

# Good Doctors make a house call

## Stars of TV fantasy show visit the Milwaukee faithful

By JACKIE LOOHAUIS  
of The Journal staff

The tall, angular Englishman stood on the stage Friday at the Milwaukee Auditorium and introduced himself.

"I'm a stranger, and my name is Tom Baker, and I may remind you of someone you know."

At which point some wisecracks in the audience of 1,000 yelled out: "Who?" Which, of course, was absolutely right.

Tom Baker is best known to fans in Milwaukee and the rest of the English-speaking world as Dr. Who, the hero of the British science fantasy TV show of the same name. The show has been a fixture since the 1960s.

The good Doctor is an unusual character, partly because he's an alien who skips through time and space. And partly because no fewer than six actors have played

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the part as the Doctor literally regenerates into a new body.

Baker, the fourth "Doctor," appeared at Milwaukee's "Dr. Who" convention with Colin Baker (no relation), the sixth and current Doctor. Since Colin Baker's episodes have not yet been seen here, it is Tom Baker whom most Whovians think of as "Who." The program airs locally on Sundays on Channel 10 (WMVS-TV).

Tom Baker calls himself a character actor. If anything, he is even more of a character today than when he played the Doctor from 1974 to 1981. His trademarks then were a long, flowing coat, a 20-foot scarf and a halo of bushy brown curls. The curls are mostly shorn and gray now, but a group of student journalists at a press conference at WMVS still sat in frozen awe of him.

"Do you think I intimidated them?" he asked later, only semi-innocently. Baker may wonder whether he has the same effect on American TV and film producers.

That's because at age 52, the cult figure with enormous appeal on both sides of the Atlantic can't find work in the United States. He blames his plight on the good Doctor.

"It was a pleasure to do the part," Tom Baker said, stretching out his 6-foot-4-inch form, clothed not in flowing coat and scarf, but in a trench coat, slacks and white Topsiders. "I couldn't tear myself away from it. And now I regret it, because I'm virtually unemployable in the minds of very conservative directors and producers.

"When you're very well known for one thing, you are rather stuck in the role. What happens is that you're in another part, and — say I'm playing some kind of visiting British journalist in an American series and I say, 'Good morning,' — in the view of the directors, it's very likely I'm just going to get a laugh. They think the viewers will say, 'Look, darling, it's Dr. Who!'"



Journal photo by Jim Genz

Tom Baker, who played Dr. Who, in Milwaukee Friday

# Who

From Page 1

Still, it seems strange that an industry that awarded minor cult figure Howard the Duck his own film should overlook the Doctor's box-office potential.

Saying Americans were wonderful for exploitation, Tom Baker said he found it striking that producers here seem unaware that he has hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions of fans. "I'm on 200 stations. I'm not saying that that should be translated into some kind of big job with Spielberg, but . . ."

Actually, Tom Baker did land one stateside part, as a "deteriorating Interpol agent" on TV's "Remington Steele." The role was trimmed to about five lines.

"It's very difficult really, for a leading man to have to opt for tiny parts," he remarked. "It's very chastening."

But actually, Tom Baker, who, like the Doctor, can be thoroughly charming one moment and thoroughly irascible the next, doesn't seem chastened at all. He happily admitted that the original appeal to playing the Doctor was "the money." And he has a genuine affection for the fans who still love him in the role.

Milwaukeeans who saw the two Bakers Friday paid \$16 apiece for the privilege.

Tom Baker said the fans knew more of the show than he did. "I never watched 'Dr. Who' when I wasn't doing it. The American fans say I was very spontaneous, and that may have sprung from the fact that I never knew quite what was going on, because sometimes I was working on five or six scripts at one time, all shot out of sequence."

At the convention, Tom Baker spent an hour fielding questions from teenagers in 20-foot scarves. "Will you ever be taken seriously as an actor?" one asked.

"I hope not, sir," came the answer.

He let fans in on little "Who" jokes, like the fact that he would sometimes deliberately mess up the Doctor's Shakespearean quotes. "Nobody on the set said anything."

And he was pleased when the fans shared his puzzlement that Hollywood vice presidents in charge of development haven't seen the Doctor's potential. "The fans know how popular 'Star Trek' was, and look incredulous when I tell them there are no plans for a 'Who' movie."

But, until Hollywood wakes up, the Doctor is doing just fine, thank you. He has found steady work in the

British theater, and he is looking at upcoming roles either as Sherlock Holmes or as Captain Hook in "Peter Pan."

Whatever regeneration the Doctor

takes next, Tom Baker keeps one career goal in sight. "I have no desire to be liked," he explained with a perfectly straight face. "At my age, I want to be adored."