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# ONCE UPON A TIME LORD

FIFTY YEARS AGO THIS MONTH, A CHILDREN'S SCI-FI DRAMA ABOUT "A FRAIL OLD MAN LOST IN SPACE AND TIME" MADE ITS DEBUT. EMPIRE ROUNDS UP ITS CREATORS TO REVEAL HOW, AGAINST ALL THE ODDS, DOCTOR WHO CHANGED BRITISH TELEVISION FOREVER

WORDS **DORIAN LYNSKEY** TYPOGRAPHY **SWHYPE**

**“WHY DO THINGS ALWAYS HAVE TO CHANGE? WHY CAN'T WE JUST GO ON AS WE ARE?”**

— WILLIAM HARTNELL (DAVID BRADLEY)  
IN AN ADVENTURE IN SPACE AND TIME

## CHANGING TIMES

1963 was a year of transformations. Future Prime Minister Harold Wilson spoke about the “white heat” of technological revolution. The political establishment was shaken by the Profumo scandal and the exposure of KGB moles. Rock 'n' roll was reborn with the unprecedented mania generated by The Beatles and the Stones. Brash, flamboyant box-office hits such as Tom Jones and the Bond movies jolted British cinema out of the kitchen sink. In America, Martin Luther King said, “I have a dream,” Bob Dylan sang Blowin' In The Wind, Betty Friedan triggered feminism's second wave, and John F. Kennedy celebrated his thousandth day in the White House, just weeks before meeting a bloody end in Dallas. Everything was in flux. Everything was up for grabs.

While all this was happening, a small group of creative mavericks at the BBC, including Head Of Drama Sydney Newman, producer Verity Lambert and director Waris Hussein, were putting together a new children's

drama about an eccentric old man who travels through space and time in a police box. As part of Doctor Who's 50th anniversary celebrations this month, their achievement has been dramatised in *An Adventure In Space And Time*, a new TV movie written by regular Who scribe Mark Gatiss. “It was a time of tremendous shift,” says director Terry McDonough. “A time-traveller's a great allegory for change, and that's why Doctor Who was so successful. There was a curious zeitgeist about it.”

Gatiss, a hard-core Whovian since childhood, began writing the script more than a decade ago, in time for the show's 40th anniversary, but Doctor Who was then still on hiatus and the BBC showed little enthusiasm. With the show now a global money-spinner, what was once a left-field labour of love has become a jewel in the autumn schedule.

When *Empire* meets Gatiss in Cardiff, on the set of his other hit show, *Sherlock*, he's fizzing with enthusiasm about the band of outsiders who made Doctor

Who work against the odds. “It's easy looking back to see how it would work, but at the time it was a high-wire act. The thing I find, working on Doctor Who, is there's never enough time, there's never enough money, there's always massive battles. So, in a way, it's very similar. In other ways I look back in envy at the fact that so much was possible. There was much more room to fail. There was a wonderful sense of, ‘What the hell, let's do this.’”

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## CHANGING PLACES

In the spring of 1963, the BBC was only just beginning to shed its stuffy post-War formality. “It was a buttoned-up, testered place,” remembers Hussein, the elegantly spoken, Cambridge-educated newcomer who became Doctor Who’s first director. “The people in charge were like naval officers. They all wore blazers and old school ties. People like Verity and myself were aliens in the landscape.”

• David Bradley stars as the first Doctor, William Hartnell, in *An Adventure In Space And Time*.

As was Newman. A celebrated TV producer in his native Canada, he had moved to Britain to become ABC’s Head Of Drama, where he created hip detective show *The Avengers*. In December 1962 the BBC poached him to shake up their own drama department, bringing in new blood such as Dennis Potter and Ken Loach. “Television dramas were invariably about the upper classes,” he later recalled. “I said, ‘Damn the upper classes: they don’t even own televisions!’”

Brian Cox, who plays Newman in *An Adventure In Space And Time*, actually met the man himself as a young actor in 1965. “He was very much in the style of a Hollywood showman,” recalls Cox. “He was the television equivalent of Darryl Zanuck. He had that kind of mentality and drive. It was the time for social revolution, the time for social mobility. In an age which was still plagued by the BBC’s lack of decision and everything done by committee, he got things done.” >

One of Newman's first challenges was to fill the problematic Saturday-evening slot at 5.15pm between sports round-up Grandstand and pop show Juke Box Jury. In March 1963 he held a meeting with Head Of Serials Donald Wilson and staff writer C. E. Webber, to brainstorm a weekly science-fiction drama aimed at young viewers — with a ban on clichéd “bug-eyed monsters” and “tin robots”.

