

Whose Who?

JUST WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO DOCTOR WHO? SINCE THE SHOW ABRUPTLY LEFT BBC 1 AT THE END OF '89, WE'VE HEARD ALL SORTS OF RUMOURS. DAVID HASSELHOFF IS THE NEW DOCTOR! LEONARD NIMOY WILL DIRECT THE MOVIE! THERE'LL BE BONKING IN THE TARDIS! THE HENSON CREATURE SHOP IS DESIGNING THE NEW DALEKS! AND IT'S ALL TRUE, AT LEAST IF YOU BELIEVE THE PAPERS. DAVE GOLDER DIDN'T, AND MADE IT HIS BUSINESS TO SORT OUT THE TRUTH FROM THE TALL STORIES...

Television lifespans in excess of 20 years are usually reserved for soap operas, news bulletins and *The Sky At Night*. Drama series rarely make it past five years, let alone run into double figures. So 26 years for a cheap, quirky SF series is nothing short of a miracle. But for *Doctor Who* fans, even that isn't long enough.

Ever since the last BBC series came to an abrupt end in December 1989, rumours of the programme's revival, both on the small and big screen, have been more widespread than sightings of Elvis. Actors as diverse as Tom Cruise, Tim Curry and Jane Seymour have been hailed in the press as the eighth Doctor, while Spielberg, Ridley Scott and Leonard Nimoy have all, at various times, been linked to multifarious film and TV projects.

But it's not all been idle gossip. Some of these projects *have* come painfully close to reality – and, even worse, a few of the most instantly guffaw-worthy casting decisions “revealed” in the popular press have actually had elements of truth to them. However, none, bar one embarrassing exception, have made it anywhere near to the screen. Yet.

That's not to say *Doctor Who* is completely dead. Far from it. During the official Doctor's hiatus, all sorts of alternative Who productions have been thriving – fan-produced video dramas, original novels, radio series, everything except *avant garde* mime theatre productions. If *Doctor Who* comes back, it won't be a resurrection, because the character never died – he's just been getting by on a slightly rickety home-made iron lung for a while.

So do you want to know what's been happening? What's been going on behind those corporate closed doors? Then get ready for the

complete guide to *Doctor Who: The Drip-Feed Years* – the truth, the rumour and the scandal, warts and all.

Doctor Who: The Drip-Feed Years

7.35PM, 6 DECEMBER 1989: Part three of “Survival” is the last new episode of *Doctor Who* to be broadcast to date. Ratings have been disastrously low for the latest season – around 4-5 million. The Sun screams the show is to be cancelled.

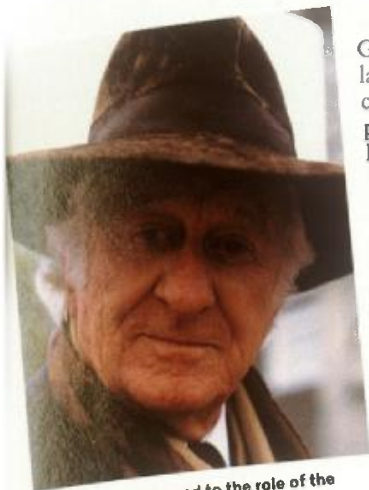
Nonsense, says the BBC. It's just that “the gap between seasons might be longer than most.” Little did anyone suspect.

The corporation announces that it is looking into independent production for the show. A decision will be made early in 1990.

“*Doctor Who* has lasted 26 years, and I can't see any reason why it shouldn't continue,” Peter Creegan had announced at a press conference in October. He added that a variety of options were available to the BBC, but that it wanted to see, “a *Doctor Who* for the '90s.” He also admitted that *Doctor Who* contributes “over £2 million” per year to the BBC through overseas sales and licensing.

Donald Sutherland is rumoured in the press to be the star of the *Doctor Who* movie being developed by production company Coast To Coast. This is a project which dates back to July 1987 when Coast To Coast brought the rights from the BBC. Back then, Tim Curry (of *Rocky Horror* fame) was the Who favourite. A script had been written by *Doctor Who* and *Space: 1999* veteran, Johnny Byrne.

JANUARY 1990: Dalek creator Terry Nation and Cyberman scribe



Jon Pertwee returned to the role of the Doctor in 1984 when BBC Radio 5 broadcast "The Paradise of Death."

