



The Biggest Surprise of my Writing Life

Mark Morris

I'VE BEEN A HUGE FAN of *Doctor Who* since I first saw it in 1967 at the age of four, and for me it's been the gift that keeps on giving, both personally and professionally. *Doctor Who* was the first form of fiction I was ever scared by, and like many creative people of my generation – particularly writers and actors – it not only helped shaped my fictional preferences, but has been a major influence on my work. It was the thrill of being scared by *Doctor Who* that led to me first seeking out, and then writing, my own ghost and horror stories as a child. My first novel *Toady* was published in the autumn of 1989 — just a couple of months before *Doctor Who*'s initial twenty-six-year run on the BBC came to an end.

Toady became a UK bestseller in paperback, and by the time *Doctor Who* came back as a one-off TV movie in 1996, with Paul McGann in the title role, I was well established in the field, with my fifth novel *Mr Bad Face* about to be released in hardback. In the wake of the *Doctor Who* TV movie, BBC Books announced plans to release a range of original *Doctor Who* novels featuring McGann's Doctor, and they gave a friend of mine, David Howe, then a reviewer for *Starburst* magazine, the task of putting together a group of writers to launch the range.

David asked me if I'd be interested in being part of this group, and in 1997 my first *Doctor Who* novel *The Bodysnatchers* was released, twenty-two years after my eleven-year-old self had excitedly bought and devoured *Doctor Who and the Auton Invasion* by Terrance Dicks, which I'd found on a book spinner in our local post office in Huddersfield.



I went along to BBC Books' launch party for the new range in London, where I was lucky enough to meet my childhood hero Terrance Dicks, and tell him how he'd helped set me on my chosen path. I followed *The Bodysnatchers* up with a second *Doctor Who* novel, *Deep Blue*, a couple of years later, and then in 2007 I wrote a book called *Forever Autumn* featuring the tenth Doctor played by David Tennant — at which point a company called Big Finish Productions got in touch.

In 1999 Big Finish had been granted a licence by the BBC to produce official full-cast *Doctor Who* audio dramas, and by 2007 were releasing a new drama every month. When they asked me if I'd consider writing a drama for them I was excited but alarmed. I'd never written a script before — would I be able to do it?

It turns out I would — and I did. I wrote a script called *False Gods*, in which the seventh Doctor, played by Sylvester McCoy, meets Egyptologist Howard Carter. In London for the recording, I turned up excitedly at the studio on the first day, wondering who Big Finish had employed to play the pivotal role of Carter in my first-ever drama script. I was soon to find out. Arriving on his motorbike fifteen minutes later, and striding into studio in his leathers, was a young actor who there was already a real buzz about, and who everyone said was destined to become a star.

His name? Benedict Cumberbatch.