In the swim?

Peter Davison, Robert Glenister and Sara Corper, still trying to keep their heads above water in BBC1’s returning comedy series ‘Sink or Swim’.

Inside: Peter Davison – on the crest of the wave
Sink or Swim, Thursday 8.30 BBC1
Add the heart-throb Tristan to the clumsy Brian, throw in a dash of flamboyant Doctor Who... and you should come up with Peter Davison, a very busy actor about to embark on a new series of Sink or Swim. He talks to Nicki Househol

The life of Brian

same time, or people might be forgiven for thinking there's only one actor in the world! I'm still feeling my way as Doctor Who - it takes time to get into a part like that. And I like to begin by playing any character very straight and letting an identity emerge almost by itself. There'll be a lot of me in him, I expect, but I also want to blend in aspects of other Doctor Whos. He'll be crotchety sometimes like William Hartnell and occasionally a bit baffled like Patrick Troughton, who was my own favourite as a child. He says the best advice he had to date came from a small boy on Pebble Mill, who said Davison's Doctor Who should be 'like Tristan, but brave'.

That's more or less where I've pitched it.'

Allowing the character itself to 'take over' a part is a technique that he believes has worked well for him. 'I had no real idea what Tristan Faron was going to be like at first. I started him off quite bland, but he very quickly came to life. I wasn't so used to the ways of television in those days and I remember waiting for someone to comment on my perform-

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eter Davison's experience of the theatre is limited to three years in rep after the Central School of Speech and Drama (where he went after leaving his secondary modern school in Woking with three O-levels) and, just recently, a production of Barefoot in the Park at the Churchill Theatre, Bromley, in which he co-starred with his American actress Sandra Dickinson. Sandra was the glamorous alien Trillian in The Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy, in which her husband
made an incognito cameo appearance as an intergalactic space animal. 'No, there's no spirit of competition between us,' he says, 'but I don't know if my male pride could stand it if she were getting more work than me.'

They live in what he describes as 'a nice, ordinary modern house' near his parents in Woking, and have four cats. 'Three of them are quite ordinary, like me; the fourth is a Persian Chinchilla which I married with my wife. We're both very keen on cats - they're so independent.' His ordinariness he continually stresses.

'My natural accent is sloppy South London. I still slip back into it with old friends, even though I had what was called a Received Pronunciation drummed into me at drama school. Most people would call it "talking posh". These days I adjust my speech automatically according to who I'm with. In an interview and on the telephone my accent is very "received" because I'm trying to create a good impression.'

He is the son of an electrical engineer and the family (he has three sisters) lived in Streatham before moving to Woking when he was ten.

After his 18 months as a filing clerk in a tax office, Peter spent nearly two years playing a single part in the drama series *Love for Lydia* and then went on to spend three years in *All Creatures Great and Small*. 'By playing the sum total of two parts in five years I managed to miss out on building up a career slowly.'

I'm particularly grateful to Tristan, because a lot of his confidence rubbed off on me. A few years ago I was very shy. I still am, really, but being known makes life a lot easier. People accept you and you don't have to keep breaking the ice. When you've been on the box, everyone is your friend. But otherwise acting is an ordinary job like any other - I wouldn't want to make too much of it.'

Being a modest chap, he didn't mention the hundreds of fan letters he gets from ladies who fancy him as Tristan Farnon. As bespectacled Brian he is a little less glamorous, but he'll find it hard to avoid being a fanciable Doctor Who. Past Doctor Whos have had to get used to signing hundreds of autographs an hour and addressing the well-informed members of university Doctor Who societies. So the charming and busy Peter Davison has got even busier days ahead.