Gerry Davis join forces to become the latest in a growing list of independent companies apparently interested in producing a new *Doctor Who*. Gerry Davis announces that their bid is being backed by two major American companies. "We want to maintain the British flavour of the show," he says, "but add the pace and action of American TV drama."

MARCH 1990: The short-lived BSB goes on air. *Doctor Who* is broadcast from the first episode, "An Uncertain Child," onwards at 5.30pm on Sundays. Fans whinge about adverts and station logos in the corner of the screen – it makes their video copies look so tatty.

APRIL 1990: Peter Litten, co-producer of the *Doctor Who* movie, says that the film will probably cost between

£10-30 million (hardly a blockbuster budget, even back then). A star is still being sought, but one of the companions is confirmed as an "earth youth" – which usually translates in science fiction as an obnoxious, hyper-intelligent teenager.

MAY 1990: Either Albert Finney or one-time Monty Python John Cleese will play the Doctor in the big screen version, according to a American showbiz reporter Marilyn Beck in her syndicated US newspaper column. The film will be directed by Bob (Porky's) Clark, and based in Washington DC. Oh, very SF. Nothing else is ever heard of this project.

JULY 1990: More details about the movie are released. A new TARDIS interior will be designed at a cost of £150,000. Caroline Munro becomes the only firm piece of casting ever in the history of the film. She will play the main baddie, Zilla. John Nathan Turner, *Doctor Who*'s final TV producer (who cast arguably the three most unpopular Doctors with the general public, and saw ratings plunge), claims: "I've seen the script and it's excellent. It will make a very good film."

NOVEMBER 1990: 30 November, and the BBC receive around 1,000 calls from fans on the first *Doctor Who* "Day of Action."

FEBRUARY 1991: The *Daily Mail* reports that the BBC has to date received over £7,500 worth of cheques made payable to "Doctor Who" from fans who want to see the programme back on the air.

An extended "director's cut" video version of the McCoy story, "The Curse of Fenric," goes on sale and becomes the fastest-selling *Doctor Who* video ever. BBC Video starts looking for other ways to sell *Doctor Who* material other than just releasing old stories. Over the next couple of years a number of "specials" are produced, including "The Hartnell Years," "The Troughton Years," "The Pert..." Well, you get the idea. Sales are disappointing. Many of them are commissioned by John Nathan Turner, who is dropped by BBC Enterprises after a six-month contract expires.

MARCH 1991: Leaked reports from the BBC suggest that an announcement about a new series is imminent. Then, nothing.

Rurik Hauer is the latest name connected with the movie *Who*, although apparently his reluctance to give up his

lucrative Guinness adverts deal to maintain the Doctor's clean-cut image puts the kibosh on this idea.

MAY 1991: The BBC finally confirms that the new series will be independently produced... If it ever gets produced at all.

JUNE 1991: Virgin Books starts publishing the *New Adventures* series of novels, featuring the McCoy Doctor and Ace. The books are an instant hit, and eventually lead to the *Missing Adventures*, featuring earlier Doctors.

Shepperton Studios is reported to be gearing up to produce a science fiction series during 1992. Immediately, the rumours begin that it will be *Doctor Who*.



Doctor Who may have been "resting" for four years, but the BBC still featured him on the cover of *Radio Times* in 1993...

JULY 1991: Shepperton Studios says it hasn't got a clue what everybody is going on about as far as *Doctor Who* is concerned.

Broadcast magazine, an industry trade paper, announces that a series of *Doctor Who* will go into production in 1992. But not at Shepperton, presumably.

Some independent production companies, including ex-*Doctor Who* producer Derrick Sherwin, complain that the BBC still has not contacted them. "Never put down to conspiracy that which can be explained by incompetence," says the ever-

optimistic *Doctor Who* scribe Terrance Dicks (whose income must have dropped sharply since the series went off the air and he ran out of stories to novelise).

AUGUST 1991: At some point Coast To Coast has changed its name to Green Light and claims that it's in closer agreement with the BBC over the film's format than ever. The possibility that it will produce a follow-on series is also on the cards. Unfortunately, the BBC doesn't seem that interested in playing cards. Pinning the tail on the donkey seems more its game.