Newman vetoed Webber's original idea about a team of futuristic troubleshooters and substituted his own invention, “a frail old man lost in space and time”, whose adventures would teach kids about history. He appointed BBC veteran Rex Tucker as producer and director and pencilled it in for July, with a budget of £2,300 per episode, plus £500 for the spaceship. According to Newman, “Doctor Who was really the culmination of almost all my interests in life: I wanted to reflect contemporary society; I was curious about the outer-space stuff; and also, of course, being a children's programme, it had to have a high educational content.”

In June, Newman asked his former production assistant at ABC, Verity Lambert, to become co-producer. At just 27 she was the corporation's youngest producer and its only female, prompting nasty rumours about how she got the job. “I'm told there were quite a few rumblings within the BBC, because she'd never been a director and because she was a girl,” said Newman. “She was tough, good-looking and stubborn. If she didn't like something, she came out honestly and said so.”

While the launch was delayed by script problems, Tucker said he was too busy to direct and soon left the show. His replacement, Indian-born Hussein, feared he'd been offered a poisoned chalice when he read the first scripts. “Nobody else wanted to do it,” he says. “The premise was great, but the first four episodes were about cavemen with funny names and monosyllabic dialogue. I thought, ‘What have I been lumbered with? How the hell do I prove myself as a director?’”

“Waris said he had to work 50 times harder to prove himself, and he's gay too, so he literally couldn't allow anything to give people a reason to get rid of him,” says Gatiss. What gave Hussein hope was the calibre of his employers. “I thought Sydney was wonderful. He wasn't just an opinionated executive, he was a man of integrity. And Verity was an extremely intelligent, attractive woman.”

“It's a funny little bunch that created Doctor Who,” says McDonough. “You've got an Indian first-time director, a female first-time producer and a Canadian Head Of Drama. It was a different energy.” By July 1963 the idea was firmly in place. What the team needed now was a Doctor.

## CHANGING MINDS

By 1963, William Hartnell had been acting for almost 30 years. Born poor and illegitimate in London in 1908, he had escaped his delinquent youth via the theatre, moving from stage to screen with impressive supporting roles in films such as Brighton Rock and, most recently, This Sporting Life. But he was frustrated by being typecast as humourless hard-nosed military men in Carry On Sergeant and the hit sitcom The Army Game. So when Lambert and Hussein invited him to lunch he was both wary and intrigued.

