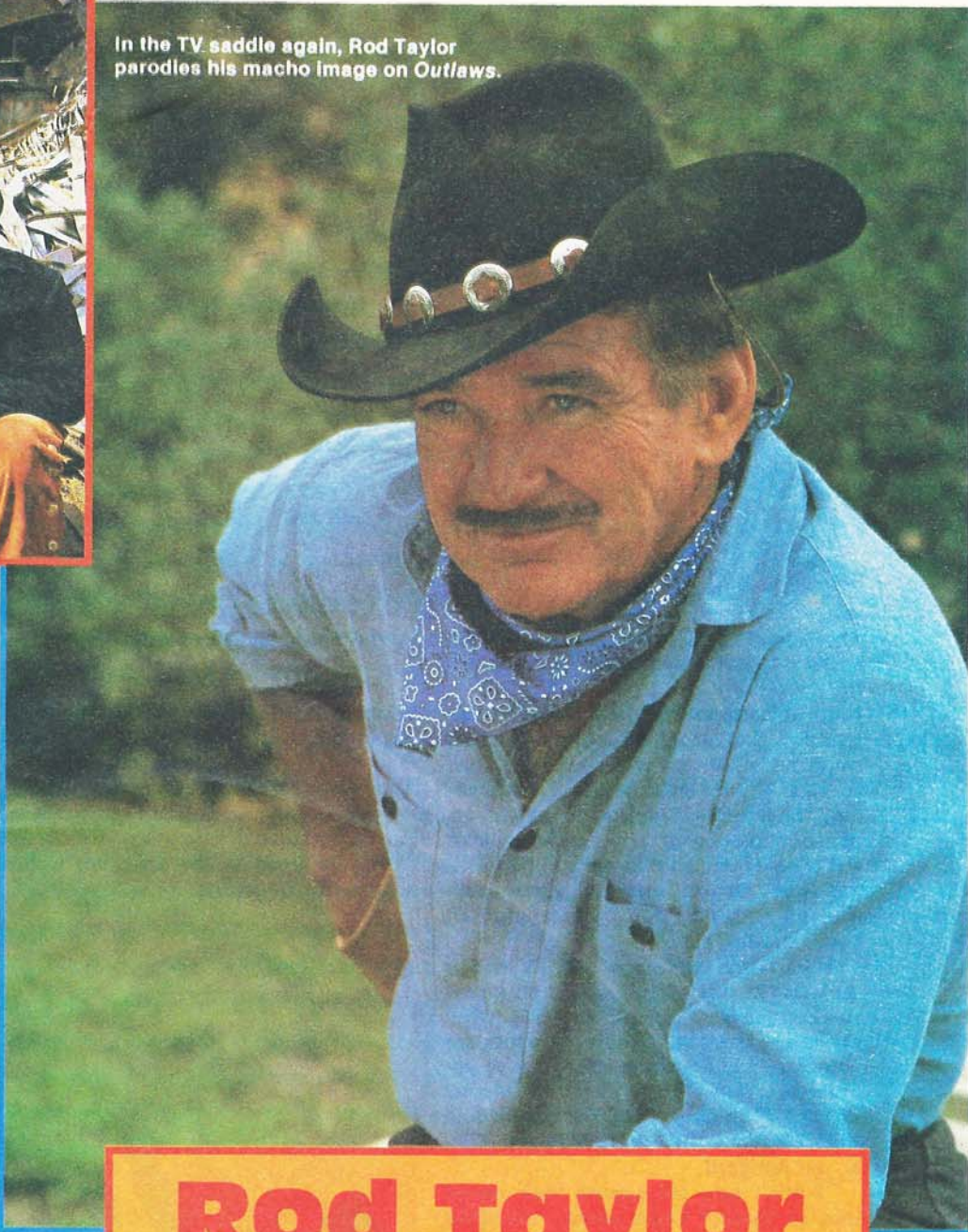




Lightning struck and these 1899 *Outlaws*—(clockwise from far left) Rod Taylor, Richard Roundtree, William Lucking, Patrick Houser and Charles Napier—have become modern-day detectives.

In the TV saddle again, Rod Taylor parodies his macho image on *Outlaws*.



