

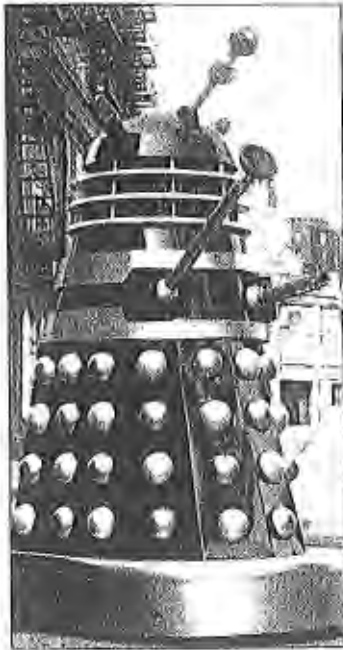
Can Dr Who survive Steven Spielberg?

A timeless
British television
tradition is
falling to
Hollywood

The Yanks are at it again. No sooner have they turned Frances Hodgson Burnett's classic *The Secret Garden* into a multi-million pound feature film drawing accents and all than we learn that another once-sacred British cultural icon is to be grist to the American mill. Steven Spielberg's mitts are itching to transform *Dr Who* into a mega-series.

Daleks as British as a kitchen-sink plunger and cybermen as native as a Hovis loaf are to be gingered up by Mr Spielberg. No doubt the Time Lord's multi-coloured home-knitted scarf, tweed jacket and Fair Isle sweaters will be replaced by bomber jackets, baseball cap and sweat shirts; his assistants will become busty blondes instead of mousey brunettes; and the Tardis will become... I can't think of a suitable American equivalent. That, surely, is the point. *Doctor Who* is quintessentially of this realm.

As one tabloid leader-writer opined, "Is nothing sacred? Next it will be Sherlock Holmes — played by Eddie Murphy". The cultural theft has got to stop. Stop stealing out heroes, runs the argument. You've got your very own Superman and Batman. Leave us our Doctor Who.



A dalek: an English icon crosses the Atlantic

And yet A call to the BBC revealed that *Doctor Who* is not on air, and hasn't been for several years. A repeat of six episodes is planned for this autumn. That is the best that Auntie can offer to celebrate the great man's thirtieth birthday.

Left to us, Doctor Who would languish. The proposed American injection of cash and Spielberg vigour offers us the prospect of a new 22-part series. The baddies that Mr Spielberg dreams up are bound to be better than anything created by the BBC's special effects department.

Haven't the critics simply got the wrong end of the dalek? Culture — high and low — should flow between countries and continents. Just as Britons from Charlie Chaplin, Bob Hope or Stewart Granger have made their fortunes in

Hollywood, so Americans have come to Britain and cheered up our native culture. Robin Hood in the hands of Hollywood is more exciting than any British version. Every remake, be it of Shakespeare or *Doctor Who*, adds something to the original.

Who are we to complain? Broadway is dominated by British theatre. *Upstairs Downstairs* and *The Forsyte Saga* play on Masterpiece Theatre. Our sourness has a distinctly unattractive tang to it. The fact is, the English language is always enriched by exposure to another culture.

Dr Who is special. As children, we were at once fascinated and terrified — it was the first thing that had ever really scared us. Take any group of 30-somethings and they will earnestly discuss far into the night the relative merits of John Pertwee and Patrick Troughton. Or cybermen versus daleks? Or who was the most scrumptious assistant of them all? A generation of long scarved, self-conscious intellectuals modelled themselves on the doctor.

But Doctor Who, of all characters, is ripe for the Spielberg treatment. For all his Englishness, he has an exotic, other-worldly character which will lend well to a bit of transatlantic polish. Of all nations, America's space programme is the most advanced and its inhabitants best able to imagine the life on other planets.

Imitation is, of course, the sincerest form of flattery. We should accept it gracefully.

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