

Looking into the future with Dr. Who

Britain's 6th Time Lord fights Master

By Tom Popson

He has two hearts. He can place himself in a trance that suspends bodily functions. His home planet is many light-years from Earth, but he left there long ago to zip through time and space in a most unlikely-looking vehicle. He keeps himself busy battling the great villains of the cosmos—the Cybermen, the Daleks, the thoroughly despicable Master—and rescuing those less resourceful than himself from fates unspeakable and seemingly unstoppable.

He is, of course, Dr. Who, a Time Lord from the planet Gallifrey and the hero of the popular British science-fiction series seen Sundays at 11 p.m. on WTTW [Channel 11].

An engaging blend of humor, adventure, imagination and preposterous props, the "Dr. Who" series follows the peregrinations of the good Doctor and his companions as they hop from galaxy to galaxy and era to era in a vehicle called a TARDIS [an acronym for Time And Relative Dimensions In Space] that outwardly resembles a British police car box.

The show, which is marking its 21st anniversary in England [the first BBC segment was shown on Nov. 23, 1963], is now seen by about 100 million viewers in 54 countries. It has generated a loyal following of fans—known variously as Whovians or Who-ites—in the Chicago area, and some of them will be gathering at the Hyatt Regency O'Hare Friday through Sunday for "TARDIS 21," a "Dr. Who" convention that will celebrate the show's anniversary and include appearances by actors from the series [see accompanying story].

So far, six actors have played the Doctor. Switching stars after they have built a following could mean death to many other series, but on "Dr. Who" the lead role changes hands fairly smoothly through a plot device that allows the Doctor to "regenerate" into a new body when he is *in extremis* [and when the current star wants out of the series].

While "Dr. Who" regularly recaptures its characters to the 25th Century or the Middle Ages in a twinkling, syndication of the show follows a more snail-like pace: Chicagoans see "Dr. Who" episodes many months after they were shown on British TV. WTTW now is airing segments starring the fifth Doctor, Peter Davison, but in England the sixth Doctor, Colin Baker, has started his run.

On the assumption that Channel 11 will be buying some of the Baker episodes [which so far have not been made available in this market], we thought it would be interesting to travel into our future and see what's in store if and when the sixth Doctor hits our screens. So please join us as we head for the Friday section's TARDIS [whose outward appearance is strikingly like that of a telephone] and punch in the coordinates [which are remarkably similar to a telephone number in



Colin Baker prepares for a journey via the TARDIS.

England) that will enable us to meet the Doctor who is Colin Baker. . . .

As we encounter Baker, a 41-year-old lawyer-turned-actor with curly hair and a genial manner, he has just stepped from a restorative bath in his hotel room after a day's filming on location near Wales. The plot setting for the day's shooting had been England at the time of the Luddite Rebellion in the 19th Century, and the Doctor had engaged the enemy around the entrance to a coal mine. The enemy, it turns

out, is one familiar to Who-ites.

"I can confirm," says Baker, who has been working on the series for about nine months, "that already in my time as the Doctor I have met two of the traditional enemies, one being the Cybermen, which I know the American viewers are very fond of, and the other being that well-known gentleman, the Master. Yes, he is still around. In fact, he's in a hotel room down the corridor from me right now. . . .

"The story we're doing now is called 'The Mark of the Rani.' I

TARDIS 21 lures the stars

Here's a brief look at this weekend's "TARDIS 21" convention:

Among those present will be four of the actors who have portrayed the Doctor: Patrick Troughton, Jon Pertwee, Peter Davison and Colin Baker. Also on hand will be Anthony Ainley, who plays the Master. Dr. Who sidekicks scheduled to attend are Nicola Bryant (who plays Peri Brown in the Colin Baker episodes), Janet Fielding [Tegan], Elisabeth Sladen [Sarah Jane Smith], Mary Tamm and Lalla Ward [both of whom played Romana] and Mark Strickson [Turlough].

Also on hand will be some of the men of the United Nations Intelligence Taskforce and "Dr. Who" writer Terrance Dicks.

Scheduled diversions include screenings of "Dr. Who" episodes, a multi-media look at the show's history, an auction of "Dr. Who" artwork, a costume contest and a sales area for "Dr. Who" memorabilia.

