



# EXIT STRATEGY

The long goodbye is almost over. Who supremo Russell T Davies tells Nick Setchfield some of the delights in store in his final Time Lord stories

**T**he other day I met Matt Smith," shares Russell T Davies, his outsized laugh seconds from detonation. "The fire alarm went off at my place in Cardiff. He's in the same building, so the two of us were standing there in our dressing gowns. Can you imagine? And where was *Doctor Who Confidential*?"

Davies raises a coffee to his lips, hooting in the London sunshine. Dressed in a suit the colour of Bournville, he's locked into publicity mode, shuttling between *Gay Times*, BBC Breakfast and Radio Kerrang. For *SFX* he's chosen the informal, fry-up scented ambience of a streetside café – "Our last *Doctor Who* interview! Historic!" – and is happy to reflect on his career-high stint as New *Who* supremo as well as stoke anticipation for "The End Of Time", the epic two-part finale that will see the Tenth Doctor exit our screens in a blaze of hankies.

"I saw David Tennant in Los Angeles. I said, 'Oh my god, you're looking well!' Then I realised that it was the first time I hadn't seen him at the end of nine months of filming. He was just looking human! Shining, unbattered by television... Hm. Unbattered. Is that a word?"

Like an unbattered sausage?  
"That's just a sausage, Nick."

Last time we spoke you said you were bursting to write the Tenth Doctor's death



Russell T Davies, our modern-day Santa Claus.

scene. Did it spring from your brain to the page or was it harder to write than you imagined it would be?

» Writing's always hard, let's be honest, but when it came to the final moments, the final scenes, I was flying. In my head I had it all planned, the food I'd eat and the music I'd play. I thought I'd be dancing on

my balcony. And then when it gets to it, it's not like that at all. You finish it, you send it off, there's some problem at work that day, something else happens, you watch *Coronation Street*, everything's normal. I'd really built it up for years in my head, thinking how exciting that day would be, but life just carries on, doesn't it? [laughs]

What was David's reaction when he finally got to see it?

» He loved it. He phoned me up the second he'd read it. It was quite private, actually. He was emotional, overjoyed. I wanted to do him proud. I wanted to do Bernard Cribbins proud. Bernard was enormously moved when he saw how much he had to do in it.

It's interesting that you called it private. Is there a secret bond between the writer and the actor and the character, something you can't share with anyone else?

» In a way. I love David, I absolutely think he's brilliant. But I don't believe in getting too close to anyone. I think you should be surprised by each other. I don't know what he's going to do in one day's set of rushes, he doesn't know what I'm going to write next. Literally he gets the script and it's a surprise. He'll know roughly where it's set, and what the intention is, but he won't know a single word of it until he sees it. It's not like we're sitting down together, planning out scenes. »

I think that's a good way to work, otherwise you just end up in each other's pockets. You don't change your own expectations that way, when you play to an audience of one. It's a bigger stage than that.

**So will that final scene kill us?**

» It's the biggest farewell in the world. He knows death is coming. I think viewers will have a choice of scenes that get to them, in a way. You're talking about five or six scenes. There's one very big scene - that isn't the regeneration - that's the scene that gets everyone. It comes about ten minutes before the regeneration, when you finally realise it's on its way, and it's magnificent. So it depends which one will click with you.

**It's a two-parter. Do they share an emotional tone or is the second part considerably darker?**

» The second episode is even bigger, as ever, because the scale gets bigger with two-parters. It's an unusually dark Christmas Day episode. We're all wondering how that's going to go down. It's got great fun in it, of course - June Whitfield's in it, and Bernard Cribbins is hilarious, and there's some very funny stuff. But the return of the Master... he doesn't just walk out of a cupboard saying, "Ha ha! I'm alive!" It's a big, proper resurrection, and that's terrifying.

**Did you always know the Master was coming back?**

» I always knew there was a way. At the end of "Last Of The Time Lords" that ring falls out of the funeral pyre, which I thought was quite funny, a real *Flash Gordon*, Ming The Merciless sort of thing. It made me laugh. I did think, "If anybody wants to bring back the Master, that's the way to do it." It's my job to work on *Doctor Who*, so even the greatest *Doctor Who* fan in the world doesn't think about *Doctor Who* as much as I do, all day, every day. It's my job to literally think about it every single waking hour. So it's not that these things are planned, it's that they're always there, in my head. And when I leave something like that ring on a funeral pyre, I think, during idle moments, "What would I do with that one if I was ever interested in bringing him back?" Or I start imagining what other writers could do with it. It's always there in my head, gestating. So when you

Good old Will is set to be the Doctor's main "End Of Time" companion.



I am the resurrection: John Simm returns as a "vagrant" Master.



Time to run again? Love the running, yeah...



His song is ending - but he still knows how to dress.



actually come to write it, you realise it's obvious that the Master is perfect for this regeneration story - which isn't obvious before you decide to write it, because every option is open, but then it's perfect because it's his ultimate enemy, and it's the ultimate crisis.

