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THE BLOG

In Praise Of The Moff: On The Legacy Of Doctor Who's Departing Showrunner

We've known this for some time but the fiery vapours swirling around Peter Capaldi's hands during the recent season finale put paid to any lingering doubts. On Christmas Day, both Capaldi (the Doctor since 2014) and Steven Moffat (showrunner since 2010) will leave the Tardis.

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Doctor Who is regenerating.

We've known this for some time but the fiery vapours swirling around Peter Capaldi's hands during the [recent season finale](#) put paid to any lingering doubts. On Christmas Day, both Capaldi (the Doctor since 2014) and Steven Moffat (showrunner since 2010) will leave the TARDIS. Not everyone will be sorry to see them go. In the case of Moffat, a sizeable

minority of the *Doctor Who* fandom has been [agitating for him to depart for years](#) and, if some reports are to be believed, the [BBC is also impatient](#) for his handover to Broadchurch-creator [Chris Chibnall](#).

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For what it's worth, I wish Capaldi had stayed on for a year or two longer. He just gets better with every outing. Moffat, on the other hand, has probably called it right: it is time to depart. But those who are so eager to bundle him out of the door have significantly undervalued his achievements.

Here are seven reasons to celebrate Moffat's seven years in charge:

1. Moffat writes interesting women.

No, really, he does. Starting with Nancy, the teenaged leader of a gang of Blitz kids in *The Empty Child/The Doctor Dances* (2005), Moffat has written a succession of intriguing female characters, from Madame de Pompadour to River Song.

It's true, his judgement has been dismal at times (that kiss-a-gram joke in 2010's *The Eleventh Hour!*) and there's been a tendency to create women who seem to exist only to save the Doctor. But he does seem to have listened to criticism, even if he hasn't always understood it. Clara Oswald deepened considerably as a character in her final season.

Moffat's transformation of the Master into Missy has been an audacious delight and Bill Potts is surely up there with the best Doctor Who companions ever. Credit goes to Michelle Gomez and Pearl Mackie for their astonishing portrayals of these characters, but it must surely go to Moffat as well.

If nothing else, he has riled enough people to [spark debate](#) about the representation of women in *Doctor Who*, both on screen and off. That debate has been needed since at least 1964, when William Hartnell's Doctor advocated that his granddaughter Susan needed ["a jolly good smacked bottom"](#). Whole books can and should be written on this subject (beginning with [Lorna Jowett's *Dancing with the Doctor*](#) (2017), which is highly recommended...)

2. Moffat gave us Doctor Who's first lesbian marriage between a Victorian human (Jenny) and a prehistoric reptile (Madame Vastra).

He also gave us its first pan-sexual character, Captain Jack Harkness, and Bill Potts, its first [subtly, proudly, believably gay companion](#).

3. Moffat's stories are clever.

And that's a good thing. It seems odd now to recall that during the first five years of new *Who* it was Moffat's scripts (*Blink*, *The Girl in the Fireplace*, etc.) that were held up for particular praise. Since then, the qualities for which they were celebrated have become

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[wibbly-wobbly, timey-wimey...](#)

Doctor Who has never been at its best when at its 'easiest' and it has always respected the intelligence of its viewers, young and old. Experimentation and cleverness are part of the deal, as are failed experiments and cleverness that goes too far. If you don't believe me, go and watch [The Mind Robber](#) (1968) or *Warriors' Gate* (1981). And then treat yourself to some [fish fingers and custard](#).

4. Moffat knows how to throw a 50th anniversary party.

By any standards, *The Day of the Doctor* (2013) was a thing of beauty. Not only did it bring [David Tennant and Matt Smith together](#), but it brought back the Zygons, threw in some Daleks and Billie Piper, and treated us to the grouchy, battered, not-to-be-spoken-about [War Doctor](#), played by the late John Hurt. And then there was that scene with [Tom Baker](#)... And the closing moments, with the speech about [going home, the long way round](#)... Not to mention the surprise treat of the online mini-episode, [The Night of the Doctor](#), bringing Paul McGann's Doctor back to the screen after 17 years...

5. Moffat's given us monsters. Lots of them.

And Doctor Who has always been about monsters, hasn't it? Russell T. Davies, for all his brilliance, was responsible for the farting Slitheen and the horribly cutesy Adipose. Moffat's mind spawned the [Weeping Angels](#) and the Silents.

In bringing back classic monsters, Moffat has balanced respect with risk. Fair enough, the big, bright, gravelly-voiced 'new paradigm' Daleks didn't work out and I'm not convinced by the flying, Tony Stark-style Cybermen but the Silurians, the Zygons and the Ice Warriors have all been lovingly and successfully updated.

As a parting gift to Capaldi, he even revived the [Mondasian Cybermen](#) in all their unsettling, Heath Robinson glory.

6. Moffat's words are exquisite. Absolutely exquisite.

His dialogue has wit, his 'catchphrases' really catch ('Are you my mummy?') and he's written some of the most powerful monologues in television history. [The anti-war speech](#) at the end of 2015's *The Zygon Inversion* should be a set text in schools. So should the

'just kind' speech from *The Doctor Falls* (2017). In the age of Trump, Putin, Assad, Kim Jong-un and Islamic State, the world needs words like these.

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He 'gets' *Doctor Who* because - like Davies, Tennant, Capaldi and many others involved in the rebooted series - he was, is, and will always be a fan. His fan instincts have infused every second of his time in charge of the show that he's been accused, by some, of ruining. As *Dr Who* scholar [Matt Hills](#) has written, 'being a fan means being disappointed by the object of fandom as much as it means appreciating it'. In 2018, Moffat will rediscover this. I hope he enjoys the experience.

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