



# Doctor Who: The Writer's Tale - The Final Chapter

*Russell T. Davies , Benjamin Cook*

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When The Writer's Tale was published in autumn 2008, it was immediately embraced as a classic. For this extensively revised and updated paperback edition, Russell T Davies and Benjamin Cook continue their candid and in-depth correspondence to take in work on the last of Russell's 2009 specials - and the end of David Tennant's era as The Doctor - while also looking back to the achievements of the first three seasons. With over 300 pages of all-new material, including new photos and original artwork, The Writer's Tale is a fitting tribute to Russell T Davies' phenomenal achievement in bringing Doctor Who back for a new generation of fans.

## **Doctor Who: The Writer's Tale - The Final Chapter Details**

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# From Reader Review Doctor Who: The Writer's Tale - The Final Chapter for online ebook

## Samwise Diamond says

The Writer's Tale is a must-read for any writers who want to know what it's like working on a huge television production like Doctor Who.

The book consists almost exclusively of emails, particularly between Russell T. Davies (Dr Who show-runner 2005-2009) and Benjamin Cook (journalist from Doctor Who Magazine). These emails span around two years as the show hits its stride and finds itself central in the public eye, raising the stakes for all involved. As such, we see the inception of Davies' episodes from Voyage of the Damned (Xmas 2007) all the way to the specials in 2009 when Russell makes his exit, along with much of the cast and crew. Measures have been put in place to make this book accessible to all, with handy episode keys and 'who's who' lists at the front ensuring even those who are unfamiliar with the show can pick it up and read without any confusion.

Throughout the book, Ben asks a lot of questions about writing which prompt Russell into giving his insights and opinions, some of which the reader may agree with, others perhaps not. Russell emphasises that his approach is by no means 'the right approach' just the way that works for him.

Yet this ongoing Q and A is unlikely to be what you'll remember the most from reading the book. Moreover you'll remember the fascinating details from all aspects of production. You will learn how budget and cast availability can shape story. You will learn what spoilers the crew fought tooth and nail to keep from the press (which is as entertaining when they fail as when they succeed). You will see behind the curtain to find out why writing can end up like cramming for Finals, and how this pressure cooker builds up and develops (and sometimes extinguishes) ideas conceived in a writer's mind. Illustrations and photo sections are a welcome accompaniment, bringing extra life to these funny and varied tales from the offices and on set.

What strikes me about the book is how personal it is. Davies doesn't hold back in his emails, boldly announcing who he fancies in the business (which probably wouldn't fly in 2018), and offering intimate discussion on growing up as a gay man, as well as details on his mother's death. All of these stories create a vivid and rich picture of Davies as a person, which is ultimately why the book works so well.

I'd say the book's biggest weakness is a lack of variety in its form. Centring the narrative around one email chain ('The Great Correspondence') can be fatiguing at times, and I found myself longing for more looks at other conversations and material between other departments, of which there is only a little. The love-hate relationship with the press being my favourite plot-thread, I would have really appreciated more images of the huge sensationalist headlines mentioned in the text as they wreak havoc for the BBC.

Overall an enjoyable and immersive read. 4 stars.

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## Holly Heisey says

I'm a huge fan of Russell T. Davies' big, epic writing in the new Doctor Who, so as a writer I welcomed this

chance to peek inside his head, through his email correspondence with journalist Benjamin Cook. What I found surprised me, enlivened me, heartened me; made me laugh and cry and say, "yes, I know that exactly!" He's candid, sordid, "big and blousy," and funny. He doesn't sugar coat things; many parts are painfully honest.

But here unfolds the twin story of one of the most successful shows of the decade and a while-I'm-writing journey of the man who made it happen. The book reads with all the nail-biting gusto of a good novel. It's a look at writing from a vantage seldom seen, from the writer's desk itself, where choices are made that effect, in Davies' case, literally millions. It's a story of what, and why, and sometimes how. It's a story of writing and life and just how much they're intertwined.

