

IT'S ONE THING WHEN POLICEMEN START LOOKING YOUNGER, but what about 900-year-old Time Lords?

Doctor Who marks its 50th birthday this month with enough celebratory events and TV specials to entertain both the general viewer and the nerd in his Dalek-packed potting shed. In 2013 the show is in rude health, huge in America, and now there's a new Doctor waiting in the wings who will reverse that worrying trend towards Time Lords barely out of school trousers.

Viewers who saw the first episodes as children back in 1963 may wonder if the new, effects-heavy show really is better than it was back in the days when everything – film, morals, RADA actors and cut-glass accents – was in black and white. Somehow the more realistic *Doctor Who* looks, the less frightening it is. Then again, it is a peculiarly British institution. Its flaws, from cardboard sets and wobbly monsters up to its current trend for the sentimental, have always been part of its appeal. Here's our parade through past Doctors...

WILLIAM HARTNELL (1963-66)

FIRST DOCTOR Albert Steptoe in space.

Today's Doctors are good-looking cheeky chappies who can't witness a lonely child or tormented space whale without bursting into tears. The original, however, was a cantankerous old swine who didn't think twice about kidnapping two upstanding teachers for a wild goose chase through time and space, and once considered bashing a caveman's brains in for mildly inconveniencing him. But Hartnell's flinty Doctor was perfect for an austerity-bred generation who could barely afford the sofa they were hiding behind. Sadly his own constitution weakened after three years as a children's favourite. In an audacious move the producers decided the Doctor would literally change bodies.

Who's Who?

As *Doctor Who* hits 50 and we wait for Peter Capaldi to seize control of the Tardis, we look back on past reincarnations and the highs and lows of the TV show

Words **Andrew Harrison**

MEMORABLE MOMENT Hartnell was prone to fluffing his lines. Once, instead of instructing a space pilot to 'Stabilise us, Maitland', he issued the command 'Stabilise us, Matron!'

TRAGIC MONSTER The Zarbi – giant fibreglass ants with men's legs sticking out below – in *The Web Planet* (1965).

PATRICK TROUGHTON (1966-69)

SECOND DOCTOR He's the pied piper, and he'll show you where it's at.

To general astonishment the BBC replaced a stern grandad figure with a recorder-playing scruff. But Troughton's playful 'cosmic hobo' became phenomenally popular. He was a warmer Doctor, with an endearing tendency to panic, but more deeply, shiver-inducingly alien than before. And with Troughton in the Tardis *Doctor Who* went very Sixties. The directors modelled his regeneration on an LSD trauma and he sported a Beatle mop. Concerns of the day intruded too: was Harold Wilson's 'White Heat of Technology' turning us all into Cybermen? Would North Sea oil exploration unleash deadly sentient seaweed? Finally we learnt that the Doctor had literally dropped out of Time Lord society. You almost expected him to sing 'We all live in a big blue time machine'.

MEMORABLE MOMENT Cybermen clomping down the steps outside St Paul's in one of telly's signature scenes.

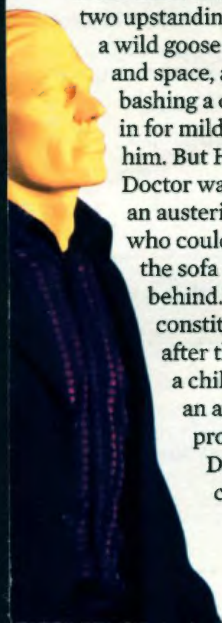
TRAGIC MONSTER The Fish People – extras in sequinned leotards in *The Underwater Menace* (1967).

JON PERTWEE (1970-1974)

THIRD DOCTOR He did kung fu fighting; it was a little bit frightening.

Pertwee's dashing smoking-jacketed and Inverness-caped Doctor was proficient in the martial arts – OK, Venusian aikido – and liked fast cars, if not fast women (although in real life, Katy Manning, who played companion Jo Grant, did appear in the nude draped over a Dalek for *Girl Illustrated* magazine). At last ▷

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Brief lives
Paul McGann (right),
William Hartnell and
an Ice Warrior

◁ here was a Doctor whose derring-do you could imitate in the playground, with your friends as the Brigadier and his private science army UNIT. To watch *Doctor Who* then was to experience a grim but thrilling kids' perspective on the crisis-stricken real world. A succession of evil corporations and mad computers threatened mankind, natural resources and pollution kept cropping up – you can blame the Three-Day Week – and it turned out that we had usurped the planet from a dormant race of intelligent dinosaurs anyway. Bad us!

MEMORABLE MOMENTS The Doctor meets himself in 1973's tenth anniversary story *The Three Doctors*. 'So you're my replacements?' snaps Hartnell. 'A dandy and a clown?'

