



DOCTOR WHO

WHO—IT'S COLIN BAKER, THE NEWEST TRAVELER OF TIME AND SPACE, CONTINUING THE 20 YEAR TRADITION OF TELEVISION'S OLDEST SCIENCE FICTION HERO

BY CL. CROUCH

When Colin Baker donned the "wonderful technicolor cozzie" (as he describes the costume of The Doctor), little did he know that he would be competing with another popular Doctor in the eyes of many fans. Nor did he expect to wind up in the thick of controversy when production came to a sudden halt on the long-running series earlier this year.

Dr. Who was in production for BBC-1, one of the two U.K. channels operated by the British Broadcasting Corporation. They each have their own comptroller who decides what programs will be produced and shown. Above them is the Managing Director of television, and above him the Board of Directors, but the day-to-day operation is left to the people in administrative positions. Thus the controller of BBC-1's job is to decide how the money allocated to his network will be spent. So what is the story? Why was a series as popular as the 22 year old *Doctor Who* suddenly suspended?

"The rumors going on about the break in filming all imply that there's some kind of malevolent influence at

work in the BBC," Baker discloses. "There isn't. There's no great plot. The truth is always a hundred percent more mundane than the rumor, I'm afraid, and always a lot more casual as well."

"Michael Grade recently took over the job of comptroller on BBC-1. He's a young man, younger than myself, and his family, the Grades, are like royalty in a sense. They've been in television and entertainment for two or three generations.

"Now, Michael Grade wanted very much to do things his way," Baker continues, "and there's an old saying: A new broom sweeps clean. So the first thing Grade did was to cancel *Dallas*.

This brought a storm of protest. I understand that there was also pressure put on him from above and *Dallas* was put back on again.

"The second thing he did was to say, 'We're going to save money and not produce *Doctor Who* this year,' because the BBC is a bit short of money. His thought was that they're going to save money to do new drama because he believed that the BBC should do more new things. And the only way they can do new things is by cancelling some of the old. That was his logic, and so *Doctor Who* fell under the axe.

"What followed was a storm of

protest—headlines in national daily newspapers. It was in *The Daily Mirror*, *The Daily Sun* and *The Daily Star*, which are tabloids. But nevertheless, in huge headlines they said: DOCTOR WHO AXED!!! Thousands of letters, and I mean sacks full, have been carried into Michael Grade's office. I haven't seen the mail myself, but I am told that this is what's happening."

THE DOCTOR SPEAKS OUT

Among those who were understandably shocked by the production hiatus was Colin Baker himself.

"I was shattered! If you put it in the context of someone who had just taken over the part, here it's at the end of my first season and the program's taken off! Now I hope and pray (and I think I know) that it's not because they think, 'My God, he's dreadful! Let's axe him!!' But nonetheless it could be interpreted that way by someone who's not interested in *Doctor Who*. It seems to read: Colin Baker's taken over the part, then they've cancelled the show. The two things are linked together subconsciously in their mind! I don't like to be associated with that kind of failure. I was very upset."

But that wasn't the only reason

Baker was disappointed. On a professional and personal level, he really liked playing the Doctor and was disheartened to see it all end so soon.

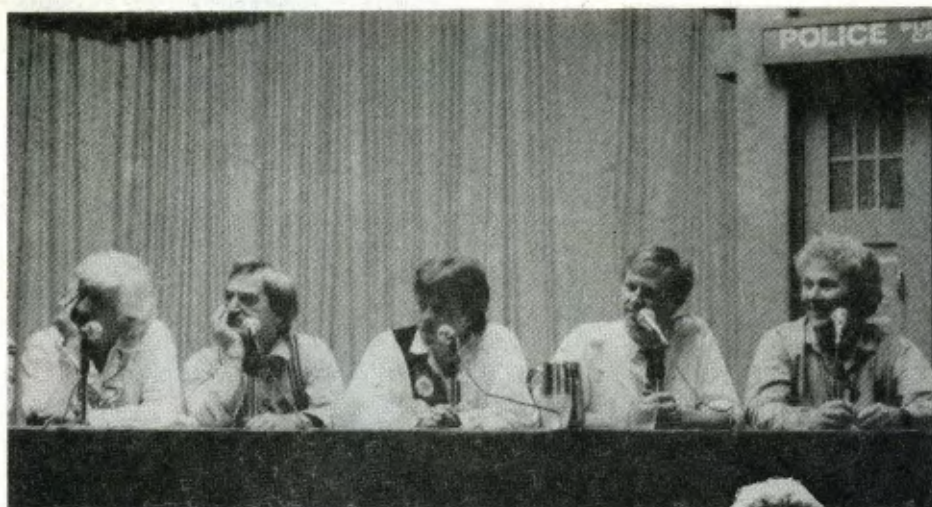
"I enjoyed it! I was geared up for it. I was ready to go onto the next series. So I'm very, very disappointed."