What: "TARDIS 21" convention

Where: Hyatt Regency O'Hare Hotel

When: Friday through Sunday, beginning at 9 a.m. each day [closing time indefinite]

How much: Adults: \$75 for three days, \$65 for two days. Children 5 through 11: \$20. Children under 5: free with paying adult.

There will be a trivia contest in which convention attendees can join the show's actors on-stage to be quizzed about "Dr. Who" minutiae.

Attendance at the convention will be limited. Tickets have been on sale for several weeks, but a convention spokesman said last week that tickets should still be available at the door this weekend. For further information, call the "TARDIS 21" hotline: [312] 283-DWHO.

don't think I'm giving secrets away if I say the principal villain is the Master and there is a new lady villain called the Rani, who is briefly in association with the Master, although they're both after their own nefarious ends. But I think I probably shouldn't tell you any more than that."

The various actors who have played the Doctor have, of course, imparted different personalities to the show's central character. They also have given him different sartorial touches. Davison sports a stalk of something that may or may not be celery in his lapel. His prede-

cessor, Tom Baker, traipsed about the vastnesses trailing a 15-foot scarf.

Colin Baker's Doctor wears a cat pin in his lapel. "My Doctor," explains Baker, "subscribes to the view of Kipling, who said, 'I am the cat who walks by himself, and all times and places are the same to me.'"

"My Doctor's character combines the irascibility of William Hartnell, who was the first Doctor, with a certain amount of the devilish humor of Patrick Troughton, the second Doctor.

Continued on page 6

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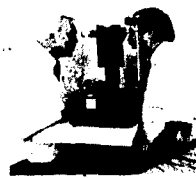
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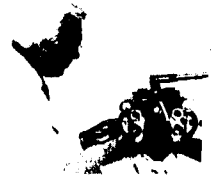
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Newest Time Lord takes on the Master

Continued from page 5

I'm trying to bring in a bit more derring-do as well. I quite like the physical stuff. A bit like Jon Pertwee, the third Doctor."

While professing not to know the exact reasons for the success of "Dr. Who," Baker has some theories:

"Humor, I think, is very important to the show," he says. "But the humor has to be balanced in the right direction. It must come out of situations in character rather than being imposed to get an easy laugh. You can go too far with humor. If, for instance, the Doctor begins to be humorous at the expense of the villains, it can diminish the threat of the villains—because basically we know that they're all men covered in foam rubber with stalks sticking out of them. It would be very easy to mock that. But that would be a mistake. There must always be a very genuine fear of these monsters.

"I think, though, that imagination is the strongest element to the show. That is helped by the fact that the writers know they can't get the Doctor out of a

tricky situation by bringing in a bank of sonar phasers. The show can't afford the gizmos. The budget for one hand-held blaster in 'Star Wars' would record five of our shows.

"There is also a particular Englishness to the show which, I think, appeals to a lot of Americans. We're not really attempting to compete with the high-technology American 'Star Wars' stuff. It's much more a rubber-band, hand-crank sort of job. That much, I can assure you, remains exactly the same about the show.

"The show is a spot of King Arthur, really. It's the old values of heroism. The lone man, unarmed, going out into the midst of the dastardly foe and winning with charm and a bit of string. And making many mistakes and having really no logical reason why he should succeed but always coming out on top. That's always an attractive concept, I think."

A lawyer who chucked life at the bar to begin acting at age 26, Baker appeared in, among other television vehicles, a serial based on Honore de Balzac writings and a down-and-nasty soap opera be-

fore landing a supporting role and eventually the lead on "Dr. Who." The series is taped over a nine-month period each year.

"At the moment," says Baker, "we're filming 'The Mark of the Rani' in an amazing location. It's a fully working 19th-Century mill village that has been preserved as a sort of museum. But, yes, we do spend a lot of time in quarries. Every single alien planet tends to be a deserted clay pit or chalk pit or gravel pit. And they are not the most joyous places, I can tell you."

While "Dr. Who" fans can be assured of future evil-doing by the Master and the Cybermen, there is some less-welcome news concerning one of the Doctor's most popular sidekicks, K-9. A computerized mechanical dog that was relentlessly logical and lovable, K-9 was last seen disappearing into E-Space, an alternate universe, during the reign of Tom Baker as Dr. Who. [Actually, it was K-9 Mark II that rolled into the distance, but we won't get into that.] The little fellow, says Colin Baker, does not return to the series, having gone to "that great bone yard in the sky."