Read this book if you are a writer. Read it if you're a Doctor Who fan, or just a science fiction fan in general. It's worth every page.

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### **Lamilla says**

Finished part two in a day on Kindle. Want my own hardcover/paperback badly

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### **Magdalena says**

Amazing adventure. Voyage not only into great screenwriter's head, but also into life of very interesting, very kind, very funny person. Two weeks ago I didn't especially like RTD. I love RTD now. Hard work. Sleepless nights. Doubts. Constant strive for perfection, for improvement. But above all - fun and happiness, because it's the best TV show ever created, isn't it? And pride. Quite justified. I really enjoyed reading about the creative process, abandoned ideas, evolving stories. About Davies' vision. (Although Kate Winslet as River Song - maybe it's too much. :D) Not only for Whovians, but for all people fascinated by act of creation, television and way of thinking of this talented, impossible man.

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### **Persephone says**

Okay, I'll be straight with you. If you're not a follower of the sci-fi/fantasy television series *Doctor Who*, there's probably little reason for you to read this book (or this review, for that matter). It's not just about *Doctor Who*, of course. It's about British television in the early part of the first decade of this century, and, above all, it's about writing, but to get to that, you'll be wading up to your waist in *Doctor Who* and if you're not a Whovian, you'll just get lost, trust me.

Russell T Davies is the guy who resurrected *Doctor Who*. Or ruined it, depending on whom you ask. I'm married to the Resident Fan Boy who seems to have been moving into the latter camp ever since we were exposed to the final four specials that rounded off Davies' tenure in the New Who universe that he created. (The Resident Fan Boy is a Classic Whovian, devoted to the series as it was between 1963 and 1988, although he'll watch anything Who-related.)

Now, I wasn't crazy about those specials either. However, I can credit Davies with making me a New Whovian in the first place. Like many current female fan-girls, I came to DW after watching Tenth Doctor David Tennant in the saucy biopic *Casanova*, penned by Davies. My reaction at the time: "Hey...isn't David Tennant the new Doctor? Wait a minute...Russell T Davies wrote this? Didn't he write *Bob and Rose* ? He's writing the new *Doctor Who* too?!?"

So I started watching the new *Doctor Who*, then I started staying up late to catch reruns of Davies' first Who season, with Christopher Eccleston as the Ninth Doctor and...

...I became a prime candidate to read *A Writer's Tale: The Final Chapter* which covers the period when Davies began writing his final full season of *Doctor Who* while beginning a long, detailed and deliberate series of e-mails with *Doctor Who Magazine* writer and journalist Ben Cook. This gives fans of the show a peephole into the shadowland of roads not taken in character development, plot, casting, and special effects (usually the first to go to save money).

For example, early on in the correspondence (back when it was going to be just a Doctor Who Magazine article and not a 600+ page tome), Davies describes his ideas for the Doctor's companion to follow Freema Agyeman's Martha Jones. (Again, if you're persisting in reading this and you're not a Whovian, you really should stop. Really.) He envisions an older woman in her thirties as a change to the twenty-somethings usually traveling through time and space with the quadricentenarian Doctor, a lady who has just been jilted by her fiancé. As these ideas are forming, news comes that Catherine Tate, who played one-off companion Donna Noble, will be returning for a whole season. Donna is thirty-something and has been jilted by her fiancé (who actually betrayed her before being fed to gigantic infant alien spiders), but now Davies must come up with a re-introduction, rather than an introduction.

And you've got to hand it to him, this guy is bursting with ideas. I spent the book thinking: "Ooooh...that would have been nice..." or "Gee, I'm glad we were spared that..." It's probably the tantalizing promise of what a story could be and the the fear that it will fall short that results in what seems to be a lot of procrastination on Davies' part. I'm beginning to wonder if this is an essential part of writing, remembering the late Douglas Adam's classic line about loving deadlines and the "whooshing sound they make as they fly by". I certainly felt a pang of recognition myself, every time Davies confesses using up precious writing time doing unrelated work or watching television, even though I have neither Davies' talent nor the responsibility for the success of an iconic television show.