By STEVE SWIRES

Once a time traveler, always a time traveler. A quarter century after riding George Pal's classic *Time Machine* to battle marauding Morlocks in the year A.D. 802,701, rugged Rod Taylor journeyed back to the future, this time to rescue beleaguered CBS from its dreaded ratings doldrums. Starring in the limited run mid-season replacement series *Outlaws*, the veteran hero courageously confronted his fiercest foe—an outlandish program concept which echoed elements of *The Wild Bunch* awkwardly combined with *The A-Team*.

As 19th century outlaw-turned-lawman John Grail, Taylor was unexpectedly transported via freak electrical storm to 1987 Houston, Texas, accompanied by his four bank robbing ex-partners, played by Richard (*Shaft*) Roundtree, William (*Doc Savage*) Lucking, Charles (*Rambo*) Napier and Patrick (*Endangered Species*) Houser. Strangers in the strange land of urban crime and modern conveniences, the confused quintet formed a unique detective agency, aided by liberated lady cop Christine (*Banacek*) Belford, utilizing quaint methods to combat contemporary crimes.

Relishing the opportunity to gently spoof his hard-bitten macho image in the light-hearted adventure fantasy, Taylor clearly enjoyed his latest small screen sojourn. "I guess I've completed the circle," the amiable Australian actor acknowledges, over a fish and beer lunch at New York's fashionable L'Escargot Restaurant. "This is the type of role I always played seriously before. Frankly, I was kind of embarrassed by some of those parts because I was given too many of them. But *Outlaws* is tongue in cheek, so it's more fun for me. I even get to laugh occasionally.

Rod Taylor Outlaw Time Traveler

The Australian actor goes West, stepping into the future and back to the TV ratings wars.

"For example, my character thinks nothing of taking on machine gun-toting terrorists armed with only his six shooter, but he's petrified by a pop-up toaster. Motorcycles scare the shit out of him. 'What is that thing? Should I shoot it?' 'No, it's some newfangled contraption. Better let it live.'"

An ensemble piece rather than a vanity vehicle, *Outlaws* required Taylor to share equal amounts of screen time with all four of his fellow actors. Fortunately, their personal and professional chemistry was pro-

perly balanced. "It's the most delightful working situation I've ever experienced," he marvels. "The rare and wonderful thing is that we five guys spend as much time together off the set as we do on. We have dinner together. We hang out at each other's houses. They stay at my home in Palm Springs. We even rehearse on our own time, for the sheer joy of working together."

Ordinarily accustomed to performing most of his own stunts, the 57-year-old Taylor uncharacteristically chose to leave



The rugged Taylor takes time out with the beautiful Yvette Mimieux during his original sojourn aboard *The Time Machine*.

Time Machine Photo: Copyright 1980 MGM

many of his hazardous *Outlaws* duties to his younger, and more athletically inclined, associates. "I'm gracefully maturing, and backing off. In other words, I *chickened out*," he chuckles. "I still do my own riding, because I like playing cowboys and Indians. But all that other bullshit—getting hit by actors who pretend they can throw punches—is *over*. I'll throw an occasional left hook, and that's it."

A four-time casualty of the TV ratings wars, Taylor was wary of signing on for yet another grueling series hitch. But when *Outlaws* creator/executive producer Nicholas (*The Incredible Hulk*) Corea approached him, after first considering Richard (*The Grey Fox*) Farnsworth and Cliff (*Charly*) Robertson (STARLOG #73), he was intrigued.

"I don't have the greatest track record with TV shows," Taylor admits. "Shooting a series is immensely hard work. I would never have done another one, except the subject matter of *Outlaws* fascinated me. I loved the concept and the characters. When CBS finally admitted that I wouldn't be too bad, I jumped at it."

Best known as the versatile leading man of such popular big screen fare as *The Birds*, *Young Cassidy*, *The Liquidator*, *Hotel*, *Dark of the Sun* and *The High Commissioner*, Taylor actually began his American acting career on television. During the late 1950s, he often appeared in such anthology shows as *Playhouse 90*, *Lux Video Theater*, *Suspicion*, *General Electric Theater*, *Zane Grey Theater*, *Goodyear Theater*, and in Rod Serling's "And When the Sky Was Opened" episode of *The Twilight Zone*.

Shortly after completing his first feature lead, in *The Time Machine* (which he

discussed extensively in STARLOG #108), Taylor spent the 1960-1961 TV season starring in the ABC adventure series *Hong Kong*, as an American journalist based in the title location. A decade later, when his film career began deteriorating, he more frequently returned to the tube, but with a notable lack of success.

