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**“There’ll be no flirting,  
that’s for sure”**

**The new Doctor Who reveals all**

**Exclusive interview with Peter Capaldi**



# The Doctor...



# ...will see you now



He's going to be trickier, fiercer, madder. In his first interview as the new Doctor Who, Peter Capaldi talks to *Matt Rudd* about time travelling, saving galaxies and what he'll be getting up to with his beautiful assistant. *Photographs: Paul Stuart*



T

oday, I have an appointment with the Doctor. It has been a year since Peter Capaldi was revealed as the Twelfth Time Lord and this is the first interview he's given anywhere in the galaxy. Not only that, he has promised to put on his Doctor's uniform — just for us.

In anticipation, I arrive a whole hour early. He arrives exactly on time, as time lords should, and just walks in. No Tardis. No theme tune. Not even any dry ice. He is wearing a T-shirt and jeans, and his skin is so pale, it's almost translucent. He's hugging his ribs like he's been fighting Daleks since January (which, technically, he has).

"Are you injured," I ask, because it won't do either of us or the BBC's multimillion-pound franchise any good if he needs to regenerate before he's even begun. "No, I'm just happy to be here," he says. "Really relaxed." He shakes my hand for as long as he appeared in the Christmas special (20 seconds), before floating off to the window to look out across sprawling St Mary's cemetery. We have dragged him from his home in Crouch End, northeast London, to a studio in Kensal Green, northwest London, but, it transpires, this is where he first lived when he arrived in the capital as a penniless Glaswegian actor. His skin is translucent with wonderment. He's hugging his ribs nostalgically.

So the first thing to note is that Capaldi is nothing like Malcolm Tucker, the spin doctor who first made him a household name turning the Whitehall air deep blue in *The Thick of It*. He is a will-o'-the-wisp, gentle and soft-spoken, small for his 5ft 9in, almost entirely non-sweary. And if he's pleased to be hanging out in a remote part of London this morning, he's absolutely beside himself with his new life as a time lord.

"When I was Doctor elect, before it was announced, I used to go to Forbidden Planet [a sci-fi superstore in the West End], and just hang around," he volunteers. "It would amuse me that people wouldn't know they were standing next to the next Doctor Who. That's all past now. I can't do it any more."

When I ask how it felt on his first day on set, his eyes mist up. "I had to step out of the Tardis into a new world," he says, fiddling with an uncooperative coffee percolator. "And because, obviously, in real life [spoiler alert] the Tardis is not inside an actual police box, you're just in this big cupboard. There are quite a few people in there, so you get quite cosy and there's no fan or anything. But you have to be the Doctor. All the other stuff you put

Buttoned up: "I tried on anything anybody suggested," says Capaldi, of the Doctor's "evolving" uniform

on the back burner, because it'll just mess you up." The percolator explodes, as percolators do — a time lord who can't even pour his own coffee, he laughs to himself.

Being the Doctor (not making coffee) is a challenge for any actor, but for Capaldi it's bigger because he is an aficionado. Make the mistake of asking him a simple Top Trumps question — are Daleks better than Cybermen? — and what feels like a whole morning can slip by on the answer. Because, you see, it depends whether you're talking about the Mondasian Cybermen, which came from the planet Mondas, circa 1966, or those that arrived from a parallel universe in 2006.

"There is a conflict among fans," Capaldi says gravely, "but I'm trying to get the Mondasians back." Which doesn't answer my question, but in case there are lots of different types of Dalek as well, I move on.

His earliest memories are of Daleks emerging from the water in *The Dalek Invasion of Earth* (1964), and it's a bad idea to sully them with talk of toilet plungers and wobbly sets. "Everybody slags it off now," he says, "but these programmes weren't made to

be viewed over and over again. When you just consumed them in that way, at the time, they were magical."

Of course, back then, Daleks couldn't go up stairs, so there was no need for Capaldi, age five, to hide behind the sofa in his third-floor tenement (his Italian father ran the ice-cream parlour on the ground floor). Instead, he built sets from shoe boxes, collected autographs — he ticked off three of the first four Doctors (William Hartnell was ill, so he got his wife's autograph instead). He wrote fan mail to the producers; they sent back old scripts — "It was like being allowed inside the Magic Circle, the point I knew I wanted to be part of this world."

His mother helped, sending him a Doctor Who annual every year. When I ask how long into adult life this continued, he starts laughing. Then he's laughing so much that he starts struggling for air. Eventually, just at the point when I'm thinking I should call for help, he regains control: "By the time the show came back [in 2005], she must have thought I was too old. But I suspect it will start again now."

Capaldi comes at a good time for the programme. Since its recommissioning

after a 16-year hiatus, the Doctors have been regenerating into ever-younger lunchbox candy. Christopher Eccleston (41), David Tennant (34), then Matt Smith (28). With it, the plot lines, much to the chagrin of die-hard Whovians, have become more *Twilight*. There has been flirting and smooching. There has been a will-they, won't-they dynamic between the Doctor and his sidekick, Clara. We were one nibble short of a hickey.

