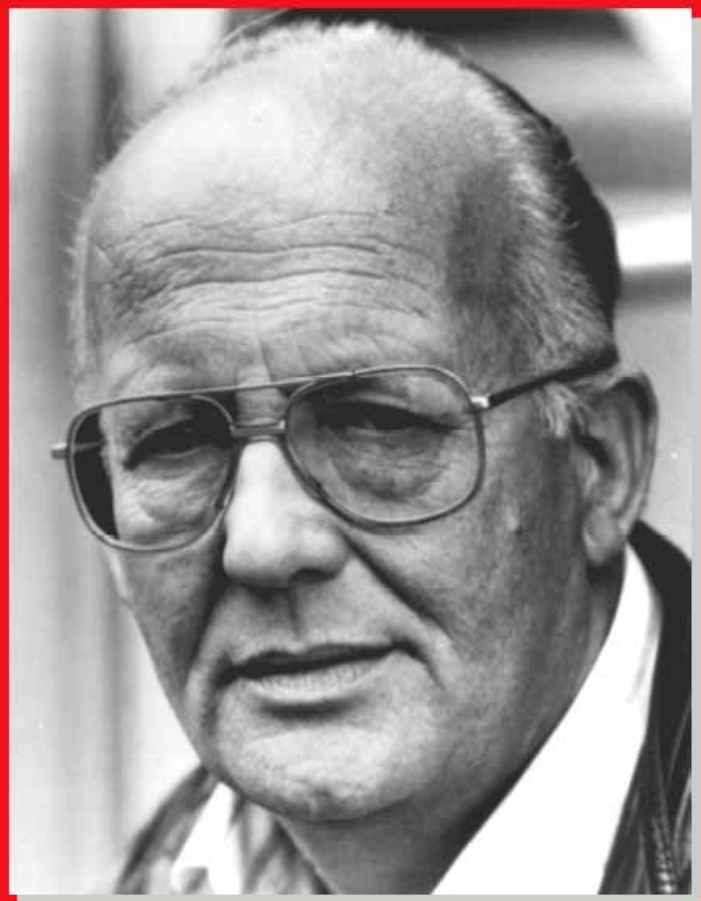


YES, ADMIRAL



SCI-FI, FRIENDS AND FURTHER MEMORIES

MICHAEL SHEARD

*Forewords by Jeremy Bulloch, Kenny Baker,
Nicholas Courtney and Peter Mayhew*

SUMMERSDALE

First published 1999

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T H E S E C O N D E D I T I O N

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AND FURTHER MEMORIES

MICHAEL SHEARD

Forewords by:

Kenny Baker
Jeremy Bulloch
Nicholas Courtney
Peter Mayhew

This one is for you, the Appreciators,
every flippin' one of you

In memory of my dear friend

Declan Mulholland

Massive thanks also to my chums

Kenny 'R2 D2' Baker
Jeremy 'Boba Fett' Bulloch
Nicholas 'Brigadier Lethbridge Stewart' Courtney
Peter 'Chewbacca' Mayhew

For their great and kind forewords

Pamela Clarke
Proofreader Fantastique

And to my lovely new editor
Elizabeth Kershaw
and her assistant
Amy Charter
Bless you for putting up with me!

Dear Mike,

May I take this opportunity of wishing you All The Best for the release of your latest book. I'm sure it will be very interesting, with all your showbiz gossip and anecdotes. I can't wait to read it.

There's somebody on my shoulder, and he's saying, 'Bleep! Bleep! Bloop!' which presumably means 'Good Luck' in R2 D2 language!

See you soon mate,

Cheers for now.
Kenny Baker

Kenny Baker
25th February 1999

MICHAEL IS A MAN ONCE MET
IS NOT EASY TO FORGET.
A GENT FROM OVER THE BORDER
IN FIRST CLASS ORDER WHEN WE MEET.

Good luck with the book, 'Grandfather',
it may be the best yet.

BEST WISHES
Peter Mayhew

Peter Mayhew
2nd March 1999

It is only when someone you have known over a long period of time starts to send you up as soon as you enter the room that you know that person is probably someone who actually likes you. On one occasion – during one of his numerous appearances in *Dr Who* – Michael and I had a long argument about which of the two of us had featured in more episodes of the programme (I think I just won, but only just).

