

For Tom Baker, Dr Who is better than a dog's life

"There's a floccose path forming on the pericarp!"—the addicts will recognize the mixture of botany and panic as typical of their favourite programme, the various adventures of *Dr Who*. William Hartnell, the first Dr Who, arrived in the Tardis (so called after Time and Relative Dimension in Space) and, with the whistling wheeze of a dying spin dryer, moved into our lives in November, 1963.

The man who has been the fourth Dr Who for the past 18 months is Tom Baker—a very tall man with a beautiful voice and a range of expression from the nobly heroic to a fleeting resemblance to Harpo Marx.

"Everyone who has played Dr Who seems to have enjoyed it", he says. "I find that my face is associated with something very nice and very charming and great fun. It is certainly delightful to see the effect it has on children. I have enjoyed my life much more since I became the Doctor—I used to get terribly tired of Tom Baker."

He comes to the part from the stage. "Nothing really happened to me of any significance until I went to the National Theatre. I was playing a dog in a revue in York—the other man was Professor Laurie Taylor. I was seen, and invited to go to the National Theatre. And I played a horse—perhaps the most famous horse, apart from Bucephalus—in *The Trials of Sancho Panza*. Things began to look up after that, they let me play human beings. I was happy at the National. I liked being part of a company, and Sir Laurence was always very kind to me." He also appeared as Rasputin in the film *Nicholas and Alexandra*. "When they offered me Dr Who, I said 'Yes' like a shot. I was on a building site at the time, and handed in my hod with alacrity."

The character and background of the Doctor has been accumulating over the years. Though he is 750 years old, as he never ceases to remind us ("As I said to William the Conqueror/Genghis Khan/Peter the Great/Pio Nono/Leonardo/Philippe Egalite at the time"), it is perhaps the change of personality that has kept the series interesting. Patrick Troughton, who succeeded William Hartnell, portrayed an eccentric, flute playing, slightly fey Doctor who wore funny hats. Jon Pertwee's steely, elegant technocrat, keen on gadgets (and a souped-up veteran car called "Bessie"), has also vanished.



Photograph by Bruno de Hamel

Philip Hinchcliffe, producer of the series, says: "What we have tried to do with Tom is to get back some of the eccentricity of the earlier character. Children are very conservative—they always hate change. It happens every time the Doctor changes—but now Tom seems very popular."

The Doctor's suitably eccentric appearance evolved over two days of dressing up. His large hat proves something of a trial in the studio, each scene preceded by an announcement from the director's assistant that the Doctor is/is not wearing his hat. The long striped scarf is a personal hazard for the Doctor. "I am constantly tripping over it. It's about 16 or 17 feet long, and in damp weather it's practically 20 feet. I had a letter from a girl who had knitted one (there's a pattern) and the first morning she wore it to school she fell downstairs and broke her ankle."

"I get lots of letters", says the fourth Doctor. "It's lovely to get nice letters from children. They always ask if I want any help—if I need them they'll be glad to join me. Children seem to like me—they send me St Christopher medals and things like that." He does

a lot of work publicizing the programme, and was amazed to find 5,000 people waiting to see him in Glasgow a short while ago. This year he switched on the illuminations at Blackpool.

It is a six-day week while the series is being made. Studio time is precious, as there can be as many as 30 scenes with a number of special effects—something repulsive being wound round an arm and carefully sprayed with fresh green slime, for example—yet the programme gets no more time allotted to it than a straightforward play. All the sets are placed back to back in the hangar-like studio, like a Chinese puzzle—drawing-room, hall, laboratory, corridors and rooftops crammed up together, with the producer's box above.

Douglas Carnfield, director of more than 50 episodes, has said that it is the most difficult show to direct in the BBC.

A working day can start at 10.30 am with camera rehearsals and end at 10 pm. There is always the unexpected to deal with. A key member of the cast caught chicken pox, and while waiting for the dreaded varicella to strike again, they had to film as much of the programme without him as they could. Robert Holmes,

the script editor, who has himself written many of the scripts, including *The Ark in Space* (which had giant ants taking over the bodies of human beings) recalls some troublesome hitches.

In his first programme as the Doctor, Tom Baker fell white on location in Dartmoor, and at the end of the take it was discovered that he had broken his collarbone; Elizabeth Sladen was rescued from being swept away in Wookey Hole. The principal characters have now done 48 episodes without a break. Anyone who thinks it is a glamorous life should opt for a regular job in the salt mines.

Philip Hinchcliffe sees the Doctor as an epic hero—allowing for the eccentric image, both he and Robert Holmes feel that Dr Who must be taken extremely seriously. In 1974 the scripts received the Writers' Guild Award. As in farce, there are rules to be kept in science fiction. The whole has a mad logic of its own, which has to be worked through, while maintaining the dramatic tension.

Details are all-important. "I dread", Robert Holmes says, "the 13-year-old pedant who knows more physics than I do." The Doctor had a Moriarty

figure in his life in *The Master*, a time lord like himself, who was a worthy adversary. The liturgy asks that we shall be delivered from the glamour of evil, and the Master certainly had it. Roger Delgado, who played the Master with great panache, was killed in a car accident in 1973, and has proved irreplaceable.

Every now and then there is an outcry that the programme is too violent, too alarming, too unsuitable for children. It is a convention that the more timid of the 60 per cent adults, 40 per cent children (who make up the weekly audience of 10,000,000 or so) watch from a safe distance—behind a sofa or through a crack in the door, shivering with delicious fright. There was a series in which people died unaccountably of the thing they feared the most, and sooner or later the Dr Who programme will get you where you live—fire, suffocation, radiation sickness, falling from great heights, enormous spiders, giant maggots, totalitarian regimes, man-eating plants and a never-ending series of unpleasant monsters. Everything, that is—except sex.

But the Doctor's ladies have, in the main, been pretty, silly little girls who moved the plot on by falling into the clutches of some loathsome creature and screaming the place down, thus setting back the cause of women by at least a century or so. Elizabeth Sladen, as Sarah Jane Smith, is first rate at conveying fear, terror and grief, and is allowed not only to be more beautiful than the other ladies, but also to take action on her own. Described as a journalist, she lives a life free of irate news editors and awkward questions about strange expense accounts. She probably works for a colour magazine. But with the Doctor so much younger these days...

Coming, as it now does, immediately after the News, where baddies of every race, creed and colour (nor to mention the odd monster) are clearly winning hands down, *Dr Who* is an intensely moral (and entertaining) tale of the triumph of virtue and superior technology. Should we ask for anything more? Missing the last episode of *Dr Who and the Zygons*, I rang my father (another fan) and shrieked:

"What happened?"

"They escaped", he said.

That's what we all really want to do.

Philippa Toomey

A new adventure "*The Brain of Morbius*" begins on BBC 1 at 5.55 today.