

Thom's Q&A at Denver's Starcon

The first page is missing. If anyone has a copy, please contact Marilyn (email link at bottom of index page).

This document was scanned from typewritten material on aged paper so errors have crept into the text. The scanner's apology to Thom, TC Fanclub editor Vicki James, and to transcriber Penni Golowka for those errors that weren't caught.

(Audience) Why do you feel Buck Rogers was canceled so soon? Was it the ratings?

(TC) After being associated for six months with the project and really learning something about the network mentality, I think everyone was very naive in thinking that overnight we were going to change the ratings, by adding Hawk, Wilfrid Hyde-White, a new admiral, and a new robot—which I think was very detrimental. I'm not a Crichton fan (loud applause).

The fellow who created Crichton, he was very obsessed with his remote-control buttons and he and I would continually go at it. I mean, Crichton could really move! I'd have my back turned and feel this whack across my backside—it was Crichton coming down the corridor at full speed and then whacking me across the back! And I'd end up standing there arguing with this machine! But I think that little things like Crichton were detrimental.

And what I said earlier about the compromise on the scripts, something that Star Trek didn't do, saying, well, "okay" to this group and "okay" to that group without making a final commitment was bad. Some of the scripts that we had to put away were just unbelievable!

Also I think everyone was naive in thinking after "Time of the Hawk" that the ratings were just going to be astronomically high. I don't think that was very practical. I said it would take a whole season to let the public get used to visually seeing the new faces on the show.

When I got the role, I asked to have all of the previous season shown for me over a period of time. I just wanted to get a sense of Gil and Erin's work, and I had not watched Buck Rogers that much. I just wanted to get a sense of the way they interacted and see how I could work with that and fit into it. I personally don't like the cartoon approach that was done in the first season—the bright lights, the discos in space, gratuitous sexual overtones—I just didn't think that it was necessary. It didn't work for me. I like the more serious approach that John Mantley took.

But everyone thought the ratings were going to change overnight. I think that was the major fault behind it. Also, the illogical pre-empting. It wasn't the belief that, after the first show, if it didn't do as well as we thought; well, we'll have to then pre-empt it. It was pre-empted six times in the course of one season. None of that really helped. And it was also a very expensive show. I believe, according to the Variety listings,, the most expensive episodic series on television for last season. I think all of this came into play, and also the present situation with NBC, with Fred Silverman in transition. I figured all of that hurt us. But I always believe that it happened for ultimately a very good reason.

(Audience) Why were you sent out on patrol so often and did it bother you?

(TC) That's called "being shoved in at the last minute or we've got to get him in to do something." And I'd say, "John, I've got to say something, I've got to do something. All right?" It didn't bother me because I always felt that my own personal interpretation of Hawk gave him such strength that one always knew he was an independent being.

The only person that he would concede to in any way would be Buck. I always wanted to feel that Hawk was bonded to Buck's side. I wanted the audience to feel that I was Buck's right hand. I was trying to make logic out of being there. Obviously, it didn't work all the time, but I never gave it any negative thought of being hustled off. No it didn't bother me. I still think the character was so strong that it spoke for itself. And I would try to take command of the situation when I was there.

Remember in "The Dorian Secret"—the scene where she looks up at me and says she doesn't want to come? Well, we had a wonderful director of photography, Ben Coleman, who was so tuned into what I was trying to do with the character that when the director, Jack, wanted to move the camera or wanted me to move out of camera as soon as she said "no" and do an offstage look to her, keeping the camera on her;

Ben said, "No, we've got to go to his face." Have the camera covering him and let him just look at her. I looked at Ben, and Ben said, "We don't need words. Let me keep the camera on his eyes and his face and we'll be all right." And he proved to be right. I don't think it's because it's me but because he understood the character so well. I think he would have done it with any actor playing the character. That's just Ben Coleman. So I tried little things like that—I tried putting in little nuances.

Do you remember the moment in "Traitor"—just about one of the last shows we did—"Testimony of a Traitor," when the high court judge says "Your friends, your earth friends, your human friends are also going to be put into jail for aiding you in your escape." When they were looking at the dailies in the screening room only one person picked up on it—the executive producer's secretary—she jumped up and screamed, "My god, did you see what he did?" They cut it down a little, but when he said "humans," I remember distinctly moving to Erin's right shoulder. It was little things like that that I tried to throw in. I was just having a good time! I didn't care if anybody else was!

(Audience) If the series had gone on would Hawk have found some of his own people?

(TC) There was talk about that. John said he had some ideas about Hawk coming in contact with some of the tribes—which was the intent of the Searcher—to find the lost tribes of Earth. But at the meeting I said let's take this a step further and make them, at this point, almost aliens to me.

So again, I could be the loner—I don't stay with them. If we had continued for another year (they were very serious about it being picked up and we were discussing story lines), I was feeling very strongly on pressing for bringing Koori back a great deal. But never in reality—always on a spiritual basis. Just to me, it would mean something to me, help me in danger and that type of thing.

Remember the script about the jade box? It was the one I liked the least because it read so beautifully but then when it was filmed they sliced up the scene where Koori comes back. We thought we had locked them into something because that scene had a very long kiss, but they cut it down a great deal because it was very passionate, and by cutting it they just made it a very dull scene.

Two minutes before we stepped in front of the camera, I said, "Barbara, I don't know what I'm going to do. I don't know how we can approach this scene because it's written so poorly. The only way to make it work is for you to kiss me and just keep kissing and talking."

And in the process I discovered film is elastic. I sat in the screening room and marveled. I marveled because John Mantley had said to me, "Aha.' You thought you had me with that kiss I Wait until you see what I did!"

And I asked him, "How did you do it?" and he said, "You'll see." He proved right. When we took a breath or something they were able to cut it back so you never see us kiss. When in reality it was a long, long kiss. We just mumbled our words! I don't know how they were able to do it!

(Audience) Do you think they'll ever continue Buck Rogers?

(TC) I don't think so, no, I don't think it will ever come on the air again. My feeling is, that's it. Unless suddenly another network decides it wants to pick up on it, but there's no talk of that now.

(Audience) Tell us about the scripts that were turned down.

(TC) There was a script written by John and a longtime associate of his, Cal Clements. Cal did a lot of How the West Was Won and Gunsmoke with John, so their minds work together very well. They wrote a script called "The Slavers" that was phenomenal.

But the network turned it down because they said it was too intellectual (large groan from the audience). What it was...are you ready for this? I I flipped. My whole panache as an actor came out....

We all had wonderful scenes and it would have been a terribly exciting episode, but it was primarily built around Erin. John created a renegade theatrical director, in space, who would capture people and who, by molecular change makes them into Greek and Shakespearean characters.

So at one point, there is a scene where I come in as Orestes, playing Medea and Gil is playing Richard III. And this bizarre character, he sits there like a master director. It was so coldly written that you literally start doing the scenes. We do this contrapuntal thing where each of us is doing a monologue to destroy each other. It was very, very exciting, and it didn't end happily—which was the unusual thing about it. It was very dark and beautifully written.

And they wouldn't do it. We were down to almost final drafts—it was booked for about the eighth or ninth show—and the network just clamped down and said "No, it was too intellectual. The audience won't understand it." But I disagreed.

(Audience) Why do they think the television audience is so stupid?

(TC) Again, it's people not willing to trust and underestimating. I think it's a terrible, terrible underestimation of the American public in general. Our president says, "We'll make America great again by doing this, that and the other." Without sounding corny, I did not know we weren't great. You know, it kind of bothered me.... I'm not being chauvinistic about it or raising flags; I just think there's this underestimation. I think the American public would not be turned off by "The Slavers."

(TC) There was originally—prior to the actors' strike—a cape on Hawk which was totally useless because it wasn't a full shoulder cape that I was able to really use to swirl out with. It was pleated—four pleats in the back—and it just draped down along the back. And the danger with that was whenever we got into any of the fight sequences (in the first four days of shooting, prior to the strike), I found myself either choking Gil to death with the cape or being hung up in a tree! I try to do as much of my own stunts as possible and the cape just became impossible to work with.

By the time the actors' strike was over we had decided the costume would consist of a jumpsuit, with the boots and gauntlets. We then got into a discussion of the weapon. One thing I wanted to evolve from Hawk, at all times, was the feeling—a sense—that the man was chiseled out of rock. I didn't want to make him so sophisticated that he displayed too much *élan*, or handled himself too civilized. I always wanted a feeling that this man could turn at any moment and become the predator that his genetic background said he was.

So I went to the costume room. The costume people at Universal were just wonderful to me. I can't stop raving about the people I came into contact with. They took me into an area where they had a lot of things left over from *Battlestar:Galactica*, and what I found was a sandal. I put the sandal against my hip, and I said, "Hmmm, this sandal... could the alien gun fit in that?" And it did. Then we found a piece of rope and they sprayed it black, and it became a holster.

It was wonderful—I loved it! Here it was a sandal and a piece of rope; and it was beautiful; it worked beautifully. And we began in the...well, I'll get into that later (how we plotted what was going to be used) as I didn't realize there was such concern about the fact of anyone wearing a gun on Buck Rogers—because you notice Gil only wears it when he goes to an alien planet. And I raised the question of "How does he know it's an alien planet until he gets there?" Bing, bang, that logic came in....

The epic costuming thing was the headpiece. Now we had the body suit, which presented no major problems once it was finalized, but the headpiece was incredible because what they had to do was take a full plaster mold of my head.

There's a funny story behind that.... I tend to get a bit claustrophobic, and I'm very gallantly sitting there in the makeup department, and the gentleman who runs the engineering end of the makeup—who does everything on paper, and handles any of the very intricate, basic construction—encased my entire head in plaster. I said to the makeup artist, "Well, fine, you know, just do what you have to do" and I see him mix up an enormous—twice the size of the box- amount of plaster.

He starts off with the gauze first, soaked gauze, then tissue over that, and then the bucket of plaster. So there's a lot of it.