Of course, having this responsibility means having not only talent and imagination, but a healthy ego and a thick skin. Davies has the first three in spades (and enough humorous self-deprecation to temper the ego). However, for all his protestations to the contrary, he has a surprisingly thin skin, particularly when it comes to the slings and arrows of outraged DW purists. When Helen Raynor (writer of two double-parter episodes) fails to resist the temptation of checking out Outpost Gallifrey (a vehement Doctor Who online fan forum), she is badly burned and Davies howls in her defense:

Helen is in a delicate position in that she's only just started, and she's on the verge of being really very good - and now she finds herself ruined by this wall of hostility. It makes me furious.

Now, I think both he and she are being a bit silly. Raynor's episodes were certainly not amongst my favourites, but apparently they were vastly popular so somebody must have like them. Davies claims you can't resist seeing what people are saying about you online. I say you can and you must and any DW writer

who is misguided enough to venture on to a Doctor Who fan forum must be bonkers, anyway. It's like a fight club in there; I avoid forums on any topic like the plague. I do, however, engage happily in post-episode analyses of Doctor Who episodes on other people's blogs. I think it's one of the pleasures of being a fan. We certainly don't expect Mr Davies, Ms Raynor nor anyone else involved in the show to drop by, take our advice or get their feelings hurt. Most smart actors don't read reviews; smart writers should probably do the same.

What did I learn from this book? I learned that Russell T Davies wrote not only his own episodes, but as the show's head writer re-wrote most of the episodes by other writers. Some evidently didn't mind and their comments on the process are included; a couple probably did. (I don't think Davies re-wrote episodes by Stephen Moffat who eventually took over the series from him.) Again, I was stunned by the quantity of ideas generated by this man; many of which were not used.

Bottom line? While anyone who is not a fan of *Doctor Who* would not get this book at all, it is pretty well irresistible for anyone who does love this extraordinary television show, whether they're a Russell T Davies fan or not. All Whovians owe a debt to him.

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### **Larry Zieminski says**

I loved this book. Consisting entirely of e-mails between Russell T. Davies (show-runner for the New Doctor Who Series through the first 4 seasons + year of specials) and Benjamin Cook (journalist from the Doctor Who Magazine), we given a behind the scenes look at how the last two years of Doctor Who (under Davies) came together.

The most interesting aspect of the book is seeing how insecure Mr. Davies could be, despite the brilliant work he produced. He's also quite the procrastinator, something I could relate to a lot.

I don't think everyone will love the book as much as I did...you really have to enjoy the behind the scenes look at the writing process. I'm sure some readers won't care about that...instead looking for juicy tidbits about the production (there are quite a few of those as well, but it isn't the bulk of this large book).

I highly recommend this to Doctor Who fans who are interesting in the creative process. I also recommend it to anyone who wants to know what running a large show like this entails.

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### **Richard Wright says**

Oh dear. The original *Writer's Tale* in hardback was in my top five books in 2008. In it, Russell T. Davies gives a year's worth of correspondence detailing agonies and wonders of writing and producing his final regular season of Doctor Who. I loved it, and declared it to be one of only a handful of books I've read about writing that I needed to read. Now comes the paperback release, except it contains another three hundred pages, continuing the story through the year in which he produced the five Doctor Who Specials leading to his departure from the series. I started the new material last night, and finished it this morning. It's as bloody brilliant as the first half, inspiring, and touching, and true. If you're a writer, of anything, you should read it. It's also given me my first epiphany in ten years about my own writing, a real mental evolution that knocks down so many self-imposed doors I'm a bit staggered at what I might actually be able to do next. I can't

guarantee that will happen for you, but Jesus, it's an astonishing feeling. The epiphany also doesn't come from writing 'tips', but just engaging with the mentality and effort Davies shows through his writings, from the sum of his thoughts and struggles. I won't put it into this year's top five, but that's only going to be because I did so in 2008, and doing so twice doesn't seem fair to the other books...