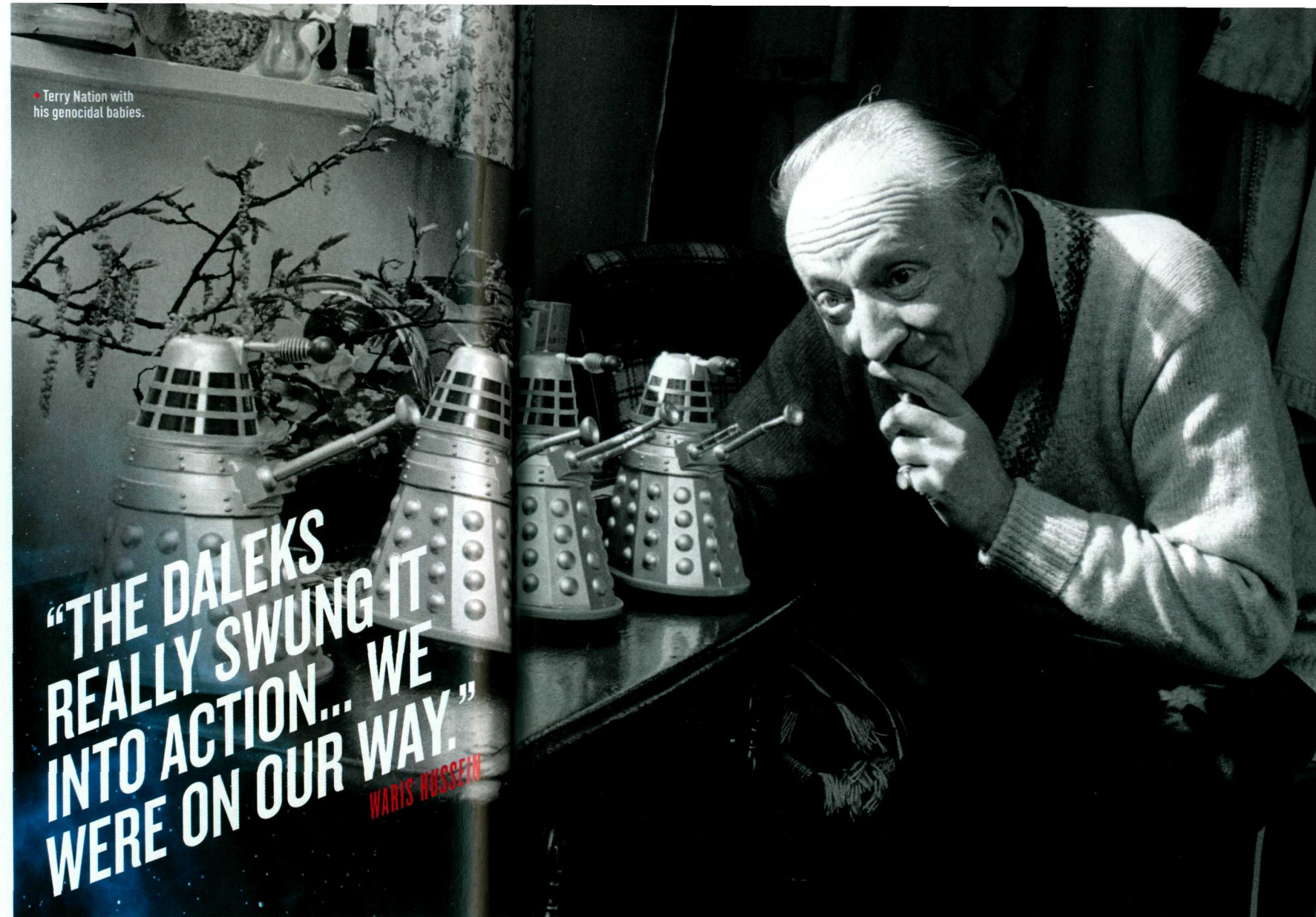
“I remember kids' TV in the early '60s and it was pretty primitive,” says David Bradley, who was cast as Hartnell for An Adventure In Space And Time on the recommendation of Edgar Wright (who'd put him in both Hot Fuzz and The World's End). “I could understand him thinking, ‘I'm a legitimate character actor on stage and film. I don't do kids' stuff.’ But after his initial reluctance he embraced it totally. The Doctor gave him a chance to expand and show a bit more twinkle.”

If Hartnell was perturbed by Lambert and Hussein's youth and inexperience, then he was swayed by their enthusiasm. The Doctor, promised Lambert, would be excitingly unpredictable: sometimes warm and endearing, at other times intimidating and cantankerous. A role he could make his own. A role, he later said, that he allowed to “hypnotise” him.

While commissioning a cutting-edge theme tune and title sequence, Lambert cast 23 year-old Carole Ann Ford as the Doctor's teenage granddaughter, Susan Foreman, and William Russell and Jacqueline Hill as inquisitive schoolteachers Ian Chesterton and Barbara Wright. They met for the first time at a photo call on September 20, and set to work.

The logistical obstacles were significant. Lambert was assigned one of the corporation's worst studios: Lime Grove Studio D. “It was horrendous!” remembers Ford, a crisp, no-nonsense character who is now a sought-after voice coach. “Terribly old-fashioned, terribly run-down. It should have been pulled down years before we used it. If it got too hot the sprinklers came on and it was terribly small, so we were tripping over each other, not to mention camera cables and so on.”