A £2.4 million bid by independent production company Naked Eye is apparently turned down by the BBC. The bid proposed a series of 12 half-hour episodes which could be re-cut into six one-hour episodes for foreign sales. In a statement to *Doctor Who* magazine, the BBC maintains that, despite turning down Naked Eye, "There is no question of *Doctor Who* being abandoned. It is still an important programme, and when the time is right it should return... *Doctor Who* is too valuable a property for us to relaunch until we are absolutely confident of it as a major success once again."

OCTOBER 1991: A group calling itself The Consortium of Doctor Who fans announce that it plans to sue the BBC for £30 million for not adhering to its Charter by not bringing back the series. They must have some seriously deranged lawyer...

JANUARY 1992: A half-hour documentary called "Resistance Is Useless" introduces a series of classic *Doctor Who* repeats on BBC 2. Fans despise the documentary, as it portrays them as a bunch of anoraks.

A company called Dark Light releases a statement expressing its desire to produce a very Americanised version of *Doctor Who*. Fan reaction is hostile. Producer Alan Johns replies: "It has been brought to my attention that the basic format we are considering for *Doctor Who* has come under a certain amount of criticism... It is up to the BBC and whoever makes the programme (and we hope it will be us) to devise the format. Opinions are fine and





Carl Blimey! Strewth! The ol' Doc meets *EastEnders* in a *Children In Need* special. Get the kettle on, 'Chelle.

welcomed, but when people try to dictate what should be done based on what they, and they alone, wish to see, it's not only selfish but ridiculous.

"Whatever happens, *Doctor Who* has to survive in a market that is ten times more hostile and aggressive than when the programme was last in production."

Brian Blessed is apparently Dark Light's preferred Doctor. Ho, ho, ho!

FEBRUARY 1992:

Tom Baker provides

the links for the "Shada" video at MOMI (for release in July). After years of distancing himself from the programme, he's finally warming to the idea of donning the scarf and hat again.

JULY 1992: The BBC let it be known that Sylvester McCoy is to be referred to as an "ex-Doctor."

SEPTEMBER 1992: Peter Creegan, Head of Drama Serials, turns down the idea of a 30th anniversary special for TV. Allegedly.

OCTOBER 1992: BBC Enterprises commissions a script for a 30th anniversary special to be released exclusively on video.

Jonathan Powell, head of BBC 1, and a man who has shown little interest in *Doctor Who*, announces that he will *not* renew his contract. Strangely enough, this comes soon after it becomes clear that *Eldorado* has become possibly the BBC's biggest flop ever.

NOVEMBER 1992: A colourised version of the Pertwee story "The Daemons" is shown on BBC 2, and is quickly rush released on video early in 1993. Colourisation of other Pertwee episodes, which now only exist in black and white, goes ahead.

JANUARY 1993: *Doctor Who* is finally set to return to the BBC - BBC Radio 5, that is. Plans for a series of five 30-minute episodes starring Jon Pertwee go ahead. Barry Letts (the producer during the Pertwee era) gets to work on the script.

FEBRUARY 1993: Alan Yentob (who has replaced Jonathan Powell as Controller of BBC 1) appears on the BBC's Entertainment Express, and reaffirms the corporation's commitment to *Doctor Who*. Yentob genuinely appears more supportive of the series than his predecessor. As head of BBC 2, he was the man responsible for putting on all those *Doctor Who* repeats...

MARCH 1993: Yentob appears on the Anne and Nick morning show, saying that the longer the show is off the air the harder it will be to bring back.

APRIL 1993: A BBC press launch on 27 April for *Doctor Who*'s 30th anniversary sees Tony Greenwood, director of Home Entertainment, fielding a barrage of questions about the future of the programme. He stresses that the door has not closed on *Doctor Who*, to which Jon Pertwee replies, "the door's closing on me

any time now." But the show will only return if it's glossy and expensive.

MAY 1993: Mike Leander, who co-wrote many of Gary Glitter's hits, claims to be negotiating with the BBC for a musical version of *Doctor Who*.

JUNE 1993: "The Dark Dimension" is announced! It'll be a 90-minute anniversary story starring all the surviving Doctors. Originally a BBC Enterprises project for a video release, it will now be broadcast on BBC 1. For the full story, see page 42. Discussions between Amblin and the BBC begin.

