



**W**hen I recently talked to Quatermass creator Nigel Kneale (*an interview will appear in a future Starburst*) he told me: "I was asked to write for *Doctor Who* at the very outset, when (*the BBC's Head of Drama*) Sydney Newman had first got the inspiration from heaven. It seemed to be such a rotten idea that I said I wouldn't do it. It was meant to be an adventure series with a central character who was able to dodge about in time and space. Which seemed to be a typical crummy producer's idea. It wasn't the sort of thing that would ever be a writer's idea. It was the sort of idea one had, sitting in the bath, and you say *Oh, no!* and you turn the tap off. *How ghastly!* And you forget it as quickly as possible and you try to think of something good. Unfortunately, that was where Newman's thinking stopped".

It's not difficult to understand why Nigel Kneale had misgivings. *Dr Who* is

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virtually an sf version of *Crossroads*; a format that allows an endless number of characters to wander in and out of the programme with an endless number of problems. Even worse, *Dr Who* was to have pretensions towards "seriousness" with the Doctor meeting historical characters such as Robespierre and Marco Polo. What saved the series was a combination of four things.

The programme was transmitted in the "family viewing" spot on early Saturday evening (*discussed by Tom Baker in Starburst 10*). Experienced writers like Terry Nation were commissioned to write the show, which was produced by the BBC Drama Department, not the Children's Department. The enormous success of the Daleks (*discussed by Terry Nation in Starburst 6*) undoubtedly changed the direction and emphasis of the series. And William Hartnell made the part his own.

The first Doctor is usually remembered as being a benign old

One of the longest running sf tv shows, BBC's *Doctor Who*, is also one of the most fluid. The series format, and even the hero, are constantly undergoing revision. *Starburst* presents a brief history by John Fleming, chronicling . . .

# THE CHANGING FACE OF DOCTOR WHO

grandfather figure—a role copied but misinterpreted by Peter Cushing in the two *Dr Who* feature films. Hartnell's version of the Doctor included a hard streak, although he no doubt had a heart (or, rather, two hearts) of gold, the character was very, very stern. The audience was conditioned to accept this characterisation from Hartnell because of his previous typecasting as military sergeant-major types: notably in his long-running ITV series *The Army Game*. In the very early *Dr Who* stories, there was even the hint that the Doctor was not the hero.

The heroes were really his companions—playing amiable, uninformed Watsons to his cold, aloof Holmes. The grown-ups could identify with humans Barbara and Ian; younger viewers could identify with the strange child Susan; but the central character was a distant, enigmatic old man who might even occasionally stoop to murder.

In the very first story *An Unearthly Child* (1963), the Doctor and his companions have to deal with an injured caveman who has been following them. When the Doctor is left alone with the man, he lifts a large rock and is obviously thinking of killing the inconvenient stranger with it. At the last minute, Ian arrives and interrupts his reverie.

As the programme developed, the Doctor did become more benign and dry humour did creep into the character. But still, as long as producer Verity Lambert and script editor David Whitaker controlled the show, the Doctor was a

**The Doctor is arrested for breaking into a police box.**

rather crochety old man and the character had a distinctly hard edge.

The humour was epitomised in a one-off Christmas show in the middle of *The Dalek Master Plan* (1965). In a whimsical episode, barely connected to the main storyline, the Doctor is arrested by a member of the Liverpool constabulary for trying to break into a police box (the TARDIS). The humour, of course, greatly increased when William Hartnell was replaced by Patrick Troughton.

When Hartnell decided to leave, there were serious thoughts of cancelling the series altogether. After, all, it would be like replacing Jack Warner as Dixon of Dock Green. Would the audience stand for it? Even Patrick Troughton was initially dubious, feeling that maybe the *Dr Who* series "had been done to death" and wouldn't last.