My first question was how was I going to breathe, but he says "Don't worry. Just leave your mouth ever so slightly open and we'll put a little hole in the plaster with a straw, and when the straw is pulled out, that little passageway will let you breathe comfortably. It's not as frightening as it looks."

The chair I was sitting in was like a barber's chair—it tilted— so he just tilted me all the way back, and started wrapping gauze and smoothing on the plaster. It began to harden; and as it was hardening, he said "Now be aware of the fact that it's going to feel as if it's pulling in on your face."

It's not. What is happening is, the plaster is drying so quickly and the gauze is staying wet, so that the texture against your skin is one of closing in on you."

I'm sitting there, encased in this enormous thing of plaster, and Werner walked away saying, "Now just relax and breathe. I'll only be in the next room, and I'll be back in about half an hour."

After about ten minutes I feel this thing tightening up on my face—closing in on me. My mouth wasn't open that wide, but I felt ever so slightly a tentacle of the gauze going down into my throat, and I thought I was swallowing it! It was exaggerated... you know how it is when you're in a completely dark room—everything seems alive in the dark?

I didn't realize I was THAT claustrophobic but all of a sudden I thought I was swallowing the plaster. And all it was, obviously, was just the fuzz on my lips. But in my mind, I thought I was swallowing it! I could not talk. All I could make was the noise "Unnnnnhh, unhhh!..."

I heard Werner in his laboratory, which was less than ten feet away—but in my mind he was ten miles away--say to his assistant, Peter, (who was working on Archer--doing some of the monsters or bird heads for Archer or something), "Go in and hold his hand. The best way to calm him down is to stroke his arm, and let him know we're here."

I heard him say this; I could hear all this! (Muffled, but I could hear it.) I knew I had met Peter earlier, because I recognized his voice. He came in, talking while he was walking towards the chair—my senses were heightened, so I knew he was walking towards me—and he said, "Relax. Don't worry. I know it's a strange feeling, you're hyperventilating; don't worry...." and he said "Hold my hand."

Well, I did the strangest thing. It reveals where a personality is at times-- how fear makes our minds work in strange ways-- instead of holding his hand, I remember just reaching out— I felt the hand—and just went like this and grabbed his pinkie! The image I had in my mind!

I found myself chuckling sitting there.... I had panicked for about thirty seconds, and here are two grown men--one sitting with

this bulbous mass of plaster on his head—and there I am with this wonderful makeup artist—just holding his pinkie. I can feel it still; it's so funny; just holding on like that. Needless to say, I didn't suffocate!

But back to the creative end of it. They had to take the mold off, peel off the plaster, and what they have underneath is a complete mold of my head, almost like a death mask. That's literally what it looks like. Then they started experimenting with poly- urethane discs and headpieces. If you try to envision a bathing cap that runs from the bridge of the nose, all the way down the back of the neck to here... That's what it looked like.

It was in quartered pieces so that he was able to make a piece, glue it, match a piece, glue it... repeating the step four times. There were seams in it, so when you looked at it you had a seam down the center and a seam this way. Liquid (soft) polyurethane was then laid over the headpiece. This left a lot of excess, hardened, soft polyurethane hanging down from it which we would subsequently cut off. The cap came down to the top of the bridge... here... and one of the rules, that came in from NBC, was that the eyes were never to be covered. I was pleased with that because it was one of the things that concerned me.

Originally the cap sat very low and I was afraid of a lighting problem—of the overhead lighting throwing shadows. NBC had sent down this memo which stated "No covering of the eyes—make sure his eyes are always seen." We discovered the only way we could do that was to completely finish the piece, feathers and all, and then I had to sit there while they took knives and just cut around the eyes.

So it became, eventually a forty-eight hour project of putting on the feathers. Once the young lady (Susan) started, she didn't like to stop. And this was done once a week! They were chicken feathers—and each one was overlaid. It took forty-eight hours because she had to match feathers. She tried to get each feather, each vein, to match a similar pattern and a similar size. The last thing to be done—which was my honor, I discovered after the first week—was selecting the brow feathers.

They said "You are the only one who knows...."—and I really was the only one who could choose the brow feathers. They picked very strange ones (like they'd just gone through a thunderstorm) and then they decided "Something's wrong with them; we'd better give him the things to handle." We talked about using plastic feathers at one point, and Werner did try that, but it didn't work. They just picked up light in the wrong way, and to simulate feathers is, I discovered, really photographically impossible. I mean, you can't. It has to be the real thing.

Once Susan had the head feathers on the model, on the polyurethane itself, it became very simple to take on and off. It would only last for one week. By the third day, I would start molting-- literally, because we didn't realize that we needed the natural oils going into the feathers. It was the first time Werner had done anything like this—so intricate. He'd used artificial feathers, or feathers that had been sprayed, you know, for a one-time use; but what we were looking for was something with a repeated longevity to it.

We had thought we could get away with at least one for every two or three shows, but we discovered that we needed one for every show—and it just barely made it through that! By the third day, as I said, it would begin to molt, and this was occurring

from the handling of it.

Brenda Todd, my makeup artist, and I were the only two who were eventually allowed to ever touch it. It became a major project. There were barricades around the headpiece.... and a stand that I would put it on, and Brenda had these enormous signs that said "PLEASE DO NOT TOUCH". We would, at one point, put on white cotton gloves, and handle it that way.

But it became so ridiculous—putting the gloves on and taking the gloves off; I'd get makeup on the gloves and then get makeup on the white feathers. So we just said, well, we'd be the only two to do it. We got into the routine of slipping it on, pulling it down, and then just taking an eyebrow brush to each feather to get all the veins going in the right direction.

What Susan, who put the feathers on, would do was overlay each one, starting from the front and working all the way to the back. What we would try to do was copy the cap from the previous week, and that was pretty difficult. The feathers were kept in enormous bins that Universal would buy, and she'd just sit and try to capture the same brown and white pattern on the feathers.

Now what was interesting, and the way they had started off originally, was that John Mantley, the producer, had wanted the feathers in black and white—but that ran into problems. Black tones became gray tones (on camera), and we finally said, let's move it into brown and white because browns seems to be a more profusive color in the feathers. The strain in the vein would be more of a brown and white. So we then, in turn, put the brown and white feathers into it, literally after the first show.

(TC) Once the headpiece was finished, we discovered an interesting thing about it. While it was in the mold—it would be affected by atmospheric heat. Heat would just make the mold so soft that the headpiece stretched ever so slightly. It fell right over the brow into the lid and I had no control over my eyelids.

After about the second show, we finished the piece completely, but there'd be all this excess hanging down in front. (Brenda had already cut off the back pieces.) She would then—with a very sharp knife and while it was on my head—start cutting right underneath the brow, so that it would sit just underneath the eyebrow itself. Now here we taped and glued two points. We did not want to lose the wonderful pocket area that occurs just over the beak of most birds. I don't even think the camera really picked it up. It just helped me to know that it was there.

What we'd do is use spirit gum on those two points. They were constantly being pressed down. Every time I went before the camera, we would press these points down. And it just gave, again profile-wise, that wonderful heavy-lidded area; effected a heavy lid in the front.

They taped the sides, right along the sideburns—we'd put double-face tape on that—and that would hold it against the sides of my head. Now, the entire feeling—although there were air holes in it—was as if you were under water. So when I talked I never really heard my own voice. And if someone was too far away from me and mumbling something, I sometimes had to take a visual cue from the stage manager or a floor director—well, he couldn't give me a voice cue, so I had to watch for some kind of cue before stepping into camera range. That presented the most difficulty, the headpiece. And it took regular care and was very, very expensive. It was well over \$700 per piece, and that's one almost every week.

I have a wonderful double/stand-in. Randy Clare is his name. He would inherit my previous week's headpiece so it didn't go to waste. (I'm sure they are still sitting around in the archives in Universal's cellar.) In "Time of the Hawk," he's the one who does that terrific standing-still spin. The man's absolutely unbelievable. He's been into martial arts since he was ten years old; it's a religion with him. There is nothing in martial arts that he cannot do.... He does not do it in the negative, aggressive, way.

He's a fascinating guy. He's teaching me and when I go back, I'll be his student again. He's thirty years old and he's got a little baby son that he's teaching now, too. But Randy's quite incredible.... And Randy has every kind of opposite quality—the small nose, blond hair—but when he puts my headpiece on.... We had a rubber nose of my size made for him and he had to go through the same thing that I went through with the plaster, and everything, just to get his nose done!

But that, basically, was everything with the costume. Oh, excuse me!

The shield; The shield everyone wanted to make soft—after they saw it on me—they wanted to make it soft, almost like the Roman shields which were basically made of heavy saddle leather. And that was their concept, to make it a la Roman leather breastplate—that would give with the body. That's what they wanted to do so I could move in it, thinking that I'd have trouble bending.

But that wasn't the case at all. I said, no, that we'd lose that wonderful, thrusting tightness, the breast effect of a bird, if we did that. The shield was interesting. It was also a mold. We went down to the Special Effects Department of Universal, and they laid me out on an enormous thing that seemed like an operating table. There's a crane overhead. Now, little did I realize that crane was going to play an important part in my four hours on that table! They had me stripped down to briefs, and first did my chest. What they did was put me in a wooden frame and pour plaster all over my body. So I get into this whole, frontal, plaster cast. That's because of the fact that the shield came from the shoulders, and they didn't know how deeply they were going to have to cut it.

Ultimately it just came down to the groin, but they went down to about the knees with the plaster. Once that hardened, I had to turn over and lay into the hardened breastplate so the contours on the breastplate and the front of my own chest were heightened. Then I was rolled over, and they put plaster on my back to get the back mold. This is where the fun came in 'cause suddenly all of this weight—and I'm talking about molds in the front about...that...big and a mold in the back about the same size—so now, to lift me, the only way to do it is with a crane.

The crane was lowered down to turn me. I love to meditate and meditation helped a great deal in this instance. For the next two hours I just kind of disappeared from this. I had myself into meditation for about two hours while I was drying, but you feel this pressure on you. It's amazing how the mind heightens things that really aren't there. There is not that much pressure, but it just felt like it was really pressing in.

