

WHO HAS TWO HEARTS, 13 LIVES —AND SIX FACES?

Doctor Who, the 20-year-old British science-fiction series, has found a new cult following in America

By Rod Townley

Who can appear simultaneously in 54 countries and be observed by more than 100 million earthlings?

Who zips about in a TARDIS (Time and Relative Dimensions in Space), a spaceship that resembles a British police call box?

Who is the Time Lord who not only battles Kraals and Man- →



The first five Doctor Whos—sort of (L.-r.): Patrick Troughton (2nd Doctor); Richard Hurndall (who portrayed the first Doctor, the late William Hartnell, in a 20th-anniversary episode); Peter Davison (5th Doctor, sitting on K9); Tom Baker (4th) and Jon Pertwee (3rd).

drels, Krynoids and Zygons, but also threatens Captain Kirk's and Mr. Spock's positions as the cultiest of cult heroes on the sci-fi circuit?

Who indeed.

Since 1963, the BBC's *Doctor Who* series has been a staple on British television and is now seen in 112 U.S. markets. Seventy-five *Doctor Who* novels

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are published in this country by Lyle Stuart, Inc. There are fan clubs such as the 18,000-member *Doctor Who* Fan Club of America and the 3000-member North American *Doctor Who* Appreciation Society (NADWAS). There are *Doctor Who* T-shirts, jackets, pins and badges.

Public-television stations are particularly enamored of the show because they can use this merchandise as a come-on during their pledge weeks. "We tie the whole package together and give them a piece," says Wynn Nathan, president of Lionheart Television, which distributes the program in the U.S. A PBS station running the show can offer a bit of memorabilia in exchange for a contribution. "People join the station in droves," says Nathan, "and they get a stupid *Doctor Who* T-shirt."

Not only is *Doctor Who* a draw for contributions, it also brings PBS stations a different and perhaps hipper audience than most of their other programming. "I guarantee you," says Nathan, "the people who watch *Doctor Who* do not watch *Masterpiece Theatre*. It's really camp."

But who, you may ask, is Who?

Don't ask. His real Gallifreyan name is unpronounceable to earthlings.

What's he look like, then? Surely, after 20 years as one of the most popular figures on the British telly, the bloke must look like *something*.

That depends. Which Who? There have been five of them, and a sixth is being readied in the wings of the London set.

Time Lords from the planet Gallifrey are allowed 13 lives, you see, so the series could run on almost indefinitely. As different as Who's first six incarnations are from one another, they have certain oddities in common: a 60-degree body temperature, a bypass respiratory system and two hearts. Although not human, *Doctor Who* favors using human forms during his travels through past, present and future civilizations. This is fortunate, because it's easier to find human actors than it is to train Drashigs or Daleks.

Yes, but what sort of fellow is he? Grumpy? Kindly? Young? Old?

Yes. All of the above. According to the producer, John Nathan Turner, the first *Doctor* (played by the late William Hartnell) was crotchety and bad-tempered; the second (Patrick Troughton, who took over in 1966) was "a kind of cosmic hobo... very Chaplinesque"; No. 3 (dapper Jon Pertwee) was an aging dandy in a flowing cape; No. 4 (Tom Baker) was a sort of "bohemian comic" who bounced around in an endlessly long scarf and camped up his lines.

After seven seasons, the personable Tom Baker wanted to push on, so Turner hired *Doctor* No. 5, a blond 30-year-old actor named Peter Davison. According to Turner, Davison projected a younger, more heroic, physically vulnerable, even fallible *Doctor*.

With Davison's *Doctor*, the writers tried to inject more "genuine wit" in place of Tom Baker's slapstick. Now, after three years, Davison also is ready to leave, and Turner has hired 40-year-old Colin Baker (no relation to Tom), a man taller than Davison who promises to bring a certain acid wit to the part.

He'll also bring a beautiful American sidekick, Perpugilliam Brown (Peri for short), a botany student played by 21-year-old actress Nicola Bryant. Sidekicks have always provided much of the show's charm, whether it be a robotic dog named K9, a beautiful savage named Leela

(Louise Jameson), a perky youngster named Adric (Matthew Waterhouse), or the lovely but totally nonsexual Romana (Mary Tamm and, later, Lalla Ward).

The monsters are a joy, too—wildly improbable, googly-eyed creatures that would not scare a 3-year-old. "Improbable?" demands Jayne Rayleigh, a 31-year-old fan. "Maybe we look as strange to a Sontaran as they look to us." She adds, helpfully: "They have sort of pig faces under these black-leather costumes."

But what in the name of the Keeper of Traken is the appeal of this show? Tom Baker, for one. Rayleigh replies. "He's absolutely charming." And the writing's a fine blend of well plotted science fiction and high camp, as when a character in one episode berates a drugged starship commander: "The passengers should be your first concern, yet I find you looking on drunk as they're attacked and killed! Well???" And the giggling captain replies: "They're only economy class. What's all the fuss about?"

Indeed, numerous 20th-century asides are slyly worked into the futuristic Whovian fantasies. Labor unions, social and racial prejudice, human rights, drug addiction—all are given a light once-over.

Then, too, suggests Rayleigh, "You kind of get hooked on the gadgetry... little gitchy things like Tom Baker's scarf, the number of stitches across and up and down. He once used that as a ruler... And he's always got his sonic screwdriver. James Bond has his watches and his guns; *Doctor Who* has a sonic screwdriver. It gets him out of a lot of trouble."

If Rayleigh seems a bit old for this sort of thing, the truth is she's a bit young. The average Whovian in the U.S. is 33 years old, according to one fan club. There's even a Who special-interest group in Mensa, a society of people with high IQs; and stations running the show in Florida report receiving letters from NASA personnel.

Nor are men of the cloth exempt from the lure of the *Doctor* and his TARDIS. The Rev. Leonard Hendrix of the Columbia Presbyterian Church in Columbia,

Miss., emphasizes that he is *not* a "theologian of *Doctor Who*," and he doesn't allude to the show from the pulpit. Nonetheless, he can't help noting that "one of the enemies of the *Doctor* is the Black Guardian, the all-evil force. I don't think they're saying that's Satan, but Satan might be like that. And the White Guardian might be like God."

The Rev. Mr. Hendrix also recalls an episode "where the *Doctor* hears his door open and he sees a great light and he walks out; and there is the White Guardian who sends him on a task. Maybe that's what it was like for John; he was sitting on the island of Patmos in exile and all of a sudden God brought him face to face with Himself."

The increasing popularity of *Doctor Who* in this country may be largely due to its ability to appeal to vastly different age groups and sensibilities, from the 13-year-old Philadelphia lad who finds the show "neat" to the Mississippi minister who discovers intimations about the nonlinear nature of time.

And what does *Doctor Who* himself say? We reached veteran actor Jon Pertwee (*Doctor* No. 3) at his home in London. Is he an ardent fan of the show?

"I never was. I am an actor. It was a job."

Nevertheless, Mr. Pertwee does enjoy the residuals, and he professes to appreciate American fans of the show. "They're much older in America [than in the U.K.]; you're dealing with intelligent people."

Since leaving the show in 1975, Pertwee has had occasion to ponder the program's vast popularity. To be sure, he says, science fiction has always been "a culty medium." But there is something else that distinguishes *Doctor Who*. "It has tremendous heart. The attitude is one of caring. My *Doctor* was rather the mother hen with his wide cloak protecting his children."

In the often brutal times we live in, there's perhaps a part of all of us that wants to believe in a whimsical Time Lord who will swoop down in his TARDIS and save us from ourselves. **END**