

TOM BAKER

DOCTORED MEMOIRS

FOR a generation of television viewers, Tom Baker *was* The Doctor; his trademark scarf, floppy hat and wild eyes endearing him to the '70s Saturday teatime crowd. With Jon Pertwee's passing last year, Tom became the elder statesman, and this has been marked in true style with the hardback release of his long-awaited autobiography *Who on Earth is Tom Baker?* We caught up with Tom in late September, just weeks before he embarked on his mammoth 50-city tour of the nation's bookshops, to share his views on former glories.

Tom's Tome

It is an inevitable question asked of all autobiographers, but Tom is quite clear as to why he chose to publish his memoirs at this stage of his life. "Quite simply, I was out of work. Anyone can be happy when they're in work and in demand, getting

rounds of applause and being smiled at. The difficulty as an actor is how to remain an actor when you're not acting, and not knowing how to gain approval. Nobody wanted me during last year, and I had just learned how to use a wordprocessor, so I started writing a story about a boy. I soon got bored with that. I suddenly started recalling my childhood and seeing it on a screen was a great novelty to me as opposed to writing with my head down. It intrigued

me how easily I could move names around on the screen. After I had written the first bit, I tidied it up and read it to my wife before dinner one night and she laughed her head off. Over the next few days I wrote some more bits and gradually the manuscript grew into the book you now hold."

Accidental Author

Having compiled his output, Tom soon found interest within the literary world. "I was surprised that HarperCollins jumped at it so quickly and told me that they wanted to read it. I was in Berwick Street in Soho and rang up their man. I told him that I had the manuscript with me, and did he want me to deliver it to him? He was very excited and I asked him where the office was, thinking that it would be somewhere swish in Mayfair. He said, 'We're in Hammersmith,' and I replied 'I don't want to be a writer if I have to go to bloody Hammersmith. B*****s to that!' But thankfully he agreed to come across to me and arrived shortly thereafter in a taxi. So you see, I'm an accidental author really." The trademark toothy grin spreads across his face, and his comments in many ways typify the frank, but hilarious, tone of the book.

Adventures in Time

The book chronicles Baker's exploits from his early childhood days in Liverpool, right up to meeting his son in New Zealand earlier this year. Although chronologically ordered in print, the chapters were written in a haphazard style. "I didn't write it in order, because basically an autobiography is selected confessions. I don't jump too much about in time in the book, which is quite ironic really because I wrote it for the fans



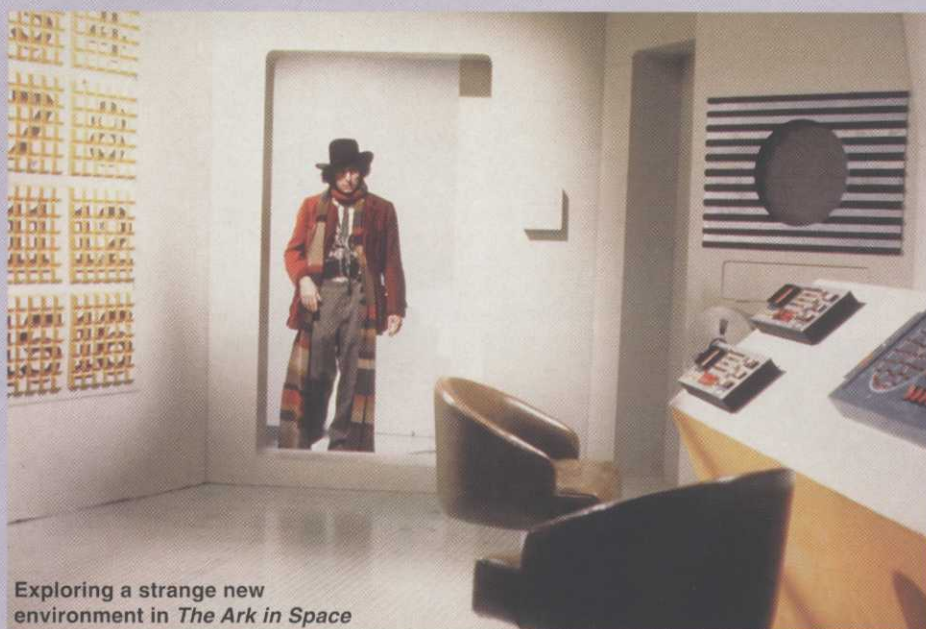
The Doctor, a Time Lord who will return to his home planet, Gallifrey

