

**HO! DOCTOR, YOU'RE IN TROUBLE...**  
In *The Runaway Bride*, this year's festive *Doctor Who*, our hero (David Tennant) meets those murderous Father Christmases again

# The Claus of doom

Psycho Santas, a bovered bride and one humongous spider? Happy Christmas, Doc!

**DRAMA** *Doctor Who* Christmas Day BBC1

**R**ose has gone, but the Time Lord remains. Surely he can't be lonely this Christmas? "Well, the Doctor's in mourning, really," says David Tennant. "Although Rose is alive and well, she's dead to the Doctor. He can never see her again. And this is someone who not so very long ago lost his entire people [when the Time Lords were wiped out]. So he's coming to terms with that, and at the same time dealing with Donna, who's a bit of a handful."

There's the answer: no. He won't be lonely. Quite the opposite. Donna, the title character of *Doctor Who*'s festive special, *The Runaway Bride*, is played by Catherine Tate. Fans will recall her surprise appearance in the Tardis right at the end of series two.

"I got a call from my agent saying [writer] Russell T Davies had been in touch and would I be interested?" recalls Tate. "I said, 'Yes, absolutely, whatever it is!' I thought I might be a Cyberman on the corner of the screen or something."

Instead, she plays one-off companion Donna in a Christmas tale that sees the return of last year's robot Santas (left) and a huge new monster, the arachnid Empress of the Racnoss (overleaf), played by Sarah Parish.

This is an adventure, Tennant explains, that "happens at breakneck pace". Tate agrees. "There was lots of running for the *Runaway Bride*," she says. "David would be off like a whippet and I'd be lagging behind going, 'Can't you just pretend to run fast?' Then wardrobe would go, 'We can see your trainers. Can you put the satin court shoes on again?' I think what they'll do in post-production is slow him down and speed me up. Get an average speed."

A wedding dress: not the ideal running gear? "No, but at least I didn't have a constant change of costume.

I never had to say, 'Box pleats don't suit me.' But it was a very pretty dress. It was like dress-up!" Russell T Davies has also

**MY WEDDING HELL**  
What has the Doctor done to make a bride (Catherine Tate) go ballistic?

promised a major chase scene, which Tennant cryptically says "involves no running. It's one of those sequences involving a lot of green screen [for effects to be added] and real screen and everything in between, stunt people and us. If it works like it did in the script, it should be very exciting."

Tennant and Sarah Parish, last seen on screen together in *Blackpool*, are friends. He recalls seeing her in her Empress costume for the first time and says, "It was utterly freakish. She's just about unrecognisable. And when she starts chewing up the

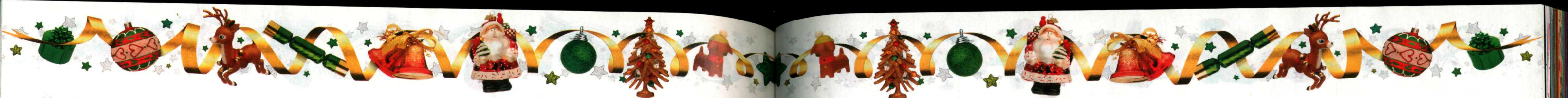
scenery, which she does with great relish, I don't know how many people will realise it's her. It really is a brilliant creation. She was in quite a lot of pain, bless her. But Sarah is the consummate trouper. She never complained, but I know her quite well and I could see, just at the back of her eyes, the discomfort."

"Absolutely exhausting", "very heavy" and "outrageously uncomfortable" are the words Parish uses to describe the experience – while adding that it looks "amazing" and "absolutely terrifying".

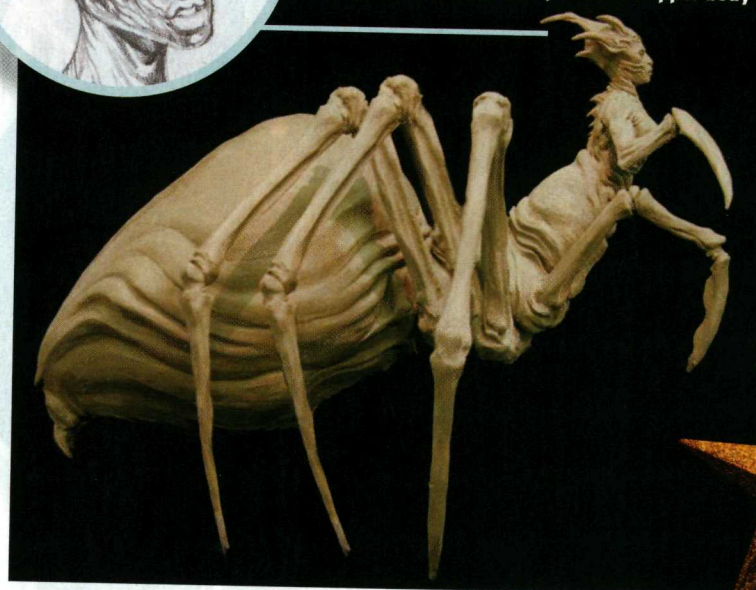
Each of her three filming days began with four hours in make-up – that's how long it takes to become a







**KISS OF THE SPIDER-WOMAN**  
As the Empress of the Racnoss, Sarah Parish was almost unrecognisable after four hours of prosthetics being applied. She then had to kneel in the spider casing (see the model below by Millennium FX) and operate the upper body



◁ giant spider, the show's largest non-computer-generated monster yet. "From the waist down it was just me, wearing a pair of cycling shorts," she explains. "From the waist up it was like a rubber suit, and from the neck up it was all prosthetics."