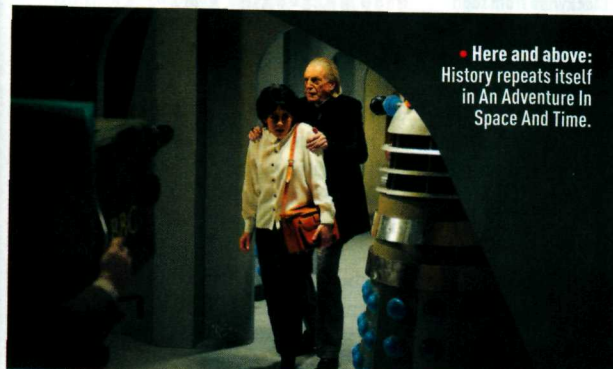
Furthermore, primitive editing technology meant there could only be four breaks in the tape per episode, so there was no opportunity to reshoot scenes because of fluffed lines or shaky scenery. The budget was, however, substantial enough by BBC standards that failure would have been a costly



• Terry Nation with his genocidal babies.



• William Hartnell as the original Doctor, before the 11 further incarnations.



• Here and above: History repeats itself in An Adventure In Space And Time.

# THE OTHER DOCTOR

## THE DOCTOR'S TWO BIG-SCREEN ADVENTURES...

→ THE 1960S SPIN-OFF FILMS, directed by Gordon Flemyng (Jason's dad) and written and produced by Amicus horror supremo Milton Subotsky, were made during the craze that followed the first appearances of the Daleks. Indeed, they were more concerned with Daleks than the Doctor. Hence their titles: Dr. Who And The Daleks (1965) and Daleks Invasion Earth: 2150 AD (1966).

At that time, William Hartnell was the only TV Doctor there had been, but he was a) working year-round and not available for the films (if he wanted a week off, he had to be made invisible on the show), and b) not a big enough star for the US market Subotsky hoped to secure.

Having played Frankenstein and Sherlock Holmes, Peter Cushing ought to have been a great Doctor, but he disastrously played down to the children, pretending to be a doddering old man and constantly winking. These films also ignore the TV character's alien origins and insist the hero is an Earthman whose actual name is “Dr. Who”.

However, '60s kids put up with the fake Doctor and loved the films anyway... They are spectacular and colourful, full of great action scenes and vivid settings. The second, slightly stronger film also introduced Bernard Cribbins — replacing Roy Castle, another children's entertainer — to the TARDIS, laying the groundwork for his return during David Tennant's tenancy. **KIM NEWMAN**



embarrassment. “We were, to be mild about it, terribly, terribly nervous,” recalled script editor David Whitaker. “We were also terribly, terribly excited.”

After a week of rehearsals, the first episode, now known as An Uneearthly Child, was recorded on September 27. The following week, Lambert and Hussein nervously met Newman for lunch to hear his verdict. It wasn't good. His notes included “girl too dour” and “old man not funny enough”. He told them to do it again.

“He used to laugh loudly, but at the same time he had an ominous presence,” says Ford. “When he laid a heavy hand on my shoulder and smiled it was always a bad sign. ‘Lovely darling but...’ ‘But’ was a very bad word. I wanted Susan to be different, strange, not human, but he wanted an ordinary kid next door.”

“Sydney was a showman and he was canny enough to say, ‘Look, you're making this too weird,’” says Hussein. “He did point out that this was for kids. I was very happy to do it again because there were many shaky moments. To remake >

a pilot was totally unheard of. It was a gamble that paid off."

But Doctor Who was not out of the woods yet. It was almost strangled at birth for the most prosaic of reasons: the budget-busting cost of the TARDIS control room. BBC One's Controller Of Programmes, Donald Baverstock, ordered the show to be cancelled after the first four episodes until Lambert convinced him that the cost could be spread across the whole series. "It was *that* close to happening," says Gatiss. "We shot it like that but had to redo it because it looked too trivial. Was that *it*?"

With the budget settled and the first episode reshot to Newman's satisfaction, the team were optimistic until the day before broadcast. On Friday, November 22, Carole Ann Ford was waiting for a lift to work on the show's second storyline when someone ran up and said, "Have you heard? Kennedy's been shot!"

## CHANGING FORTUNES

The news from Dallas was so shocking that it swallowed the weekend. "It was like someone hit you on the head," remembers Hussein. It couldn't have been a worse time to launch an ambitious new drama and the ratings were a disappointing 4.4 million. Newman had to persuade the BBC to repeat the episode the following weekend, to a much warmer reception. But its survival was only really ensured by a race of genocidal pepper pots.