They lifted the molds off, and now they had these two separate pieces—a back piece and a front piece, about, as I said, so thick—with the contours of my body. They then, in turn, bring that over to another department that takes hard polyurethane and

lays it all over the mold, peels it off, and you have a very thin strip of hard polyurethane. They do that four times, and then mold all four of those pieces together. The same procedure is repeated for the back. So what you end up with is, about a half-inch thick breastplate, in the front, and a backplate, out of this hard polyurethane.

Now ultimately you all saw what it looked like when it was finished, right? I mean, very thin and black. What we discovered was, if I moved too quickly, say, brought my arms together—like that—I could snap the center piece right around the chest. So we were always one step ahead of ourselves and had a second one.

One of the conceptual aspects of the character was—we didn't want to hide the fact, when the question came up—"Is the breastplate part of Hawk's natural anatomy or is it a protective breastplate, like a shield?" I wanted to go in that direction, because I said there was no way at all that we could possibly convince the camera and the viewer that this is a bird's breast. It's impossible. It just doesn't have that kind of mobility.

I said let us give it that somewhat primitive feeling—it's a subtle thing because not many people could see it, but when the camera picks it up, they'll see that there is this heavy leather lanyard holding these two pieces together. (Had the show run on to a second season—there was talk of finding a way to change the costume. John wanted to change certain aspects of the costume. Very simply there was going to be a scene where I was captured and stripped of all of this. And that would have justified the changing of the costume. It was a very interesting script idea that he had.

The piece came together, back to front. Now, with this heavy lanyard on both sides, I didn't want a fly closing on the front of the jumpsuit—they had talked about doing a fly-front. I said it has to be as tight and as sleek-looking as possible. Again, there is the sense of someone always moving fast and forward. I just wanted the body movements to always be clear; they wanted the sculptured look of a bird's feather, in the sense of a sleek body.

Our only problem with that is I'd have to make sure not to drink too much coffee or water or juice in the morning because when Nature calls....! Once I got into the breastplate, I never took it off until lunch and in the evening I never took it off until I finished the shooting, because it took about fifteen minutes just to get the thing strung on the sides.

Another problem was, once the headpiece was on, to lift the shield all the way up without taking it apart—just by loosening the side—would pull the feathers. So what we would do is, take a light piece of silk, wrap it around my head completely, and then lift the shield up over that. I would run to the John and run right back.

But on this one particular day when we were shooting, everyone was suffering from the flu, and I was taking a lot of Vitamin C. We were right in the middle of a shot and I said, "Gentlemen, I just can't do it" and we stopped. It was like, "Here comes Thom" and it was Jack on my left, Barry on my right, and Erin screaming;

We're all running down to my trailer, and we're unstringing it, and I was saying, "Don't take it off, fellas, don't take it off" because I didn't want a feather problem.

I have this wonderful dresser in Los Angeles, Jack Takeuchi, and Jack has a little penknife. (I love to tell this story.) I am convinced that he could do a complete remake of Star Wars with just that little knife of his for fitting the costumes. I mean, what the man does is unbelievable.

Because when I'd put the breastplate on, some of the atmospheric conditions, again, would either stretch the chemicals in the urethane or tighten it. So around the arms and under the armpits it would sometimes stretch out in the course of, let's say, a day. He would then have to shave underneath the armpit. He had his penknife, and he would just cut—once it was on me—to give me, again, mobility. He would just sit in my dressing room, and cut around the armpits so I was able to be free.

Because that minute detail wouldn't come out in the molding. You would have to cut, because sometimes the mold would spread due to the natural California heat or cold. And then it was sprayed, and they would every so often highlight the curvatures of the chest with silver paint that wouldn't read silver on the screen.

The breastplate was wonderful to wear and, as I said with the boots, it gave me a wonderful uplifting feeling—putting on the breastplate became the final touch for being Hawk. It's like the final thing in anything that we do—when you know it's perfectly right. The wonderful thing that happens, when you know that the right button has been pushed in some way inside yourself. I mean, you bake a cake, you paint a picture, you take a photograph, you sew a hem on a dress—whatever it might be—that final little thing comes in and you know, "My god, this is it. This is right."

They had made the breastplate and the backplate, strapped me into them, and the powers that be at NBC were behind me, and John Mantley, our executive producer, was sitting in front of me—I took this breath—and I'll never forget it—it was amazing. It's like *deja vu*, just now.... The costume designer, my dresser...we were all in one of the lower subterranean dressing rooms; and I'm looking into the mirror—I'm in full regalia, everything is on—the fellows are stringing me up and I'm standing, looking into the mirror over John's head.

John says, "Well?" and I said, "He's arrived. This is Hawk. He cannot be changed." He just felt so beautiful.... The breastplate, literally, put the final texture on Hawk for me. Then he...took off. I That's primarily the history of the costume. All that took place in, I'd say, about a two-and-a-half-week period.

I had total mobility in the costume. I studied dance for a number of years and it left the legs, the back and the hip free to move. We never had to go to anything soft.

Now Randy, my stunt double, he is wearing a leather breastplate. That is leather he wears because of the fact that he could never do that spin, logically, because his legs come up so close and there's that dip into the groin with the breastplate. The breastplate comes down this...low and a few times I did jump from rocks and realized I shouldn't have been jumping from rocks that way; John would scold me: "You shouldn't be doing that; your stuntman should be doing that'."

What we discovered problem-wise with the costume was fascinating. We were shooting at Vasquez Rocks for all of "Journey to Oasis". ("Time of the Hawk" was at Malibu Canyon, which is both a very desert-type and tree-lined area because of the

timberline; whereas Vasquez Rocks is sheer—they used them a lot for westerns back in the 30's and 40's—just sheer desert.)

It was later on in the Fall, so the weather wasn't really, really, too bad. We just made it look that hot. So we were shooting the second episode out in Vasquez Rocks, about seventy miles above North Los Angeles, and it was very hot in the costume—at one point I was about 101-102 degrees inside it.

I thought I was going to pass out. It was retaining all of the heat, and I had been leaping off the rocks and everything else. (In many cases, in "Journey to Oasis," when you'd see maybe a five-second scene, that's almost two or three minutes of me running all over the rocks, and they just took what they wanted.)

They actually had to put ice cubes, at one point, down the costume while we were shooting. They just stretched me out and Brenda Todd, who was my makeup artist, would take bags of ice cubes and encase them around my face, because the feathers would begin to wilt and get soppy. That was the drawback with the feathers—particularly around the neck. I tend to sweat a great deal and they would start sticking to my neck.

So a hair dryer always had to be next to me with the makeup man, and he would be blowing me dry when we were doing exterior sun shots. Now we're shooting "Journey," and I'm up with Odie-X on a mountain top.

I'm awaiting the arrival of the boom, the lights are all set up and they're using two cameras. This is very high up; we're about sixty-to-eighty feet high on a cliff side. They brought in the dollies and an amazing thing happened. (We had started setting this thing up around four-thirty on a Thursday afternoon, anticipating that we were going to be using it in night shooting.)

I was very, very hot, uncomfortable-to-very hot. Suddenly the sun went down behind one of the high ridges and within, I'd say without exaggeration, 5-10 minutes the costume became a refrigerator. It was amazing. I was literally shaking. We discovered they were picking up my teeth chattering on my body mike! That's when we learned that the polyurethane literally retains cold as well as heat—and as quickly. I was against the hill and I couldn't move from my position because everything was marked. Meanwhile they were fixing Odie-X's (Felix Silla) makeup because he was having a problem with the mask. (It wasn't latex of any kind, so it didn't give, and he had trouble talking and breathing, and it kept cracking. They had to replace the blue makeup constantly.)

Ben Coleman was our Director of Photography—and he had the crew bring up to me blankets on a dolly. And eventually they started lighting torches, and surrounding me, because of the time expended (half-hour/forty-five minutes) dealing with the complications of Felix' makeup.

So there I was against a rock, holding on and I couldn't come down because it would throw off the markings for the lights, and they just came up with torches and kept a circle of heat around me because it got colder as it got darker. It was fascinating what problems one costume could cause!

So then we took precautions. What Jack did was, go back to the Costume Department. He found this enormous orange cape,

and from then on I just wrapped myself in this cape whenever we did an exterior shot at night.

During the day, Mike Holowach, our Director of Props, would bring out large umbrellas and place them over each one of our chairs to keep the sun away. We did suffer from the heat. But that was only on location; and I love shooting on location. In the studio, there was no major problem. Only if there was a fight sequence or a lot of running. Then my own body heat would build. Usually it would triple—if my body heat was up, it would triple that amount with the shield on.

It was a wonderful costume to wear—it just photographed so beautifully, too. And Barbara's—Barbara's wasn't as difficult to make up. Barbara Luna's—Koori's—was just a decision as to where to put the feathers. That was the big thing on her costume. I hope that answers your question...because I can just talk and talk and talk!

There was an interesting thing about the boots. It's an intimate story which is fun. I had tried on about six different pairs of boots, and nothing felt right. They all had heels. Gil Gerard's dresser was also involved in the preparation of my costume.

He said, "Wait, there's a pair that Gil used in the Buck Rogers movie, let's try those." I put them on and it was the most incredible feeling. I started walking around, strutting around, and I began to feel a nice kind of walk. It was like the first time I put on the shield.

I said, "My goodness, the character is growing, he is getting there, he's telling me something," with this beautiful, beautiful pair of boots. The boots were custom-made, for about \$600.00, by this wonderful bootmaker in Los Angeles. (He makes most of the studio and film boots. That's all he sells commercially.)

I found something very interesting in these boots. I never wanted to use my hands in climbing mountains or anything of that nature; I wanted everything to come from the legs and from the feet. Again, moving as a bird would. I mean, a bird never uses its wings for anything other than flight.

He only uses them in flight or in fighting, but he never uses them to walk on a limb or climb a wall. (I wanted to always have the feeling that there was this animal thing going out, always reaching out. This became more explicit as we went along in the shooting.) But what I found out about these boots was that they were so soft, I was at times literally able to run up a sheer rock wall—just by gripping with the boots!