In recent years we have renewed our acquaintanceship, due to the fact that we tend to meet with regularity at *Dr Who* conventions. These are events where a great deal of socialising goes on, and on one occasion the two of us were interviewed together. At the conclusion of said interview – and for no apparent reason at all – Michael and I broke into a song and dance number, ‘Me and My Shadow’.

It occurs to me that since this is Michael’s second book and I have only written one – I had better be *his* ‘shadow’ and follow his example!

Nicholas Courtney

Nicholas Courtney
March 1999

NB: Nick’s great book is titled *Five Rounds Rapid*, published by Virgin Publishing.

I have known Michael for twenty-five years, and he looks the same now as he did then (at least a hundred).

We first met whilst working together on an RAF documentary. Needless to say, he was my senior officer . . . He is one of the most enthusiastic people I know, always the first person to arrive, and the last to leave. His energy is boundless, and he is always ready to help anyone, whether it is organising a raffle, or helping out in the karaoke contest.

No one falls asleep when he is on stage, if you dare, his booming voice jerks you to attention. There is more than a touch of 'Bronson' in him, and I don't mean Charles!

In the last few years we have met up at various Sci-Fi conventions due to the popularity of the re-release of *Star Wars*. I thought I attended a lot of conventions, but Michael sometimes manages to attend two in a weekend, or is it three? I am sure his name is always top of the promoters' list, he is good value in every aspect. His varied career continues unabated, and not many actors can boast of appearing in eight *Dr Who* stories, and portraying Hitler on four separate occasions. I hope that we will work together again soon. I, for one, am very glad that he has followed his highly successful first book with this long-awaited second.

Good luck Michael.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeremy Bulloch". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'J' and a long, sweeping underline.

Jeremy Bulloch
28th February 1999

Prologue

Let me make it abundantly clear from the start, this is not a sneaky way for me to begin the next volume of my memoirs before the second thirty years is up. (Please see, read and enjoy volume one, *Yes, Mr Bronson – Memoirs of a Bum Actor*, also published by Summersdale, the first edition of which sold out before it reached the shops!) No, give us a chance, I expect to enjoy those years first!

It has been pointed out, however, that although the excellent *Yes, Mr B.* covers more facets of my business than any other tome, before or since, and is affectionate, informative, detailed, and amusing (other reviewers' words, not mine); there are inevitably some bits and pieces which are either not mentioned, because they are a consequence of my profession rather than an integral part, or not given enough weight because there were, frankly, not enough pages in book one. *Dr Who*, *Star Wars*, *Space 1999*, *Blake's 7*, indeed all things Science-Fiction, certainly come into this category – shame on me!

So, do you remember Dearly Beloved? Those who have read the aforementioned masterpiece will certainly have heard of her, those who have not done so had better hurry; the third edition has also all but sold out. (But, shush, don't worry, the fourth will in fact be along soon.) Dearly Beloved, then, my missis, along with a great many others, including my publishers (and isn't that a recommendation), persuaded me to fill in those bits, gather the pieces, expand the weightiness, and give you *The Untold Stories*, tarra!

Before I continue, though, I must give mention to a couple or so sources of invaluable help, without whom it would not have been possible to give you these wee writings. The *Dr Who* Anorax from the Isle of Man; my old mate Chris Gardner (newspaper man extraordinaire); and Mr Iain Lowson, who hails from Edinburgh, hence the Scottish spelling of his name.

Many, many years ago I was doing, not a book signing, that was ages in the future, but an ordinary autograph session, way down somewhere on the south coast. This chap came up, and said, 'Can I have your autograph please, and will you personalise it?'

'Of course I will,' I replied. 'What's your name?'

'Iain,' (note the spelling).

'OK Ian,' quoth I, and I started to write.

'No' like that!' the guy shouted, 'I'm a Scotsman and proud of it. It's the Scottish Iain, with the extra 'I'.' From that day forward, if there is even the slightest doubt in my mind, I always ask people to spell their name.

Hey, I'm off at a tangent already! But that means I've got lots to tell. But before we go, I must first set the scene.