interview

BAKER



Photos © BBC Worldwide



Exploring a strange new environment in *The Ark in Space*



of **Doctor Who**. They are the people who created me. The book is not exactly a 'thank you,' because I think it would be too sugary to say that. I don't want them to throw up, I want to amuse them," laughs Baker. "Sometimes they asked me questions at conventions, and it was not appropriate to give them the time for the full answers. In the book, I have the time to speak more frankly and tell them things about myself that they might not already know. One of the reasons that I am looking forward to this tour of the UK is that finally I am going to have something new to give to the fans. It hurts them to hear that I don't have any new work or

haven't been offered a job in the last year. They can't understand why, because *they* would offer me work if they could. Now I've got a treat for them, a book which will contain some new things."

Selected Confessions

As with all autobiographies, taste and dignity prevent the author from revealing the whole sordid story. "I held back on lots of things because I don't want to hurt anybody or be cruel to them. There are whole areas in one's life that don't belong just to you, and I can't talk about them without consulting these other people. I've tried to be as honest and discreet as I can, hiding things that are of no concern to anyone else. As I've already said, they are just selected confessions." Although not tied to the Hippocratic Oath, this Doctor has made a point to show that the only person to blame is himself. "I'm the great big victim and I've survived this long on quite a small talent. When I talk about the fans of **Doctor Who** it makes some people heave, but they don't realize that it was these people who gave me a chance in life. The response of the fans made me famous throughout the world, and they made me welcome wherever I went."

Fan Tales

Many of his peers are a little snuffy about fans, but Tom Baker recognizes the debt that he owes them. "Fans are superior human beings because they don't run out of affection and they don't betray their heroes. Fans stay loyal. In real life, love doesn't endure, ambitions aren't realized, and growing old is humiliating, but fans don't see these things, they remain precious to the very objects that they created. Yesterday, I had a letter from America which read 'Dear Tom Baker, I just can't get over the death of Princess Diana. Anyway, I'm a huge **Doctor Who** fan!' He just jumped from one real tragedy into another, but I'm sure that Diana would understand because she was quite an amusing girl." Tom is at his happiest when recanting anecdotes, and continues. "Some other American chap wrote to me and said 'Dear Tom Baker, I was having a drink with a Jehovah's Witness friend of mine the other night, and when we got onto the subject of Armageddon your name came up! My friend happened to remark that you died in 1986, and I was terribly shocked by all of this, so can

you please write back and tell me if this is true or not.' The Americans are frank about that kind of thing, but here in Britain we are more reserved, although a lot of that is changing now as we try to catch up in the pop culture war."

The Two Romanas

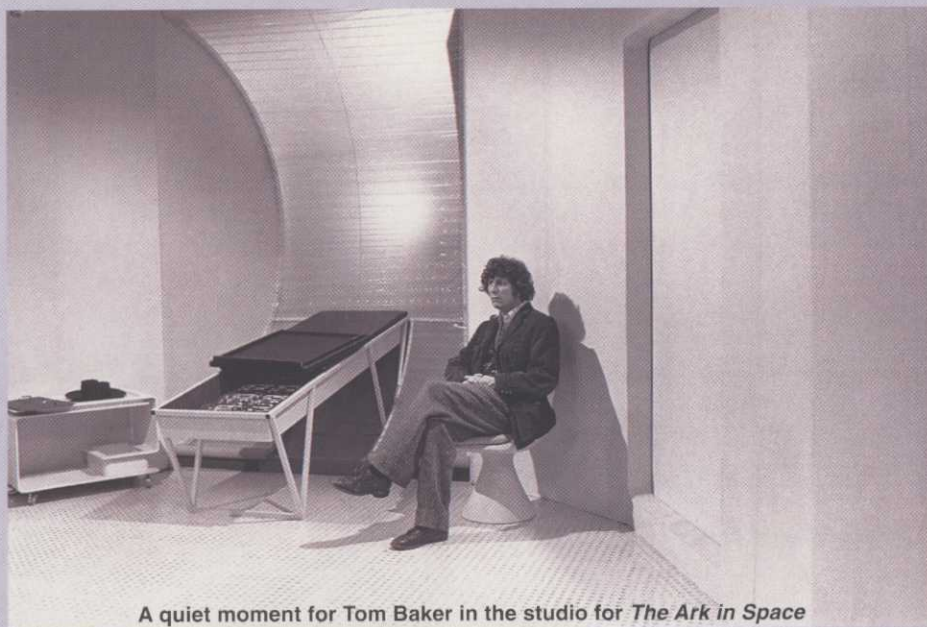
The loyal legion who follow **Doctor Who** never fail to amaze Tom, particularly those who can recall the smallest details. "That's charming to me, because they see a detail whereas I've only got the vaguest outline of it. Fans, like journalists, are very childlike because they always need to know "who was your favourite girl, best monster, etc...?" These are basic things that children ask because it matters to them." Some fans revel in continuity errors, or contradictions within the scripts, but this does not bother Tom. "I don't mind if people catch me out, I just admire them for their knowledge. They love it if I mix up Lalla Ward [Companion Romana, and former wife] with Mary Tamm [first incarnation of Romana], because they feel like they've got one over on me. One American fan actually asked Lalla who her favourite monster was, and being a very witty girl her answer was 'Tom Baker,' which I thought was great."