They were incredible, even with this two-inch heel on them; So the ultimate joke of this is, we had the gentleman who made these boots make two pairs for me because, by the time "Time of the Hawk" was finished, the originals were totally destroyed by all the climbing and the falling on rocks.

I think the man has me implanted in his mind forever, because I was with him every morning before shooting, and every night I'd run down to his studio to make sure he was cutting them right. Me—telling this man, whose life work is making boots, to be sure that everything was perfect on the cut of the sole of the boot! And he did make an exact duplicate of Gil's boots. It's funny, because Gil and I are literally a size apart in the boot, yet it seemed to work perfectly. I took it as a piece of destiny.

(AUDIENCE) When you had a real hot scene, and you started sweating, did you have a lot of trouble with the sand clinging to the feathers?

(TC) It's very funny that you should bring that up, because I tend to sweat a great deal, very heavily. In "Time of the Hawk" we had to have three separate headpieces ready because we discovered that, during most of the fight sequences, I would pick up so much sand there was no way to dry the one piece and then brush off the sand.

So we had Brenda Todd (my makeup artist) and her assistant, as well as Jack Takeuchi (who was my dresser) and his assistant all running up and down the mountain. It was like a revolving door. All you saw were bodies running up and down the mountain—to change the shield, change the headpiece, again to change the shield, etc.

Yes, the dirt did stick. That's why we made one headpiece per week. And my stuntman—Randy Clare, a brilliant, brilliant stuntman—would inherit each one of these sandy pieces 1 So he had to suffer for it, not me.

(AUDIENCE) Could you tell us a little about where you felt the character of Hawk was ultimately heading?

(TC) That question really kicks off a kind of personal thing that we can all share here. The show isn't on the air and I think there are backstage stories we might enjoy.

When I was presented with "Time of the Hawk," I was in New York. It was in May of last year and they had already cast everyone. Everyone was all set except the new character. John Mantley, the executive producer, was brought in to rescue Buck Rogers, which had been canceled after the previous season. The show was guaranteed renewal for only thirteen weeks on the basis of having John take over.

John originally wanted someone much older as Hawk. He just envisioned a much bigger, craggier, older person—for whatever reason. So I knew there was going to have to be a lot of convincing. They sent the script to me in New York—to get my feelings on it. I just went insane over the first script! What I read was not what you saw on the air.

I think what was on the air was extremely good—but that original shooting script was more fantastic. I knew it would eventually have to be cut, because of the subject matter—which we'll get into later on. But when I first read the script, the character was described on the first page: "closeup of thick, burly birdman in cockpit of his hawkship, with wife, Koori, behind him" and "large, enormous beak." And it continued, "feathers protruding from the neck and the shoulders and from the head—which is wrapped in feathers."

My agent said, "You know, you're probably going to have to wear a mask." I said, "I don't think they're going to make it (my nose) look bigger!" He began to describe the cowls around the eyes, and I said, "I don't think it has to go in that direction." I felt so confident after my first reading!

Reading the script further, I began to realize the frustrations of this character. The injustices in his life appealed to me a great deal, and I had some previous knowledge of the bird race and the hawk people of Orongo on Easter Island, because I had read *Aku-Aku* by Thor Heyerdahl. That was where John Mantley's idea of Hawk originated. It was a great concept for a character.

So I was flown to Los Angeles to audition for John Mantley. The minute I read for him and showed him my feelings about it—where I wanted to go with it—he bought all of it. Right there on the spot, John said, "I would like you to be Hawk."

And I replied, "I want to be Hawk very, very much." Then he very honestly told me that he had written Hawk into only four scripts, and he could not guarantee that I'd be in anything beyond that. I said, "Fine."

So as far as my agent and I were concerned I would sign primarily to do the two-hour premiere. That meant, though, that I would be tied up for thirteen weeks contractually, which financially was fine. To me, it meant I was tied up for thirteen weeks and being paid, in theory, for doing nothing if I were not in any other episodes. But once they started looking at the dailies of the premiere—while we were still shooting it—they saw they had created a "monster". (Well, they didn't realize it, nor did I because I went into it with such sheer animalistic love and joy for the character.)

They said, "My goodness, he's just running away with this; we're paying for thirteen shows and he's going to have to be in all thirteen shows." The scripts were already written, and they were under a great deal of pressure, so they started inserting me into strange scenes. What I call "thisaway" and "thataway" scenes with someone saying, "Please go out on patrol and find such-and-such." I even found myself at times asking to be written out of scripts because I felt I didn't belong, that I intruded.

For instance, my personal joys in *Star Trek* were the scripts. And we came nowhere near that "complete concept" as in *Star Trek*, science fiction-wise. I think our scripts were very good and that we were opening new areas of thinking in science fiction.

But I said to John, "Well, look, there are certain story lines I just shouldn't be involved in." He countered with, "Once the show is aired, I think the audience is going to demand that you be there—at least physically. We have to show your body."

To illustrate—I got a call one morning. I had been out jogging, got back and called the service (this was at seven o'clock in the morning). I wasn't expecting to work. The message was: "Please come to the studio; we want to shoot a scene (from "The Saurians")." It was the scene of me just standing on the bridge of the *Searcher*, preparing to leave. As a matter of fact, I was to go off on a search patrol and then come back and hold the mirror up to Buck. They literally wrote that scene in, I'd say, five minutes. I was put right into it I

What I tried to do creatively—in those situations—was get away from the "thisaway/thataway" thing because I always felt that my own natural presence and energy would support the choices I had made for Hawk—with his being the alienated man/bird that he was. I think it worked most of the time. It went in the "Tonto" direction maybe twice—where I was really cringing and raising my shoulders and saying, "Oh god, that shouldn't have been."

But I think that most of the time I made Hawk someone who created his impression in five minutes and then could go off. I

don't mean me; I mean Hawk. I think Hawk was so powerful that many an actor—and I say this in all honesty—could have stepped into it and made it his own. It was a unique, guaranteed part. I really and truly believe that. Does that answer your question at all?

(AUDIENCE) Would you like to see a Hawk spin-off--to have his own series?

(TC) Yes, I would. We talked about this. When it was brought up in discussions with John Mantley and our line producer, John Stephens, my feeling was that one of the failures of Buck Rogers, and why it didn't carry on to another season, was the fact that we did an almost impossible thing—we tried to cater to too many age groups. I don't think you can do that with any piece of creative material, particularly film, particularly literature, particularly scripts.

I think, again, using Star Trek as an example—it was written for adults, and children were just swept up with anything they "chose" to be swept up with. There was a meaning for adults and all ages—even a "moral". Many times there was a wonderful ethical point being made, and it was even more powerful.

Now this is what we didn't do. We started to do it in the storyline and then suddenly someone obviously felt "we've got to cater to the children, we've got to make it cute," and they'd go off in another direction and make it, or attempt to make it, a children's story.

So what happened—the storylines collided. We had a meeting about this, as the reaction to Hawk was so strong. I said to John, "If we do go ahead, and there is talk of a spin-off, the only way I can see myself being happy—and to make myself do it--would be if we aim the show for adults."

And I think we could have done it. The world of science fiction has opened to me in the past nine months on a level that I think is incredible. I'm seeing its humanity—it's so beautiful. It's the study of relationships with people and of understanding. These are some of the elements that I try to bring into Hawk.

"Humanity" is the magic word for me with that character—taking another species, making him human, but retaining the facet that he can turn predator at any moment. Those were the big challenges. And these are the elements that I would have liked to see in a series, if it had gone that far. Now, what happens two to three months from now— I don't know. But I have this philosophy with regard to situations of this kind—if it's asleep, let it sleep. Leave it at that.

(Audience) Could you tell us a little bit about the development of Hawk—your feelings, your input, the ideas you had when you first read the script.

(TC) In reading the script, the scene that primarily turned me on was the scene between Buck and Hawk in -the cave when they started their trek to the Ilamajuna. They discuss the purposes and the reasons why Hawk has this enormous hostility toward the human race.

And it must be remembered that we're both beings out of sync with the time that we're in. I mean, this is essential--we are basically freaks of nature. We didn't belong there. We were wrong for being there. From the first page, this is what went through my mind.

I said, "We are out of sync with the world around us; I by almost 300,000 years; he by 500." Now, what we saw on the air was a very tame, edited version of the second draft that I had read. In the second draft, it was a very moving scene because both Hawk and Buck started talking about a supreme being...a supreme power. I bring this out to Buck in the script-- I said to him, "We destroy everything we touch." And if there is a god—I use the word "god"--he wouldn't allow this to happen.

Buck goes on to mention God; he then mentions a man called Jesus Christ who was born in a stable, and he talks in these terms of a religious power...a Jehovah. These are all the terms used.

I constantly retaliate with the destructibility of this kind of god (this is potent for television), and why would a god of this power allow certain things to happen. Buck then challenges my god, Make Make. The whole thing became highly, highly religious, and we started covering the whole concept in a transcendental way of religion and a higher being.

It was a very intense argument between the two of us. I knew by the time I got to Los Angeles all of this would be cut out. I knew they wouldn't allow this to go on television. And, of course they did cut it.

But what we did try to keep within the context of that scene was a challenge of a very rational man who is five hundred years out of his sphere of life and philosophy--and myself, who is basically the noble savage coming down from the mountaintop. I always wanted to impart the feeling that Hawk was chiseled out of a rock--that I just swept out of the rock, instilled with very primitive, instinctual, intelligent feelings. So Hawk's god wouldn't be referred to as God in the conventional sense, but as a greater power—and that power is to let people live as they are and be as they are. These are the philosophies that Hawk had. And this was all inherent within that ten-page scene.

Then the second scene -one that just devastated me (I cried when I read it, and I'm very flattered when everyone reacts to it) was the death scene between Koori and Hawk.

I said the nerve, the wonderful nerve that a writer has put down in these three pages. There aren't many lines. The challenge was: is an actor going to be able to say to another actor, who has a feather headpiece on and a wax Vishnu behind him and candles burning, "I cannot live without you." I mean, that's an enormous challenge. I get very turned on by that.