I did promise Anorax Anonymous, to give them their full title, that I would start thus: 'I was invited to the Isle of Man the other week to be the surprise guest at Andy's twenty-first birthday party', but it's such a super story that I'm sure they won't mind if I hold on to it for a while, so that I can give it its full weight.

Conventions will happily be one of the largest contributors this time, and I couldn't decide if I should put them at the beginning or at the end. At the beginning, and you readers might not bother with the other Sci-Fi gems to follow; at the end, and you might skip the first half and again fail to find the other delightful nuggets. At one stage I even considered bringing out a whole bag of separate booklets, but quickly discarded that as impracticable. The content of each of these smaller manuscripts would still be scintillating of course but it would be a Herculean task for the publishers. So I thought, what the convention, I'll stick with the one book.

Michael Sheard.

Ryde, Isle of Wight.

Chapter 1

I was just on the point of putting conventions first and Sci-Fi last, when I had an even better idea. I finally plumped for interspersion. A couple of conventions, followed by a thumbnail sketch of a Sci-Fi chum, then some interviews, another convention, more thumbnails, more conventions, etc. A large number of the conventions were also attended by my mates anyway and that, I thought, will give variety, and keep me laughing as I write. I'd better come clean from the start, although I very much enjoy doing interviews and personal appearances and all the rest, it's conventions I love most.

OK? Right, but just before we start – here I go on a tangent again! As many of you will already know, I don't like the label 'fan'. It stands for fanatic and I don't think you are fanatical. Can we please agree on another handle? How about 'Appreciator'? You, the apps, have always played a huge part in my life and this time you are very much the most important ingredient. An actor can, if he's lucky, have a goodish career without ever receiving even one app letter – it's not likely, but it is possible. But to be invited to conventions; to be a special guest; open penguin pools; give lectures, to be a guest on TV and radio chat shows and invited to open supermarkets; one must have appeared in something – or things – and have given a performance, or performances, which have been special, and deserving of praise and recognition by you, the audience, the appreciators.

Before I do finally get going therefore: Thanks, your appreciation is very much appreciated. This one is for you.

OK then. Let's start . . .

Chapter 2

I'm going to start with a wee convention I did in Essex a couple of months ago with 'The Men Behind the Mask'. How I could possibly think of leaving Sci-Fi to the end I don't know. I'm delighted to say that the Sci-Fi aroma will permeate this book like a mug of fragrant coffee. Of course it will, it's bound to. Sci-Fi has played a huge part in my life, still does. Wait until I tell you of *First Frontier* and *Manic Moonsters!*

Dr Who conventions may have come first, but as there are, alas, no more *Dr Who* planned (at this time), and it has to be said that the *Who* appreciators diminish in number, year by year. I was talking to a chap in America the other day who very reluctantly admitted that he doubted whether the States could give full justice to a (solely) *Dr Who* convention for much longer, and that they were already beginning to combine them with other Sci-Fis. It's a heck of a pity and we who are *Who* apps must hope that one of these days *Who* will be resurrected.

But in the meantime, there are lots of others keeping the flag flying. There are the wonderful 'Star Treks' of course. The first *Trek* convention was held in 1971 – they expected 300 and 3,000 arrived! And apart from the new digitalised trilogy of *Star Wars* (what a wonderful première that was – read *Yes, Mr B.* for more) there are the new *Star Wars* films, episodes one, two and three. There's *Babylon 5* too, *Highlander*, *Blake's 7* . . . you name it!

Well, blow me. Would you believe it? The phone has just rung and it was a chap from Exeter – Mark O'Grady – asking if I could help him with his new *Dr Who* convention. Honestly, I promise. Maybe I underestimated the power of *Who*. But I'm not going to scrub my previous observation. I still think it's true. But please don't misunderstand me, Andrew (Beech

– organiser of the super *Dr Who* convention, Panopticon), I think your conventions are wonderful and I can't wait for the next.

