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TELEVISION REVIEW

Deep breath, then dive in

There's a new Time Lord in town, and he's set to make his mark on 'Doctor Who.'

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When Steven Moffat titles an episode "Deep Breath," he isn't kidding.

For a program known for its harum-scarum pace and keep-up-or-shut-up iconography, the Season 8 Saturday premiere of BBC America's "Doctor Who" opens slowly— even with the T. rex — and radiates a newly modern self-consciousness, albeit dressed in Victorian garb. And for fans wondering how the series will accommodate the Doctor's regeneration

from 11-year-old Matt Smith to 59-year-old Peter Capaldi, the answer is: Very Directly Indeed.

But first, that deep breath, which, after all the hoopla surrounding the iconic show's 50th anniversary last November, certainly seems in order. Especially since, along with a new Doctor, Moffat has ordered up a new look for the opening credits (more clockwork than fiery cloud swirl) and the interior of the TARDIS.

For those just joining the "Doctor Who" universe, TARDIS stands for Time and Relative Dimension in Space, comes shaped like the blue British police box and is the Doctor's main form of transportation.

That's me trying to fall in with the premiere's obvious [See "Doctor Who," D6]

A changed Time Lord set to up the sci-fi ante

["Doctor Who," from D1] embraces of post-anniversary new owners. The episode opens with Strax (Dan Starkey), that adorably cranky Sentoran, narrating the Doctor's regenerative life span in the form of a video entry, with his own hilarious editorializing. Behind him, series notables Madame Vastra (New McIntosh) and Jenny Flint (Caitlin Stewart) attempt, once again, to avert Earth's destruction.

"By the goddess, are you blogging?" Madame Vastra asks Strax with sly incredulity, when she catches sight of the screen to which Strax directs his explanation of how there have been 12 doctors. Maybe 11, he adds, mimicking the actual biosphere debate. "Well, technically 11."

Having averted disaster, the three answer a call from Victorian London where a Trenz is pining the Thamos, as so many things do in "Doctor Who." Before long, the TARDIS appears, along with the Doctor (Capaldi), dazed and confused, and Clara (Jenna Coleman), also dazed but more concerned than confused.

She doesn't understand

'Doctor Who'

Where: BBC America

When: 8:15 p.m. (pre-show begins at 8) Saturday
Rating: TV-14 (may be unavailable for young viewers)

Why the "new" Doctor seems so much older.

And it isn't just the lines on his face or the silver in his hair. Capaldi's Time Lord is fretful where Smith's was impish, anxious where David Tennant's was manic. (He's also, like Capaldi, Scottish, which seems a wee bit unfair to Tennant, who famously longed to be the first killed Doctor only to have his brogue turned into "strawry English.")

As the crisis evolves — humans threatened, this time by murderous androids — the Doctor wanders ragged and mad, a spindly Lear trying to remember why everything seems at once so foreign yet so familiar. Whovians will be able to answer some of his questions, but the Doctor's concern with his new visage heralds a

deeper understanding of who, exactly, the Doctor is, and who he isn't.

"You thought he was young?" Madame Vastra admonishes Clara when she seems unable to accept the lines and hair. "Your gentleman friend, your lover? He has seen stars fall to dust. You might as well flirt with a mountain range."

And there it is, right up front, what so many previous episodes have danced around: The Doctor is a Time Lord, more than 2,000 years old. He has saved humanity countless times but he has also killed and banished and damned. He has (or thought he had) destroyed his own planet for the good of the universe.

He has loved and lost and, more important, loved and left. Each and every one of his companions. Even his beloved Rose (Billie Piper) had to settle with a mortal imitation, while River Song (Alex Kingston), the Doctor's "wife," was reduced to a bit of computer memory that he didn't want to see anymore.

"I'm not your boyfriend," this new Doctor tells Clara, himself reducing to dust the



ENTERED ASSISTANT EDITOR

PETER CAPALDI and Jenna Coleman usher in a new season of "Doctor Who."

starry-eyed daydreams of multitudes.

The original Doctor may have been an old man, just as the original "Doctor Who" was an educational children's show, but the modern incarnation has taken the romance of the last living Time Lord quite literally. Tennant's Doctor especially was a high IQ dream date, seducing companions and breaking their hearts.

To avoid complete repeti-

tion, Smith's Doctor took aboard a couple, Amy (Karen Gillan) and Rory (Arthur Darvill) whose love story, often triangulated by the Doctor (whose heart clearly belonged to Amy), served as painful reminder of what an ageless being cannot have: a long-term relationship with mortal.

Not this time around, no, sir. Or, at least, so it would seem. For all the running and unflinching commen-

tary about the new Doctor's face, Capaldi is an attractive man, if quite a change from Smith. Still, behind his furrowed brow and tendency to complain roll new and exciting storms, which may tilt the tale away from love and longing and back to adventure.

Either way, this Doctor is truly something else again.

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