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, ie. our what-next. A Dalek in a Victorian antique-dealer's store 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 _doppelganger_ element occurred 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, becoming truly marvellous 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 luridly larking about on a beach which is the least remarkable item of the obligatory seaside scene in the working-class melodramas of the Fifties.

That seaweed troubles me, just as it troubles the crew pumping Eugoras out of the North Sea in the year c.2006; we have already seen some angry clashes of murderous 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 habit of taking the doctor to founth. 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
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.