**THE NEW DR WHO**

**JOHN FLEMING TALKS TO THE NEW PRODUCER OF THE LONG-RUNNING TV SERIES, DR. WHO.**

The new season of Dr Who has a new producer. How will that affect the programme? Will there be lots of changes? John Fleming went to BBC TV to talk to producer John Nathan-Turner about his plans and his views on television's longest-running fantasy show.

Nathan-Turner is 33 and was born in Birmingham. On leaving school, he turned down a university place and, instead, decided on a theatrical career. After some experience in acting and stage-management, he joined the BBC in 1968. He worked mostly on drama shows and eventually became Production Unit Manager on All Creatures Great and Small, Anglias, Flesh and Blood, Nicholas Nickleby and last two seasons of Dr Who. He describes the job of Production Unit Manager as "general and financial adviser to the producer." Fleming and Nathan-Turner talked when the BBC financial crisis was at its height.

**Starburst:** You were a Production Unit Manager. That sounds un-creative.

**John Nathan-Turner:** Well, I became production manager in order to ultimately become a producer — as a stepping stone. I enjoyed doing it, but I was just another rung.

And certainly that sort of financial back — mentally — is tremendously useful for actually doing the job.

**Your executive producer is Barry Letts, a former Dr Who producer. Doesn't that cause friction?**

No, it's absolutely no problem at all. Barry is also producing the family classic programme Poldark which may take up a lot of his time. But he's someone I go to for advice and consultation when I need to. This is your first programme as producer and you're the new producer of Dr Who. How is that changing your job? Have you had any conflict of view with Letts?

**I'm very fond of the situation some years back where there was a boy and a girl as companions.**

**I think there have always been lots of writers who've never written for the show before and wanted desperately to do it. I mean, if you don't entertain new writers, you'd be stuck with the same people who wrote it in 1963. We are concentrating on new writers who come with fresh ideas and a fresh outlook to the programme.**

**I'm surprised you don't have a full-time historian for the series, like Coronation Street does.**

**Well, I'm keen on continuity. I've spent a lot of time looking back at the old cassettes and scripts of stuff that unfortunately been junked. I think it's tremendously important. I think obviously the time will come — it hasn't so far — when one will want to change something for the particular structure of the new script. But I see no point in changing it for change's sake. You might as well get the right, if possible, and then change it if you absolutely have to because it doesn't quite work within the framework of your particular four-part series.**

You were going to scrap K-9.

**No, this is something that's been blown up by the press. I have been accurately quoted as saying there are some stories in which he will not appear this season, but there are no plans for him to leave the programme during this season at all.**

Surely the problem is that K-9 is omnipotent and, any sooner the Doctor gets into, this silly dog will always rescue him.

**I think it's something that some writers have relied on to get the Doctor and/or his companions out of a situation they can't get out of. But that's something we're watching.**

The newspaper coverage didn't affect the K-9 decision at all.

But even in that article in The Sun, I was quoted as saying there are no plans to get rid of K-9. I think it was some sort of inside story from the BBC and somebody had got their wires crossed.

You're bringing in a new mate companion. Does that mean Lalla Wan't is leaving? Lalla is leaving the programme. Is she being replaced by another female companion? I went to see Lalla — or, at least, the character of Romana — gets on with the new boy, because they do at least three stories together before Lalla goes. I was very fond of the situation some years back where there was a boy and a girl as companions. I thought it worked tremendously well. Why did it work?
Lalla leaves. She's not being killed off.
So you're leaving it open that you could
replace her with another Romana?
Ff... I'm leaving that open.
This new male assistant, Matthew Waterhouse.
He's 18-years-old. He hasn't done a lot of
acting before - he's only done two episodes
of a new BBC serial 'To Serve Them All My
Days'. I think he's quite a find - he's going to
be great.
What sort of character is he in the story?
He's a rather rough diamond who is a
member of a sort of street gang who go round
stealing food to eat and pickpocketing. He's

"Apart from two very well-known
Dr Who writers (David Fisher
& Terrance Dicks) this season is
totally new writers."

been described as a cosmic Artful Dodger
which, in a way, is not a bad description.
Is that where the idea came from?
(Laughing) Not at all.
What was the original idea?
We wanted somebody young, who was ad
venturous, intelligent and not totally
good - or, at least, appeared not to be totally
good - appeared to have a few bad streaks as
well as very good ones.
Speaking a bit like Avon in Blake's 7?
Not at all like that.
An anti-hero?
No, I wouldn't call him an anti-hero at all.
He's very young. Are you consciously trying
to get a younger group in?
Yes. Actually, Matthew, who's 18, looks
15 - so yes, I am trying to bring the ages of
the companions down.
One of your new writers, Andrew Smith, is
only 18. How did you find him?
He sent in unsolicited scripts. In fact, he'd
been sending in stuff for about five years.
There was a massive file in my script editor's
office, including old scripts that he'd sent in,
scene-breakdowns, story ideas. And there
were a lot of encouraging replies from pre
vious producers and previous script editors.
He then sent in something else that we
thought was worth encouraging. I must
say, I'd delighted with the four scripts he's
produced. I think he's quite a find. He's doing
a story called 'Full Circle', the third one to go
out.
Earlier on, you mentioned new radiophonic
music. I gather Dudley Simpson won't be
composing incidental music as he normally
does.
No, he won't. The incidental music is also
being done by the Radiophonic Workshop.
Will you still have Musicares Union
problems?
Touch wood - currently we don't. The
decision was made back in January and it
couldn't have been more fortuitous, really.
If you were affected by the M.U. strike, do you
think the show would work as well without
music?
I'd be very unhappy to put the programme
cut without incidental music.

It's been tremendous so far. I can't believe
the time is slipping away so quickly. I was
originally asked to look after the programme
for 15 months - one season - and I've done
almost 9 months now. I mean, you can see
from the chart on the wall, our short sche
dule's so grueling that the months do tend to
go by very quickly.
And where do you go after Dr Who?
I'd very much like to stay with Dr Who for at
least another year.
One last question - I have to ask. Are the Daleks
coming back?
No. In this season.