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## **Jay Bell says**

This book is a series of emails between Russel T. Davies and journalist Benjamin Cook. I found that disappointing at first, but most of the emails are long rants from Davies about what it is like to be a writer, so it isn't far from what a proper book from him might have been like. I think writers would get the most from this book, since the interesting tidbits on Doctor Who are few and far in between.

This new edition contains 300 pages of new material, which mostly consist of Davies feeling stressed out and tired along with random chitchat between the two. There is more discussion on Doctor Who, but this is mostly Davies reporting ideas he had that we've since seen on screen.

What I found most disappointing about this book is how it only covers Series 4 of the show and on. It would have been so much more interesting to read about the process of reviving Doctor Who and bringing it back to screens. Maybe some day that story will be properly written down.

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## **Ben Dutton says**

There are many hundreds of books about writing – some of them are very good indeed. When I taught creative writing at university, I used to wax lyrical about Stephen King's *On Writing*, but also about E.M. Forster's *Aspects of the Novel* and Dorothea Brande's *Becoming a Writer*. To that inestimable list I can now add *The Writer's Tale* by Doctor Who head Russell T Davies.

When this book first appeared in 2008, it was hailed as a masterpiece. Included in top ten lists at the end of the year, appearing on Richard and Judy's Book Club list and read by millions of Doctor Who fans, I was a little wary that it would be too populist, contain not nearly enough about the actual writing process. I did not buy it then. When Russell T Davies completed his final episodes for David Tennant, they updated the book, and it was declared even richer in content. Now I had to have a look.

Constructed around an email correspondence between RTD (as he's known) and Doctor Who Monthly editor Benjamin Cook – he requested RTD to deconstruct his writing process over the course of one episode that became a two year analysis in writing, living and thinking. That this is a book about Doctor Who is almost incidental: the lessons one can learn from this invaluable tome can be applied to any form of TV writing. As someone looking to begin a career in the BBC very soon, it has been an eye-opener and primer for what I can expect.

It is also very, very funny. This was the biggest surprise – though it shouldn't have been, for RTD's scripts have always been funny (a small aside: I've followed RTD's writing career since 1999 when *Queer as Folk* showed me that there was more to TV than the serial killer dramas and dull action movies my family thoroughly enjoyed. I think I enjoyed that show all the more as I had to watch it in secret, at two in the morning, and couldn't talk to anybody about it as all my friends and family were/are homophobic and so I

related to Nathan Malone and his journey, and boy did I laugh with them too) and this book is just as funny: his lift journey at the NT Awards with Liz Sladen and the rest made me buckle over with splitting sides.

If one has even the slightest interest in writing, Doctor Who, the television industry, then *The Writer's Tale* is an absolute must. I'd recommend you watch the finished products of David Tennant's final episodes as *The Doctor*, as it illuminates those moments wonderfully: and made me keen to sit through them all again.

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### **Shannon Roberts says**

"I only write to find out about myself, and I'll only achieve that if I'm honest."

I'd always admired Davies. I was a big Doctor Who fan; while I enjoyed Moffit's tenure as show-runner, Davies will always be \*my\* writer (well...possibly him and Cartmel).

But to get an inside glimpse of Davies' process...to have another writer, and a damn good one, talk about his struggles, his fears, his procrastinations--as well as his triumphs and successes...I just don't think there's another book on writing out there that's nearly so reassuring, so validating, so RELIEVING as *The Writer's Tale*.

I took months to read this. One month in, I found the courage to start putting some words of my own to paper. As I continue to write, I will probably continue to refer back to this book. It's the most quotable, candid discussion about writing, with none of the pretension of a book about "how to write."

