STARLOG INTERVIEW

Jeremy Bulloch

The Empire's silent stalker, Boba Fett puts aside his Wookie scalps and unplugs his jet pack long enough to tell us about the actor behind the helmet.

By ALAN BRENDER

In The Empire Strikes Back, Jeremy Bulloch is the evil, stealthy, chief bounty hunter, Boba Fett—a proud possessor of Wookie scalps and battle wounds. In real life, Bulloch is a charming, bovish-looking, blond-haired, blue-eyed British actor who counts Disney films and TV sit-coms among his acting credits.

Bulloch started acting when he was 10 years old. "I was a typical freckled-faced sandy-haired lad," he says. During those adolescent years he played in hundreds of series aimed at kids, including the second episode of Dr. Who.

He's been an actor now for 25 years. ("You can work out my age from that," he adds jokingly.) Among the movies in which he has appeared are: Mary, Queen of Scots, Summer Holiday, The Virgin and the Gypsy, Escape from the Dark and O Lucky Man. He's been in two James Bond films; he was Q's assistant in For Your Eyes Only, and in The Spy Who Loved Me, "again a small part. They put these charges under me, and I get ripped apart after 20 minutes—the story of my life," he says with an ingratiating smile.

In television Bulloch has played the spectrum, from Hotspur, in a fairly recent production of Richard II, to one of the lead characters in a zany British comedy series, Agony in England.

When The Empire Strikes Back was being filmed in London in 1979, Bulloch went to the studio to talk to George Lucas and Gary Kurtz because "there was talk of this new character—not a big character, but a new one. I arrived at the studio not knowing what was going to happen."

"They asked me to put this costume on, which I donned and thought: 'This is strange.' There was an odd sort of Wookie scalp hanging from my shoulder, which I originally put under my helmet because I thought it was some kind of hair piece."

"It took a long time, but I finally got the costume on. Then I walked onto the set. My first meeting with George Lucas was actually in the costume. He said, 'You look fantastic.' I didn't know how to react to everything or what he wanted me to say—even if he wanted me to speak. Everybody was on the set because they were actually in the middle of doing something with the snow creature. Everything seemed to stop and there was this marvelous feeling of a presence of somebody else. All the crew looked around at this new character. I thought, he, this character, obviously looks good. He's the one that got away. There are bullet holes all over his armor. And he has a shredded cape. He's got these Wookie scalps. So he's obviously done pretty well over the years in the Galaxy."

"Lucas chatted with me and said: 'This looks marvelous, and as far as I'm concerned you're fine.' At the time, the character of Boba Fett was just one of the bounty hunters coming down to capture Han Solo and take him away.

"It wasn't a part I tested for. I have tested for a lot of different films and either I've got them or haven't. The part of Boba Fett is very slow, very stealthy. I remember the director saying to me on the first day before we started: 'This character has to be a very cool
customer. Imagine you’re walking down the street in a Western town. He’s quick but stealthy.’"

**Speaking For Boba**

Bulloch practiced various voices for the character, including one that was very mechanical sounding, but in the end his voice was dubbed. “They went back to America,” Bulloch says, “to do a lot of the sound stuff. I’m not going to stand and say ‘Why didn’t you use my voice?’ If I used my voice as it is now, it wouldn’t be right. They used a voice similar to the one I tried to do. As I see it, the character has his mask and his mystery. It doesn’t matter who does the voice.

“I had a real letter from a girl which was quite funny. She wrote: ‘Is it your real voice? You send me into a deep swoon. Mind you, if it isn’t your voice, I won’t stop loving you.’”

Although the actual role was not very large and his voice was never used for any of the lines, Bulloch says that he couldn’t believe the number of letters he received. “I get fan mail from other things, but not in such a rush. The first batch came last August—about 25. Then another lot came—50 letters. Then a hundred. And so it went on.”

The only other time that Bulloch received anywhere near the number of letters he has received for his role as Boba Fett was when he was in a popular British soap opera. One time while on that soap his father in the serial died. Some fans then sent him a wreath and their condolences.

Now, he says somewhat jestingly, “‘Many people have written for me to send them something. ‘Could you snap off a bit of your tie? Do you have a shirt we can have?’ All sorts of things.”

Most of the letter writers who have written because of his Boba Fett characterization are between the ages of five and 25. “Quite a lot from women,” he adds, “which is always nice. I replied to each letter. Several people have written to me three or four times via America and their letters get to me maybe two months later.”

“A lot of letters have come from six year olds. They write in their scrappy handwriting, ‘Dear Bob Fett’ or ‘Bubble Fett’ or whatever. ‘We think you are terrific. Your friend, Brad Hacko.’ So I’ll write back: ‘Dear Brad, Thanks very much. I will send a photograph soon. May the dark side of the Force be with you. Boba Fett.’ Just underneath I write my real name, Jeremy Bulloch.”

Most of the letters from older fans ask such things as: “What are you going to do in the next film?” “Will you capture him?” “Will you kill him?” “Who are you, anyway?” “Some,” Bullock adds, “have even written to me, saying ‘I’m sure you could be the other.’ I wrote back and said, ‘That’s very kind but I don’t know what’s in the writers’ minds.”

At the time of this interview, Bullock didn’t know yet whether he would even be in the next film. “Having been an actor for 25 years, you don’t say, ‘Oh, that’s lovely. I’m doing the next film. Then I’m doing...’ until you’ve been asked and things have been signed. Everything is very secret at the moment, which is quite right. There is so much about the Empire that things should be kept quiet. A lot of actors in The Revenge of the Jedi won’t know what’s happening even the day they start. I feel the more mysterious they keep it, the better it is.”

