

The Record spends an evening with a lonely Time Lord

A JOURNEY INTO THE UNKNOWN



TOM BAKER... "The time had come to move on."

BEFORE the big man arrived the crowd in the art gallery were looking reverently at the pictures, whispering the tommy rot that most people whisper at these events.

But when Tom Baker, TV's Dr Who, steamed in like the Titanic looking for a disaster, followed by his gang of sweating, swearing rag tag and bobtail Soho revellers, he became the main event.

'The doctor has made me quite well off ... and there was no row with the BBC'

"It's him, I tell you it's him" and they nudged and they pushed to get nearer to the best exhibit there.

Tom, with his flock of wild bouncing hair, bulging eyes and wearing an immaculate suit stood before one painting.

In the words of a true connoisseur he boomed out in that far rolling voice of his: "Just look at that arse, how it goes with the sweep of the scenery in the background."

He looked it up in his catalogue, he happened to be carrying three of them, each as thick as a Bible and found they were for an exhibition next door.

SHATTERING MIXTURE

After a quick tour of the pictures Tom and his retinue, men and women, booze pouring from every pore charged up to the bar.

They stood out like a team of trapeze artists in a monastery, mouthing good-humoured obscenities with vigour, freshness and beguiling abandon.

The gang was drinking a shattering mixture of vodka and white wine.

When the bar closed Tom drank straight from the neck of a bottle of wine, draining the dregs as though snatching at the very last of life itself.

The barman turned down Tom's application for more wine and was called something unfit for early evening viewing.

Outside we boarded a cruising taxi and headed for a restaurant of Tom's choice, the most expensive in London.

By William Marshall

I paid the cab and Tom pushed more notes into the driver's hand screaming at him: "Remember me, remember me whatever you do."

As soon as we got inside the door the barmen chorused "Where's your scarf, Doc?" and Tom replied with a flip of his leg which told them to get lost.

The delightful, matey Tom tried to get the waitress to sit and have a drink with him but she shrank away, face and neck mottling in confusion.

We ordered oysters and lobster and wine.

Over the oysters, lobsters and wine Tom said: "Finishing with Dr Who is a great emotional jolt after playing it so long.

"But we need these emotional jolts in our lives, they are good for us.

"The doctor has made me quite well off and believe me there was no row with the BBC, it was strictly my decision.

DIGGING DITCHES

"I have had offers and my next project after finishing the present Dr Who series, hopefully, will be a Sherlock Holmes film.

"It's The Hound Of The Baskervilles with me playing Sherlock.

"I like that kind of role, there is so much nastiness in the world, so much violence and horror I want to keep away from it.

"I don't want the horrible realities... That's why I liked Dr

Who. It was all fun, fun, fun.

"The time has come to move on. Who knows maybe I'll end up digging ditches or working behind a bar, heaving coal.

"I wouldn't mind a bit. I need to work. Any work.

"I am looking forward to the unknown, the wonderful idea that anything or nothing could happen to me.

"I AM A LONELY MAN, A REALLY LONELY MAN."

Lonely Tom, say I. Dr Who lonely?

FAMOUS PEOPLE

"Oh sure, sure I could be surrounded by people all the time. I'm famous and famous people can be that way.

"But I have my luxurious flat in Gloucester Road where I sit late at nights and go to bed where I can't sleep because I'm a chronic insomniac.

"I have my books, my 150 dictionaries that I read because I like words.

"But I am just as lonely as those people I see scurrying home from work, picking up a pack of beer to drink with their meal."

Tom is long divorced with two teenaged sons and says: "I have two ladies regularly in my life.

"They are always there when I need them, but marriage? No I don't think so. I'm too, too busy.

"But here I am, marvellous home with everything in it except a TV but what's the use

when I have no one to share it with?"

No TV, I ask Tom.

"No. Never watch it. It's just not a habit I got into".

Over the coffee and liqueurs with me sticking to wine to keep ahead of the game Tom says for no reason at all:

"I've been saved from becoming an alcoholic because I've got a very jumpy nervous stomach.

"It won't take a lot of alcohol."

Tom's stomach must have been in pretty good shape right then because the tiny heavy-duty liqueurs are disappearing at a handsome rate.

He takes his copy of The Hound of The Baskervilles out of his bag and begins to read.

The great shaggy head with the greying curls is bent over, one hand on his liqueur glass, and he's suddenly oblivious to everything.

He simply oozes that loneliness he was talking about.

STREET LIGHTS

Outside in the late night the street lights fleck the rain puddles and we hail a cab and thunder off in all directions, Tom bellowing at the cabbie.

We get out at some godforsaken back alley and Tom says he's going for a Chinese meal.

I'm left alone in an unfamiliar street, watching Tom stride off, pretty steady on his feet.

HE IS THE LORD OF TIME BUT IT IS WELL PAST MIDNIGHT AND HE CANNOT SLEEP.