I'd like to pop another quick tangent in here and tell you how I came to be writing this second lot of pages in the first place. About a month ago my lovely publishers took me out to lunch in the pub next door to their offices in Chichester. We had a great time and happily chatted about this and that. I had a beautiful piece of very fresh cod – there's a superb wet fish shop in Chichester, I bet the pub buy their fish there – accompanied by an excellent salad. When we'd finished, and were sipping the second, or third of our favoured tipples, Stewart (Ferris), one of the founding partners of Summersdale and no mean author in his own right – *The Busker's Guide to Europe, Don't Lean Out of the Window* etc – said suddenly, 'Michael, *Yes, Mr Bronson* is going terribly well, what about giving us another?' I confess I was a wee bit taken off guard. Flattered of course, most certainly, but just a smidge gobsmacked. Imagine, *me* gobsmacked! Particularly as I was being asked to continue doing what I'd so enjoyed doing the first time round. But after a moment I found myself saying that I'd be delighted, but he did remember, didn't he, that *Yes, Mr B.* had taken quite a longish time to write, because I could only put finger to word processor between engagements, and that now I was also doing far more conventions.

'Don't worry,' Stewart cut in, 'you'll have bags of time, we don't want to bring the new book out until next year . . .'

Then the penny dropped. A publisher must find a hook on which to hang his author's work; that's why Bronson was chosen as the title of my first book, because of *Grange Hill*. Stewart figured that he had, with the resurgence of interest in Sci-Fi, an excellent hook whereon to hang the second. Fingers

crossed, that by then I'll also be starring in the new Sci-Fi series I mentioned, *First Frontier*.

I told Stewart that I thought it was a great idea. 'You know masses of people connected with Science-Fiction,' he continued, 'try and find a theme you haven't covered before which will allow you to weave in as much Sci-Fi as possible and with your inimitable style we're bound to have another hit.' Inimitable style! How could I refuse such flattery, not that I had any intention of so doing of course. I already had the theme, indeed I think it had always been there, lurking, but I did ponder Stewart's suggestion for a couple of weeks and talked it over with Dearly B. For one thing, although Stewart had said I had bags of time, actually, I only had some fifteen months in which to write it.

But there was never really any doubt, on top of everything else, I love a challenge. I got back to Summersdale and told them I'd love to write *Yes, Admiral*. And an added bonus is that now, when I go to conventions and see my mates, I tell them they'd better watch out and mind their Ps and Qs, 'cos they're going to be in the new book. Everybody is, organisers too.

Ha, ha, ha! Read on . . .

Now then, where in the Galaxy was I? Ah, yes, Essex – Basildon to be exact. I did say a wee convention, didn't I? Well, yes, I did do a smallish trader's fair in Basildon later, but this one was, in fact, so gigantic that I don't think Paul Miley, the organiser, really knew what hit him!

At autograph signing sessions I always like to have space to chat to the appreciators, but here they were pushed through so quickly by the venue staff (not Paul, I hasten to add), that we didn't have a chance. It was utterly frantic. But it does illustrate the power of Sci-Fi. And long may it continue!

This escapade, for that's indeed what it was, also served to emphasise the advertising possibilities of the Internet. I didn't grow up with what is termed 'modern technology', and I've had to adapt to the wonders of the computer, walk-around phones, digitalised whatsits and fax machines. And as for the Internet . . . wow! I learn very quickly, I think, although I'm still amazed that I can pop a letter into a fax machine and the person at the other end can be reading it almost before the type is dry. I've got a word processor and I'm now very good with faxes. But the power of the Internet is awesome. Where is it going to end?

For the aforesaid Basildon convention, Paul had advertised through the normal channels – magazines, newspapers, hoardings, some of us did radio interviews, etc – but he'd also utilised the Internet to massive effect and updated the info every week.

Paul Miley, by the way, is a very nice chap who has a reputation for never being on time for anything. If you've any sense you'll turn up at least half an hour after the allotted time because you know he won't be there. He also appears to be very laid back about things, but on the morning of the Basildon convention, it has to be said that even he was ever so slightly, but justifiably, anxious. There were simply thousands of people descending on the venue – thousands. It was like the Cup Final and Grand National rolled into one.

Regrettably, in the end, huge numbers had to be turned away. Some who'd been queuing for hours were understandably something less than pleased, particularly as the venue staff had decreed that there should be only one queue, for both those who had booked in advance and had their tickets, and the ones who'd turned up on the day.