TRAGIC MONSTER Alpha Centauri the monocular ambassador has been unkindly compared to a giant green penis. Those were simpler times (*The Curse of Peladon*, 1972).

TOM BAKER (1974-1981)
FOURTH DOCTOR The K-9 defence league, of course.

A former monk and building-site worker from Liverpool, Tom Baker was by far the most alien Doctor so far: a bug-eyed oddball in Toulouse-Lautrec get-up who could flip from jolly to callous in a beat of either heart. Bloodthirsty young viewers loved his grisly Gothic horror adventures – old nemesis The Master returned as a rotting corpse, companion Leela was half-eaten by a giant rat, and some of the fights so murderous they enraged Mary Whitehouse who forced the BBC to tone down the *Grand Guignol*.

An unfortunate side-product was detestable tin dog K-9 (above), a perfect example of the aggravating robot sidekick as harbinger of bad times to come. For many Baker was the best, a bohemian who could play Professor Henry Higgins to Pan's People-clad savage Leela or undermine the Daleks' creator Davros armed only with a jelly baby. Whenever *The Simpsons* spoof *Doctor Who*, Tom Baker is the one they choose.



Tom Baker could flip from jolly to callous in a beat of either heart

MEMORABLE MOMENT In *Genesis of the Daleks* (1975) Baker's Doctor can prevent the Nazi dustbins' birth simply by touching two wires together. But does he have the right to change the future? Find out... next week!

TRAGIC MONSTER The giant rat that chomps on Leela in *The Talons of Weng-Chiang* (1977) is patently a large brown rug with actors thrashing around inside it.

PETER DAVISON (1982-1984)
FIFTH DOCTOR Time Lord goes to Lords.

After the barminess of Tom Baker's later years, the BBC played safe with an actor who was already famous as Tristan Farnon from *All Creatures Great and Small*. Davison's Doctor was also fresh-faced, idealistic, occasionally naive and terribly English, a sort of nerve-calming John Major to Baker's wild-eyed Margaret Thatcher. The fifth Doctor was charming enough but the stories took a terrible dip, as did the costumes (prevailing look: budget-rail Hot Gossip) and especially the monsters. One notorious aquatic dinosaur called the Myrka was evidently moonlighting from playing Dobbin in nearby panto. Corny guest stars proliferated and the show moved from Saturday to midweek (sacrilege!) – *Doctor Who* was losing its way. When, in a bid for notoriety, they had infamously wooden companion Adric blown up by the Cybermen (see below), it took true loyalty not to laugh.

MEMORABLE MOMENT In *Earthshock* (1982) Adric dies in an exploding spaceship – and for one memorable time only, the credits rolled in silence.

TRAGIC MONSTER The Raston warrior robot in *The Five Doctors* (1983). A practitioner of modern dance in a silver leotard does not a convincing android killing machine make.

COLIN BAKER (1984-1986)
SIXTH DOCTOR Not a patch on the rest.

Poor Colin Baker. Someone had to be the 'least good' Doctor. By the go-getting mid-Eighties sci fi had fallen out of fashion and the increasingly tatty-looking *Doctor Who* was marked for death by BBC controller Michael Grade, a confirmed *Who*-phobe. To reinject a little jeopardy into a tired-looking show, the producers gamely cast a sixth Doctor who was as haughty and abrasive as Hartnell's original – then dressed him in a self-consciously wacky outfit that would disgrace Colin Hunt from *The Fast Show*. Throw in the worst companion ever (Bonnie Langford as shrieky Mel) and you could see *Doctor Who* spiralling towards the cosmic plughole.

MEMORABLE MOMENT When he awakens from his regeneration, the confused Doctor attempts to strangle companion Peri. Not a good start.

TRAGIC MONSTER Rebellious walking plants the Vervoids (*Terror of the Vervoids*, 1986).

SYLVESTER MCCOY (1987-1989)
SEVENTH DOCTOR Better than you remember.

Britain had all but given up on *Who* by the time the keys to the Tardis passed to McCoy, an alumnus of Ken Campbell's alternative theatre troupe who reputedly once held the world record for keeping ferrets down his trousers. His swivel-eyed, tartan-trousered Doctor – who was half Spike Milligan and half Wilf Lunn from *Vision On* – didn't exactly promise a return to the glory days of the Sixties and Seventies. But against expectations the seventh Doctor turned out to be rather good. He was now a time-travelling Machiavelli and as deliciously mysterious as Troughton or ▷

◁ Baker. Though in the end he couldn't save *Who* from cancellation, McCoy is the Doctor most likely to surprise.

MEMORABLE MOMENT A Dalek finally climbs the stairs in *Remembrance of the Daleks* (1988) – it's flying! And Nicholas Parsons is quite wonderful as a vicar racked by doubt in the vampire tale *The Curse of Fenric* (1989).

