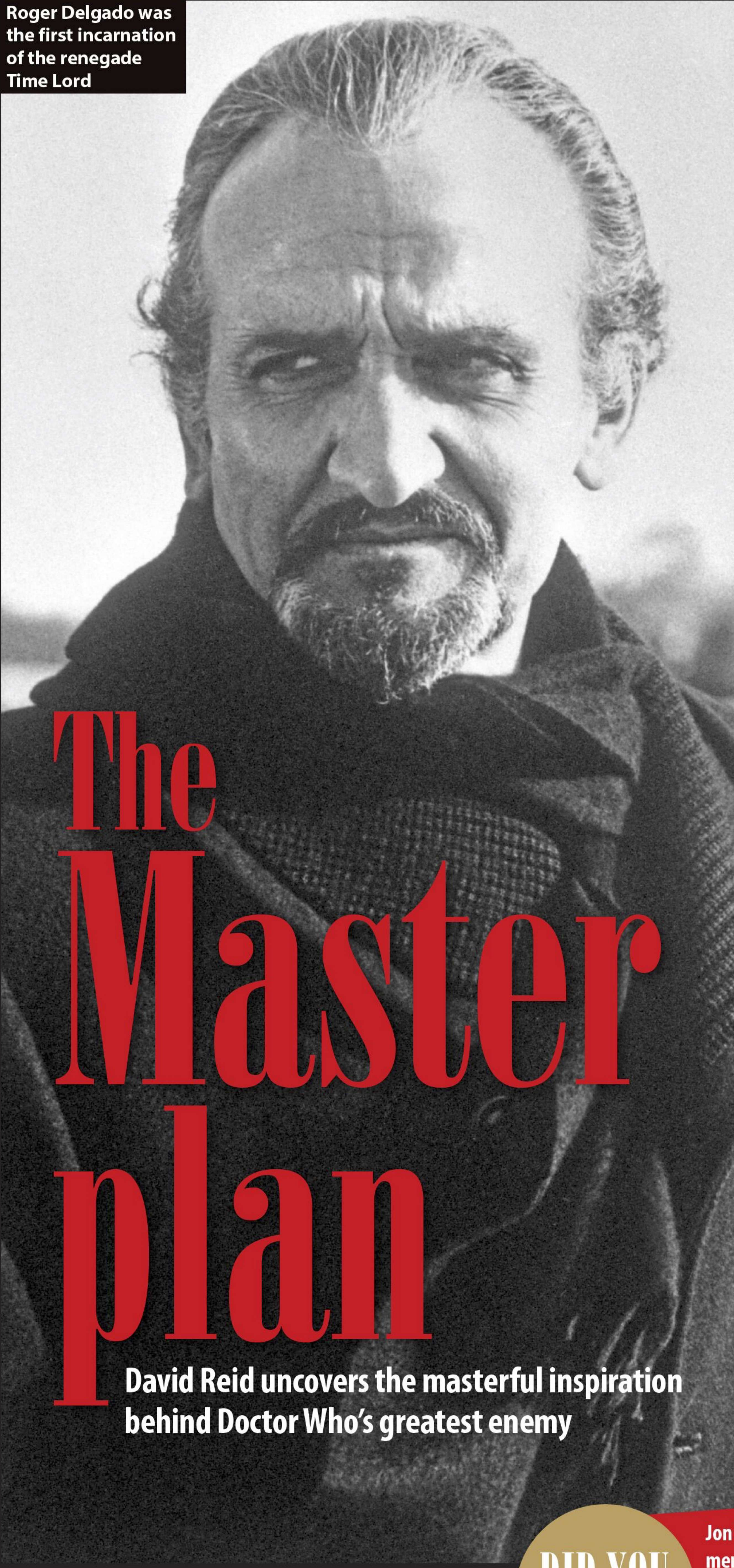


Roger Delgado was the first incarnation of the renegade Time Lord



The Master plan

David Reid uncovers the masterful inspiration behind Doctor Who's greatest enemy



Although enemies on screen Roger Delgado and Jon Pertwee were great friends

The third incarnation of Doctor Who had hit the ground running. Jon Pertwee's suave, action-hero take on The Doctor, combined with a new Earth-bound, Quatermass-meets-James-Bond format – and for the first time in colour – saw previously flagging ratings soar through 1970. That is until the excellent, but sprawlingly over-long seven-part season finale, *Inferno*, resulted in viewers losing interest and tuning out.

Producer Barry Letts and script editor Terrance Dicks realised they would have to re-energise the series a second time.

Throughout Pertwee's first season, The Doctor had worked as a scientific advisor for UNIT (the United Nations Intelligence Taskforce), reporting to Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart (Nicholas Courtney) after being exiled on Earth by his own race, the Time Lords. Letts surmised that, while the premise remained good, ➤

DID YOU KNOW?

Jon Pertwee said Roger Delgado was, 'one of the bravest men I ever knew because he was basically cowardly. He was genuinely frightened of just about everything: water, heights...' Pertwee admired how he faced his fears and never let the audience see that he was terrified.

more variety was needed. He decided that The Doctor would begin to travel in space and time again, but also pondered how he could 'inject a note of difference into the rest? And more to the point, what could we come up with for our opening show that would catch the attention of the great British public?'