Doctor Dummy

Tom makes reference to *The Five Doctors* within his book, an anniversary special in which he declined to appear. In deference to his absence, the producers used his Madame Tussaud's dummy for publicity shots, and he was bemused that people thought that it was really him. "That actually happened. It was forced on me and nobody noticed that they had dug out a dummy for the day. However, I haven't lived to be 65 without realizing that we are all interchangeable. Sometimes I'll go after a film and when these American producers call you in to see them and you look at the script, you find that it's an absolute pile of whippet s**t. I say to them 'You want me to read it to you? Why? Do you think that I can't read?' They'll look at me and say 'Tom, we want to hear *how* you read it,' and I just say 'Get lost, you've seen what I've done and know what I can do.'

Casting Aspersions

"I went for something recently; they were casting a bloody Channel Four pile



A quiet moment for Tom Baker in the studio for *The Ark in Space*

of s**t, which was pretending to be art. Inevitably, for someone of my age they wanted me to play an old man, and the word that they always use is 'irascible'. Obviously, all old men in India are irascible, and they just trotted out all the standard clichés. I told them that I was quite capable of playing an irascible old man, but who was the director? The director was too grand to be at the auditions, so I asked the assistant whether the director was a man of courage. He didn't understand what I was getting at, but the fact remains that quite a lot of directors that I've worked for, died shortly afterwards, and I thought that he ought to know. Well, I might as well have just vom-

ited on the table because that was the end of the whole interview. The point is that I was just doing my performance for them, but they were so wrapped up in this pompous script that they didn't recognize a character actor who could turn their lines into rolled gold."

Donkey Jacket

Forget Any Warhol's 15 minutes of fame, Tom Baker was a household name for seven, and he never forgets it. "I continually recall my days of glory. There's that marvellous poem about the Messiah's donkey, which says it all - 'I too once had my day.' I might only be a donkey, but one day



The 'dummy Doctor' in the *Five Doctors* photocall

I carried Jesus on my back through the streets of palms. I personally wore a scarf and jacket, and apologize for the grotesque wrenching of that analogy, but at one time I was in 68 countries. No one else could knock on just anyone's door and walk into their house for a warm welcome. I remember all those days when I was a children's hero, and know that nothing in my life has been as interesting as an actor. I've been in pieces here and there on film and television, but they weren't nearly so much fun. I've done very important plays like *Who Killed the Count?* but give me **Doctor Who** any day. Get me back in that TARDIS!"

Giving Back to the Community

Tom is still recognized whilst out in public, and for many people he is still the same character that they followed so many years ago. "Down-and-out boys selling *The Big Issue* come up to me and say 'Can't you get us out of this place, Doctor? They still have this affection

for me, and they won't even take my pound for the magazine. What they really want is for the TARDIS to arrive, and for us to travel away to a nicer place, and I just wish that I could do it." There is a particularly poignant passage in the book where Baker recalls his frustration at not being able to help sick children. "The parents forgave me when I didn't cure them. They would say 'Thank you anyway, Doctor.' I would be looking at a child in a coma who was going to die, and that was a very precious amazing moment for me. It's very easy to mock that, but I won't hear it mocked. The parental love of children is not a mocking thing; the blind devotion of mother love is quite wonderful. I liken it to those

people who go to shrines and

aren't actually cured by a miracle, but still feel better in themselves for going." Although he could not exercise some special Galiffreyan medical cure, he made the effort to visit, and in many ways the result was the same.

