The Empty Child* [2005], and shots of anyone in too much pain are trimmed – strangling, stabbing, and anything easily imitated by kids. There's no actual ban on seeing blood at seven at night, but I'll only allow it in extreme circumstances. Even then, only sparingly."

Readers might surmise that *The Waters of Mars* is Davies's challenge to his successor's reputation as the master of scary *Who*. Moffat's previous horrors include the gas-mask zombie child asking "Are you my mummy?" in *The Empty Child*, Weeping Angel statues in 2007's *Blink*, and shadows that bite in 2008's *Silence in the Library*. "Steven and I should have a scare-off," laughs Davies. "He's got the wonderful advantage of having kids, so he doesn't have to think back to remember how scary shadows under the bed are; he can see it for himself, in his own house! It's his mind that invented those magnificent Weeping Angels – absolute terror, from something that can't move! I give up. I surrender. The crown is his."

SHIVERS
Can Russell
T Davies surpass
Steven Moffat's horrors:
clockwork android, zombie
child and Weeping Angel?



The Edge of Destruction (1964)

In a psychodrama set in the Tardis, the Doctor's grandchild Susan lunged at her former teacher Ian with scissors. "The wrath of the [BBC] Children's Department came down on us for that," said *Who*'s original producer Verity Lambert. "They wanted the whole series taken away from us. Looking at it today I can see, yes, that was a mistake. To use household instruments in a threatening way, where they can be imitated, is a bad idea."



Terror of the Autons (1971)

A terrifying double whammy from this Jon Pertwee story. Scotland Yard complained to the BBC after policemen were unmasked as horrifying faceless Autons. And a hideous plastic troll doll (above) sprang to life, causing many nightmares. "We had reports that children were frightened to go to bed with their teddy bears in case they were strangled in the night," said 70s producer Barry Letts. "We learnt a big lesson from that."



The Deadly Assassin (1976)

Mary Whitehouse of the National Viewers' and Listeners' Association branded a fight to the death between two Time Lords as "sadistic". "I can see it still in my mind's eye," she said in 1993. "The final shot was of the Doctor [Tom Baker] drowning – an image left in the minds of children for a whole week." The BBC later censored the scene from their master tape but it has survived in a fan's home recording. **Patrick Mulkern**

"I suppose that's my reputation," considers Moffat, "but it's sort of nonsense, really, isn't it? I wrote things like 2006's *The Girl in the Fireplace*, which is a load of slush in frocks [well, there was that nightmarish ticking android under the young Reinette's bed]. You try to think of something that gives people a fright, but I don't think we're out to horrify anybody. The monsters are just made up. You know they're men dressed up. They're monsters from fairy tales. There's a very clear line in children's heads between the real world and the pretend world –

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DAVID TENNANT

and people who say there isn't are mad."

What about their mums and dads? "I think there were things about *The Empty Child* that scared adults more than children," he acknowledges. "An eerie child is probably more frightening to an adult. But if you're really that terrified of *Doctor Who* in your adult years, then, um..." You need to get a grip? "Yeah. There must be some films that really make you wet yourself. Have you seen *The Ring*?! But if you put *Blink* on at nine or ten o'clock and said to people, 'Ohh, this is really frightening,' they'd want their money back! But in context – at seven o'clock on a Saturday night, when Ant and Dec are prattling about – *Blink* is actually quite frightening."

As will be Tennant's final two episodes, or so we're promised. His swansong will air over the Christmas period. "The shadows are darkening," says Davies, "as we head for the Doctor's final journey. Old friends are returning – with Bernard Cribbins and Catherine Tate [Wilf and Donna] delivering their most heartfelt performances – but there's an old enemy crawling back into life as Christmas approaches. The Master's return is just the start of our biggest, most heart-breaking story yet. The Immortality Gate is waiting," he concludes cryptically, "and beyond that... the tenth Doctor faces the greatest terror of all."

Benjamin Cook

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