



WHO ON EARTH IS TOM BAKER? An Autobiography

By Tom Baker

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Tom Baker, the fourth Doctor Who on British television, brings all his talent as a raconteur to this autobiography, which was first published in 1997 and ranges from his childhood, through his 7 years as Doctor Who to the engraving of his gravestone! Born in 1934, Baker grew up in an Irish Catholic neighbourhood in wartime Liverpool. His stories about his large family, his difficulties at school, his love of collecting war salvage, and his fascination with the church are entertaining, hilarious and poignant in equal measure.

Baker had an unusual teenage, entering a silent French religious order aged just 16, and for 5 years attempted to live up to the ideals of poverty, chastity and obedience. Eventually realising the religious life was not for him, Baker went straight from the monastery into National Service. As he adjusted from monastic silence to the rumbustious world of the army and the Royal Army Medical Corps, he baffled and amused officers and fellow soldiers alike by his wit and individuality, leading to many comic situations, described by Baker with great gusto. While taking part in amateur dramatics in the Royal Army Medical Corps, Baker's acting talent emerged, so after demob, he applied to Rose Bruford College of Theatre and Performance where he met Laurie Taylor whose friendship and collaboration eventually led to Baker being noticed by the National Theatre.

After years of joblessness or small parts in repertory theatres around Britain, Baker was in a revue with Laurie Taylor at the York Festival in 1968 when a National Theatre talent scout spotted him. Baker describes stimulating years working with Laurence Olivier, Joan Plowright, Anthony Hopkins and Derek Jacobi amongst many others at the National Theatre. Baker's first major film role was as Rasputin in 'Nicholas and Alexandra' which made him think he was on the way to Hollywood stardom, only to find himself broke and jobless again in London afterwards. He was actually working on a building site when Bill Slater, Head of Series and Serials at the BBC, proposed him as the new Doctor Who to take over from Jon Pertwee.

Baker shares the exhilaration of his regeneration from hod carrier to Time Lord, from out-of-work actor to one hugely in demand. Then followed 7 years of fun

and challenges working on the popular, long-running television series, which brought Baker international recognition and popularity. Baker describes the end of his seven-year stint as Doctor Who when he returned to the stage in plays such as 'Hedda Gabler', 'Educating Rita' and 'She Stoops to Conquer'. Baker's autobiography closes with his move to a converted school house in Kent in 1986 where he mowed the lawns of the graveyard next door and one day decided to buy a gravestone and have his name and birthday engraved on it: an example of Baker's anarchic humour, which throughout the book hovers cleverly between thoughtful reality and comedy of the absurd.

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