

THE ARTS

Last bus for Eldorado



Picture: STEPHEN SHEPHERD

Yzen Eng can't accept 'Eldorado' has been scrapped

THE MAN who drives the Number 7 bus to Russell Square had been ruminating for days on the injustice of the BBC in axing his favourite soap. So he put up some posters on the bus and at each end of the route he got out of his cab and started asking the passengers for signatures. Four thousand names later, 32-year-old Yzen Eng's Save Eldorado Campaign had 1,000 members, a campaign minibus, a computer database, a newsletter and regional offices in London, Cardiff, Manchester, Glasgow, Tyne-side, Hull, Skegness and Northern Ireland.

But last night the credits rolled and the little golden *Eldorado* sun slid into the sea for the final time. So how does Eng feel now? "I feel very motivated. What we want to do now is broaden and strengthen the campaign," he says. "We have an unstoppable momentum which will eventually force Alan Yentob to reverse his ill-judged decision."

So there's a chance of a relaunch then? "Don't be

silly," says the BBC firmly. "It's over. The last episode has been filmed. It's never being made again." They point to the lyrics of the special *Eldorado* recast:

*It was over before it had begun
And often love can go that way.*

But if you're really in love, the last goodbye is hard to take. "I just don't accept the BBC's decision," says Eng. "No decision is irreversible."

It is true that sometimes, when the BBC says "no", it really means "maybe". Several thousand *Dr Who* fans have lobbied for the return of the Time Lord ever since the BBC closed the Tardis door in 1989. After four years of being palmed off with repeats by an intransigent Corporation, a 90-minute special is planned, and a whole new series mooted. "We're very excited," says 24-year-old Tim Burchall

Eldorado is dead, but a Chinese bus driver fights on. Jane Thynne reports on viewers who won't let go of their favourite shows

from Bristol, with the steady fortitude of the seasoned campaigner accustomed to false hopes being dashed. By day he is an insurance salesman, but in his spare time he writes for *Times Lives*, one of numerous fanzines dedicated entirely to the appreciation of *Dr Who*.

Campaigns may need political muscle. The Save Radio 4 Long Wave Campaign gathered at least 30,000 supporters, several of them MPs, and was instrumental in the BBC governors' stepping in to ensure the survival of Radio 4 on both wave-bands for the time being.

But, above all, campaigns take patience, as fans of *Take the High Road* lobbying for the return of the Scottish Television soap on the

national network are already beginning to realise.

It was the sheer duplicity of the BBC that got Eng going. "I saw Alan Yentob on *Right to Reply*. It was three days before he axed it and he said the decision had not been made. Who makes a decision of that magnitude in three days?"

Eng is not a stereotype fan of soaps. "I detest them, actually. My favourite viewing is things like *The Late Show* and *Newsnight*. I used to watch *Eldorado* for a laugh, but I found myself laughing less and less. The cast withstood a hammering from the critics, then this guy came along and pulled the plug. I thought the viewers should have their say."

Born in Britain to Chinese

parents, Eng was once a professional tennis coach. Three years ago he began driving the Number 23 and Number 7 to Liverpool Street and Russell Square. In October he hopes to study music as a mature student. Even then, he says, "I don't think I will ever be able to give up my *Eldorado* campaign."

"My driver's uniform has been invaluable. It made it easy to go up to complete strangers in the street and say, 'Do you want to save *Eldorado*?' This bus driver can change hats, too, and converse in the business-speak which is now mandatory at senior levels in the Corporation. "What the BBC is doing goes against all the laws of business," he says. "You've got a long-term investment here and a rising consumer base. The product is improving all the time and the general trend is upwards."

The campaign is taking its

toll, however. "I'm under severe stress. Every spare moment is taken up by *Eldorado*. I can't move at home because of the mountains of paper. I've got one pound left in my building society account, I can hardly afford to eat and I'm behind with the rent."

Why does he do it? It's not as though there weren't enough Save *Eldorado* campaigns. The Sussex-based *Eldorado* Appreciation Society has collected 1,000 signatures. A posse of ex-pats in Gibraltar has fired off angry letters to the BBC. Another Save *Eldorado* is run by Heather White, sister of the actress who plays Gwen Lockhead. Gwen Lamb in Middlesbrough has been ringing Alan Yentob four times a day for months.

Eng is diplomatic. "We don't want any credit. In a year's time when Alan Yentob has changed his mind and recommissioned *Eldorado* and it's in the top three, we want everyone to say what an intelligent man he is to correct an error of judgment and make a brave decision."