I said, "This is what I must do: take this birdman and make him real--to reach people." I am ultimately complimented as the actor when people come to me and say that they felt something. I mean, who knew?

They ask, "Did you plan to cry?" The crying just started between Barbara and myself.

It was just a very magical day when we shot that scene. David Opatoshu, the beautiful, beautiful actor who played the Ilamajuna

was all set, so we went down to the cave set on Stage 12. (The cave area was a small set, no more than really just this, and it was difficult for the camera to get around.)

There could have been no more than twenty or thirty words spoken by anybody. For some reason it became, for me, a very religious experience from a creative standpoint. We had maybe four mini-lights and Ben Colman, our director of photography, said no more than two or three words as to where to move the camera, and the rest was done with candlelight.

Everyone just seemed to be in sync. Talking about souls all being turned into each other. It was so strange. Usually we're very boisterous, you know, a kind of rough-and-tumble set. This time, everything was arranged within forty-five minutes and Vincent McEveety, our director, didn't even want to talk about it. He just said, "You do what you do, we will have the camera on you."

The camera really couldn't go any place—it was set behind one wall. I was to walk down the corridor, put Koori on a pallet, the llamajuna would talk to her, and Buck would step away. The geography of the room really dictated how we were going to move and where the camera could go.

We were using two cameras: one overhead and one straight on. We just got so swept up with it that we literally did the master shot in one take. That is the ultimate compliment. They just refused to go back and shoot it again.

They said, "That is it. We will go with that." Again, it was only because of the content of the material. It was the power of his writing. It was a guaranteed scene because of the way it was conceived. Realistically speaking, they are making these two animals--so feeling and so sensitive and so human in what they wanted to do and feel--it allowed them to cry.

I mean, I didn't know I was going to cry and neither did Barbara. It just started and I didn't stop it. I let it come out. The more I saw what could be made with Hawk, the greater I felt the character was. And I'm going back, of course, to the beginning, the concept of the noble savage.

I think it was the message of power—the thing that meant a great deal to me as an individual. I think in fear they strike out because I'm wearing feathers. Because they fear me, therefore they strike out at me, many times—just because I'm different.

I think we as humans do that. We just focus on someone who walks a little bit differently or moves a little differently, and we get a little scared. So all of these played with me, one way or the other. Everybody involved with it was tuned into it. An actor sees—well, I like to think of it in terms of a gradual arch. I always I like to think of a role starting here, swooping up, and then coming down and having its completion. You know when to peak. And sometimes you shouldn't peak.

You don't really peak until you're down here, or maybe you should peak over here and then just drag everything else with you. Do you know what I'm talking about? Is it too abstract in that context? That's what I feel emotionally. I felt strongly enough about the script, "Time of the Hawk," to sign for just this one script.

Eventually John Mantley said if the show was picked up, what he would like to do is spend one week focused on Hawk, one week

on Buck, one week on the Admiral, etc. He said because the show is going to reach such proportions, if it's picked up, we'll just have to do it that way.

I said fine, but that: I would like to go back to my original concept- of making Hawk the noble savage. I would have liked to always keep Hawk distant, alien and sensitive--not part of any group. I wanted to take "Prometheus Bound" and make that into a whole study of paleolithic birds and everything—with Koori coming back to help me save Buck and Wilma. It was one of the scripts I was putting together.

Then I started to research the part. I went to the Museum of Natural History and studied the beautifully laid out dioramas there of birds. I found myself making a new connection to things around me. One of the beauties of the acting business is that you've got to call on so much constantly.

If your work is solid, you're constantly open to everything around you and you find yourself saying, "I may use this. It can work for me at some point, or, it can't work—get rid of it." It's a wonderful revolving garbage can in some ways. I found myself running in Central Park and relating to birds in a completely different way. It's the same in Los Angeles. And it was all in preparation...watching the way a head would move.

I went to the Audubon Society and started studying all the paintings. I managed to limit it down to studying the whole hawk genus. I found that three hawks—the red-shouldered hawk, the swamp hawk, and the harris hawk—worked the best for me. They incorporated all the elements that Hawk would need to work.

The red-shouldered hawk due to the fact that once its mate dies, he never mates again. Yet every year he will migrate back to that spot. I found I was able to use that, so I started to study the whole physiological setup of the red-shouldered hawk, the way the, beak was placed, etc. I could not find any real ones, but I did study a lot of pictures.

I was able to locate some real swamp hawks. I choose to call it "swamp" hawk as opposed to a conservator term of "marsh" hawk. "Marsh" hawk is too polite. I like the swamp concept.

James Audubon has a brilliant painting of one in flight—they can cut low, ergo they swoop in and out of weeds, weave in and out of bulrushes and that sort of thing, and they can soar very, very high. Not for great distances, but they can go up high and then they shoot down on their prey. I said, "Ah, that will take care of the combatant sense of Hawk," his ability, in the script, to shoot low and disappear. (Koori says, "He will find you; he will find you.")

Swamp hawks move very, very quickly. I chose the harris hawk because it's the only hawk that can devour his prey in the air while still in motion. Most hawks can't do that. Most birds can't do that--they cannot fly and devour their prey at the same time. A harris hawk can do that. It is one of the few hawks that is still used to train for falconry. Now, I needed all of this harshness in there because I said my own sensitivities, my own feelings will compensate for anything that's too harsh.

I needed that constant feeling of the primitive thing, and I narrowed it down to those three hawks for those reasons. Ergo,

certain looks that Hawk has, the twist of the body, etc.--and they became more subtle as we went along--developed out of my studies of these particular hawks.

I was then able to incorporate a lot of the feelings that the red-shouldered hawk has—again for me in acting terms and I won't get into them--in my relationship with Buck.

Gil had said to me, in an early preproduction meeting, "Now where do you see the relationship going?" And remember you're dealing with another artist who has been on the air for one year. (I really admire him for this.) He's been on the air for a year, has established himself in a phenomenally charming character. (I did not like the first year and had the premise been like that the second year, I would not have done Hawk, but then I have the theory that Hawk would not have come into being if it had been patterned like the first year.)

Keeping in mind what John was doing with the scripts, I said to him, "I would like to see a relationship evolve." I think it's wonderful, on stage and in film and story, to be able to get a Damon and Pythias, or Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid relationship going. I think there's something very special about a relationship between two men—take Kirk and Spock, for example--! mean look at the wonderful thing that they had going there. And I wanted this between Buck and myself.

I said we have got to have "a galactic, non-sexual love affair," that's how I phrased it. I think that really started our playing off each other--because he was very good at that. I wanted the feeling to come across that there is nothing that those two men who are out of sync with their worlds wouldn't do for each other. We've got to feel that we can turn and one will be there for the other.

It's the only thing that justified some of the silly insertions of Hawk later. (They always tried to make the insertion scenes between Buck and Hawk because their relationship was so firm.) In the lizard show—I'm literally off on patrol and Buck is the only one able to see the molecular breakdown of the lizard people—Buck says, "Get me Hawk; I need Hawk." It's a wonderful way to end an act!

And when they come back out of a commercial break, you see Wilma saying "Hawk, come back, he needs you," and the ship just swings back. You don't see me again until five minutes before the end when the alien has a gun pointed at Buck, and you just see Hawk's black gauntlet come out and just grab the alien's hand and pull it back, disarming him.

Gil and I never said a word to each other. (I'm so flattered when people catch that.) They kept the close-up of Gil's look to me and my look to him--you know, just a nod back and forth. I think, because we went into it with such strength, eight shows later when I was inserted into stories, it worked because we had gone into it with such strength in the emotional life of our characters. I was very, very satisfied with that, but it made complications for the creators.

It made great problems though with Wilma (Erin Grey). She and I tried to get something going. I finally had to say, just from the physical standpoint, "Erin, never reach for me." We did a scene from "The Crystals," and she did a lovely thing.

She touched me, and someone thought she was trying to relate back to Koori. We did try to keep a logical progression going on

in all of the shows, but I told Erin, "It's not going to work. You should never be the aggressor with me. I think I will hurt both your character and mine. Hawk must respect you as a commander. He is a friend, but he is still an alien. I may have joined the ship and Searcher crew, but I still want to be an alien. I still want to be a distant person who, at a moment's notice, can turn."

So I was always the aggressor. I would help her out of the ship or if someone came long and attempted to hurt her, it was my arm that shot out and pushed her out of the way. That happened both in "Hand of the Goral" and in "The Guardians."

Did anyone see "The Guardians"? It was a 'Pandora's Box' type of concept. Again, it was a beautiful script that ended by being bastardized somewhere along the line because they were afraid of the religious connotations in it.

At the end, every religion was represented along the top of the parapet, or the wall. They had left out two religions, and they were concerned about it, but we couldn't put any more people on the parapet So they just had everyone dressed in black robes and the young Christ-symbol stand on the wall.

In this episode, we were set up for an earthquake, as you remember, with the palace walls and all the jars and everything falling down. Well, it had taken them a whole weekend to mine the entire area in the back lot of Universal. There was no rehearsal because there were gallon gasoline tanks spread out, and some dynamite, and flashpots.

They knew where the earth was going to crack and the shepherd boy was going to disappear. Then there was a foul-up. They'd never been quite sure where I was going to appear in a script, since Universal's reaction—after watching the dailies—was, "We've got to get more of him into it now." They started inserting me here and there.

This was one of those insertion days. What happened that day was they had no stand-in, no double for me. Randy Clare, my double, wasn't there. I said, "Well, fine, let's not hold it up; let's just do it—this is costing a lot of money, time is money, so let's just do it." They did have Gil and Erin's stunt-doubles there, because they were going to explode everything around us.

So there's Erin's stunt-double to my left, I'm in the center, and Gil's stunt double to the right.

