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Doctor Who class notes: Tom Baker, Hammer horror and 'Genesis of the Daleks'

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Tom Baker, the Fourth Doctor in "Doctor Who." (BBC video still)



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SYRACUSE, N.Y. -- "Doctor Who" class professor [Anthony Rotolo](#) will never admit he has a favorite Doctor, but if one exists, it's probably Tom Baker.

Not only did he tell us the Fourth Doctor held a "special place in his heart," but Rotolo showed up to class on Feb. 16 wearing Tom Baker's signature striped scarf and floppy hat.

1974 to 1981

Culture in the U.K. and the U.S. diverge a bit at this point.

"In the U.S., Nixon's been in office, hippies are out of fashion and the U.S. debates a return to conservative values," Rotolo said.

Across the pond, however, Margaret Thatcher (Leader of the Conservative Party) still wouldn't become the prime minister for another nine years. The counterculture in the U.K. remains strong and the 'Hammer horror' movement grows in popularity.

Hammer horror referred to a resurgence in monster movies thanks to Hammer Film Productions in London. The film company re-imagined and classic monster movies, including Dracula, the Mummy and Frankenstein's monster.

As Hammer raked in success, themes of horror started to emerge in "Doctor Who" and monsters became more developed, both in their characters and in special effects.

The Fourth Doctor (Tom Baker)

Baker spent seven years as Doctor Who, and during that time, ratings skyrocketed. Baker's Doctor regularly drew in 8 to 11 million viewers.

"For the first time, the Doctor acts distinctly alien," Rotolo said.

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He's unpredictable, subject to mood swings and uses jelly babies to distract his enemies or reward his companions.



As Rotolo explained last week, Baker presided over a real shift in "Who" fandom, in which people on the fringes started to identify with the show.

"I mean this in the best way -- that's when the geeks and the freaks started to connect with the series," he said.

He recorded 178 episodes, worked with four different producers and four different actresses playing the three different companions during his tenure.

Genesis of the Daleks

One of the most well-known and well-regarded serials during Baker's era was "Genesis of the Daleks," aired originally over six weeks.

"Genesis of the Daleks" influences and rewrites "Doctor Who" in a definite way.

"It goes from being about the monsters to dealing with issues, like genocide," Rotolo said. "It gets deeper and, in some cases, preachy."

The Daleks were created to reflect the U.K. post-WWII fears of zealous racism, fascism and nationalism.

When the Doctors refer to the Daleks as "totally evil," the Daleks' creator Davros explains their programming. Their programmed "ideals" align frighteningly with those of the Nazi party.

"They are conditioned simply to survive," Davros explains. "They can survive only by becoming the dominant species...when the Daleks are supreme rulers of the universe, then you will peace...they are a power not of evil, but of good." Shiver.



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Muddy Mudskipper

Feb 17, 2015

I was too young to pick up on all the subtext, I just wanted Davros' rolling chair.

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Katrina Tulloch | ktulloch@syracuse.com

Feb 17, 2015

@Muddy Mudskipper That chair was beyond awesome. I want to be Davros next Halloween just to have an excuse to make one.

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Muddy Mudskipper

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