

more warmly pig-headed and Victoria Waterfield more vulnerably wet all the time. There must be children accompanying the Doctor, or so the basic rules of the game demand; but both of these two were acquired on the Tardis's markedly more feeble excursions into the past, and they still trail some clouds of costume-drama whimsy about them. From my earliest days of comic-reading, I have always distrusted retrogressive time-machines: the Yankee at the Court of King Arthur, or the lad who uses an air-gun to reverse the course of events at Bannockburn, is a cheat in more senses than one. Science-fiction plays on our terror of a future out of control, and should stick to its last, which is our what-next. A Dalek in a Victorian antique-dealer's study is merely a comic anachronism; a Dalek next week or next decade is on the margin of being a terrifying possibility. The When is more important than the Who.

On the other hand Daleks have by now become so domesticated that they are comic at the best of times. The most genuinely terrifying recent adventure concerned the inhabitants of a remote planet who had lost all physical existence, and could only survive (as mind, or spirit, or vital influence) by snatching human bodies, which then obeyed them. The human spirits, which also involved a corpse-like material 'shadow', were stored away in the car park at London Airport. Where else would one put such things? The great advantage in sophisticated terror here was that no clanking robots or slimy polyps were needed from special effects. The point, as in *The Man Who Was Thursday*, is whether or not a perfectly normal looking human turns out to be on The Enemy's side – a common ingredient, incidentally, of a child's everyday experience. This *doppelgänger* element recurred when the admirable Patrick Troughton played both Dr Who and the evil Salamander, would-be world dictator. First the cast and then the audience were kept in suspense as to which twin had the megalomania. The device is at least as old as *The Prisoner of Zenda*, but rarely fails.

To become truly modish, a cult on the scale of *The Avengers* – a possibly undesirable consummation – *Dr Who* would have to sharpen its visual style. The opening titles were picked out years ago by the *Times Literary Supplement* in a special number devoted to the avant-garde, and Ron Grainger's backing is as weirdly memorable as anything since *Journey into Space*. But once in the main body of the story, the camerawork dwindles: the Underground, even the deserted Underground, is a familiar property, and last Sunday's episode included some ludicrous larking about on a beach which was the soggiest possible echo of the obligatory seaside scene in the working-class melodramas of the Fifties.

That seaweed troubles me, just as it troubles the crew pumping Eurogas out of the North Sea in the year c.2000; we have already seen some angry clashes of masterful executives which are straight out of *The Troubleshooters*. It is one thing to avoid ludicrous monsters, and another to fall into the old television idiom of romanticised documentary. As Jamie remarked (in so many words), the Tardis has a statistically improbable tendency to fetch up on earth. Was this a hint from one script-writer to another? One of the things we might learn elsewhere is what set the Doctor on his Flying-Dutchman travels in space and time in the first place. Like Captain Nemo, he is sometimes a little ostentatiously secretive about his central mystery. Children are not

TELEVISION

Doctor When

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Children's television should be judged primarily by children, and secondarily by parents. Falling as I do between the two categories, I confine my critical attention to children's - programmes - really - for - adults, such as *The Magic Roundabout*. And the greatest of these, the all-time Daddy's electric train, is surely *Dr Who*.

It is just too frightening for some real children, for a start. I know one four-year-old who stood rigid with terror in front of the soft-whispering Ice Warriors, inviting his mother to come and hold his hand in case she was frightened, but I know many more households where the programme's name is forbidden in case the older children acquire a taste for it and the younger ones refuse to be excluded. There is nothing like being dragged out of bed by juvenile nightmares for blunting the finer edges of one's aesthetic judgment.

Not that *Dr Who* is aesthetically flawless, or even single-mindedly mature. (It may lack moral centrality, too.) The strains of constant production are beginning to tell. Last week some rather fierce seaweed gushed out of a ventilator and advanced on the captive Victoria Waterfield; it was only three weeks ago that a similar ventilator admitted billowing clouds of the sinister fungus choking London's Underground. Fungus to seaweed is not the widest gamut in the world, and everyone might benefit from a pattern of six weeks on and six weeks off rather than the present continuous stream of six-episode adventures. The Doctor is also, by my reckoning, due for a change of youthful companions. Frazer Hines's Jamie is growing

much concerned with such things, and apparently swallowed the change from one actor to another without much difficulty, but adult palates are choosier.

Not too choosy, however: *Dr Who* is obviously one of the BBC's great box-office successes, and no amount of peripheral niggling will alter the fact. It owes little of this to its timing: if anything, 5.25 on a Saturday afternoon is an inconvenient slot for adults. It is an inconvenience that some of them have learned to live with. By comparison with much of the literary science-fiction available, *Dr Who* is crude indeed, but a new medium doth make children of us all. *Dr Who* in colour will be able to get away with anything – for a while.