Mike Vandrell, Gil's stunt-double, said, "Now don't forget. There are four cameras going and there are six explosions. We'll count to know when to move. The major explosion consists of two separate gallons of gasoline which will go off, and a half-stick of dynamite. That'll be about sixty feet away, and it's really buried so there's going to be a big kick of dirt. The sixth one will go on the beat, and then the next one will go."

My move is the cue for action and they start the earthquake. Everything starts going... cameras are all rolling around--they're literally rocking the cameras on their beds. The explosions start and I count, but somewhere along the line, I missed one of the counts. I got a hold of Erin's double—because I had to move around her at one point to try to reach the shepherd boy, who eventually ends up being the god-figure.

Then Buck comes further around me and then on the final explosion, I would throw myself on Wilma. (Whenever I was

protecting the two of them, I would do a sweeping motion with my arms out and leap upon them.) But what happened was I missed the count. Mike was of course still counting—and I couldn't get him to move. Now Erin's double moved, and I could not move until he went around her so I could throw myself on her, and I'm yelling, "Move! Move.' Michael, Move!"

There was no fear of my voice being picked up with all these explosions going on and we weren't miked. He just wouldn't move. I could feel him—I was like this and he was over me--I could feel his body just pressing against me. I said, "Michael, move, move!" Everyone's fear is that I'll get a little carried away and just not worry about certain things...the feathers would go like this!

The entire company is now lined up watching from behind camera. While I'm trying to get Mike to move there is this tremendous wave of heat from an explosion. It went up so high!

Mike took the brunt of the heat. He said, "I knew you had lost the count because you started to move too early." By missing that one count...well... it must have flamed heavily because he was singed —his whole suit in the back was singed. It looked incredible on film I must say, it was really very, very exciting. That was one of our inside stories.

(Audience) I was surprised to learn that you were going to be attending STARCON. I had read an interview in which you had made a comment that you did not want to do appearances as your character because you didn't want to get permanently cast like Nimoy did.

(TC) Right. I said specifically to David Bender of Starlog magazine—when he asked about opening up supermarkets and doing personal appearances in the costume—that no, I wouldn't do that. I think it's detrimental to any actor. I mean, I think that reality must always be there. It's a choice. Forgive me on saying that but it's very subjective.

If an actor says, "This is all I want to do. I definitely want my Captain Marvel costume to be part of me—a la the Lone Ranger's choice— I will do that." Fine, it's a decision he makes. I don't think it's a wise choice. I think it's poor management, because I think it negates a whole world of other work, the work he'd get involved with if he had the time. So that was the motivation behind the statement that I would not appear in costume. I think there should definitely be that separation. I just don't think it's healthy.

And in relationship to the Leonard Nimoy character—his creation of it— I think it's so unique and so brilliantly done and was one of the firsts, that's why, well, he is Spock. And I think with all the enormous support in fandom he has behind him, it's propagated that this is the only thing he can do.

But I was coming into my character with slightly different credentials. I think Star Trek was Leonard Nimoy's first series, if I'm not mistaken. In my particular case, it wasn't. With me there is a strong, within-the-business following; I mean Los Angeles knew me, the television community knew me for five years—1 started going out in 1975—and the theatre in New York knew me.

So there was strong, previous inter-company knowledge of me so I wasn't frightened about having this stigma. People had said,

"Well, aren't you afraid that you'll only be thought of as Hawk?" No, particularly not now, because I had some previous credentials.

(Audience) What does the future have in store for Thom Christopher?

(TC) Well, now that the director's strike is over, and the writer's strike is winding down, I'll be going back out to Los Angeles and looking into some mini-series. We were discussing one just last week. I'll see how negotiations on that turn out. Also, a play is under consideration in New York. One of the benefits of being in this business that we jump between Los Angeles and New York. I love it.

(Audience) When would you say your career really took off?

(TC) I came out of the army in the sixties and I had about two years of stock and regional theatre, then everything went very dry. I have always looked the way I look now, and at fourteen years old, in my first performance in summer stock, it was really strange.

People were asking "Who is this fourteen-year-old kid running around who looks thirty?" So I had that problem, but life began for me, really, around thirty years old. And that's when my career really began to take off.

(Audience) Where will your career go from now since you've had the experience with Buck Rogers? Will you do any more science fiction?

(TC) Again, I bless HAWK and Buck Rogers for they put me into a whole other level. Within the business I had an established reputation, so people in the Los Angeles area and, of course, in the theatre in New York, knew me. What it did, do is bring me to the attention of you, the public. This boost has now made me more available to a potential series, mini-series, films, and even stage work.

And that, again, is interesting—because it is all due to you out there. That's what's so wonderful about this business. You can't do it alone. When anyone stands up there and gets their Academy Award, or their Tony, or their Emmy, and they give the impression that they did it alone.... No. They survived alone, but they didn't do it alone. It was everyone out there, and it's a good thing to remember.

(Audience) After portraying HAWK, do you look at birds in a different light?

(TC) I was running yesterday morning, and a beautiful blackbird came down next to me and we ran and we talked to each other I (Laugh)

I do find myself looking at birds in a completely different light. We sat down to have lunch, and we were talking—my eye wanders up and what's sitting there but this baldheaded eagle in a lithograph in the dining room--right here in this hotel.

And I felt myself saying, "I know things about you that you don't think I know!"

There was a wonderful young woman, Hilary Leach, who was the trainee/assistant director on the Buck Rogers set. She was really a delightful person who had studied in Russia. She speaks Russian and French—she has an incredible mind—but she has this thing about wanting to be an assistant director.

She said she was alone and her sister was down from Sacramento. I said we were having company over and she should come along too, and we could talk.

Well her brother showed up unexpectedly with a friend of his who happens to be one of California's most highly respected masters of study of hawk and eagle life. We ended up talking until about four o'clock in the morning.

Outside our apartment in Los Angeles we have night owls. At one point we went outside and he started talking to them. One was a male and one was a female, and he got the male so irate because the male thought his territory was being infringed upon.

It was one of the most incredible ornithological things to watch because they're like humans, they do the same things. It was just incredible. He was explaining so much to me that while we were shooting, I was busy calling him all the time and asking if I did such-and-such would a bird do that. So I find myself very, very tuned into birds.... But I did a great deal of research on my own. In New York, prior to flying out or anything—I was determined to get the part!

(Audience) Did you ever do any television or anything before HAWK?

Yes. In 1974 I did my second Broadway play, "Noel Coward in Two Keys," with Hume Cronyn, Jessica Tandy, Anne Baxter and myself. Just the four of us. And again, it was a major turning point in my life. We were doing an American premiere of a Noel Coward show. It was two one-act plays.

They changed characters in the one-act plays, but my character stays the same. It takes place in a hotel suite in Switzerland. I stay the same character, just serving, in theory, the six different people. They were so gracious to me. I only had two pages of dialogue and I would say a page-and-a-half of that in either Italian or in French, with the rest being in English.

But my character is constantly on stage, coming on with the champagne and serving. At one point I served an entire meal—they ate it and I cleaned the table away, put the souffle out for dessert, and made the salad all on stage during the course of the play.

They were such incredible artists to work with—they never stopped me from having byplay. In one of the plays, Hume plays a character somewhat like Somerset Maugham/Noel Coward, and he's attempting to seduce me, so we have a lot of eye contact with each other.

Everyone just responded so beautifully. And subsequently I got the Theatre World and Clarence Derwent Awards. That brought me to the attention of California and as the story goes, they started flying me out for screen tests and guest star shots.

So for the past five to six years, prior to Buck Rogers, I was doing guest star shots on nighttime television.

Then I did two soaps—Edge of Night and Love of Life. That was in the early seventies.

Doing commercials and then eventually developing into soap operas—which are an incredible training ground. I'm so glad that there are now soaps being done in Los Angeles—at one time they had only one and they are the most phenomenal preparation for an actor!

To be in a studio at six o'clock in the morning and have a performance by seven. And they have constant script changes! But it's incredible to be able to feel the work with the camera. I enjoyed the two soaps that I did. Then came the stage and, subsequently, television.

I did a Rookies episode, which was my first major nighttime television show. It was 1975 and I really lucked out with the script. The muses of the gods were with me because it was an incredible script.

It was called "Sudden Death" and it was all about a Vietnamese prisoner of war who comes back to the States.

My character was a marine, and Dankc is the fellow who left him behind. What happened was, I had set up in a Hollywood studio the prisoner of war camp and closed the entire studio so no one could come in. I manage to bait him to come in and we spend forty-five minutes tracking each other down in a make-believe jungle. It was just such an incredibly good script that it had an enormous effect on a lot of people. I'm just so pleased that people still respond to it.

One of the nice things about television directors—and I don't mean this sarcastically—is that a good television director will not tell you what to do. He'll just tell you what's not working and he'll tell you where to go. But he won't say anything beyond that.

That's good in television because you're doing it in six days. We were rehearsing the scene where I get Danko in a bamboo cage and I make a 360 degree turn around the cage, doing this long monologue. I timed it so that I would finish right back in the same position I started from.

Well, when I finished, everyone started to applaud! I looked around and said, "Fellas, this is still rehearsal." It turns out they weren't applauding the fact that it was good or bad, they were applauding the fact that I was able to say all the words! You see, all the soaps I have been on have never been taped. I came in on the last days of live soaps, in the early seventies. Everything we did there was live. I think that soaps are incredible preparation and that's why some of the New York actors—not me—but other New York actors are respected for it when they go out script down. I can't learn a scene or a line until I know the whole script.

(Audience) What type of books do you enjoy reading?

(TC) Primarily I enjoy reading biographies, autobiographies, I devour plays, and now, since Buck Rogers, I'm moving into the world of science fiction. Playwriting-wise I try to read every play that is newly published. I go to the Shakespearean plays constantly, reading and rereading them. The older I get, the wiser they seem to get. They take on a different meaning.

I love Ibsen. And I love Arthur Miller. There's a whole period of American play writing in the thirties and the forties that was incredible—playwriting that we're just not doing today.

Autobiographically, I like to read about theatre people and science. I adore science. I don't have a mind for implementing it, in a practical sense, but I've always admired men of science. I don't think there's a pattern to my reading interests. I'm moving away from American fiction, because there's not that much fiction that's good these days. Popular fiction, I'm talking about.