In the spirit of the current popularity of awareness songs, a tune titled "Who Cares?" about *Doctor Who* was recently recorded. All of the proceeds from its sales will go to cancer research.

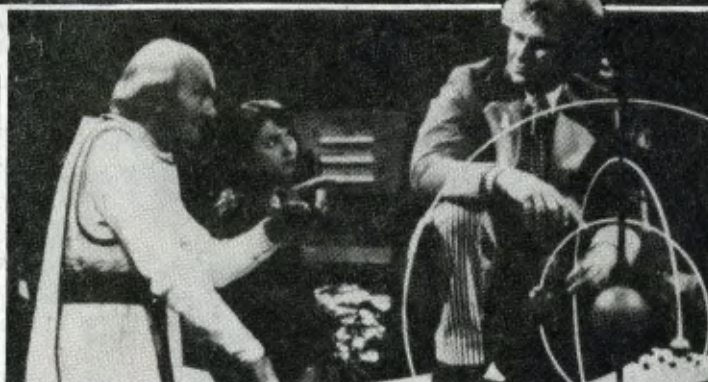
"It was obviously done in the wake of the Ethiopian appeal record. But of course, it's much more minor. The funds go for cancer relief, so it wasn't done to raise money for *Doctor Who*. It was



A gaggle of young *Doctor Who* fans, dressed up as their favorite incarnations, presided over by current *Who* portrayal Colin Baker.



Above: a convention panel featuring four of the actors who've portrayed Doctor Who: (L to R) Jon Pertwee, Pat Troughton, Frazer Hines (who played Companion Jamie), Peter Davison, Colin Baker.



just a protest song. People who sang on it included The Moody Blues, Phyllis Nelson, a lot of British pop singers like Bucks Fizz...and I even sang on it as well!"

Rumors continue to fly about how soon production will begin again. When it does, Colin Baker fully expects to return. One rumor which has been making the rounds concerns Tom Baker, the actor who played the fourth Doctor, returning as a guest star in an episode.

"It's absolute hogwash! I had lunch with the script editor, whom I see regularly. We're just waiting to hear what's going on so that he can commission the scripts. If he doesn't know, I'm sure that whoever said that Tom Baker's going to play an abbot in one of the shows is just starting a rumor for the sake of having a bit of fun."

BAKER VS. BAKER

A phenomenon peculiar to American *Who* fans is the preference for Tom Baker over all the other actors who played the doctor, even though he left the series three years ago. The

reason for this is that Baker's seasons were the episodes seen first by U.S. fans. Having another actor playing Doctor Who is, to we yanks, tantamount to having someone other than Leonard Nimoy playing Mr. Spock.

When Colin Baker first started appearing at U.S. *Who* conventions, he affected a running gag of acting offended whenever he saw fans dressed like Tom Baker's Doctor.

"I did it as a joke, because the name is the same, the hair is curly and there are obvious comparisons that are going to be made. I've never met the gentleman, but I suspect we've got the same sense of humor," Colin suggests. "Plus there are similarities in our ways of playing the part, although I would say I was more like the other Doctors than like Tom. But he has such a firm foothold here! He's an obvious target to go sniping at, but it's all done in the best possible taste. There is a tradition established with the Doctors that when, say, Pat Troughton and Jon Pertwee get together, they have a kind of friendly rivalry. I think if I was ever nasty to Peter Davison, people would lynch me because he's such a patently

nice person.

"At my first American convention, wherever I looked, there were scarves. So off the top of my head, I just said 'Burn your scarves!' But there are some people who don't understand my sense of humor. I met someone at a convention recently who told me that I had been 'extremely rude' to her at another gathering. It turned out that what happened was that I had seen her wearing a huge Tom Baker scarf and hat and I said something like 'Get rid of that scarf at once! How dare you wear that in my presence!' I thought I had said it in humor. I think the mere fact of saying that indicates that it's not intended to be serious. But this woman had been distraught for weeks because I had told her to remove her scarf. I would say that's hypersensitivity rather than anything that's my fault."

But Colin Baker understands why his namesake has such an unusually large following in America, moreso than Tom does over the other Doctors back in England.

"In England we obviously had it in order," Colin says, "so that Tom Baker is the fourth Doctor. He happened to play it for seven years, which is a long time, so there was a generation that only knew Tom, really, and for whom Hartnell and Troughton were just memories. But over here in America, you started with Tom and you had seven years worth of Tom to watch, which is a hell of a lot! So you got Tom first, and that's a very strong image to begin with, and you got the others afterward. I can see where a 'Tom cult' would've built up. It didn't have that same kind of footing in England. Because Hartnell, say, only did it for three years, we got used to the idea that The Doctor was going to change.

"Tom has great charisma. He's got an intensity and a very particular, strong face," Colin continues. "The comparisons, though, are made not by we who play the part, but by fans. They all seem to want to have a favorite. I personally think that's rather sad. I feel that it's quite nice to like the program and enjoy each Doctor as they come along."