We, who were inside sitting at our tables, were not fully aware of what was going on outside of course, but we had an inkling. Walls of people (those who had managed to get in)

kept heaving towards us. And they were being pushed at us by the venue staff who, in spite of all their bullying . . . ‘Come on, for heaven’s sake get a move on. And Mr Bronson (for the few who still don’t know, that’s me of course!), no talking, just sign. We must keep things moving’ . . . their efforts didn’t manage to get the last appreciator through until well into very late afternoon. Oh yes, we all ignored the orders and still found time for wee chats. But blimey, the power of the Internet. Dearly B. and I have just been connected so I know what I’m talking about – and I still don’t understand it. WOW!

Now then, my chums. I will, as I’ve said, introduce one or two every so often. So here then, in no particular order – oh these actors, you’ve got to be so careful not to offend them – is the first. My very dear valued chum – Uncle Peter Mayhew.

Peter and I have a very special rapport, particularly at signing sessions. I do with all my mates – I think and hope – but Peter is very special. For example, I always like to sit next to him. OK, I know, it’s because he’s big and he can protect me, and he lends me his silver signing pen when I haven’t got one, or mine’s run out. But it’s more than that. Peter and I have an easy-going relationship, which particularly lends itself to these occasions. We joke as we sign and can thus put the odd nervous app at their ease. And there’s even something else. I’ve always been fortunate, or found it necessary, to have all my faculties about me when I’m thesping. I’ve never had to give a performance with one arm tied metaphorically behind my back. Imagine what it must be like, then, to make your mark, as Peter has, with your face completely obliterated by mask, make-up, or machine. There is one scene in *Empire*. Harrison Ford (Solo) is expecting Debbie Reynold’s daughter (Princess Leia) – sorry Carrie, I trust you’ll understand, I think your Mum was so completely wonderful in *Singing in the Rain*, still do – Harrison is expecting Carrie Fisher to kiss him and she

kisses Mark Hamill (Luke) instead. There follows a great sequence in which Peter, without the benefit of his face remember, all but steals the scene with his knowing looks and raised eyebrows. Great.

I'll be coming back to my signing partner later . . . Often.

Imagine. My publishers have sent me on a book signing tour. 'Just up and down the south coast and around to begin with Michael, you'll love it. And just before Christmas, so you're bound to make masses of sales.'

Of course I loved it, and I'm going to pop a twist of these sessions into the pot as we go along. Don't by the way confuse shop book signings with convention book signings. Convention signings come later, and as often as not I've had to contend with and compete (albeit with affection), with the likes of Kenny Baker, Tom Baker, Colin Baker, Sophie Aldred, Gareth Thomas, Sylvester McCoy, Jeremy Bulloch, Dave Prowse, Robert Picardo, Peter, *et* many others, bless 'em every one!

My shop book signings are all mine. I'm on my own when I do them and they are (mostly) huge fun. Apart from anything else I'm the only guest there and if I don't do well, if I'm not bright eyed and bushy tailed, I don't sell. It's my fault and I might as well have stayed at home.

Let me give you a flavour. Two Saturdays before Christmas, I think it was, I arrived at Guildford station. It was eight in the very cold morning. As I girded up my spirits for the day ahead, I literally bumped into Mike Vardy, the distinguished TV director with whom I'd worked many times. He'd just seen his lovely vision-mixer wife, Sandra, off on the train to London Weekend TV.

'Michael,' he said, 'what on earth are you doing here at this hour?'

'I'm here to do a book signing at Smiths, Mike.'

'You've written a book? What is it, a thriller?'

'No, it's about me and my first thirty years in the business. It's doing very well, actually. You're in it.'

'Oh, I am?'

'Yep. Remember when we formed that production company that nearly made it? It's all there.'

'Oh, is it? Ah. Well, perhaps I'll drop down later and buy a copy. I hope you're nice about me.'

'Always am, Mike. You know me, I speak as I find.'

No, he never did drop down and thus missed the best book about the business he's ever missed. And he needn't have worried. Although I call a spade a shovel when I have to, Mike, I'm a pussy cat, me.

But, by Vardy, I can't go toddling off insinuating sillinesses from yesteryear; I must set the scene. First of all, forget Vardy. I'm sure he won't give a damn if I class him as a very small actor in this play. A walk-on, even!