Producer Innes Lloyd guided the successful changeover from Hartnell to Troughton and took the brave step of totally changing the Doctor's personality as well as his face. There were long discussions about what the new Doctor should be like and, at one point, Troughton even suggested blacking the



Opposite: *Dr Who* (William Hartnell) and two strange creatures called *Sensorites*. Above: *The three faces of Dr Who* (left to right, Patrick Troughton, Jon Pertwee and William Hartnell). Below: *Dr Who* (Jon Pertwee) and the *Ogrons*. Below right: *Dr Who* (Tom Baker) and his assistant, also of the race of *Time Lords*, *Romana*



character up like Al Jolson or playing him as a windjammer captain with wild hair. But Sydney Newman had Charlie Chaplin in mind.

Troughton's characterisation, as it emerged, was influenced by that idea. It was much more whimsical, much more lighthearted than the rather grave and schoolmaster-ish Hartnell version. Troughton's gimmick was playing his recorder, something he did whenever he wanted to think—rather like Holmes with his violin. It was the second Doctor, too, who pioneered the celebrated sonic screwdriver, a wonderful and totally unexplained device which seemed able to do anything—a sort of pocket-sized K-9.

The early *Dr Who* stories retained the originally-intended balance between

history and science-fiction. There were stories where the Doctor met Marco Polo, Robespierre, the Crusaders, the Romans and the Aztecs. But, equally, there were outlandish fantasies set on other worlds in which the Doctor was pitted against bizarre monsters. In his time as producer, Innes Lloyd deliberately steered the series

**"I want Dr Who to have less history and more guts."**

firmly towards science fantasy. He said: "I want *Dr Who* to have less history and more obvious guts". He introduced adversaries such as the Cybermen. But basically, during Lloyd's time, the stories were centred less on monsters than on some mysterious hidden menace which

might—incidentally—involve monsters. For instance, the Chameleons story *The Faceless Ones* (1967) set at Gatwick Airport, in which aliens were gradually replacing human beings with alien replicas—basically a paranoid *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* idea.

When Peter Bryant took over as producer, the monsters arrived with a vengeance. There were Daleks, the Cybermen, the Yeti, the Ice Warriors and various assorted robots.

Meanwhile, Patrick Troughton's characterisation of the Doctor had developed into a kind of cosmic Columbo. He was a rather dishevelled, rather vague, tramp-like figure who seemed to be continually encountering

**Hartnell's Doctor could be abrasive and rude.**

military commanders facing alien invasions. They, of course, were in command and were clearly intellectually superior to this rather oddly-dressed intruder who stood in corners and asked odd questions. But, in fact, the Doctor knew exactly what was happening from the start and took a delight in slowly lifting the scales from unbelievers' eyes. However, where the Hartnell character could be abrasive and deliberately rude, delivering lines like "Your arrogance is almost as great as your ignorance," the playful Troughton character went in for amiable send-ups and subtle deflation.

This tendency to deflate authority was inherited by the third Doctor, Jon Pertwee, who was mostly Earth-bound with UNIT. Deflating officers and politicians by showing them to be inept bunglers, he was harsher than Troughton but less abrupt than Hartnell. Pertwee's dignity contrasted with Troughton's



Above: *The Doctor* (Tom Baker) at the controls of the *TARDIS*. Right: *The Doctor* (Jon Pertwee) and the alien warrior, *Linx* clash in *The Time Warrior*.



Left: *Dr Who* (Tom Baker) and his assistant, *Sarah* (Elizabeth Sladen). Below: *The Doctor* (Jon Pertwee) battles one of the fearsome *Sea Devils*.



apparent anarchy and the other thing he brought to the part was gadgetry. The new Doctor was much more gadget-orientated than the old (a touch of the actor entering the character) and, in one episode of Pertwee's final story *Planet of the Spiders* (1974), the production team let him run riot with every bit of hardware they could get their hands on—an autogyro, helicopter,

**Jon Pertwee helped to design the Whomobile.**

speedboat, hovercraft etc. Towards the end of Pertwee's tenure, he also helped design the Whomobile, which first appeared in the story *Invasion of the Dinosaurs* (1973). It was a flying saucer-type car for the Doctor to play with and, possibly, a sign that stranding the character on a realistic Earth was causing some concept-problems for the more fantasy-minded scriptwriters.

