Ben Miller chronicles a fanboy’s dream: taking on the Time Lord – as the Sheriff of Nottingham

My Doctor Who diary

“Pull this one off and I may be my sons’ hero for ever”

BEN MILLER

My kingdom for a horse rider

8 APRIL. First day of shooting. I’m about to do some marauding. Somehow, from nowhere, an entire medieval village has been created in the Vale of Glamorgan. I can’t believe the budget. On a two-acre plot are at least a dozen wattle houses, kitted out with authentic cooking implements, with suitably ancient breeds of chicken pecking in the dust. I sidle up to one of the crew. Amazing attention to detail, eh? He looks at me strangely. “It’s Cosmeston Medieval Village, Ben. It’s a theme park,” I nod sagely. “Do you want to meet your horse?” I am led towards a sable-black beast 15 hands high that looks like the steed of a Norse warrior god. Perched on top of it is the bass player from Nine Inch Nails. Oh – hang on, I’ve got a double. And he can ride! This just gets better and better.

Back at base, I bump into Peter Capaldi, who is filming a different episode. He greets me warmly, which is a relief, as the last time I saw him he tried to throttle me with a yard of piano wire. He claims it was part of the play we were doing at the time, The Ladykillers, but I have my doubts. He is dressed as the Doctor, and something about the frock coat and the tieless, buttoned-up white shirt is instantly iconic. Suddenly I place it; that’s how Peter always dresses.

So, how is he finding it? “I’m like a kid in a sweet shop,” he says, grinning. “I was meant to have a day off yesterday, but I saw they were shooting a fight with the Daleks, so I came in anyway. Couldn’t miss that, could I?”
I wield my sword

9 APRIL Swordfight rehearsal. A little humbling. Tom Riley from Da Vinci’s Demons is playing Robin Hood, and as well as being a devastatingly handsome, impossibly witty and brilliant actor, he is a master of the blade. When I wield my sword I look more like a painter and decorator trying to get some wallpaper up in a hurry.

After five minutes’ swashbuckling I am exhausted and call for time out. Tom offers me a carrot stick. I take one, artfully draping my coat over my bag of doughnuts.

Kid in a candy store

17 APRIL Possibly one of the most exciting days of my life. We arrived early at Caerphilly Castle to see hordes of extras thronging the gates. I check the call sheet, which lists the day’s business. No sign of a crowd scene.

Have they changed the shooting order? My friend on the crew shakes his head. “Those aren’t extras. Those are the fans.” I have Sonny with me today, and his eyes are out on stalks. One of the ten-year-olds is a huddle of lucky ten-year-olds wearing head­phones, listening in to the scene, their eyes glued to the monitor. At the end of the day, Peter and Jenna sign a Day of the Doctor poster for Sonny. Peter signs his name over the picture of Matt Smith, and Sonny and I smile appreciatively. This is the only show in the world where that makes complete logical sense.

The last time I saw Peter Capaldi he tried to throttle me

with me today, and his eyes are out on stalks. One of the true joys of the set is how welcoming it is to children. Whatever’s happening in front of the camera, you can guarantee that somewhere behind it is a huddle of lucky ten-year-olds wearing head­phones, listening in to the scene, their eyes glued

Final cut

1 MAY Last day of shooting. The studios here in Cardiff rival anything I’ve seen in the US, and we have spent the week shooting on colossal interiors with an army of crew.

My last-scene—but-one is my sword­fight with Tom Riley. What I hadn’t quite counted on was the fact that we rehearsed with wooden swords, but the ones we are shooting with today are very, very metal. After some particularly inept clanging on my part I end up making a new joint in Tom Riley’s thumb. He is far too polite to say anything, but when we say our goodbyes I can’t help noticing he shakes my hand with his elbow.

For my final scene I am to be winched right into the roof of the studio on a wire, then dropped some three storeys onto a crash mat.

Everyone applauds. Tears well in my eyes. Then Paul comes over the radio, “Can he do it again? The monitor cut out and I missed that one.”