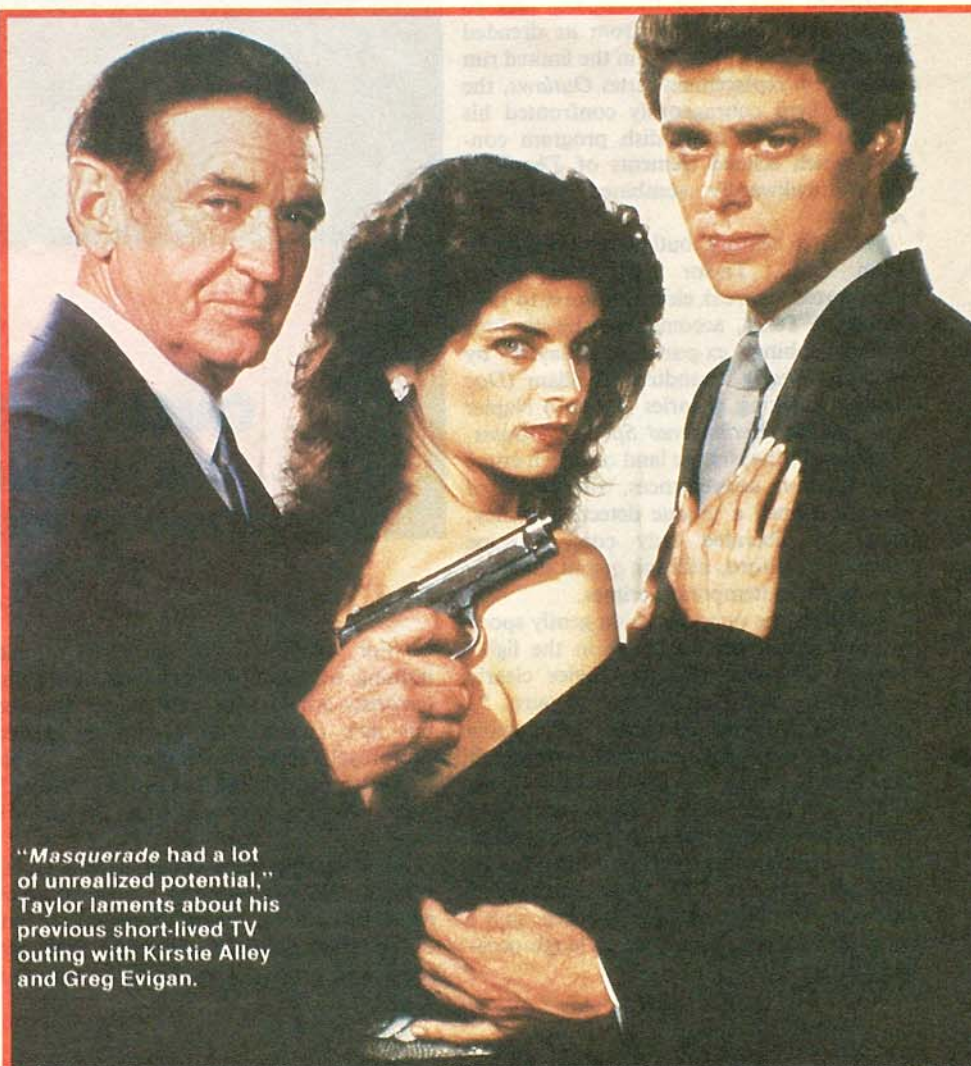
Although he was ideally cast as a turn-of-the-century trouble-shooter in the 1971 CBS adventure series *Bearcats*, the program was cancelled after 13 episodes. "*Bearcats* was simply too expensive," Taylor explains. "We couldn't shoot all over the country and simulate 1910. The TV antennas and airplanes drove us crazy. It was a good concept and a fun show, but it cost a fortune."

Bad luck continued to plague him when NBC failed to pick up his 1975 private eye pilot *A Matter of Wife... and Death*, based on Burt Reynolds' 1973 hit film *Shamus*. Two years later, the same network axed his third series, *The Oregon Trail*, in which he played a peaceful pioneer moving West, after only six episodes.

Lured back to ABC for the 1983-84 season by creator/executive producer Glen (*Battlestar Galactica*) Larson, Taylor portrayed the unlikely named National Intelligence Agency chief "Lavender," leading co-stars Kirstie Alley (STARLOG #102) and Greg Evigan on a weekly *Masquerade*, which clumsily mixed *Mission: Impossible* with *The Love Boat*. This spy series sank so suddenly, that the final episode—guest starring Sybil Danning—was never broadcast.