But I love science fiction. I just finished reading Deathbird Stories. It was wonderful! Do you remember one of Arthur C. Clarke's "called "The Star"? Isn't it gorgeous? It's a beautiful five-page short story and I recommend it to everybody. It's really fantastic and would make a wonderful movie.

(Audience) Do you watch television? What is your favorite show. You can't say Buck Rogers because it's gone....

(TC) Favorite shows? Sixty Minutes, Nova when it's on. All Carl Sagan PBS shows. The man really has "saganized" television. There are a lot of people you can learn from and he's one of them. You can disagree.

I know a lot of scientists and a lot of professional minds, and I'm sure a lot of minds out here are turned into the whole world of science and science fiction. We can disagree with certain approaches he takes to his work, but there's something to be said about "Saganized" television!

And I love movies.... We're fortunate in that we have Home Box Office. I watch movies day and night, even bad ones—really, really bad ones. And of course, I'll watch something if a friend is acting, directing or writing something.

I watch movie specials and if a favorite singer like Lena Home, Tony Bennett or Barbra Streisand is doing a special or something like that, I'll definitely watch.

(Audience) What sort of roles would you like to get into in the near future?

(TC) I think at this point in my work I would like to get into heavier romantic characters. My goodness, how can I give you a specific example? The...Bogart/Paul Muni type of thing. I adore Paul Muni. I don't think most of you know who Paul Muni is. He's dead now, but that kind of thing.

Show business is a visual art so everyone says, "Well, he's relatively tall and good looking...he'll play ethnic, so we'll make him

a gangster or something like that." I feel that one has to say "no" to certain things at certain points in his life, so I've always made sure to say "no" at the right time. As Richard Rogers once said, "If you want to enjoy your work and ultimately get to the end of the rainbow you're after, you have to know when to say 'no'." Saying it is very easy; I've said no a lot.

(Audience) Are you going to do any sightseeing while you're in Colorado?

(TC) I'm hoping to on Monday. I have friends who live here; they just had a baby. The four of us are going to drive up to the mountains. Denver isn't like anything I expected. It's amazing. I had in my mind, from things David and Susan had said, when they were talking about the mountains that it was a hilly place like Los Angeles—where you can reach out the door and pluck flowers off the mountain. I thought it would be right out the door, snowcaps and all. It was early in the morning when I saw my first mountain and it was very exciting.

In Denver, I didn't expect, architecturally, so many big buildings. And I can only say to you, please, please cherish the architecture that you have in here from about the middle-1800's on, because it is absolutely magnificent. I went down to Latimer Square, the restored area, and walked back and forth for about half an hour on the side of the street.

If you look up at the key design around some of those buildings—and I'm sure a lot of people haven't—it's awesome. It is absolutely awesome because you will not find anyone today who can even make a mold to make it. It's incredible; it's some of the most magnificent old architecture I've ever seen.

I just hope these big buildings don't keep going up the way they've been, and destroying all this architecture. It's magnificent. George (Takei) and I were just going crazy about it.

(Audience) I loved the character of Hawk and I think you would be great in Star Trek. Do you have any interest in being a part of it?

(Thom) That's a marvelous idea! If Gene Roddenberry could hear that. I never thought of it! I have a vision of Leonard Nimoy and I walking up the same corridor. It would open up vistas incredibly!

(Audience) We're serious—we have a lot of power!

(Thom) Yes, oh, yes. I have tremendous respect for Star Trek. I know it's no longer on the air as a series, but to go into the film? Most definitely!

(Audience) They're bringing in some new characters...do you think they would create somebody new, or would you mind becoming a Vulcan?

(Thom) I can see it already. From feathers to pointed ears!

(Audience) Leonard Nimoy, eat your heart out!

(Thom) I would certainly be open to something like that because I think it was a terrific show. I think it was one of the finest ever broadcast on television.

(Audience) We'll talk to Gene!

(Audience) Did you ever see any of the Buck Rogers shows before you appeared in it?

(Thom) A few of them. We were discussing this at lunch. I saw them and didn't care for them. Now, that has to be taken within context because I think that the previous producers made a creative story that I disagreed with. They made it into a comic book.

Now that is only a very subjective attitude. I would turn the show off because of its bright lights, disco girls, and poor scripts. I think the approach was very blunt and left nothing to the imagination. There was no time for the imagination, when this cartoon was all laid out in front of you.

Now, this is the first question I asked when my agent said, "You've just gotten a call from NBC and they're revising Buck Rogers." I said, "No, I can't get into it, John." (John was my agent.)

John said, This is being redone, completely redone. They've brought in a new producer and there's this character, the Hawk." And that started it off. That's when I said, "Yes, well, let's take a look at it."

I then asked during the actors' strike to have a screening of as many episodes as possible. Watching them helped me feel out Gil and Erin's senses, and their acting behavior, because we were so limited with time. I just wanted to see how the people I'd be working with behaved. What I found was that they were just actors being comfortable with their fellow actors. So I did eventually see almost all of them. I didn't feel Gil was well used as Buck, because he's more than just this blond guy winking (laughter). There's a little more substance there, and with Erin.

(Audience) Did you like working with them?

(Thom) Very, very much. They're very giving. The thing I enjoyed with Gil is that everyone anticipated—and it's only logical--! mean, you're the star of the show and all of a sudden this guy in black with boots and feathers walks on the set. How do you start contending with this? But a wonderful thing happened.

We had a meeting, and he said to me, "Where do you think Hawk is going to go? Where do you want to go with Hawk?" And to answer a question from before, one of the beauties of the first script—which I was basing my whole agreement on—was that there was a wonderful thing potentially available in the script, the love that two men can have for each other, which I think is very special. You know, Damon and Pythias, Starsky and Hutch, Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid. It's interesting. I just

think it becomes something very different.

I told Gil, "What it comes down to is, it's got to be a non-sexual, galactic love affair." And I think that really started showing—that playing off one another—because he was very good about it. What we did was, each time we had a scene, no matter how brief, we would really try to show the quality that the relationship had.

I think this was also in the publicity that I was reading, and they were hinting at it in the many press interviews which came from a real cross section of the business. But the feedback that I am getting even now just reaffirms my own feeling that it was our relationship that was getting across.

(Audience) Would you please tell us about the "nose story" you referred to earlier?

(Thom) Oh, yes. I mentioned in an earlier session today, something about a nose! Well, Randy Clare, was my stand-in and my double. He comes up to about here on me. But for some reason, he looks just exactly my height on film. We can stand together, back to back in the costume, and people would not know which one of us was which.

He's blond, and he's got this little turned up nose. He's a master of every one of the martial arts and devoted to it incredibly. Not in a hostile way—it's almost like a religion—he's so deeply devoted to it at this point. Randy had a problem with his nose. I said, "Randy, I've got a large nose and it would be easier to make yours bigger than to make mine smaller."

So Brenda Todd brilliantly created, using the same formula they used to make the headpiece, a nosepiece out of polyurethane. So one day she came down to the set with a bagful of noses—all mine. And when we put one on Randy it was like looking at a clone.

You remember, if you saw "Time of the Hawk", there was that wonderful moment in the fight when Randy did a flip from a standing position. He was standing still and he just did a double somersault. Well, we were rehearsing it, getting the camera lined up because they were shooting from about thirty feet below up to us on a mountain top.

Ben Coleman, our director of photography, was on the ridge, the camera pointing up; I was sitting behind the camera watching the preparation and he did the flip.

And suddenly, he came out of the second turn and we saw the nose go one way, and his body go the other way! I just couldn't resist it—he had no idea what was happening, he's so concentrated, energy and everything, on that just to get that turn out—and I bent down, picked it up—walked to the mountain top and I just simply said to him, in a very low voice, "Your nose." It was wonderful. There were a lot of incidents like that.

We're both thick in the leg and in the rear; we're both very muscular here, because of the dance background and martial arts. Someone said, "Well, we try to tell by your rear end when you're standing back-to-back, this one is this one because of the smaller rear end," but it doesn't always work out that way.

(Audience) Did you ever have a weird time schedule—like going to film at 2 o'clock in the morning?

(Thom) Was there any kind of strange or unusual time schedule with regard to doing certain scenes? Specifically with the Buck Rogers series, yes. We went on location for the first two episodes, because the budget on the show was enormous for that kind of series in today's production market. We did "Journey to Oasis" and "Time of the Hawk" in Vasquez Rocks and Malibu Canyon. Now, Vasquez Rocks is a good seventy-to-eighty miles outside Los Angeles proper, so that meant I really had to be up at around 3:30 in the morning, to get to the studio in order to go to the location with the costume department.

My dresser was there and the make-up artist—there would be about six of us in a van—and we would all go up together. We'd arrive in Vasquez Rocks about 5 a.m. and be ready to start shooting by 6—primarily because we were trying to beat the sun going down.

I also worked on an episode, of The Eddy Capra Mysteries, which was on for one season in 1978. I was a guest star in that and played a kind of rough-and-tumble Humphrey Bogart-type character.

Unfortunately, I have a propensity for getting seasick on small boats. Anything big, I'm all right, but on small boats.... They decided they were going to shoot all the way out at Long Beach, but we had to shoot into a Black Hole—that is used to give the effect that the ship was coming in from the ocean.

So we were all out there, camera boats, lighting boats—they're on separate boats completely, cameras on one boat, equipment on another, director's on another boat—and I'm in a small motor boat that's going to take me out the the supposedly sailing Queen Mary and move in on it. We're flipping around horizons—Long Beach is where you are—the ocean is behind me, and this is my acting position. Well, everything is being done through loudspeakers...back and forth.

Suddenly, something went wrong with the generators. I knew Neptune was against me. It took them about two hours to fix the generators, and we were way out. There was a sudden squall, the boat was rocking—and, you know, I've got a responsibility, I'm being paid. So I literally stand up in the front of this little motor boat and start doing my lines and just shout off to the camera boat which is in front of me.