Mine's a Double

Being such a clean-cut children's hero was somewhat restricting for Tom, as he could not be seen out smoking or drinking in public. "I insisted that when I was near children I should still appear to be The Doctor, whereas I was really leading a double life. I wouldn't have bad language or cigarettes near them, and it was terribly important that I kept this illusion going. To them I was Dr Jekyll, not Dr Who, whereas I was also Mr Hyde down in Soho, socializing with [painter] Francis Bacon and the crowd, getting juggled up and pissed all the time. In those days it was more exciting in Soho than going to the movies. By day I was this mystical charismatic figure of goodness and virtue, piously blessing children, but by night I would turn into this awful lowlife. That's the way I was, and it was a way of coping with this great responsibility of being Doctor Who."

Monsieur Sinbad

Leonard Nimoy once wrote a biography called *I am Not Spock* because he was fed-up being forever associated with his character, but Tom is proud to celebrate his tenancy as the Doctor. "It is the only glory that I've ever had, and it went on for seven years. Not everyone becomes a big star in Abu Dhabi, and I'm not even sure whether I was dubbed, or still in English. I do recall that a few years ago I was learning to speak French and I picked up a French television channel; I live near to the coast in Folkestone. I was watching the programmes and I found myself in *The Golden Voyage of Sinbad*. I'd only been learning French for a couple of weeks, but there I was on the screen speaking perfect French. It did me good, and persuaded me to continue with my studies."

Time Out for a Time Lord

When Tom accepted Barry Letts' initial invitation to be The Doctor, he had no ideas what effect it would have on his life. "It was all new to me and I didn't really know what was going on. I only really began to



get to grips with it when the mail started flooding in. It made me feel good, and that's why I stayed so long." Tom was having a ball, and could not understand the logic that dictated he should be moving on. "Why shouldn't I feel good? Why should I leave because someone says to me 'Isn't it about time that you did something else?' It's like going up to a couple and saying 'you two have been happy for five years now, so isn't it time that you looked for someone else?' Of course you wouldn't say that, you hold on to what's precious to you. Naturally, I had to leave eventually and give somebody else the opportunity to make the programme again."

Glory Days

Many reasons have been cited for Baker's departure, but he has no illusions as to why he needed to move on. "By then I was extremely opinionated, proprietorial and possessive because I had been stuck in the middle of it for such a time. My leaving was a terrible mistake because since then I can't say that my career has been much of a success. I live on my past glory of being in **Doctor Who**, but fortunately, whilst most of the actors who played the character have now died, I have just become old, or older, depending on your point of view or the light. I'm living on former glories, and I don't think that much is going to change now. In fact, the book could have been called Past Glories." Tom had previously been quoted as saying that any autobiography that he wrote would be called 'All Friends Betrayed', but this title was abandoned along the way.

The Four Producers (or The Production Line)

Each of the four different producers within Tom's tenure left their distinctive mark on the show, and he offers further insight into their characters. "Barry [Letts] left the smallest mark, because although he hired me, he was primarily just preparing



Tom Baker's Doctor was always ready to point out something interesting...

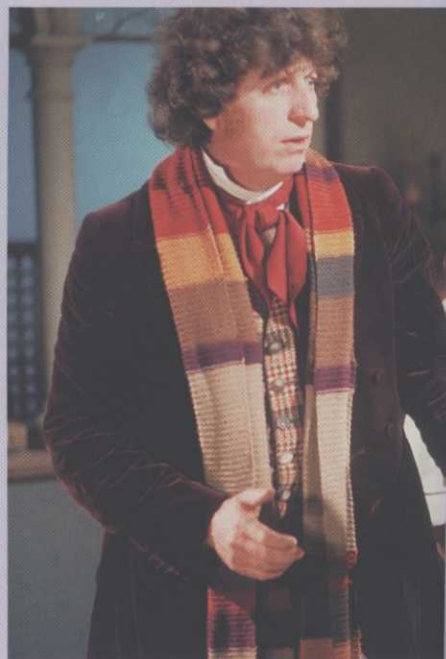


Tom Baker's Doctor was always investigating, but sometimes to his cost...

