

# THE REAL McCOY

IN THE past 20 years, he's defeated the Daleks, stamped out the Cybermen, kept a fatherly eye on a dozen glamorous girl assistants, had myriad different faces, and changed his height from six feet three to five feet six ...

Who are we talking about? Doctor Who no less. Sylvester McCoy, the seventh Doctor, is only five feet six — the smallest so far!

And if the programme-makers really wanted to bring more humour into the show, they could hardly have chosen a better man.

His comedy career started in a less-than-auspicious way, 16 years ago, when he became known as the man who put ferrets down his trousers!

Today, he still holds the world record and claims he actually started the craze. "There's no trick," he says. "You can't train ferrets and they do bite. But I've been lucky. I've only been bitten once — on the finger!" As a pub performer, one of his stunts was to hammer a six-inch nail up his nose!

Later, he joined a road-show which played pubs, clubs and even prisons. After that, Sylvester, a 43-year-old Scot, appeared in children's TV on *Tiswas* and in the TV epic

By JUDITH REGAN

"The Last Place On Earth," the story of Scott of the Antarctic. "People have been telling me for years I'd make a good Doctor Who," he says.

So how does he see himself as the celebrated space doctor? "It will be more humorous, I hope, but it's not going to be a comedy half-hour," he says.

"I don't want it to be slapstick, but I would like to continue the dotty, zany humour Patrick Troughton brought to the role.

"The Doctor will never fight anybody," says Sylvester. "I feel quite strongly about that. The Doctor should never use a gun. He's a man of peace. He uses his brain, his wits, his humour.

## 'Doctor' Sylvester is all set for lift-off

"But, most of all, I just want the Doctor to survive. After all, he's been a hero to generations of kids."

The good Doctor is facing his ultimate battle — for existence. This time, his enemies are not from outer space, but TV network executives who think it's perhaps time the Doctor was grounded for good.

And if the international viewing figures for the new series, which starts in September, aren't up by at least three million on the last one, the doctor's chances of survival are less than those of a shooting star in a black hole!

The show has already had one stay of execution. A public outcry persuaded TV bosses to reprieve it after a decision had already been taken to shut the door on the battered police box for the last time.

But BBC boss Michael Grade is known to dislike the programme and has told the producers that if *Dr Who* is to survive, it must change an image that has become "violent and humourless."

If figures drop, the Doctor will be banished to outer space for good ... So, there's been a quick response to the space rescue call ... a whole galaxy of stars will be involved in the new series.

Among them is comedian Ken Dodd, playing the part of a galactic gatekeeper in an episode to be screened in November.

"I can remember watching the very first show," he said during a break from filming. "I've wanted to be in the series ever since."





"For the moment I've got to fit into the script because when they wrote it, they had no Doctor. Future scripts will be written around my personality — assuming they don't exterminate me first!

"After being in the business for over 20 years, I seem to have acquired instant fame.

"But at the moment my only sense of responsibility is to learn all the lines and avoid bumping into monsters. One of the joys of the job is that that there is never any time to do anything other than get on with it.

Doddy's appearance will not be a long one, however. The script demands that he meets his doom at the hands of Don Henderson — known to millions as the detective Bulman.

But the victim himself is not worried a bit. In a 30-year career it's the first time he's had an opportunity to play a death scene. And he's relishing every moment of it.

"My death scene will be one of the longest ever," he said. "It's the first one I've ever done and I'm looking on it as my big acting break!"

● OPEN DOOR to a new starring role . . . and (inset) close-up of the man who will be taking a ride in the Tardis.



WHO'S WHO . . . William Hartnell, Patrick Troughton, Jon Pertwee, Tom Baker, Peter Davison and Colin Baker.