

Doctor Who puts accent on a new look to old show

By Simon de Bruxelles

THE ninth Doctor Who has a confession to make, nearly three weeks before his police box materialises for the first time on 21st-century television.

Christopher Eccleston, who has inherited the time-travelling Tardis from predecessors including Patrick Troughton, Jon Pertwee and Tom Baker,

never liked the programme as a boy. He told the audience at a preview of the first episode yesterday in Cardiff, where much of the series was filmed, that he found the character of the Doctor "too authoritarian" and tried to avoid watching it.

The new Doctor is a completely reconstituted character, with short hair and a well-worn leather jacket. He jokes about his sticking-out ears and northern accent.

"I'm different from the other Doctors," Eccleston said. "All the others spoke with this RP [received pronunciation] accent — maybe it was that that put me off."

The new series has retained the best of the old, including the 1950s police box, the theme music, the Daleks, who first



The Autons, aliens of living plastic who take the shape of shop dummies, take over London in the first episode of *Doctor Who*

appear in Episode 6, the Time Lords and the Doctor's "sonic screwdriver". Banished are the wobbly sets and creaky special effects. The new Doctor is mercurial, funny and ever so slightly camp — and he enjoys a closer relationship with his new female assistant than previous doctors. Rose, played by Billie Piper, finds his lack of

social skills infuriating and endearing in equal measure.

Eccleston says that he brought some of himself to the role, but his real inspiration was the creator: the writer and executive producer Russell T. Davies. Eccleston volunteered for the role as soon as he read that Davies, writer of *Queer As Folk* and *The Second Coming*, in

which Eccleston starred, was behind it.

Thirteen episodes will be broadcast in the crucial Saturday early-evening slot on BBC One from the Easter holiday weekend. Unlike previous series, nine of the 45-minute episodes will be self-contained stories, while the other four are two stories in two parts. The

latest Time Lord is very much a creature of the 21st century. His predecessors might have maintained a discreet silence if confronted by the entire British Cabinet breaking wind uncontrollably, as happens in one episode. But the new Doctor tells them: "Would you mind not farting while I'm trying to save the world."

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