If you're a writer...read this. Not only will you find it, I think, tremendously reassuring, you'll find it USEFUL. Davies has Ideas about Writing, and frankly, I think they're all correct (or maybe I just like that a famous person happens to agree with me). This is such a wonderfully enriching read, that puts into words so many of the things we instinctually FEEL about writing, but can't quite say...seriously, just pick it up. Nothing I can tell you will do it justice, so just trust me on this.

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### **Marcus Gipps says**

I've always liked Russell T Davies' writing - I've seen everything since *Queer as Folk*, and greatly enjoyed his Doctor Who novel *Damaged Goods*. I'm also a Who fan, so it probably wasn't hugely surprising that I was very very excited about the return of the series back in 2005. Luckily for me, I've generally enjoyed it, so I don't know why I didn't read the original version of this book - the idea of Davies writing about his writing process, and the production of such a successful show, wouldn't normally pass me by. Still, every cloud - when this greatly expanded edition came out, I remembered my failure to pick up the hardback, and had a go at this one instead. It's a fascinating read (well, if you like Doctor Who, or have an interest in the making of modern television), surprisingly honest and self-critical. I know some people don't like Davies' self-promotion and that he can sometimes come across as arrogant, but the version that appears here is very human, and very self-aware. A very brave decision to allow this to be published - I can only imagine what got left out! - and a deeply engaging, and intelligent, read.

I read a paperback at work before Christmas, and forgot to blog about it. Bad Marcus. Out now, ISBN: 9781846078613.



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## **Katherine Sas says**

This book is not for Doctor Who fans.

I mean, it is. Of course it is. It's co-written by one of the great Doctor Who writers and a columnist for Doctor Who magazine, chronicling a three year period of making the show, and they constantly talk about the process of making Doctor Who.

But really, this book isn't only (or even primarily) about Doctor Who. If you are interested in writing, or the writing process, this book is for you. If you're interested in the aesthetics and production of TV, too. In a nutshell, this book is about artists, and work, and self-doubt, and self-confidence, and actors, and producers, and fans, and fandom, and critics, and media, and journalists, and politics, and faith, and humor, and life.

Oh, and Doctor Who. That too.

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## **Angela says**

I absolutely loved this book. So much so, that I began rationing the final few chapters to make it last longer. It gives a real insight into the creative process of one of my favourite show. It really dispels the myth of the professional writer, sitting down in their office at a set time and typing the whole day away. I love the fact that Russell T Davies appears to approach writing episodes in the same way I approached student essays, (minus the coffee and cigarettes). The idea that one of the most successful writers on British television spends his time finding new ways to avoid writing and hoping that leaving it to the last minute will provide adrenaline fuelled inspiration is, (to use what appears to be his favourite word) a HOOT!

Reading between the lines of the, no doubt highly edited correspondence, I get the sense however, that working with him as an executive producer was far from fun at times. He clearly doesn't suffer fools gladly (his least favourite phrase) and you can see hints of the attitude that was rumoured to have Christopher Eccleston running for the hills after one series on the show.

Benjamin Cook does his best not to come over as a complete fan boy, but fails spectacularly at times. Though his questions to Russell do become braver as the book progresses, clearly mirroring their working relationship. There is also a shift in tone in the later chapters. These were written after the publication of the original book and you can see that both writers are now acutely aware that they are writing for actual publication, even adding exposition emails to fill the gaps of conversations they've had in person. This makes it seem less personal than the majority of the book, but no less enjoyable.

Reading the book so long after the event it covers adds a different dimension as well. We now know, just how well (or not?) Steven Moffat was, at taking over the series and it's a little sad reading Davies excitement about moving to LA, knowing that before long, his partner's illness would have him returning to the UK. All in all, I think this is one of the most enjoyable books I've read for a while and a great read for anyone interested in writing or TV production. It certainly inspired me, hence the unusually long review.