JULY 1993: "The Dark Dimension" is off, the BBC announces on 9 July. Various Doctors, especially Colin Baker, grumble about the size of their parts in the show.

AUGUST 1993: *The Daily Mail* reports that the main reason the special is pulled is because there was a tension building between BBC Enterprises and BBC Drama, which was annoyed that the corporation's commercial arm was making one of its own programmes. Peter Creegan, BBC Head of Drama, is portrayed as the principal villain. Curiously, *Who*-supporting BBC top dogs, Alan Yentob and Tony Greenwood, are out of the country when the decision was made to scrap the show, the paper reveals.

OCTOBER 1993: 26 October - *The Daily Star* breaks the Spielberg-to-produce-*Doctor-Who* story.

"Hunky *Baywatch* star David Hasselhoff may step into the

TARDIS time machine," it claims. "The handsome muscleman is tipped to play the time traveller in a multi-million pound TV series spectacular by Spielberg. Favourite to play the Doctor's female assistant is ex-Benny Hill Angel Louise English, 28. The BBC are considering Spielberg's proposal for a 22-episode project."

The BBC confirms that it has had what it calls, "tentative discussions with Spielberg."

NOVEMBER 1993: *Doctor's Who*'s 30th anniversary is "celebrated" by a travesty called "The Dimensions In Time." Comprising two ten-minute episodes, it's shown during *Children In Need* and on *Noel's House Party* the following day. A 3D extravaganza ("fund-raising glasses available from WH Smiths"), it's produced and directed by John Nathan Turner. The plot has all the surviving Doctors and a number of companions wandering around Albert Square meeting various *EastEnders*. It doesn't even succeed in being amusing. *Doctor Who* fans are furious. Casual viewers are confused.

A documentary, *30 Years In The TARDIS*, is a much better celebratory event. Featuring copious amounts of clips from the show and interviews with the show's stars and famous fans (Toyah gets kinky just thinking about plastic Dalek playsuits, for instance), it's directed by Kevin Davies, an animation expert who worked on *The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy*.

However, production on the documentary is not without its traumas. "It got to about a week and a half before transmission, and the two producers saw a rough cut and didn't like any of it. They didn't understand the thrust of what I was doing," claims Davies.

Producer John Whitson counter-attacks, saying, "What we viewed (apart from a petrified film editor) was a meandering 20-minute cut less than two weeks before transmission." A slanging match ensues in London's *Time Out* magazine, and the documentary is re-cut by the BBC.

Davies and Whitson later "clear the air," and Whitson gives Davies the chance to direct one of the five-minute mini-documentaries which precede BBC 1 repeats of the classic Pertwee story, "Planet of the A



Daleks." Hmm, Yentob is obviously a *Who* fan – when he moves to BBC 1, so do the repeats... Davies also gets the chance to re-edit the documentary for an extended video release. Recreations of classic *Who* moments are put back in. "People have jokingly called it the director's cut, but if it was a director's cut then it wouldn't have had quite so much of the broadcast version in it as it does," says Davies.

JANUARY 1994: Amblin enters discussions with American network CBS over *Doctor Who*.

FEBRUARY 1994: The latest over at Green Light is that it has joined forces with Lumiere Pictures. Jane Seymour will play the Doctor – according to *Today* newspaper, anyway. Other papers favour Michael Crawford. But time is running out before the company's contract expires. Denny Martin Flynn, writer of a few of the *Star Trek* movies, has rewritten the script. According to SFX sources, this version "seemed to be the Doctor searching for the Key To Time all over again."

The Rocky Horror Show's Richard O'Brien is now the favoured TV Doctor among the tabloids.

MARCH 1994: Amblin confirms it has brought the rights to produce a new series of *Doctor Who*. The press is rife with rumours that Alan Rickman will be the Spielberg Doctor – he denies everything.

The Sunday Times goes as far to suggest that Amblin will be remaking classic *Who* stories, and that a producer has been appointed – Peter Wagg, who worked on *Max Headroom*. Ridley Scott is suggested as a director for the pilot. Tom Cruise and Dudley Moore are extreme outside possibilities as the Doctor. Spielberg and Terry Gilliam are rumoured to be interested in directing episodes.

