by Debbie Glanke, Chris Heim, Mindy Kolot and Cris Noll

November 23, 1963 was a historic date for television. It was the debut of what would be one of the longest running, most widely distributed and well-loved programs, the science fiction serial "Doctor Who." Though severely overshadowed by the previous day's event (the assassination of President Kennedy), by late December of that year, with the introduction of the evil space monsters the Daleks, the show was the rage of England.

Though the Daleks were greated in much the same way that R2D2 and C3PO would be much later, it is not only them, and the myriad other exotic space creatures, that make the show continuously popular. Ask any Doctor Who fan, and there are an estimated 98 million of them in 39 countries, and the answer will vary. Certainly a good number are science fiction fans. Others are drawn to the many companions who accom-
Doctor Who

company the Doctor on his adventures. Many like the general tone or mood of the show, its atmosphere of warmth, good humor, and simple, decent virtues. As Elisabeth Sladen (who played Sarah Jane Smith, one of the longest running, best loved companions) put it, "What we do have is a caring for people. It matters very much that (the characters) help each other. It's good sense on that program." But if there is one answer that comes up most often, it is that the character of the

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Tom Baker

Doctor himself attracts people. The Doctor is a rather strange fellow—a 700-year-old Time Lord possessed with a striking intelligence, an heroic if rebellious nature, and insatiable curiosity. He travels through time and space in his Tardis, a rather erratic vehicle, larger inside than outside. Due to a malfunction, the Tardis is frozen in the form of a police box. Perhaps his most disconcerting quality, and the one that allows the show to continue, is his ability to regenerate, cont. page 55

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which changes his features and, often, his personality.

"Doctor Who" evolved slowly. Originally conceived as a children’s show, it had at first only the skeletal outlines of what would eventually become a rather elaborate mythology. As first played by the now deceased William Hartnell, a British stage, film and television actor, the Doctor was a rather "crotchety old man." By the time Hartnell left for reasons of health in 1966, the basic foundation was set.

The second Doctor, Patrick Troughton, had theatre training and began working in television after World War II. During his era, the character of the Doctor changed into a somewhat Chaplinesque figure, a "sort of cosmic hobo." But the first two Doctors are, for most American viewers, only the stuff of legend. Because many of the films were lost, and all were in black and white, they have not been distributed here. So for many the first introduction to the Doctor was embodied by Jon Pertwee.

Pertwee comes from an old and distinguished family. Known as "The Man with a Thousand Voices," he began his career in one of Britain’s radio’s longest running comedies, "The Navy Lark." After his own six-year lark in the Royal Navy, he worked in the circus, teamed the music hall circuit (for a time with friend Peter Sellers), and then began a successful theatre career, getting a Tony nomination in 1967 for his role in the Broadway production of "There's A Girl In My Soup."

When Pertwee joined the show the character of the Doctor changed again. "The head of the BBC said they'd like me to play it," Pertwee relates, "and I said, 'How do you expect me to play it?' He said, 'As Jon Pertwee.'" Well, I said, 'Who's Jon Pertwee?' Because I don't know. 'Well, we know who Jon Pertwee is, so you just go ahead and we'll tell you what we think is you.'

"The fact that I wear flamboyant clothes, and the fact that I ride motorcycles and used to race grand prix cars and I used to race speedboats—fly—drive hovercraft—I'm an underwater skiver (Pertwee wears a Roman ring from 850 B.C. and a Greek pendant from 1250 B.C. he found while diving.) —I do all these things anyway. So I incorporated all these things in the program because I thought it would give it another fillip, another dimension."

One of Pertwee’s fondest recollections of the show was the “family” feeling among the cast and crew. One of his most trying was learning the dialog. "Many of the writers are very erudite people. They used to write eons of gobbledegook which I could not understand. I used to write it on the Tar- dis. I used to write in on my frilly sleeves. I'd write it on my knees if they weren't being shown. And Liz (Sladen) and the Brig and Johe Levene playing Sgt. Benton spent an entire morning moving the furniture. So when I came to do the cue, I said, What... I... Well... They'd shot it and I had nothing to read. So I had to make it up."

Pertwee left the show in 1970. His friend Roger Delgado (the original Master, the Doctor’s arch-foe) died in a car crash and other friends from the program were leaving. Pertwee says it was "the end of an era," and he decided to leave, too. Since then he has played the main role in a successful TV fantasy series, "Worzel Gummidge." In his spare time, Pertwee says, he and his wife travel. "We’ve been around the world three times. We know nearly every island you can get to that’s uninhabited. We’ve been self-supporting on islands. I don’t like the Hiltons of the world. I like to enjoy myself by mixing with the indigenous people, and diving, and enjoying the sun and the water. That’s what we really like to do."