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## **David says**

Two years worth of email correspondence between Doctor Who showrunner Russell T. Davies and some

spod from Dr Who magazine, that ends up as a writing guide that's actually worth reading. These are dispatches that come direct from the front line of writing a hugely successful television show, and they trace many of Davies' ideas from formation to onscreen realisation, and give a great insight into the pressures, the panic and the immense workload that occasionally drove him to the edge of despair.

Towards the end of the book he writes about having caught a repeat of his episode *The Sound of Drums* on BBC3. "Was I on drugs when I wrote this?" he asks, echoing many who often criticised his style of writing for the show - often characterised as being brash, messy and unsubtle if not outright bonkers. I've been one of those critics, but, you know what, I take it all back. Actually, that's not entirely true, but I do have a newfound respect for the man after reading this book. For me, there's still too much running and shouting and exhausting mad energy in some - but by no means all - of his "big, blousy" episodes, but learning about the man's creative process and the sheer turnover of ideas has been revelatory.

In his email replies to Benjamin Cook's questions, Davies is open, direct and typically ebullient. In many he describes at length about his technique and what he has learnt from his years of scriptwriting; in others he's merely sighing over Russell Tovey or some other male guest actor (if you want to know why sex has, for better or worse, crept into Doctor Who's scripts since its relaunch - well, it's because he seems preoccupied by sex). But he is always completely entertaining, and this book beats every dry, plodding how-to-write-for-TV manual out there.

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## **Michael Mills says**

On his *Who's Round* podcast (in which he interviews various people who've been involved in *Doctor Who* over the years), Toby Hadoke got very annoyed with those listeners who only downloaded the episodes in which he interviewed Russell T Davies.

I do feel for Hadoke but I understand why listeners reacted in that way: it's not just that Davies was far more notable a contributor than Geoffrey J. Cravat and most of the others Hadoke has interviewed (as showrunner from 2005 to 2010, he oversaw the series' revival and arguably most popular period), it's that he is also one of the best interviewees out there.

So *The Writer's Tale*, a record of the emails sent between Davies and journalist Benjamin Cook, over the latter years of Davies's time showrunning *Doctor Who* is a real treat.

If you're a fan of the show there's all the behind the scenes gossip and factoids you could hope for (Dennis Hopper's abortive role in the 2007 Christmas special; Davies's original low-budget plan for David Tennant's finale; Penny Carter, the companion who wasn't) but the real joy of the book is getting 700 pages of Davies's thoughts on narrative, representation, the TV industry, and everything in between.

Deliberately neither a behind the scenes guide nor an instruction manual on writing, it is a record of the process of writing as told from Davies's perspective. You don't have to agree with him, you don't have to emulate him, you don't even have to like him, but when you disagree, dissimulate or dislike it'll likely be in the understanding that it is Davies himself who has given you half the tools to argue against him. You may despair at his endless last-minute rushes to write his scripts, but it's because of him that you'll understand *why* that complicates matters and makes other people's lives more difficult. He's not short on self awareness.

He's also very, very funny, which helps.

Special shoutout also to interviewer and editor Benjamin Cook, who's the co-author of this book but too easily overlooked. He has an almost tabloid sensibility – but in this context that's actually a very, very good thing. So often in this correspondence he picks Davies up on points or off-hand comments that many would automatically shy away from out of politeness or fear of confrontation; Davies's reflection on his own grief at his mother's death is one of the most moving things I've read in a long time, and it's prompted by Cook asking him flat out why he's not come to terms with it.

Writing, Davies says, is about hammering away at your brain until you find some form of words that feels true to life as you have lived it. This book, as much as his TV scripts, is an exercise in that. God I wish he would write a novel; it'd probably kill me.

If you're a *Doctor Who* fan, this book is a no-brainer. If you've never even heard of a Dalek, but are interested in storytelling, put it at the top of your TBR pile. And always make time for a Russell T Davies interview.

Marvellous.

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