TRAGIC MONSTER The Kandy Man, a Bertie Bassett lookalike sadistic robot who drowns you in 'fondant surprise', in *The Happiness Patrol* (1988).

PAUL MCGANN (1996)

EIGHTH DOCTOR A brief moment in time.

Tousle-haired scouser McGann could have been a splendid Doctor. Sadly he appeared just once – in a TV movie that contained so much gobbledegook about the Master, the Daleks, Gallifrey and so on, that casual viewers who tuned in were completely baffled.

CHRISTOPHER ECCLESTON (2005)

NINTH DOCTOR A working-class Time Lord is something to be.

The Reithian grandees who created *Who* as a vehicle to enlighten children about science and history would have had a fit if they'd foreseen Eccleston in the part, with his cropped hair, leather jacket and genuine Salford accent ('Lots of planets have a north!'). Where were the frock coats and the improving homilies? Isn't he a little common for a Time Lord? But reviving the show with a heavyweight actor – of *Our Friends in the North* and *Hillsborough* fame – proved to be a masterstroke, banishing *Doctor Who*'s reputation for cheesy performances and wobbly sets.

Though Eccleston's comic gurning could be a little CBBC, for the first time since the Seventies the show was actually frightening, with unstoppable Daleks and a pervasive sense of dread. Sparky shop-girl Rose added some *EastEnders*-style appeal and – more heresy – a love interest. The result was the most successful revival in British TV history and



Behind you Ellisabeth Sladen (as Sarah Jane) and Tom Baker with an uncharacteristically docile Cyberman

Today's cynical audiences are no longer terrified by a man in a rubber suit

Simon Callow was just one of many A-listers who wanted in (as Charles Dickens in *The Unquiet Dead*, 2005).

MEMORABLE MOMENT The Doctor's electrifying eyeball-to-eyestalk confrontation with the lone monster in *Dalek* (2005).

TRAGIC MONSTER The creatures were all pretty well realised by now, although flatulent invaders the Sliitheen tried the patience somewhat (*Aliens of London* and *World War Three*, 2005).

DAVID TENNANT (2005-2009)

TENTH DOCTOR He'll come to your emotional rescue.

Tennant's hugely popular four-year stint marked the triumph of soapy values and emotional incontinence over good old-fashioned nameless terror. This young, lean, cheeky, even *fanciable* Time Lord became the first heart-throb Doctor. Though *Doctor Who* could still summon up the horrors of the black and white years – sentient statues the Weeping Angels, spaghetti-faced monstrosities the Ood, Satan himself imprisoned on an asteroid – it now had to compete with *Britain's Got Talent* and *Big Brother* as lip-wobbling mainstream entertainment. Then, in real life, Tennant married Peter Davison's daughter, thus becoming his own father-in-law. As you do.

MEMORABLE MOMENT Rose falling into an alternative universe to be parted from the Doctor for ever in *Doomsday* (2006), the series' greatest heartbreaker.

TRAGIC MONSTER Peter Kay's corpulent alien the Abzorbaloff in *Love & Monsters* (2006) was designed by a schoolboy, and it showed.

MATT SMITH (2010-2013)

THE ELEVENTH DOCTOR Return of the Great Eccentric.

To some, the most recent Doctor was a floppy-haired, face-pulling ponce, a children's light entertainer with none of the danger of his illustrious predecessors – a typical family-friendly BBC creation. To others, he's a mash up of the best of every previous Doctor, combining Troughton's eccentricity, Tom Baker's alien qualities, Davison's innocent and even Hartnell's melancholic darkness. This is what happens when you have to please all of the people all of the time.

Today's cynical audiences are no longer terrified by a man in a rubber suit so the show concentrates on conspiracy and the time-twisting tale of the Doctor's relationship with his enigmatic on-off wife River Song. You may suspect they make it up as they go along but *Doctor Who* can still create the sense that you've fallen into a larger and more mysterious universe, just as in 1963. Smith leaves the role at Christmas and the twelfth Doctor will have to win over the show's new American audience and you hope they'll keep the schmaltz at bay. And if *Doctor Who* proves anything, it's that change is *almost* always a good thing.

MEMORABLE MOMENT The Doctor stands atop Stonehenge and scares off every alien species in the Universe in *The Pandorica Opens* (2010).

TRAGIC MONSTER An invisible giant turkey menaces Vincent van Gogh – now that's skimping on the budget (*Vincent and the Doctor*, 2010). ♦

For *Doctor Who* nerds everywhere, there's an extended version of this feature at saga.co.uk/magazine



Who are they all?

Clockwise from above:
Tom Baker, Abzorbaloff,
Matt Smith, Yeti, Bonnie
Langford, Sylvester
McCoy, Christopher
Eccleston, Dalek,
Patrick Troughton, Peter
Davison, Zygon, Auton,
Colin Baker, Cybermen,
Jon Pertwee and David
Tennant (centre)