The Filmgoer's Companion describes him as a "British character actor with a larger-than-life air," and for seven years, Tom Baker brought that very quality to the title role of the longest-running science-fiction TV series ever, Britain's Doctor Who.

Now, three years after Baker "died" in the last episode of "Logopolis" (to be replaced by Peter Davison), he remembers his TV tenure as "very, very happy years—I don't recall a single day when I didn't want to go to work."

Working on Who could be quite strenuous; it usually took about 48 weeks to tape a single season's 26 episodes. Nevertheless, Baker says it was worth it: "I remember laughing a lot, enjoying the energy, and being the weekly reference point with new directors and new designers. It's a sort of involvement which will probably never occur for me again, because I can't imagine doing a TV series where I would stay for so long." He pauses to reflect. "I think I probably stayed too long on Doctor Who. I should have been brave and given someone else a chance earlier, but it's quite hard to give up something which makes you very happy.

"There's a dilemma which actors face. As soon as you're successful in something, there's a temptation to think, 'Well, let's move on and capitalize on it,' since variety is what stretches an actor. In the end, I believe I stayed because they took the time to consider my views and listen to them. They were kind enough to do that because they were convinced that I had the program's total interest at heart."

Given such happy memories, why isn't Baker appearing in the BBC's 20th anniversary celebration of Doctor Who's first broadcast? At the time of taping, Baker was touring with the Royal Shakespeare Company, and despite attempts to shoot around that commitment by producer John Nathan-Turner, the actor decided not to appear in the show. "I did look at the script and think about it for a week or two," Baker says, "but, somehow, I couldn't brave—I didn't have the will power to go back to something which I had left, that I had been so happy in, and return to it with strangers. I just couldn't accept that feeling—and John Nathan-Turner was very sympathetic. He said he half-understood, which I thought..."
was very kind." Nevertheless, Baker's presence will be felt in the anniversary special through footage from the previously un-aired story "Shada," which was halted in production by a 1980 technicians' strike and never completed.


During his stint as The Doctor (he played the role longer than any other actor), Baker appeared in 41 Who stories, and co-starred with eight traveling companions: Elisabeth Sladen (Sara Jane Smith), Ian Marter (Lt. Harry Sullivan), Louise Jameson (Leela), Mary Tamm and Lalla Ward (Romana I and II), Matthew Waterhouse (Adric), Jane Fielding (Tegan Jovanka) and Sarah Sutton (Nyssa).

Since leaving the TARDIS in 1980, Baker has been busy. In addition to his Royal Shakespeare performances, he played the title role in "The Trials of Oscar Wilde" in London's West End theater district and later Long John Silver in a stage version of "Treasure Island." Offered the chance to portray Safari in "Amadeus" in a British tour, Baker turned it down due to the nine-month commitment. Usually, an actor leaving a role like The Doctor would be deluged with scripts to repeat the character under another name in a similar series, but Baker has been lucky. "The anxiety of being typecast has largely vanished for me," he comments.

Baker is married to a Who co-star, actress Lalla Ward, who played Romana from 1980-81. After departing the series, Ward toured in a play directed by Gillian (Cats) Lynn and co-starring Leslie Caron.

**Elisabeth Sladen Returns to the TARDIS**

It has been six years since she last stepped over the threshold of that blue police box, but Elisabeth Sladen still has happy thoughts about the time she spent traveling the cosmos with Doctor Who (see STARLOG #42 for an earlier Sladen interview).

"Looking back on it, it's quite a high point, really. Everyone looked after you on that show," she laughs at a private memory. "I will never need a psychiatrist. I stayed three years because I loved it. Originally, I was only going to stay one year, but I enjoyed it so much that I decided to stay longer."

When Sladen left her role as Sarah Jane Smith, the hero's companion in Doctor Who, she stated publicly that she would never appear in Who-related material again. But in 1981, she played Sarah once again, in a pilot episode for a series to be called K-9 and Company. The plot revolved around a gift from the Doctor to Sarah, yet another version of the Time Lord's mobile computer, the dog-like K-9. Together, K-9 and Sarah must solve a mystery in the English countryside. Sladen admits that the pilot appearance and her subsequent return for The Five Doctors special go against her original resolve. "I said I would never do Doctor Who again, but K-9 and Company was basically different—the idea of an assistant working without the Doctor. And to be asked back for a 20th anniversary celebration—well, it would almost have been bad manners not to go."