To many fans, Doctor Who is synonymous with the next actor to take the role, Tom Baker. And many, in less guarded moments, will confess that the real reason they watch the show is because of their fascination with him. Baker claims to be surprised by the reaction he elicits from Americans. "The enthusiasm is indescribable, isn’t it? It’s the sort of reception opera singers get. Really, it’s just that Americans are very demonstrative," he laughs. He
John Nathan-Turner, producer of “Dr. Who” and “All Creatures Great and Small” up. I used to find that so tiresome.” Baker says he left the show because he had done it long enough and wanted to move on to other things in his career. Asked what he would like to be remembered for, he replies, “Questions like that bother me slightly because I don’t know how I’m looking. I hope that that won’t really come up for some time since I really can’t be dealing with the thought of not existing. I think death is really just a weakness of character. People should just pull themselves together and refuse to go.”

The Doctor next appeared in the form of Peter Davison. At 11, he was the youngest Doctor and known to most viewers primarily as the younger brother in the “All Creatures Great And Small” series. Like Baker, he attended drama school and hooked up with Nottingham Playhouse shortly after graduation, playing small parts before gradually drifting into television.

Although the Doctor may not have been his most difficult acting challenge, it was tough to succeed the immensely popular Baker. But the show continued to attract viewers, proving Baker’s theory that “no one has ever failed in it.” The formula is more powerful than the person who is at the front of it.” Davison says the Doctor is appealing because “he doesn’t conform to any normal ideas of the hero. You can’t put him in a peghole and say he’s a sort of James Bond.” In fact, he says, if producers tried to create a successful science fiction series, “No one in their right minds would really have come up with the Doctor.” He adds that the appeal of all science fiction is also partially responsible for the show’s success. It is “marvellous for expounding ideas, whether they’re sort of foreboding or otherwise.”

Davison’s tenure as the Doctor, however, will be one of the shortest of all the actors in that role. He takes his final episode in December and will then be off to other projects. The Doctor however will go on, regenerating into British actor Colin Baker. Who knows how the sixth Doctor will behave in his sixth incarnation. But Doctor Who fans know it will be worth finding out.

The 20th anniversary of Doctor Who will not go uncelebrated in Chicago. WTTW Channel 11 (which airs the shows Saturdays at 9 AM and Sundays at 11 PM) will be showing a 20th anniversary program, “The Five Doctors,” which unites all of the actors who played the good doctor in one show. The special, being distributed worldwide simultaneously, unlike the regular series which is shown two years later in the U.S., can be seen November 23 at 10:30 PM.

A 24-hour Doctor Who convention is also set for November 26-27 at the Hyatt Regency O’Hare. This one may outdo the half-day conventions in the combined. Along with exhibits, contests, and a 24-hour video room, the convention boasts a spectacular list of over 20 guests, including four doctors (Pertwee, Baker, Davison, and Troughton), Liz Sladen (Sarah Jane Smith), Louis Jameson (Leela), Anthony Ainley (the Master), John Leeson (the voice of K-9), and Matthew Waterhouse (Adric). Tickets are available from Spirit of Light, 4805 W. Irving Park, Chicago, IL 60614 or by calling 683-0400.

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modestly brushes off the tag of most popular Doctor. “That’s sort of a happy accident. I have no control over it. I didn’t set out to do it.”

Baker grew up in Liverpool, the son of a Jewish father and a devout Roman Catholic mother. At sixteen he entered a monastery. “My very first ambition was to be a saint. I’ve always been ambitious, unlike the character of the Doctor, and I wanted to be a saint from an early age. Then I toyed with being a martyr, but I got frightened of that, so I came out into the big world.” Once out, he was in the service and briefly married (he has two sons) before returning to his early love, the theatre.

Although he did attend drama school in his youth, he has no fond memories of it. “I met Rose Bradford’s, which had a tremendous reputation for voice and movement at the time. I was particularly interested in their stupid theories,” he explains derisively. “They could relax people and make them move very well, but it was all bullshit. I’m still as tense as ever.” The tension seems to have served him well in his post-Doctor career. Baker has done theatre “nearly non-stop” since leaving the show, playing Oscar Wilde and Long John Silver, as well as doing a stint in the Royal Shakespeare Company. He emphatically rules out another series like “Doctor Who” because it “took me 43 weeks or so every year to do, and I really couldn’t get to grips with anything else.”

At the time he was chosen for the show, however, the job was something of a godsend. Though he had appeared in a number