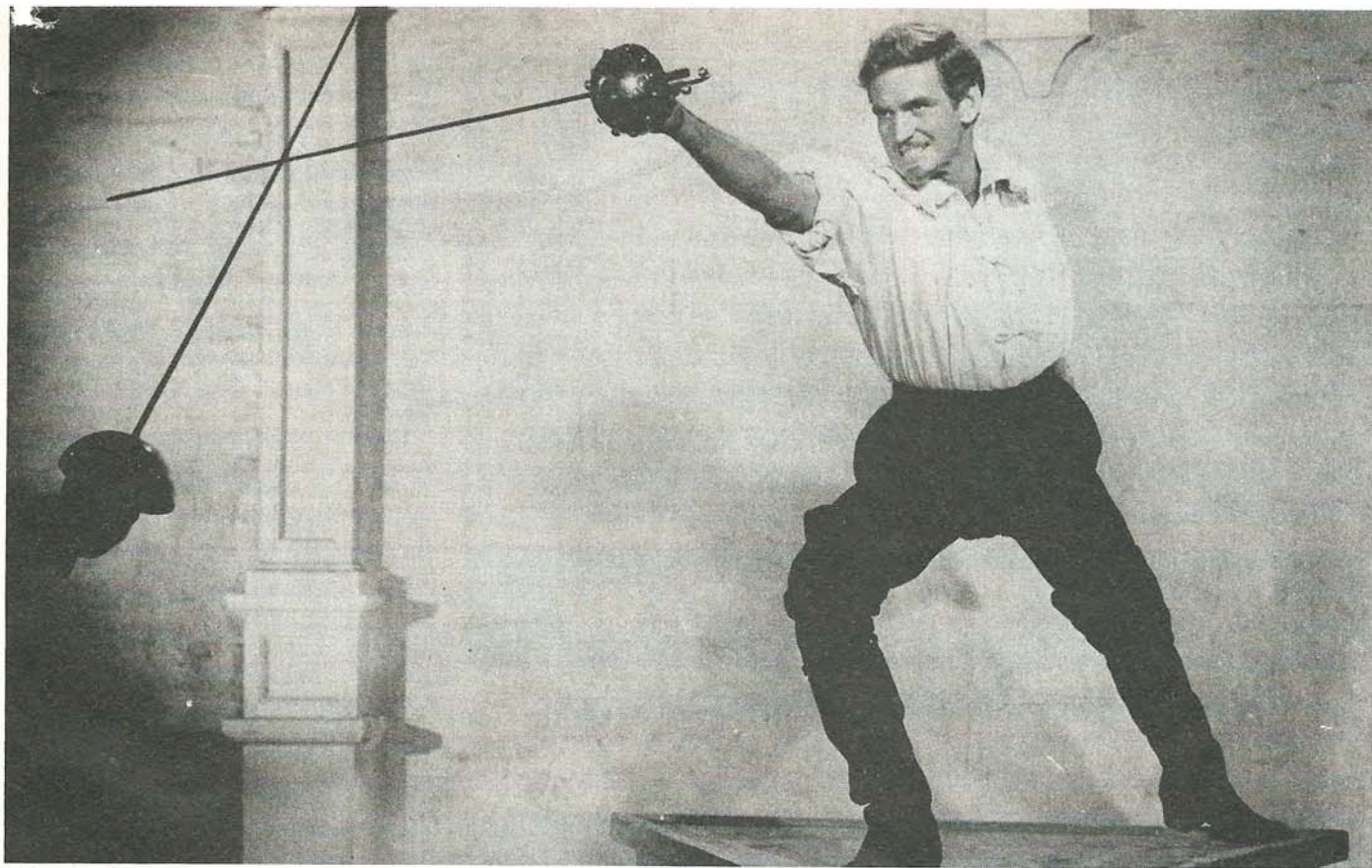
"Something strange happened between Glen Larson and ABC," Taylor muses. "I don't know what it was, but it was definitely unfriendly. It was too bad, because *Masquerade* had a lot of unrealized potential. They just didn't know how to develop the concept."

Masquerade Photo: ABC



"*Masquerade* had a lot of unrealized potential," Taylor laments about his previous short-lived TV outing with Kirstie Alley and Greg Evigan.