The answer came to Letts and Dicks remarkably quickly. Several people had likened the relationship between The Doctor and the Brigadier to Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson, so they conceived a formidable new character as The Doctor's Moriarty; his intellectual equal but opposite – as evil as The Doctor is good. The Master would be of The Doctor's race, another renegade Time Lord, and Letts instantly knew who should play him: a frequent co-star and professional theatrical villain from Barry's earlier acting days, Roger Delgado.

A MENACING CHIN

Delgado was born in London in 1918 to a Belgian mother and Spanish father. He made his BBC debut in *The Three Musketeers* (1954) and quickly became known for playing scoundrels, appearing in many TV shows, notably including the duplicitous Spanish envoy Mendoza in popular ITC series *Sir Francis Drake* (1961-62).

He and Barry Letts had previously worked together as part of writer, director, producer and future BBC Head of Drama, Shaun Sutton's so-called 'Rep', a band of actors he used frequently that had also included second Doctor, Patrick Troughton.

Coincidentally, and unknown to Letts, Delgado and Pertwee had been close friends for many years, as Pertwee fondly recalled, 'Roger was one of my greatest friends ever – a modest, lovable man with a ready wit and a fine sense of humour.'

Delgado was delighted to be cast and later revealed, 'I love playing villains. I am chosen by directors to play wicked men because I have a beard, a menacing chin and piercing eyes. I was thrilled to be offered the part of The Master as I had tried three times to break into Doctor Who but the scope offered by the part was way above any other I had considered.'

The Master's debut was preceded by a striking Radio Times cover featuring an imposing close-up of Delgado, with The Doctor and Brigadier in the background. It was brilliant publicity, although Jon Pertwee was not impressed and complained, 'People keep asking me how I feel about Roger Delgado taking over as The Doctor.'

Season opener, *Terror of the Autons*, masterfully incorporates the new villain into a supercharged sequel to the previous year's *Spearhead from Space*, with the evil, plastic-animating Nestene hive mind and terrifying Auton dummies now collaborating with The Master. The four-part serial, which also introduced new companion Jo Grant (Katy Manning), showcases a compelling, almost telepathic chemistry between Pertwee and Delgado, who face off with a pitch-perfect mixture of amused contempt and grudging respect.

The Doctor's arch nemesis managed to show up, in league with various human and alien villains in every serial that series – including the classic horror-inflected *The Daemons* (1971).

Barry Letts continued to successfully apply his strategy of attention-grabbing openers over the next two seasons, first by reprising classic enemy the Daleks in *The Day of the Daleks* (1972) and then with the multi-Doctor 10th anniversary story, *The Three Doctors* (1973). However, The Master remained very popular, and Delgado reprised the character in a further three adventures before an unexpected real-life tragedy struck.



Anthony Ainley loved playing the part and even answered his phone by saying, 'This is The Master'



Michelle Gomez and John Simm both played The Master in 2017

During a break in the Doctor Who schedule, Roger had been contracted to appear in a film called *Bell of Tibet*, being made in Turkey. En route from the airport to the filming location his taxi driver decided to take a mountain road and, out of control after a near collision with another car, drove over a precipice. Roger was killed instantly. He was only 55 years old.

THE MASTER RETURNS

Just when it seemed that The Master had been respectfully retired for good after Roger Delgado's death, the character re-emerged,

three years into Pertwee's successor, Tom Baker's tenure as the fourth Doctor. *The Deadly Assassin* (1976) features a heavily disfigured Master, played by Peter Pratt, an actor previously best known for comic roles in Gilbert and Sullivan operas.

The Master returned again, initially in a similarly unrecognisable form, in Baker's penultimate adventure, *The Keeper of Traken* (1981), portrayed first by veteran character actor Geoffrey Beevers, before 'merging' with the body of The Doctor's ally Consul Tremas (Anthony Ainley). Ainley continued to play The Master

for the remainder of the series' original run, including in final serial, *Survival* (1989). He also reprised the role for the computer game, *Destiny of the Doctors* (1997).

Then American actor Eric Roberts and, for one short scene, Gordon Tipple, played The Master, alongside Paul McGann in the 1996 Doctor Who TV movie.

In the modern 21st Century revival era of Who, Derek Jacobi briefly undertook the part before regenerating into former *Life on Mars* (2006-07) star, John Simm during tenth Doctor, David

Tennant's second season and Scottish actress Michelle Gomez became the first female incarnation (as Missy) of the character during Peter Capaldi's twelfth Doctor's run. Gomez and Simm memorably guest starred together in the two-part multi-Master story, *World Enough and Time/The Doctor Falls* (2017).

The Master's most recent incarnation was Stockport-born actor Sacha Dhawan who appeared in five episodes during thirteenth Doctor Jodie Whittaker's tenure between 2020 and 2022.

Anthony Ainley played the part with great theatrical flair for the

longest time, and all the other protagonists, so far, have brought their own compelling slant to the character. But, from the moment he declaimed his menacing first line, 'I am usually referred to as The Master,' Roger Delgado set the scene and cemented his unsurpassable legacy as one of the greatest villains of all time and space.

Sacha Dhawan was the nemesis of Jodie Whittaker's Doctor



DID YOU KNOW?

In *The Sea Devils* (1972) The Doctor engages in a rare bout of physical combat – a sword fight with The Master. Pertwee recalled that Delgado was doubled in many of the shots by stunt man Derek Ware as he 'disliked all forms of physical violence'.