I was due at Smiths at eight-thirty a.m. and I had 150 books to sell. Yes, that is a hell of a lot. I did however have two things in my favour. My youngest – Rupert – is a teacher at Guildford High School for Girls; and I had Southern Counties Radio on my side. Southern Counties had already asked me to do a phone-in the following weekend (more later) and when I told them that I was doing a book signing in Guildford which is their main base, they'd very kindly suggested that I do a wee chatette during my signing. A sort of boost for me and a trailer for them for the following Saturday.

Super, great. Only one problem. Have you ever been to the Smiths in Guildford's High Street? It's next door to Dillons, would you believe – a touch more of that later, too – and the only problem is that the ceilings are a trifle low and if you're at the back of the shop selling your wonderful biography you can't get a signal on your doctor daughter's mobile. (Those who have read *Yes, Mr Bronson* will know her as Susannah, my

little girl, who became a doctor of medicine and who is now a mum in her own right.) Zanna had come over to Guildford this day to show off her new baby daughter Bethany. I must admit, by the way, that whereas Dearly Beloved is just about there, I can't certainly be advanced enough in years to be a Grandad. Can I? Oh, alright then. I'm a Grandad.

OK, I had Zanna's mobile, but I couldn't get through to Southern Counties and they were desperate to contact me. So, what the hell to do? The excellent teacher of A-level History and Politics at Guildford High School for Girls came to the rescue, as he has on many occasions. Rupert stood outside Smiths, in Guildford High Street, amid the seasonal carol singers, chestnut vendors – I had some later and they were gorgeous – and the clowns, and when at last Southern Counties were able to reach him, he vigorously waved a Guildford High School scarf. (A pre-arranged signal, the scarf had been loaned to us by his terrible four, The Four Musketeers – read on!) I then rushed out into the street, having first asked the next purchasers of my book, a couple of very tough looking chaps with shaved heads and rings all over the place, if they would mind waiting. Their reply had been,

'Yeah, 'course we will mate. You go an' talk on the radio. And don't you worry mate. We'll make sure nobody nicks your books, Mister BRON – SON!' (When the apps really get going it always comes out like that, as a two syllable chant.)

I was rather relieved to have two such excellent bodyguards.

I did my radio interview, out there, in the road. Actually the High Street in Guildford is a pedestrian precinct so there was no possibility of my being knocked down by a passing double-decker. Great stuff, we had a wonderful time. I loved it.

So did the all the appreciators. Dearly B. and I used to live near Guildford and a goodly number of old friends popped down to say hello. Our ex-next door neighbour, for example, and a lovely lady from Dearly B's baby-sitting circle days who

didn't buy a book 'cos she had one already. And the Four Musketeers of course, mentioned above, Erika, Alexa, Lulu and Esther – the only girls from Rupert's form who are, well, let's say high spirited! Thanks for the loan of the scarf, by the way. The five of us – the four of them and me – bought a copy of my book between us. One pound each. Oh yes, didn't I say? Normally the book's great value at its shop price, but at book signings and conventions it sells for only a fiver. And you get it signed!

Hey ho. A great day. And when I'd finished and was on my way to Rupert's flat to see Bethany, I popped into Dillons, which was next door remember, and left a note for dear Tom (Baker) who was due to do a signing there the following week, of his book, *Who on Earth is Tom Baker?*. (I must watch this, that's the second time I've advertised someone else's work!)

Dear Tom,

As always, I've got in first. If you sell as many books as I've sold today, you'll be doing very well!

See you at the next convention.

Yours Aye, with love . . .

I've liked T. Baker Esq., immensely, ever since I first met him at the start of rehearsals for director Paddy Russell's *Dr Who*, 'The Pyramids of Mars'. 'Pyramids' was a great four-parter, as was 'The Invisible Enemy', which I of course also did with Tom. Two very nice contrasting parts in fact. Scarman, in 'Pyramids', was a rather meek man, terribly concerned for his brother, who hid in a very small cupboard with Elizabeth Sladen and actually got to enter the Tardis. For one scene at least I became a *Dr Who* companion.

I was also in a very small space in 'Enemy'. As Lowe, who, once he'd been taken over by the virus was a very evil man, I