STEVE SWIRES, senior STARLOG correspondent profiled Adam West in issue #117.



"Pretending to still be the tough man of action isn't dignified for me anymore," says the one-time swashbuckler.

Disappointed by such cavalier treatment, Taylor then retreated to Europe, where he starred in a pair of adventure films unlikely to receive domestic theatrical distribution. However, the caper thriller *Marbella*, subsequently retitled *Hot Spot*, and also featuring Britt (*The Man With the Golden Gun*) Ekland, is due for home video release from Vestron.

"I play a drunken bum American ex-naval commander who dreams up a sting," Taylor relates. "He recruits a bunch of other bums to help him, and they're played by some wonderful Spanish actors, who spoke terrible English. The producer had such a fight with the director, that they couldn't finish the movie. To help them out, I worked two weeks for free. Even so, we missed winning an Academy Award by that much."

Moving on to Stockholm, Sweden, Taylor next took the lead in *The Face*, later renamed *Mask for Murder*, opposite Valerie (*Superman*) Perrine and genre legend Christopher Lee (STARLOG #70). "It's a strange, murky, semi-horror/murder mystery," he reports. "I play a sympathetic detective on the trail of a strangler. Valerie plays my wife, who is having an affair with my best friend. Christopher plays my boss, the police commissioner. It's actually not too bad a picture, but I have no idea what has become of it."

Unfortunately, schedule conflicts with these European productions prevented Taylor from participating in the publicity campaign promoting the December 1985 theatrical re-release of a movie which is curiously omitted from his official filmography. Unbeknownst to most of his

fans, he contributed the British accented voice of Pongo, the lead dalmatian, for Walt Disney's 1961 animated classic *101 Dalmatians*.

"Walt had liked me in something, and personally called me to do *101 Dalmatians*," Taylor recounts. "I had forgotten all about it, until it was re-released. Frankly, I've never even seen the film. But Walt was the sweetheart of all time. He and his people were so well organized, it was unbelievable. They showed me rough cartoons before I recorded my lines, and I found it fascinating. I wish I had gotten to know him better."

Understandably absent from Taylor's endorsed filmography is another title which recently surfaced on home video, the 1961 spaghetti muscle saga *Colossus and the Amazon Queen*. "Son of a bitch!" he explodes with laughter. "You found the skeleton in my closet. To be honest, I had a devious motive for making that movie. It was because of my nasty love life. I was having an affair with Anita (*La Dolce Vita*) Ekberg, and it gave me an excuse to get free air fare to Italy to see her. I've been trying to *hide* that fiasco ever since. Releasing it now on tape is like digging up a porno film out from out of my past."

Indeed, home video's insatiable appetite for product has inevitably exhumed most of the obscure foreign films Taylor reluctantly specialized in during the 1970s. Currently available are: *Partisani* (as *Hell River*); *Blondy* (a.k.a. *Vortex*) as *Germicide*; *Five Graves for Rogan* (as *A Time to Die*); *On a Dead Man's Chest* (a.k.a. *Jamaican Gold*) as *The Treasure Seekers*; and even *Long John Silver*, his 1954 Australian feature,

which passed into the public domain.

Ironically, the belated video release of *On a Dead Man's Chest* exacerbated Taylor's festering anger at his treatment by the movie's producer. "I wrote and starred in that picture, and I wasn't paid for doing either," he complains. "I stupidly took a percentage of the producer's profit participation, instead of a salary. Then, he told me the film had been impounded in some legal hassle, so there was no money.

"Eight years later, I was shooting *Marbella* in Spain, and English tourists who were watching us working presented me with videocassettes to autograph. To my surprise, they turned out to be something called *The Treasure Seekers*. Those bastards changed the title and released it on tape—and I still haven't been paid."

Wary of these cinematic shenanigans chronic to independent production, Rod Taylor is grateful for the chance *Outlaws* has given him to work again in the more professional world of commercial American television. Self-conscious about continuing to strut his two-fisted stuff beyond the point of plausibility, he welcomes his new image as a macho elder statesman, secure enough to poke fun at his seemingly invincible screen persona.

"Pretending to still be the tough man of action isn't dignified for me any more," he reflects. "There comes a time when you're over the hill, and there are plenty of great looking younger actors who can take your place. The action stars of today are making some wonderful films. There are no 'I could do it better' feelings in me. The younger they come, the better they get. That's why Olympic records are broken." ☆