When Lambert first told Newman about the Daleks, conceived by freelance writer Terry Nation and designed by the BBC's Raymond Cusick, he dismissed them as hated "bug-eyed monsters" and would have vetoed them if he'd had time to find a replacement script. But he conceded, when the ratings for the final episode of the arc came in, that ten million viewers couldn't be wrong. He never doubted Lambert again. "Some of the best things I have ever done are the things I never wanted to do," he later reflected. Nation got the credit and royalty payments for the rest of his life; co-creator Cusick, as a BBC staffer, received a £100 bonus and a Blue Peter badge, to his lasting annoyance.

"I was working in a factory in York and we were just as spooked by the Daleks as kids nowadays," remembers Bradley, who was 21 at the time. "The Daleks really swung it into action," says Hussein. "Once kids were hiding behind sofas the BBC realised what they had. By the time I did the third lot there was more money. We were on our way, thank goodness."

"I couldn't go to the shop for a bottle of milk without people crowding around and asking for autographs," says Ford. Hartnell found himself followed down the street by awestruck kids and deluged with

earnest fan mail asking complex questions about the physics of the TARDIS.

Hartnell was a complicated character. In *Who's There?: The Life And Career Of William Hartnell*, his granddaughter Jessica admits he could be "intolerant, bigoted, irascible and tense", but also loyal and generous towards workmates he respected. "He could be quite intimidating if you didn't know that under this spiky exterior he was very sweet — marshmallow, in fact," Lambert testified.

Ford remembers him fondly, except for the times when his protectiveness towards his on-screen granddaughter became oppressive. He would sometimes scold her for blowing her pay cheque on new clothes or drinking cocktails in the BBC bar, though he always apologised later. "He thought I was younger than I was because I was playing 15," says Ford. "I was a married woman with a child! Look, this was the '60s. It was all happening out there. The music, the clothes... everyone was firing on all cylinders."

For Hartnell, the Doctor was the role of a lifetime and he wanted it for as long as the show lasted. It didn't occur to him his younger colleagues may feel differently. "Bill just couldn't understand why they wanted to move on," says Gatiss. "He got this towards the end of his career and it was like, are you fucking crazy? It's a generational thing. Having radically changed the set-up at the BBC with this insane little show, all he wants to do is keep it exactly where it is."



• Clockwise from top left: Original cast Carole Ann Ford, Jacqueline Hill, Ian Chesterton and William Hartnell; The Dalek craze sweeps the nation; Hartnell with Ford in the first series; David Bradley as Hartnell in *An Adventure In Space And Time*.

## CHANGING FACES

The first to go was Waris Hussein, who moved on after six months, his reputation established. At the end of the first series, Carole Ann Ford left too. "Susan was becoming so repetitive," she says with an exasperated sigh. "They didn't develop the character at all. Originally she was going to be extraordinary: physically as capable as an Avengers girl and mentally as capable as her grandfather. I could have done amazing things for them if they'd written it like that."

BBC Photo Library

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better than the writers did. One guest actor, Julian Glover, remembered him as "this grumpy bloke sat in the corner, scowling in disapproval at all I did".

"New people came on board who didn't care enough and that's why he became so proprietorial," says Gatiss. "He was the last man standing."

In the end, it was Hartnell's health that brought him down. A heavy spirit-drinker and smoker, he developed arteriosclerosis, an early symptom of which was a tendency to botch his lines. During the first series, this was manageable. "We were theatre people so we could cover up for him," says Ford. "I'm sure I sometimes saw a twinkle and he did it on purpose. There was a battery of machines called the Fault Locator and on one occasion he asked me to check the Fornicator!"

But eventually, his growing frailty and difficult behaviour become unsustainable and the BBC drew-up plans to replace him. "When ill-health overtook him I should imagine he found that very frustrating because it meant he was dipping below his own standards," says Bradley. "But he was convinced that he was the only one who could play the Doctor because the concept of an actor leaving a show and someone else taking over was inconceivable at the time."