In the meantime, Sladen has kept busy with British regional theater. She is currently considering scripts for a return to television. But, certainly, nothing could compare to the excitement, the thrill and the outright danger of Doctor Who. Sladen laughs about Sarah's propensity for stumbling into trouble. "Always falling down holes! In the Dartmoor one, 'The Sontaran Experiment,' she's carefully told, 'Don't go with people, and that he moves around in this wonderful machine which is dimensionally transcendental, bigger on the inside than the outside."

"Everybody knew all these facts, and nothing could change. One of television's paradoxes is that it takes place almost exclusively in a domestic context. Any long-running series freezes characters once they have become established, because the audience doesn't like sudden changes. If someone wrote a Doctor Who story in which he got involved with a girl, or was gratuitously violent, I think that would be unbearable for our audience. That predictability, that certainty, of a character's qualities reassures the audience—and they don't want it changed, just like a small child wouldn't like his favorite uncle showing up after two months sporting a beard—or totally bald."

"The problem is how to be inventive within those very severe, daunting limitations. I enjoyed the challenge of trying to be surprising and inventive within those boundaries. To a certain extent, I met that challenge by going out to promote the show and meeting the children who watched it. I was always very touched by the sweetness of their response. I was touched most of all that, just for a little while in my life—you know the expression, 'Don't talk to strangers'—that rule didn't apply to me. I had, through the license of television and the character I was playing, a marvelous, intimate intimacy with children. That was very precious to me."

Baker says he has always considered Doctor Who a children's show, "of whatever age," he adds. "Doctor Who is a show

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**Inside Who's Soul**

His most famous role, Baker admits, is not a part which allows an actor to experiment. "The Doctor," he says, "wasn't really an acting part, in that it never really could develop. This character was utterly predictable—being the hero, he always comes out on the moral side. Everyone in the audience knows all about him: his home planet, his age. They know that he is an innocent, that he doesn't get overly involved emotionally

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**Doctor Who is a show meant for people with the childlike ability to respond to the preposterous adventures of this innocent with the capacity to be surprised.**

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**Patrick Daniel O'Neill is a former Associate Editor of STARLOG and an expert on Dr. Who. He interviewed Michael Ironside in STARLOG #74.**
near, Sarah.' So, she immediately does—and falls down into the hole. Stupid brat! “But if you want a really harrowing story: We were filming ‘Revenge of the Cybermen’ in these caves. It was very oppressive. You couldn’t stand up most of the time when you weren’t working. You just had to sit there, because if you went up to daylight, you would be late for your call to come back. At any rate, there’s an underground river running down there at about 30 miles an hour. No one knows how deep it is; people have been lost down the hole. They presented me with this thing which looks like two skis bound together. They put me on it, told me to ride it to the other side and beach it, then go after the Doctor—just as if that happened everyday.

“Idiot that I was, I did it.”

“And then they said, ‘Lis, we didn’t actually see you get on it. We’ll take you back to the other bank’—which is very slippery mud—and we just want you to push off in the thing. Don’t put the motor on. Just push off. We only want a shot of you getting on. We’ll come and collect you in the boat.”

“I said, ‘You want me to go right, but the current is running left. The nose will turn with the current and I’ll go down that hole!’ The fellow who made the contraption said, ‘No, you won’t. Whichever way the nose is pointing, that’s the way you’ll go.’ So, I believed him, trusting person that I am. I got on it, didn’t start the motor, and what happened? It starts to go down the hole! I did what I thought was the smart thing—I jumped in and trod water.

“Fortunately,” Sladen continues, “one of the stuntmen, Terry Walsh, bless his heart, was there doubting as a monster. The costume lady had told him to get into costume. But he said, ‘No, I’m going to stay in my wetsuit until Lis finishes this scene.’ He was in like a flash and pulled me out. After that incident, I always made sure I had a double.”

Sarah Jane Smith is frequently called the first of a new breed of companions for Doctor Who: bright, independent women, not just screamers. “The first who isn’t quite so silly,” is the way Sladen terms it. “She’s the prototype for all the ones who have come since—Leela, Romana, Tegan and Nyssa. I was told by Janet Fielding, who plays Tegan, that she gets letters complimenting her on her resemblance to Sarah. I sometimes wish that Sarah could have been a little more independent, but I don’t think the format was open to that idea.”

“Doctor Who is about the Doctor, and that’s why the show’s format works—and has worked for 20 years. I don’t think you can have two characters who are pushing too much of their own way. You concentrate on one,” Lis Sladen concludes, “and the other, the companion, must bounce off him.”

—Patrick Daniel O’Neill

meant for people with the childlike ability to respond to the preposterous adventures of this innocent with the capacity to be surprised.