When Jon Pertwee decided to leave the series, various actors were considered (including Jim Dale), but the part finally



went to Tom Baker (see *Starburst 10*).

After the imperious Hartnell, the playful Troughton and the commanding Pertwee came the fantastic Baker with those large alien eyes and a return to the humorous characterisation of the second Doctor. A global disaster like the end of the world won't ruffle him at all. But, if he runs out of jelly babies, there's a panic.

One of the strengths of the *Dr Who* series is its flexibility. The central idea seems to have taken such a strong hold on the audience that even the details of the format can be changed without losing viewer-loyalty.

The original Doctor's companions were two adults and a youngster. The Doctor's grand-daughter Susan was originally intended to be a tough little *Avengers*-type girl who was able to communicate telepathically with the Doctor. But this idea was dropped before production began. Susan became an ordinary teenage girl with whom other teenage girls could identify. The original three companions soon developed into two: one female and one male. Latterly, that has developed into a single girl companion.

The arrival of K-9 is also rather worrying. Although he is extraordinarily popular with the viewers (at one time, he was getting as much fan mail as Tom Baker), he could turn into a crutch for the scriptwriters. Why bother to write the Doctor into an apparent corner and have him extricate himself imaginatively when you can just have K-9 rescue him? If the Doctor's in a cliff-hanging situation, it doesn't seem so serious because the audience knows the omnipotent and omnipresent K-9 is around. There is also the problem that K-9's tremendous powers weaken the threat posed by any

of *Dr Who*'s adversaries—to such an extent that, in the new season, it apparently proved impossible to work with K-9 and the Daleks in the same story and K-9 had to be (unconvincingly) written-out for the duration.

Even the Daleks are not universally liked. At least two of the actors playing the Doctor hated working with them because they felt the deadly pepperpots had boring characters. All a Dalek wants to do is kill you and take over the world. In fact it's not quite that simple. The Daleks do have motivation. They're malformed creatures forced to live their lives inside a cramped metal casing, never able to walk in the sunlight, forever seeing through their restricted eyepiece a world in which human beings are physically unrestricted. No wonder they hate people, want to kill them, want to enslave them. The Doctor explained as much, once.

Nevertheless, humanoid villains certainly offer a more obvious and

**The Meddling Monk was a mirror image of the Doctor.**

immediate psychological interest. The Master, for example, was, in fact, got a higher degree in Cosmic Sciences. And there was the wonderful Meddling Monk, a sort of mirror-image of Troughton's Doctor. In fact, he wasn't so much villainous as mischief-making. One of his little ploys was to deposit a small sum of money in a bank, then nip forward a few hundred years in time to collect a fortune in compound interest. He also had the brilliant thought of giving Tudor England television so that everyone could watch Hamlet: a worthy idea of which the Doctor disapproved.

Again, the Meddling Monk was the

Doctor's intellectual equal: a pre-requisite for humanoid villains. He was even one-up on the Doctor by having a fully-working TARDIS.

In the second episode of the *Dr Who* series, William Hartnell came out of his TARDIS, looked back at the police box and muttered, "Why didn't it change? Good heavens!" The original idea was that the TARDIS would blend into its surroundings, materialising in the 1960s as a police box, ancient Greece as a Doric column, a forest glade as an oak tree etc. But the police box seemed such a successful idea that it was retained and it was simply said that the TARDIS had a materialisation fault. The Doctor also had

**No one can know for certain where the series is heading and what will happen.**

no control over where he went in space and time (a necessary plot device). The TARDIS time circuits were later repaired by a short-sighted scriptwriter and now a piece of circuitous logic has had to be used to justify the original idea of uncontrollability: The Black Guardian of Time is chasing the Doctor—if the Doctor knows where the TARDIS is going, then there's a chance the Guardian might—so a randomiser device has been constructed and no-one can know where the machine will land next.

With actors, producers and script editors changing fairly regularly, a randomiser device has also been built into the series and no-one can know for certain where it is heading where it will land and what will happen. Especially as, on past experience, it seems likely that star Tom Baker and producer Graham Williams may soon think it's time to be moving on to other areas.