Meanwhile, Leonard Nimoy is appointed by Lumiere to direct the film. There also seems to have been some friction between Amblin and Lumiere over film rights, which nearly scuppered the Amblin deal.

APRIL 1994: *The Star* is at it again. This time the paper reckons Pamela Anderson will be the Doctor's assistant in the Spielberg series.

Green Light's rights to the movie fall through. As it has failed to commence shooting, the rights revert back to the BBC.

MAY 1994: John Pertwee announces that there will be a second radio *Doctor Who* story – "The Ghosts of N-Space" (which the BBC has yet to schedule).

JULY 1994: The man from CBS, he say "No." Amblin begins discussions with Fox. Apparently, only two actors have been seriously considered for the lead role – one in his 40s, the other in his late 20s, but "an eccentric Tom Baker type."

SEPTEMBER 1994: Dalek creator Terry Nation confirms that redesigned Daleks will appear in the Amblin pilot for *Doctor Who*. The Fox deal seems to be for a two-hour pilot in May, with a series starting in the Autumn. The police box

TARDIS will be kept, and the lead actor will be British. A script is approved by the BBC. It is written by John Leekley, whose previous credits include *Miami Vice* and *Nightmare Cafe*. The script deals with the Doctor's flight from Gallifrey.

Leonard "Spock" Nimoy is again suggested as the director.

OCTOBER 1994: At Panopticon '94, Sylvester McCoy confirms that Paul McGann was offered the role of the Amblin Doctor. Jim Dale's name is also flung around.

Philip Segal, the production executive in charge of *Doctor Who* at Amblin,



Three men who could have been Doctor Who – if we're to believe the tabloids. Donald Sutherland (left) was suggested as a movie Doc as far back as 1987. Brian Blessed (centre) was flavour of the month in January 1992. Meanwhile, Sylvester McCoy recently claimed that Paul McGann had been offered the role for the Spielberg *Doctor Who*.

reveals to the media that the Master and Davros will feature in the pilot script.

FEBRUARY 1995: Fox pulls out of the deal (apparently going for a new version of *The X-Files* instead), but Amblin continues looking for US backers. Universal begin to show interest.

Philip Segal turns up at a convention in California with design sketches for Gallifrey and the TARDIS as they would appear in the Amblin series. He also previews five seconds of computer-generated effects showing a Dalek's outer casing folding away to reveal a Dalek creature, plus a snippet of the title sequence which looks like an updated Tom Baker diamond-shaped time tunnel effect. He also

announces that, "As of today, the show is a co-production between Universal Studios and the BBC."

APRIL 1995: Leaked reports from the Fox Network suggest that the US channel is still considering a *Doctor Who* TV movie, despite reports that it had pulled out of the project earlier in the year.

Fox has apparently released a statement saying: "We can now confirm officially that BBC Worldwide and Universal Television have signed a script deal with the Fox Network for the development of a two-hour *Doctor Who* feature... Due to various factors, Amblin's name has now been removed from the project... The executive producers in charge of *Doctor Who* remain Philip Segal, who is still with Amblin, and Peter Wagg. They are both British."

BBC Worldwide continues to release no more details, other than, "A television series of *Doctor Who* is currently under development with Amblin and Universal." However, Philip Segal's office confirmed that, "the series is still in production, and we are currently looking for a suitable writer." Indeed, according to reliable sources, Segal is spotted in London, apparently in discussion with possible writers.

"Expect an announcement from us confirming the writer within a few weeks," predicts Fox.

MAY 1995: So what exactly are the odds of us seeing a new *Doctor Who* series in the next couple of years? Despite "developments" in America, there have been so many false starts on the Amblin (or maybe not Amblin any more) project, you can't help but be sceptical.

On the other hand, after the success of *The X-Files*, the BBC is clearly more ready to risk putting money into SF-related projects than at any other time since the late '70s. So that's got to be a good sign.

Oh yeah, and since everybody else is at it, let's start a ridiculous rumour of our own – Julian Clary will be the new Doctor. Honest, guv. Remember, you read it here first. ☹

To find out what happened to that 30th anniversary special we were all waiting for, just turn the page... ☹