The idea of allowing the Doctor to regenerate was a stroke of genius, ensuring the show's longevity: Gatiss believes it was first suggested by third-season script editor Donald Tosh and



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# WHO'S WHOS

## KIM NEWMAN ASSESSES THE 11 INCARNATIONS THUS FAR

 <p><b>WILLIAM HARTNELL</b> 1963-1966</p> <p>→ Most heroes are nice, handsome young men, so Verity Lambert decided he'd be a craggy old git. Victorian clothes and attitudes, know-it-all but arrogant. The Sean Connery of Who — he did everything first.</p>	 <p><b>PATRICK TROUGHTON</b> 1966-1969</p> <p>→ Younger, goofier and shabbier, "a hobo in space", less patriarchal and doctrinaire. Played the recorder, fooled humourless villains into thinking him an idiot, possessed a fiercely moral core.</p>	
 <p><b>JON PERTWEE</b> 1970-1974</p> <p>→ More stylish, disliked bureaucracy and militarism, performed "Venusian karate", more explicitly non-human (the two hearts business), eco-aware in a '70s manner.</p>	 <p><b>TOM BAKER</b> 1974-1981</p> <p>→ A scarf-trailing clown who became the most recognisable Doctor. Sometimes callous to remind us he wasn't human. Later stuck with a robot dog and weak jokes.</p>	 <p><b>PETER DAVISON</b> 1982-1984</p> <p>→ A handsome, nice young man with a tendency towards pacifism and indecision, in Edwardian cricketing togs, exhausted by a TARDIS-full of squabbling sidekicks.</p>
 <p><b>COLIN BAKER</b> 1984-1986</p> <p>→ Performance as a quixotic loon wasn't bad, but suffered from that horrible multicoloured coat and some of the worst writing the show has ever seen.</p>	 <p><b>SYLVESTER MCCOY</b> 1987-1989</p> <p>→ Funny teeth, sort-of Scots accent, prone to running around and incapable of explaining things. Came out as an ant-Thatch leftie, but got cancelled before she did.</p>	 <p><b>PAUL MCGANN</b> 1996</p> <p>→ Floppy-haired romantic, whose regeneration is likened to Frankenstein and Jesus. First of the 'kissy' Docs. Half-human, like Spock (since retconned and forgotten).</p>
 <p><b>CHRISTOPHER ECCLESTON</b> 2005</p> <p>→ Traumatized Time War vet, Manc-accented on the principle that "lots of planets have a North", dressed down a bit, always piled on the inner angst, burned out fast.</p>	 <p><b>DAVID TENNANT</b> 2005-2010</p> <p>→ Sharp suits, estuary know-it-all accent, terribly enthusiastic, prone to soporifics, really wanted to settle down but aware of duty as last of the Time Lords to protect the universe.</p>	 <p><b>MATT SMITH</b> 2010-2013</p> <p>→ Bow tie, prone to one-off attempts at cool followed by notes to "never say that again", given to falling over, the youngest Doctor to date. Inherited sticky-up-hair from predecessor.</p>

Hartnell's nemesis John Wiles, both of whom resigned before it happened, leaving Newman to wield the axe. On July 16, 1966, Newman informed Hartnell that he would be filming his last episode in October. The devastated actor's next job was in Christmas pantomime.

"He's like someone who gets the thing he's always wanted for Christmas and then has to give it back," Gatiss says sadly. "There's something terribly affecting about that. An Adventure In Space And Time is about not being able to say goodbye."

To Terry McDonough, its message is more brutal: "No-one's irreplaceable."

It might have been some consolation to Hartnell that his beloved show transformed the BBC forever. By escaping its kids' TV ghetto and demonstrating that young viewers loved to be scared witless, it knocked down the fences between different audiences and established the enduring format of the teatime family hit. It gave British science-fiction a strong new voice of its own: playful, eccentric, unsettling and endlessly versatile. More broadly, it proved that untested creative mavericks could be trusted to turn strange new ideas into populist smashes, and encouraged the corporation to be less cautious and pedantic — well, at least a little.

Hartnell retired due to poor health and died in 1975. Newman passed away in 1997 and Lambert ten years later. But Gatiss interviewed all the survivors of the first episode at length and invited them to visit the set of *An Adventure In Space And Time*. While McDonough was filming a conversation between Hussein (Sacha Dhawan) and Lambert (Jessica Raine), Gatiss swears he saw a tear run down the real Hussein's cheek. Gatiss gets emotional just talking about it. "It's a very touching story. I go to bits every time I get to the end. I can't help it."

