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David Hasselhoff: Up close with the Hoff

By: Katherine Rushton

David Hasselhoff appears like a hyperreal version of the woolly-chested "Baywatch" lothario who appeared on our screens through the 1990s. He's taller, louder and, God forbid, even brasher than either lifeguard Mitch Buchannon or his "Knight Rider" character Michael Knight.

"Hey babe," he booms, as soon as he clocks that, of the various women attending the front-cover shoot for his forthcoming autobiography *Making Waves* (Hodder, September), I am the one there to interview him. "Up here, baby!" He guides me, hand disconcertingly low on my back, up to the studio's mezzanine floor.

There our "interview" is in fact a monologue, as Hasselhoff recounts at break-neck speed his experiences as Michael Knight's real life alter-ego. By his own admission he's "not that good at structure" ("I'm kinda ADD"), and so one heroic tale veers off into another, abruptly interspersed with shouted impersonations of the characters he meets.

It is hard to keep track, let alone identify the man himself within the medley. But even Hasselhoff appears confused: "Image is what people perceive my life to be. It's nothing like the truth. So I'm telling the truth, but part of my life is my image, so it's part of my work," he says.

His book will attempt to make things clear. "I'm trying to document all the amazing things that have happened to me. It's about facing your fears and using your power in a positive way." A distinct soupçon of self-help creeps in. "And it's about showbusiness. You can use it to your advantage or disadvantage, or for self-indulgence. I've done everything, and I talk about what I've learnt through all those journeys: how I tried to save the world and I forgot to save myself."

Besides TV stardom, those journeys have included a successful pop career in Germany, alcoholism and, more recently, divorce from his second wife Pamela Bach. The divorce is still going through the courts and is banned from discussion, but Hasselhoff promises the book will bring things up to date. "Yeah, OH YEAH!" he whoops gleefully. "Ha,ha! You guys, y'all got a last chapter now!"

It will no doubt be a sensational read: since the interview, Bach has claimed in court that Hasselhoff once beat her so badly he broke her nose. But despite the volatile domestic set-up, Hasselhoff seems to see himself more as superhero than flawed human being. All branches of his frenzied narrative sooner or later converge on the common theme of his "spiritual calling" to change people's lives through the character of Michael Knight.

"I can go into any hospital in any country and make a kid smile and forget about their pain for a couple of seconds," he explains.

"How fantastic is that?! I just walk in. All the kids go, 'AAAAH! Michael Knight!--and they're coming at me with their IVs! It's incredible. Michael Knight is my shield. [Booming voice] I AM SUPERMAN, and I can go ANYWHERE!"

Later, he recounts how women in Iran watch "Baywatch" via satellite. "They're sitting there oppressed--they can't vote [sic], can't do anything! And then they go, 'What the fuck?! This is the world! Why I can't I go out there?' And then they pull their burkas back and they've got blonde hair! It's a question of the culture and the freedom it gives to these people."

Hasselhoff may be a man possessed by his own power to impact on people's lives, but he is surprisingly able to laugh at himself. He recently toured Australia in a T-shirt saying "Don't Hassel the



Hoff", and goes about armed with two sets of signing photos--dreamy black and white for his sincere fan base, and Speedo-clad in Technicolor for the more tongue-in-cheek. "I get a real kick out of it all," he says. "I took a lot of shit for the name Hasselhoff, so now it's like it's got a life of its own. I look back and think, 'Who is The Hoff?', you know. It's not me!" It's a very good question indeed...**THE END**

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