“In a way, it’s easy to play him, because he’s an alien, isn’t he? And when you’re playing an alien, you’re licensed to react in quite different ways. You’re allowed to be quite mischievous and utterly unpredictable—because your scale of values and experiences, is quite different in the mind of the audience. Therefore, you can threaten someone with a jelly baby rather than a gun, and it makes perfect sense to the audience.

“I used to get a bit wound up about the way we seemed to solve everything with an explosion, but that’s one of the problems with science fantasy. We tried to do the

The Doctor contemplates destroying his greatest enemies in 1975’s “Genesis of the Daleks.”
moral thing, in which the evil forces, after being convinced of the error of their ways, cause their own destruction. Sometimes, we had dilemmas over that, over who was to push the button—but apart from that, Doctor Who was really quite fun."

Baker’s long tenure as the British SF hero wasn’t his first brush with the world of fantasy. In 1974, he joined John Philip Law, Caroline Munro and stop-motion legend Ray Harryhausen for The Golden Voyage of Sinbad (FANGORIA #4). As villainous Prince Khoura, he opposes Sinbad (Law) in the quest for the pieces of a magic amulet, meeting centaurs, green men, and eight-armed, eight-bodied living statues along the way. His approaches to the evil of Khoura is no different from the heroics of Who. “I don’t make a separation between villains and heroes when a part is offered to me,” he notes. “When an actor gets hold of a role like Khoura, unless he’s an absolute bonehead, he must never categorize the character—because that characterization leads to prejudice and preconceptions. And it’s preconceptions in the approach to acting problems which freeze people and prevent spontaneity.

“What I’m saying is that if I was asked to play Dracula, for example, it would never occur to me, once I started working on the role, that he be the villain of the piece. I would only play Dracula from Dracula’s point-of-view. It must be left to others, the audience or his opponents in the play, to describe him as the villain. So, it’s not actually a question of playing heroes or villains, it’s simply a question of playing the best part as well as I possibly can, from that character’s point-of-view, and not from the preconceptions of unthinking directors, other actors or critics.”

**Outside Who’s World**

Since most of his post-Who work has been stage, Tom Baker obviously loves the theater. “There’s nothing to compare with that marvelous sense of danger and excitement of doing it live,” he notes. “Only having one stab at each scene as you go through it—that, in itself, is marvelously exhilarating. And from the point-of-view of vanity (and you mustn’t overlook that), it’s a very thrilling experience at the end of a day’s work to be applauded very warmly, or to receive an ovation.” He contemplates the feeling for a moment and continues. “If there were more ovations in everyday people’s lives, they would probably have a happier time. It would be quite interesting, domestically, if after cooking a great dinner for her family, a woman got a standing ovation from them—so that she had to retreat to the kitchen in tears, with all of them shouting ‘More, more!’ Imagine a similar response when the man comes home with the wage packet, or a child with a good school report.

“Applause is such a sweet, comforting thing and, of course, not very many people do. But when it comes to getting it on tape or on film, you must be prepared, although you mustn’t assume, that you’ll do it again and again and again. If you’ve prepared it carefully, that repetition can get a bit tiresome.”

At the moment, Baker is struggling with an interesting problem for an actor. He is still receiving fan mail for a role he left years ago, and from a new locale, the United States. And the mail itself strikes him as a bit unusual. “Curiously, although I’ve said I think of the program as a children’s series, most American fan mail is from young adults, people in their middle 20s,” he notes. “They also seem to read things into the scripts and into my character that quite astonish me. Some fans seem to see something, well, messianic about The Doctor.

“That response may be because American televised SF has always taken itself very seriously, and the acting on those shows—well, the acting isn’t really bad, but it’s that sort of earnest, ‘I’m-wearing-my-heart-on-my-sleeve’ kind of acting. That’s one-line, one-thought acting. The kind of character who has always fascinated me is the fiendish type, having lots of thoughts at the same time, combining patience with kindness, fun with anger. I like that complexity of character.”

Brushing back his shock of curly hair, Tom Baker sums up American reaction to the Doctor with this anecdote: “I remember meeting one group of American fans and I asked them what I could do for them. As if it had been rehearsed, they all cried out together, ‘Take us with you!’ I was terribly touched and, at the same time, rather frightened by their reaction. Yet, I’m still very happy to have played The Doctor—and to have touched so many people and been touched, in return, by the sweetness of their smiles.”

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The Doctor and Sarah in a scene from the 1976 story, “Seeds of Doom.”

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"I had, through the license of television and the character I was playing, a marvelous, intricate intimacy with children. That was very precious to me."