**Was it a character you still had something to say about?**

» Yeah. He's still a blank slate in a way. When I did him last time I thought, "Oh, he's the opposite of the Doctor". I put him in a black

suit, I gave him a wife instead of a companion. You make him powerful as the Prime Minister whereas the Doctor is always alone. And then of course he's a murderer, whereas the Doctor is not. I took it to those sort of extremes. And when I came to write this, you can play opposites in so many ways. He's the opposite of the Doctor, but now he's powerless, he's wretched, he's practically death incarnate, he's dying.. I'm not giving anything away by saying this, but his resurrection goes wrong, and he's becoming this feral beast. He's wearing a hoodie, he's dirty, he's living among the homeless on Christmas Eve. It's a great thing to show on BBC One at Christmas! He's literally in the wastelands of London, with charity burger vans and stuff like that. Stuff you wouldn't normally see on Christmas Day! The Doctor in contrast becomes this kind of lordly figure in a TARDIS, with friends like Will... So they're different opposites again. And you realise you can play it any way. It's like life and death - the Doctor is life and the Master is death. There's this fantastic special effect where the Master's turning into a skeleton... John Simm's face shimmers and you see all the bones underneath, with bulging eyes and the sinews and everything. He's death, practically, and he really goes for it.



The Vinvooci, just one of many elements in the final specials



Allons-y one more time!



Is Donna looking at the person she's not meant to see ever again?

## "If I was doing a fifth year I'd probably be sitting there going, 'Yeah, the Ice Warriors!'"

**"A Song For Ten" came on my iPod the other day and I felt painfully nostalgic. Does 2005 feel like a long time ago for you?**

» It feels like a million years. And it does fill your whole life, it's that kind of job. It's the size of it. Watching *Confidential* is like watching myself rot! It's actually a record of how exhausting this has been. Phil Collinson said this to me – don't watch season one of *Confidential*, because you'll cry...

**So that's where your inspiration for the Master came from...**

» Ha ha! Exactly! That's what it was – it was me! It's frightening. You think, god, that's visible aging, that



Joshua Naismith, a man with plans



RTD almost brought the Krotons back!

programme's killed you! But it's been brilliant. It's been the best time

**How much of the five years was a grand plan, and how much of it was you busking?**

» I cannot tell you the difference. It's a constant world of *Doctor Who* that my head is in. It was very unplanned in many ways. I'd start more or less every year with a new companion. I'd know whether they were there one year or two years, but I never quite knew how I was going to get rid of them. That was scary, and I loved that. I loved the adrenaline, of surfing the 13 episodes, knowing that Rose would be going in "Doomsday", knowing that Martha would be going in "Last Of The Time Lords", knowing that Donna would go in "Journey's End", but not quite knowing how... And that was really scary. You would literally sit there halfway through the series going, "I don't know how to write them out, and everything's in the wrong place!" And then it turns out you have been putting everything in the right place all along. It's not even your sub-conscious, it's your conscious. You're thinking about it all the time. But it's frighteningly unplanned. All of them, Freema, Catherine and Billie, all of them said "How are you getting rid of me, then?" And I'd be going, "I don't know yet!"

**Was there anything from the classic series that you wanted to bring back, but just never quite had the chance to?**

» If I was doing a fifth year I'd probably be sitting there going, "Alright, yeah, the Ice Warriors!" or something unexpected, like the Macra. I tell you what I would have done, because of what you can do with CGI – the Krotons! [last seen in 1968 Patrick Troughton tale "The Krotons"]. You'd lose that shape completely, but a crystalline monster is a CGI monster waiting to happen. Something like that would be really fun. But, if I'd been dying to do it, then I would have done it. I'm just talking theory now. It's not like I'm walking away from it thinking damn, I never did the Krotons!

**Was there anything from your own time that you were dying to revisit?**

» I thought it was a shame to kill Cassandra. Because Cassandra's magnificent. I could write a whole spin-off series about Cassandra! But her death was lovely, and it would have spoiled it to bring her back. I remember in the third year thinking, oh, you could just do a bit of time travel or introduce her sister or something like that... but that would just ruin it. I loved all those Year Five Billion ones. I was really sad to leave the Year Five Billion. I loved Novice Hain. I always thought you could do a story about Novice Hain as an old cat having been ruler of New New York for many years. But sometimes you get just a little too fannish, sometimes you're just doing that because you like them, you haven't got a story to tell. I liked Elton Pope in "Love & Monsters", and I would have loved to have brought him back, but actually he's perfectly preserved in that one story. That episode's a mad world, and you can't touch it, really, because it's a mad little sphere, and if he'd turned up again with his paving-slab girlfriend, that would have taken some explaining!

**You say it was your job to think about *Doctor Who* every hour of the day. How do you stop thinking about it now?**

» Oh, amazingly easily! What I love is that I'm utterly a fan now. I was in the office on Monday. They're terrible in the office, they've got photos of new monsters and designs and the Doctor and Amy in costume together with... certain characters... and it was just blowing my mind! So I'm loving that. That's all I cling onto now. I saw one thing in this photo, and at two o'clock in the morning I found myself lying in bed thinking about it. "Ooh, why have they done that? Ooh, what does she say to him? Ooh, I wonder what the repercussions of that are..." Like a proper fan! It was brilliant. I was laughing at myself, thinking, "You can't stop!" **SFX**

**"The End Of Time" parts one and two will be on BBC One on Christmas Day and New Year's Day.**

See [www.sfx.co.uk](http://www.sfx.co.uk) for more exclusive chat with Russell T Davies