the way for Philip [Hinchcliffe], who was very interested in sword and sorcery stuff. I got on very well with Philip, and he must have been 10 years younger than I was." The Hinchcliffe years are generally recognized as being the golden age of the show, and Tom has his own theories as to why the show never fully regained those glories "It might have been down to our losing Philip. Although there was no one that I consciously made an enemy of, some people I got on with better than others. I never really fused with Graham Williams, although he was probably the nicest man that you would ever wish to share a gin and tonic with. At the beginning, I was fresh and discovering the part, but by the time that Philip went I knew so much more."

Seven Year Itch

Baker continues his analysis by looking at his final season. "I can't remember too much about my time with John [Nathan-Turner], because by then I knew my time was up. I'd been there seven years. I knew all the internal shots and when a new director would try and set-up the camera a certain way I would say 'No, don't do that, cock, we did that last week. If you do it over there it will be a lot better.' I felt that I was being kind and helping them out, because alternatively I could have just rolled my eyes and done what they told me to. In time, I lost my freshness and started to become very bossy; I was very opinionated about the scripts and how things should be done. Things were becoming a little blurred to me – I was Doctor

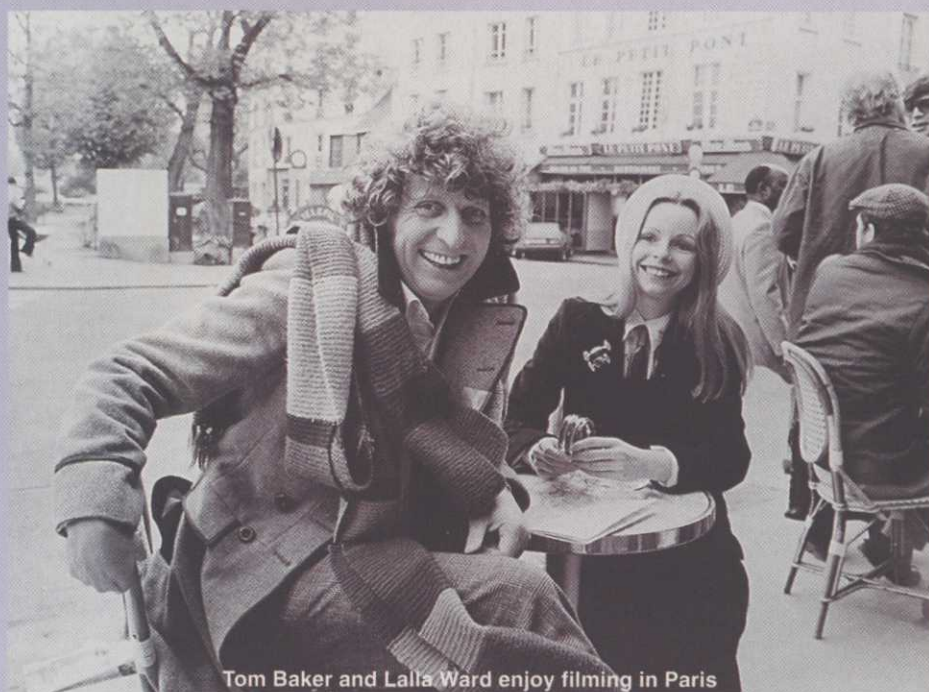


Who. People tell me that they remember seeing me walking down Notting Hill Gate wearing my hat and flying scarf, but that is not true at all, I didn't wear them outside. What's important is that this is the way that they remember me."