The head, she notes, "was really heavy. A huge head sealed to my own, so you couldn't get a hand in to scratch an itch. It was on for 12 hours, so if you had an itch it was a nightmare. I'd never worked with prosthetics before and you have to really work your face to actually see it moving."

To complete the Empress, Parish slotted into the abdomen part of the costume, behind which operators, shrouded in black, manipulated the beast's back end.

"I was jutting out of this spider, a bit like a figurehead on a ship, my back arched, kneeling in a mould of my knees," she recalls. "Then there's the huge, heavy prosthetic make-up, and I had to work the two front legs and my upper body, so it really looks like she's an alien. It was great fun to do, but absolutely exhausting."

Is she at all recognisable? "I'd say no, because I've got eight black eyes, eight legs, a big red bottom and a big pair of fangs. However, I did show a picture to my friend who went, 'Yeah, you can tell it's you'. Which I thought was slightly insulting."

Christmas fix over, series three,

which is already being filmed, starts next spring. The 13 episodes feature *Who* writer Mark Gatiss on screen, a meeting with Shakespeare and at least three new monsters: galactic stormtroopers the Judoon; blood-sucking Plasmavores; and Carrionites. "I'll give you that last one as a little exclusive," says Tennant. Plus, of course, a new companion: Martha Jones, played by Freema Agyeman.

Until then, revel in feisty Donna, who's pitched into the Doctor's world of chaos on her wedding day. "They start off at loggerheads," says Tate, "because he doesn't want this woman shouting and slapping him. And she doesn't want this madman ruining the biggest day of her life. But they end up..." she falters, wondering how much she should say.

Well, you can't help but love the guy, we venture. "Exactly. Exactly." **Nick Griffiths**

And there's more!: *Jo Whitley Meets Doctor Who* (Christmas Day Radio 1); *Doctor Who Confidential*, featuring monsters and music (Christmas Day BBC1); a new *Doctor Who* story for BBC 7, *Blood of the Daleks* (New Year's Eve); spin-off show *The Sarah Jane Adventures* (New Year's Day BBC1); and the conclusion of *Torchwood* (New Year's Day BBC3).



**VICTORIAN CROSS**  
Billie Piper as Sally faces up to evil gang mistress Mrs Holland (Julie Walters). Will photographer Fred Garland (JJ Feild, below) be able to help?



# Piper's smokin'!

From sci-fi to grimy period mystery...  
**Billie Piper's striking out on her own**

**DRAMA** *The Ruby in the Smoke* Wednesday 27 December BBC1

**B**illie Piper is time-travelling again. This time, however, she's going it alone. The *Doctor Who* star swaps the world of the sonic screwdriver for that of a pearl-handled revolver in BBC1's dramatisation of Philip Pullman's *The Ruby in the Smoke*. Piper plays Sally Lockhart, a nicely bred 19th-century orphan who plunges into the dark heart of Victorian London to solve the riddle of her parentage.

"It's a big old romp of a story, with proper goodies and baddies," promises Piper. "Sally is a fabulous heroine. She's trying to find out about her father's death in a shipwreck and, as she goes about it, a whole other mystery unravels."

Set in the dank, dangerous milieu of London's docklands (though shot in Liverpool), the drama drips with period atmosphere. Co-starring Julie Walters as an evil gang mistress (a kind of female Fagin without the charm), *The Ruby in the Smoke* offers the kind of down-and-dirty view of the underworld Dickens never dreamt of.

"At first I couldn't believe that it was written for children," says Piper. "There are lots of brutal murders, and Pullman writes about Victorian London as it should be – grimy, grotty and poor. But kids can handle more than we give them credit for." Nor is Sally a conventional

Victorian heroine: she can't play the piano for toffee, but she's a whizz at book-keeping and a crack shot to boot: "She's quite something with a gun," says Piper, "and that was just about the hardest bit for me, as an actress. I don't like guns at all. In fact, I find it hard even to hold one."

With her background in pop music and media prominence as the streetwise Rose Tyler in *Doctor Who*, Piper has become a kind of pin-up girl for contemporary youth culture, publishing her autobiography *Growing Pains* at the age of just 24.

*The Ruby in the Smoke* is her first foray into period drama:

"It's something I've wanted to try for a long time. There's a lot of detailed research – which I find fascinating – but there's also the potential to get a lot of things wrong. You can't just put the dress on and be a woman from Victorian times. Women were very different then. They had this whole different way of talking, which is really hard to get your head around – not the language, but the carefulness with which they expressed themselves. And the pace of everything was so much slower."

A second Sally Lockhart mystery, *The Shadow in the North*, is already in the can and, after Christmas, Piper will be seen swishing her skirts once again, this time in ITV's *Mansfield Park*. "I've no idea why I get cast in those roles, but I'm really grateful," she says. "At some point though, I'd like to have a crack at being a bit of a cow!" **E Jane Dixon**

**LINKS** [www.bbc.co.uk/drama](http://www.bbc.co.uk/drama)