And that was done at 2 o'clock in the morning which was the only time you could arrange to have no traffic in the Long Beach Bay area. But we were out about seven miles and it's a pretty scary feeling. I was also going to do the jump from the boat. They had a stunt man waiting, but I said, "No, I can do the jump." That didn't bother me because I figured I'd jump right into the water and just pop right out.

But someone said to be careful at this time of morning, that the sharks were feeding. I'm serious! So the cowardly side of me said I don't know if I'd panic once I hit those black waters—and from that height I'd go down deep.

So my stunt man did it and he was very good. I hadn't even met him before. He just did the jump off the boat. But there are

bizarre hours, yes. It's again all part and parcel of the responsibility.

(Audience) Where did you study acting and what are some of the things you've done.

(Thom) Acting is all I ever really wanted to do. I went to Performing Arts High School and had wonderful people guiding me. Then I went on to college and studied drama, which was basically my mistake. My advice to anybody who's going off to college and who wants to be an actor is: don't major in theatre in college.

I mean, I think that's the mistake I made. Major in English, or take a liberal arts course. Because I discovered that in most universities and colleges, anybody who has free time will be able to work in a production or work in theatre. You have that accessible to you, so you can do it.

Then I went on to the Neighborhood Playhouse. I received a scholarship there for two years, and that's when I started to get enticed by dancing, because I met a wonderful man, Louis Horst, who was about eighty years old when I met him. I heard when I was in the Army that he had died, which was about two years after I graduated from the Playhouse.

But the man created classical dance forms in music in this country that were absolutely incredible. He urged me to be a dancer but at that point I was nineteen and I just felt it was a little bit too late. But I enjoyed it and I just took classes for years after that...in jazz, tap, musical-comedy type things.

I had started doing summer stock and when I came out of the army, there was a very lean period when everyone was telling me, work-wise, "Well, your career isn't really going to start until the late twenties or early thirties," because I always looked this way.

At fourteen, I looked this way—you know, the body of a thirty-year-old and the mind of a four teen-year-old. It made for problems. But the career and work really didn't become satisfying and give me a livelihood until about ten years ago.

I did a play with Rex Harrison that subsequently led to a play with Jessica Tandy, Hume Cronyn and Anne Baxter, called "Noel Coward in Two Keys." It was the American premiere of Noel Coward's last two plays. In that production I played a waiter who speaks Italian and French. I had about two pages of dialogue and maybe had about five lines in English.

But they were such wonderfully gracious and talented people to work with. There were just the four of us in the production. They changed characters in the two plays. I stay the same. It all takes place within one hotel in Switzerland. My character comes into their lives just to serve champagne, and make food—literally doing all of this right on stage. I was never really off stage for any length of time.

As a result, I got the Theatre World Award and the Clarence Derwent Award, it was because of their graciousness and give-and-take that that happened. Those subtleties were happening among all of us. And the critics and the audiences picked up on it. This brought me to the attention of Los Angeles and television.

I had done two soaps prior to that in New York, but nighttime television hadn't started. It's been almost a logical progression for me. There's a theory a lot of actors have that I disagree with. They say you can't build a career any longer in this country. Your work can't go on a career-step basis. I think it takes a lot more blood and a lot more patience and a lot more angst and belief in yourself, but it can be done. Thus far, I've proven it, if modesty is possible.

The next step is films, and the ability to work in both media: on camera and on stage, I wouldn't want to give up one for the other because I enjoy them both so much, and I find them both very satisfying. One helps the other. I find the stage helping my work with the camera.

(Audience) Since you've done a science fiction show, would you like to do more?

(Thom) Yes. Yes! From that standpoint, I was going to get to that—I'm glad you asked that question—when I read "Time of the Hawk," it was an incredible, incredible, script. John Mantley at Universal told me that although I had signed for thirteen shows, and would be paid for thirteen shows, there was no guarantee that I'd be in more than four of them.

And I said, very bluntly, I am determined to get this part. It was down to about three actors, two out on the coast and me in New York—and I said, "I am determined to get this. The script is so incredible." It was very different from what you saw on the air, and very bold in concept. I thought there was great challenge in the

character. I always wanted to do something as fantastic as this with all the elements of science fiction in it. I still consider Hawk a fantasy persona. I got out to the coast, told them my feelings about the character, auditioned, got the part, and it opened a whole new vista for me.

I realized then that—some thing I said yesterday morning—and my contact with so many people here, too, in the past forty-eight hours has helped to reaffirm this—science fiction works at its best and greatest when it's done truthfully and sincerely, and when the humanity of everybody involved, whether it's Odie-X or Darth Vader, is done with true emotions.

I mean, it's wonderful to see Star Wars and a boy cry over his aunt and uncle being killed. I am nuts about Star Wars. I just think I'm insane about it. I'd love to do something like that. It was one of the challenges I found inherent in Hawk, making him real, making him feel, never forgetting the fact that although it is a human being playing the part, you are still dealing with an animal instinct. And to keep that reality going.

I think ultimately on a consistent level, Star Trek is the apex of television science fiction on a consistent level of creativity with people being real at all times. I admire it enormously.

And a great many of Star Trek's writers scripted unbelievable episodes for television. I would definitely like to do more science fiction. It's opened a whole new world for me and it appeals to certain kind of panache and drama within myself because, well, you know, "You're going to play a bird?!"

And I said, "Yes. Yes, I'm going to play a bird." But I just saw so much within the script that I could bring to it. It was very, very satisfying.

(Audience) Have you ever gotten any bad reviews in television or stage and do they tend to bother you?

(Thom) I can honestly say, and I say this in all humility, no. (laughter and applause) And I mean that! I really mean that. Someone perceptively said earlier that Hawk was like Tonto.

And Hawk was Tonto—when it got to that level. So they'd turn the camera on me, and I'd say, "The hell with it, I'm going to have a good time and do what I'm doing." I mean, there are little things I do in the show that I was getting a kick out of and didn't think anybody was picking up on—and a whole lot of people were picking up on them.

No bad reviews for a play either. There was one off-Broadway play that I did the male lead in— a very experimental piece—and everybody else got mentioned in the raw, ugliest way in the review. But they just never even mentioned my name, and I was very happy about that—I thought it was nice. But that's the only thing negative that's stayed in my mind. We closed in two weeks, but I came out of it beautifully. I had a wonderful time.

(Audience) What advice do you have for struggling actors and what was your most embarrassing moment?

(Thom) Well, my advice to anybody going into theatre—is you can't go into it expecting immediate results. You've got to have enormous patience and you can't go into it saying to yourself "Well, I'm gonna be a star tomorrow." You have to get that whole "star" concept out of your mind. It doesn't work that way.

Being a "star" or aiming for that status is like saying you're going to work so you can own a yacht. It's a result... That is only a result... after a lot of hard work. But you've got to be prepared for that, you've got to be prepared to survive, totally on your own, while—which is very important- staying open to everything that's around you. You've got to be a survivor and it's all got to be open.

And learn, learn, learn; learn the language of life and the language of people because that's where it all comes from, really. That's the only advice I can give at this point. It isn't easy, but then again, nothing worthwhile in life is.

(Audience) Then it really is worthwhile?

(Thom) Oh, I think so. I think it's the only profession where you can stand up and say, in a strange and bizarre way, "I take total responsibility for everything that I am doing" for these two hours on stage or the five minutes in front of the camera. There's no one but me; do you know what I mean? I am totally responsible—that is it. The ultimate responsibility. You're creating something on the moment. It's awesome. It's like playing god in a way. I mean, that's the proportions of it in my mind. It is like playing god for a brief moment; for a brief moment, you're playing some kind of creative giant.

Your second question, my most embarrassing moment? First, during that same summer stock season in Cragmoor, New York, I was doing a play called Witness for the Prosecution."

Very briefly, at the end, the woman reveals herself as the one who killed the leading man. (Marlene Dietrich did it in the movie.) When her husband—whom she gives up her life for by admitting she committed the murder- turns on her, she takes the knife and right there in the courtroom, stabs him, and the play ends, and justice is served.

So, I had just started off at Performing Arts High School, I was into the Stanislavski method and I was saying to myself, My god, I've got to find a reason." I was playing the English policeman—who had no lines—who just came on stage and brought papers and that type of thing. I had my English bobby costume on. and I walked on- stage and I said,

"I've got to go on stage for a reason; I've got to come on stage for a reason!" So I walk onstage and I see this wonderful knife sitting right there—and, remember, the play has to end with her stabbing him—so I Said, "Ah, the knife! I'll take the knife off. Isn't that brilliant?" (laugh)

Everyone's standing onstage, I walk over, a cocky fourteen-year-old kid, I pick up the knife, and there is an audible six-person-cast-member gasp onstage. Everyone goes 'Gnnhhuuhhh!" And do you know what I had the ego to think? That they're loving what I'm doing! I said "They love it! They're so impressed with me! I'm brilliant. Oh, I m going to be a star tomorrow!"

I was fourteen and I'm brilliant. I go out the door, and for some reason, the finger of god touched me and made me turn because I went "Omigod I can't do this." And I turned, and I put the knife back on a side table, and I could hear them all go "sighhhhh"! That was perhaps—for me—the most embarrassing and terrifying moment onstage.

Filmwise, Gil and I were doing a scene together. It was the one show I disliked, the one with the green box. I really disliked what they did to that script. I'm waking him out of his stupor and I'm pulling him up into my arms, and we're doing this scene, and we want to make it as intimate as possible, and suddenly this feather started to twirl.

And I'm holding him and we're talking, and I know his mind at this point because there are times during rehearsal when he'll try to break me up, and I cannot be broken up. It's impossible to break me up onstage or on camera; I can do it to other people; they can't do it to me. So, he's trying—I can see his eyes twinkling—we re still talking and doing the scene and I say, "Buck, you were screaming; you were screaming, Buck. What was wrong. Buck" and this thing's twirling and swirling. And he says, "Hawk" and I say, But Buck, I'm moulting!"

(transcribed by Penni Golowka)