Pepperpots of Pepper

The Hinchcliffe years came under considerable attack from the auspices of Mary Whitehouse due to the allegedly unacceptable level of violence. Tom still does not understand why. "I never thought that it was violent enough. There are degrees of violence that are so obviously theatrical that we could have got away with them, but to tell you the truth, I used to get terribly fed up that the shows would get resolved with explosives. When I took off the top of a Dalek's head I would say 'Why can't we use a pepper mill, so that each time he tries to come up with a plan he starts sneezing instead?' It's better to outwit people rather than resort to a cataclysm, but we can blame the Bible for starting the trend for all these explosions and floods." Having left the show in 1981, Tom did not watch any of his predecessors for one simple reason. "I never followed it when I was in it! I just did the show and didn't dare tamper with it at all. I was worried that if I started looking at it, then I'd start getting even more strange ideas. Occasionally I'd watch scenes if they wanted me to re-dub them, but problems arose when I told the director that it would have been so much better if he'd let me do one more take. In those days we were very much controlled by the unions and everyone would be look-





Tom Baker and Lalla Ward enjoy filming in Paris

ing at their watches at the end of the day, and you didn't have time for another 10 minutes shooting."

Doctor McGann

Last year's Paul McGann *Doctor Who* tele-movie received very mixed reviews, but Tom is unable to pass comment, because he didn't watch it. "I asked my wife [Sue] to watch it for me, she's very good like that. She's very clever, and I'm her only error in good taste. She commented that it was not very mysterious, it was just urban adventures with no feeling that there was a world elsewhere. It's not that I'm complaining, I've had my day, I just think that I am better off well out of it. They didn't ask me to look at the script, which doesn't surprise me because gifted people seem to avoid me like the plague." A spark of an idea crosses Tom's face. "It would have been nice if I had been asked to play the villain, so that whoever

played the Doctor could have done a little double-take for the fans. Intrinsically, there isn't any difference between Doctor Who and Davros, or Holmes and Moriarty. They are interdependent beings, one can't exist without the other, and they are married together as the same person. That might have been an interesting plot development for the movie, having me as the villain," he ruminates.

No Laughing Matter

Although nothing has regained him the popularity of *Doctor Who*, Tom has turned in memorable appearances in *The Lives and Loves of a She Devil*, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, *Medics* and *Cluedo*. He also enjoyed a stint as a salty sea dog in *BlackAdder II*. "That show was marvelous to be in, and I've always thought of myself being in comedy. *Doctor Who* was very funny sometimes, and I like to think that I have the capacity to make people



Three memorable *Who* images: the TARDIS, K9 and Tom Baker's Doctor

laugh. Somebody wanted me to be in several episodes of a new comedy called *Chalk*, but I looked at it and thought 'I'd rather be dead'. That might be a slight exaggeration, but it is nearly the truth, because I simply couldn't play this ridiculous headmaster with his stupid lines about girls' tits and the way that they walked. Television today is run by people who more or less skilfully write sarcasm. Sarcasm, particularly between men and women putting each other down all the time, is all we get. You wouldn't do it in real life in a pub because you'd get your teeth smashed in." Thankfully, not all shows have proven to be so distasteful to Tom. "I'm currently working on a big American documentary about the history of the Twentieth Century as seen through the movie camera. It's about 15 hours long, and so far I've done nine for the company, Trans World International. Who knows, I might not ever be offered work again!"



The many faces of Tom Baker...

Write or Wrong?

Tom is anxious that the book will be well received. He has no end of enthusiasm for the book, or its roots. "I like to talk about **Doctor Who** because it reminds me of desperately happy times, and I can't wait for the book to be out so that I can talk about it with everyone." If the book is a success, Tom will no doubt be approached by the publishers for a sequel. "I have no idea whether I will write any more memoirs, but I do have an idea for a story about a wicked child, an evil boy who gets off to a prodigious start. I've worked out his death scene – it's very slow and agonizing and I'm sure that children would like it. I can't actually call myself a writer, I just write down my memories, and I don't know whether I could structure a whole novel. When you are writing about your own experiences it is so much easier because you are right on top of it, but when you move into the realm of imagination it becomes a lot trickier thing. Instead of writing, maybe now is the time to get rediscovered in an another amazing part."

Whatever the future, Tom obtains pleasure in knowing that he was a major influence in the lives of so many children. When you read the book don't expect to find out a definitive view of Who on Earth is Tom Baker, because he doesn't really know himself. His thoughts on the wording of his epitaph are very modest, but indicative of a man who never expected great things, is still bemused by modern life, and coming to terms with years of self-loathing. "It's hard to know the content (of my obituary), because so few people will remember or care afterwards. It would probably go along the lines of 'Most of the time I did the best that I could.' " Who could ask for anything more?

Nick Joy

The new Doctor pops out of the TARDIS in *Robot*