**Gearing Up**

“If I do Revenge of the Jedi, I shall play him exactly as before—stealthily and slow. Each turn of the head is slow. He’s always aware of people around him. And he’ll have all that gear. He carries this gun. He has a jet pack, a rocket launch. There’s so much on his arms—all sorts of buttons he can press for laser rockets and things like that. It’s rather like wearing armor from the Middle Ages but with sophisticated science-fiction gear. Goodness knows how we’ll run from anything with all that gear.”

During the filming of Empire, Bulloch says the jet pack was a heavy burden to carry around. It weighed approximately 20 pounds. “When they would put it on me, I would suddenly dip right back. Every once in a while, the director would say: ‘Are you okay, Jeremy?’ I’d say, ‘Yes,’ but in fact I was suffering. You can’t complain. You just get on and do it. At any rate, I used to wear it for a quarter of an hour at the most. But it looked good. And it made me stand very straight.”

“The helmet was another problem. It wasn’t very heavy, but it was very hot. But I reckon I didn’t have it as bad as some of the others. Dave Prowse was very hot under the
The famous carbon freezing chamber, where Fett waits to collect a frozen Han Solo.

Before *Empire* premiered, Fett was introduced as an animated villain in the *Star Wars* TV special.

Darth Vader costume. And Peter Mayhew, who plays Chewbacca, he was stifling. And Anthony Daniels . . . I'm probably the least one to complain. Mine compared to theirs was very light. Still, it did take some 20 minutes to put together."

One afternoon the costume caused Bulloch some embarrassment and discomfort. As he tells the story, "I was so thirsty one afternoon that I drank a couple pints of lager and had a light sandwich. Just as I finished that, they said, 'Okay everybody. Back on the set. Let's carry on with the freezing chase scene.' So the dresser got me back into costume. The director said, 'Let's start with where you are walking down the stairs.' It took a long time to set up this scene—about 20 minutes. By then the two pints of lager had worked their way to my bladder, but I couldn't get out of my costume. So I had to hold it. You can't suddenly say in the middle of shooting a scene that has already been set up, 'Excuse me, could I relieve myself?' It would have taken me 20 minutes to take the costume off and 20 minutes to put it on again. Everyone knew
though I was desperate to go, and they all made remarks. I just had to suffer through it, but it made me laugh later."

During the filming of the carbon freezing chamber scene, Bulloch was greatly concerned about his footing. "I was walking down behind Han Solo, and I thought: 'If I slip now, I've had it. I'm going to destroy everything. Because I couldn't see where I was going. I had these funny boots with two spikes in the toes and every now and then as I would touch my foot down one would get caught and crossed. I thought I would be going head over ass.'"

**Early "Who"**

Aside from *Empire*, Bulloch has only appeared in two other science-fiction features—both were episodes of the British SF institution *Dr. Who*. "I did the second story of *Dr. Who* way back in 1962 when I was 16 years old. I was the leader of a race of children. They were a very intelligent race. We had this swept back hair, pointed ears and sort of funny eyebrows on top of our foreheads. They blocked out our real eyebrows and put these eyebrows on the tops of our heads. The special effects didn't work at all."

Ten years later, Bulloch appeared in another segment of *Dr. Who* as a different character. By this time the series was into its third doctor, Jon Pertwee, and the special effects had much improved. "In this segment," says Bulloch, "I played Hal, the Archer, who is like a Robin Hood character. The telephone box arrives, and there's Dr. Who and all these people from the Middle Ages. I'm supposed to be a nice young man, a brilliant archer with long hair, tights and all that. Suddenly this creature from space arrives, an ugly sort of lizard-looking creature. The only way to kill this creature was to fire this arrow from my bow into a tiny hole in the back of his neck. Right at the end of the series I do kill him, and the doctor goes off quite happily."

Bulloch says he recently spoke to the producer of *Dr. Who* and told him, "Look it's been 10 years since I did the last one; so I'm ready to come into it again." He said, 'Well, we'll see.' There is a possibility. I've dropped the suggestion, and I hope they pick up on it. I feel that 1982 is my time to come back into it again because it will be 10 years since I did the last one and 20 years since I did the first."

Should the producers ask Bulloch to appear in a *Dr. Who* segment, he already has an idea of the type of character he would like to play—"a masked creature, that would be nice. I've been seen in the other two. I think I could go by the mask this time—or be just a voice."

Of all Bulloch's roles, his two sons, ages eight and eleven, have enjoyed Boba Fett the most even though they could not see their father's face in it. "They were thrilled with this role," he explains, "better than *Hamlet*. I recently played Shakespeare all around the country. When I got home, their little faces were there and they got the picture of daddy up there as Boba Fett. Usually they take my acting career in stride. My oldest one, the eleven year old, plays it down. He never says I'm involved in acting. But my little one tells his friends that his dad is a creature. And if they don't believe him, he tells them that his dad will come and beat up their dads in his costume. They love it. I think Boba Fett means more to them than anything I've done. The eleven year old will say, 'I liked that play you did.' But with Boba Fett, there's more variety for them. It's world-wide."

Bulloch himself loved having done the part. "It's almost like being a five year old," he explains, "but taking it seriously because it is a job of work. You are carried away by these fantastic sets. I hope this won't be my last science-fiction part because I love it."

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An International Fan Club has been established for Jeremy Bulloch. Fans in the United States and Canada should write to P.O. Box 6916, San Jose, CA 95150. In the United Kingdom and the rest of Europe interested people should address their queries to the club at: La Maida Avenue, London W2 1TF, Eng.