The heroes of *Blake's Seven*—Dayna (Josette Simon), Tarrant (Steven Pacey), Avon (Paul Darrow), Vila (Michael Keating) and Cally (Jan Chappell)—engage in *Powerplay,* an episode written by Nation.

I was the first writer to keep control of my creation for television, I believe,” says Terry Nation, referring to his most famous brainstorm, the evil Daleks. When he originated those infamous alien enemies for the BBC’s *Doctor Who,* Nation’s contract included a piece of the rights to the salt shaker-shaped villains.

“My agent very cleverly did that for me,” he reveals. “There was no such thing as BBC merchandising in those days. In fact, the first licensing for Dalek toys went to somebody else. The BBC hadn’t begun to develop and do its own licensing. Almost anyone in BBC Enterprises [the licensing and merchandising arm of the British TV and radio system], who has been there long enough, will say that Enterprises was built on the Daleks. They were the first thing they really did.”

Surprisingly, the inspiration for the mechanical-voiced assassins, with their constant cries of “Exterminate!” was a graceful dance troupe. “All my life,” Nation explains, “I had been watching movies, where, no matter how scared I was at the fearsome creature, I knew, at the back of my mind, that it was only a man dressed up in a costume. There were arms, legs and a head. No matter what you did with it—it was a man. So, I really started from that basis. I did not want this alien to be humanoid in any way.

“I had seen, that very week on television, a Russian ballet company, the Georgian State Dancers. The girl dancers did a number in which they wear long dresses that touch the floor, and they move in tiny steps, so they appear to glide. You never see their feet move. It’s exactly the way a Dalek moves. Then, I took off the head and the arms, and gave it a few things to make it work, and in the end, a Dalek did not look like a man dressed up.”

Returning to the business end of writing for series television, Nation explains why, after their first two or three appearances, there was a gap of several years before the Daleks returned to menace *Doctor Who.* “I never really had a dispute with the Beeb,” he says. “I think the show was always trying to do without the Daleks. They were never terribly happy that the Daleks, at least in the early days, were a continuing big success. I have no
direct evidence of this belief, but I've always felt it. Inevitably, when Doctor Who began to dip in the ratings, they would say, 'Can we do another Dalek series?' because they always raised their ratings right away."

On the other hand, Nation admits, that the big gap between Dalek deprivities may have been his fault. "I was working on many other shows at the time, and may not have wanted anyone else to write it. I was never terribly happy with other people writing the Daleks."

Eventually, though, Nation permitted other writers to take a hand in charting the Daleks' destiny. "Ultimately, I realized that, if I wanted them to be seen again, and I wasn't going to have the time, others would have to write the Dalek scripts. But I kept script duties, and I have to approve the scripts. I won't let them be killed off again."

The Blake's Seven crew, however, was killed off at the end of their last episode—and Nation's not entirely happy about it. "It's a sort of thing you must protect against," he says. "It makes a wonderful finish for the show, but it's also protecting an investment of creativity that has a long life. There's a way of reviving them, and with some literary skill, we can get them back."

That end, the destruction of all the heroes, was a somewhat downbeat finale to what many American fans have found to be a depressing, albeit fascinating, TV show. Blake and his fellow rebels are up against overwhelming military opposition, and never seem to win a decisive victory. Nation admits that is a theme which runs throughout his work. "I suppose it's the little guy against the system," he says. "I disagree that it's depressing—I think it's constantly hopeful, that people will continue, in the face of incredible opposition, to do what they believe. They're not going to be put down and say, 'All right, they're bigger than us, let's join them.' With Blake, they go on, fighting what is probably a losing battle. But if you want to look historically—I don't want to bring up Vietnam especially—but they were primitive armed men fighting first the French, then the Americans. Against the greatest firepower in the world, they won their war.

"You can't destroy a belief. You can destroy an army, but you can't destroy a belief. Blake and his people believe."

Nation is not unhappy when fans note his penchant for strong villains and emotionless creatures. "I think characters without apparent emotion—the Daleks, Zen and Orac in Blake's Seven, even to some extent Servalag and Travis—help to play up the human feelings of the other characters," he says. "In addition, when these emotionless characters are grand villains, they allow the writer a chance to say something about the primacy of humanity, when his emotion-filled good guys win out. I knew my guys were the good guys, the white hats, so, ultimately, I suppose I must take responsibility for the fact that I was making a political statement, whether I was aware of it or not."

One thing the writer will not take responsibility for is the thrust of Blake's Seven after he stopped scripting it. "It's very hard for a

The Dr. Who movies with Peter Cushing as the Time Lord were based on Nation's TV stories, though he didn't script.

Surrounded by his robotic opponents, the Third Doctor (Jon Pertwee) considers escape in Nation's "Death to the Daleks."