During the shoot, Gatiss invited some Who-loving friends down to see the set. One of them was the 12th Doctor, Peter Capaldi, who is 55, the same age as Hartnell when he took the role. "He sent me the most beautiful email the day after he visited," Gatiss beams. "It said: 'Even as a child something about the melancholy of the show sang out to me.' Even though it's mostly an adventure series, the emotional highs for me are when companions go and when Doctors go. There is a pleasure in melancholy."

Like every Doctor except, tragically, the first, Capaldi knows he is replaceable. In Doctor Who, everybody says goodbye. Everything changes.

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**AN ADVENTURE IN SPACE AND TIME WILL AIR ON BBC TWO DURING DOCTOR WHO'S 50TH ANNIVERSARY WEEK, STARTING NOVEMBER 18.**



# WHEN DOCTORS COLLIDE

WHO SHOWRUNNER STEVEN MOFFAT ON 50TH ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL, THE DAY OF THE DOCTOR

## ➔ THE CARDIFF NERVE CENTRE OF DOCTOR

Who is a fortress of encrypted files, closed sets and non-disclosure agreements, but showrunner Steve Moffat, the man who made "Spoilers!" a catchphrase for rogue time traveller River Song, needs no further incentive to keep a secret. So when *Empire* asks him what he can reveal about the show's 50th anniversary special, *The Day Of The Doctor*, he says simply: "It's the most important day of the Doctor's life."

Okay, so here's what we know. It will include the Daleks, '70s villains the Zygons, Billie Piper's former companion Rose Tyler, Jemma Redgrave as UNIT's Kate Stewart, Gavin & Stacey's Joanna Page as Queen Elizabeth I and, oh yes, multiple Doctors.

"I wanted to get the Doctor from several angles," says Moffat, a high-voltage Scot who talks faster than most people think. "Rather than a reunion, I wanted the Doctor at different moments: the current Doctor, a previous Doctor and an unknown Doctor."

The new incarnation, as revealed in the last season finale, is the mighty John Hurt. "I was very relieved he said yes," says Moffat. "I knew it would entail casting someone so enormous that everyone would drop their coffee when they saw who it was."

As well as Hurt, departing Doctor Matt Smith will come face-to-face with his predecessor, David Tennant. "They play different aspects of the same part," says Moffat. "It's a really good double act. Very funny. They work together sublimely well."

The bond was just as powerful between takes. "They loved each other and they've remained in touch," says Moffat. "They were always gossiping away in a corner because they share a common experience...

David and Matt both resigned saying, 'I don't really want to leave but one day I have to, so why not today?' But what David has discovered, and what Matt will discover, is it's never over. You'll always be the Doctor."

One of Moffat's earliest memories is of William Hartnell giving way to Patrick Troughton in 1966. "I complained to my dad, where was Doctor Who? And he said, 'It's him with the black hair.' And I said, 'That's not Doctor Who, he's far too young!' What started me down the road to where I sit today was being bewitched by the idea that the Doctor was just a Doctor. There were a whole lot of Doctors. It made Doctor Who ten times more interesting."

Moffat, who has written for Doctor Who since its 2005 revival and succeeded Russell T. Davies as showrunner four years ago, still sounds utterly in love with the character. For one thing, the Doctor remains a mystery, unconstrained by decades of complicated continuity. "What's his name? Who was he married to? Who are his children? Why did he leave Gallifrey? Fifty years on, we know only a fraction more than we knew on the first day. You think you know him but you know *nothing*."

The second reason is simply that the Doctor is so much fun. "His appeal to children is that he's a child in disguise," says Moffat. "He's one of them. Whether he's a crotchety old man or a hipster boffin, he's really a big kid. He's so vital and alive. You can't get tired of that because he changes all the time."

*Empire* mentions Mark Gatiss' theory that the core of the show's appeal is the melancholy of saying goodbye. Moffat is only half-convinced. "I think it's more complex than that. Rebirth is at the core. There's an ending, yes, but there's a reassurance that the moment of sadness will be followed by a sunrise. That's the fundamental message of all kids' stories: as dark as it gets, the dawn will come." He takes a rare breath. "No show has so many endings and so many beginnings as Doctor Who."

**THE DAY OF THE DOCTOR AIRS ON BBC ONE ON NOVEMBER 23.**