Following the age trajectory, the next Doctor would have been 23, and all would have been lost. Or, to be terribly 21st century, he could have been a she. Or Idris Elba — a favourite, although he may have been the unnamed black actor who turned down the role last time. Instead, the BBC went for a TV geriatric. Capaldi, 55 and counting, is joint oldest time lord with William Hartnell.

In the translucent flesh, he looks a good 30 years younger than Hartnell, thanks largely to the fact that he gave up alcohol years ago (and Hartnell liked a drink). But he's still old enough that the BBC has a chiropractor on speed dial. More awkwardly, he's old enough to be Clara's father. This regeneration lark can have disturbing Freudian implications. So will the relationship with Clara, played by 28-year-old Jenna Coleman, continue to be romantic?

"There'll be no flirting, that's for sure," he says. "It's not what this Doctor's concerned with. It's quite a fun relationship, but no, I did call and say, 'I want no Papa-Nicole moments.' I think there was a bit of tension with that at first, but I was absolutely adamant."

What will there be, then? Is the 12th Doctor an old codger like Hartnell? Will he be a more modern fiftysomething, a time lord who can work an iPad? Executive producer Steven Moffat has said he'll be older, trickier, fiercer. Mark Gatiss, the best writer on the show, says the new doctor "has a madness in his eyes".

"All that's true," says Capaldi, "but he's also joyful. One thing the show does well is balance the epic and the domestic. You can go from the edge of the universe to a pedestrian precinct. This Doctor loves watching stars being born in Andromeda; he's also thrilled to see litter blowing across the supermarket car park at dawn."

So who has he based his mad-eyed, fierce, joyful litter-watcher on? It was widely assumed that his Malcolm Tucker had been forged in the same fires as Alastair Campbell, but Capaldi later revealed the inspiration came from Hollywood's "malevolent forces in Armani suits". So what about the Doctor?

**"I did call and say, 'I want no Papa-Nicole moments.' There was a bit of tension with that at first, but I was absolutely adamant"**

"There was a large selection of people," he says. "I won't name names, because it's more fun for people to spot them. I have a book, though. I started to collect images and quotes from people I thought were Doctor Who-ish. They might have a turn of phrase or a certain look that works... so I brought these things together."

The book is kept under lock and key. After the first five scripts of the new series were inadvertently leaked at the start of the month, he's not taking any chances.

Capaldi didn't arrive at the start of shooting in January with a fully formed Doctor. "Sometimes I'd look in the mirror and think, that's just me. That's not him. But some days he'd look back and I'd try to catch it. It's not an intellectual process, it's just an instinctive relationship." His character has evolved through the first few episodes.

The uniform has evolved too. Out with Smith's tweed, in with a long black jacket, scarlet lining, black trousers, Doc Martens and a waistcoat that was, up until the 19th cardigan v waistcoat committee meeting, very nearly a cardigan. Thank goodness it wasn't a cardie, I point out.

"It was a good cardigan," he says, defensively. "You haven't seen the cardigan. A cardigan doesn't sound good, but it can look great. Tom Baker wore a cardigan."

Settling on the final outfit took weeks and is the stuff of any man's nightmares.

"I tried on everything anybody suggested," he says. "We'd go to a costume house and have huge, exhausting sessions of getting dressed up. It's fine for about 15 minutes, but by the time we've done 3½ hours, it's like, get me out of this. The most ridiculous outfit, the one I loved, I looked like Count Arthur Strong with a real, old cardigan."

He didn't go for Count Arthur Strong. He went for a sort of magician look. "Magician look?" he says, more defensively. "I think it's quite a hard look. I always wanted him to be in black — I always just saw the Doctor in dark colours. Not tweed. Matt's a really young cool guy — he can wear anything, but I wanted to strip it back and be very stark."

Many Doctor Who scholars think the plots could do with stripping back too, after the last few series have become increasingly OTT. Can we expect fewer fireworks and more drama?

"We still blow a lot of shit up," he says. "That's very important, but it's going to be a bit different from what we've seen over recent

years. A bit more gravity. Some situations are more sombre and I think there are more rooted dramatic scenes. Over the past two or three years, which I've loved, there has often been a breathless vigour; we still have that attack, but we have another level of drama, another tone. And the scenes are longer."

Capaldi was in Prague shooting *The Musketeers* when his agent called to say he'd got the part. He spent the afternoon wandering around the city, humming the Doctor Who theme tune. "I just didn't think it was something that would happen to me."

He had to keep his big secret from everyone but his wife and his 21-year-old daughter for the next 10 weeks. This is when you would have found him at Forbidden Planet, amusing himself and only himself. But he didn't say yes to the part immediately. "I didn't want to be Doctor Who in a Doctor Who I didn't like. I had to be convinced the show was going in a direction I was interested in. I had to think carefully about the level of visibility. My life was blessed, but as soon as this happened I had paparazzi outside my house. People spoke to me before and recognised me, but nothing like this. I had to decide if I was ready to live with that, because once that genie is out of the bottle, it doesn't go back in." ➔





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Not that he was ever going to say no. “I thought, ‘You’ve loved this since you were a kid, how can you not be Doctor Who?’”

It would, however, be wrong to say Capaldi was always destined to play the part. His life has been too mercurial to allow anything approaching destiny, as a quick time travel back through his CV demonstrates. He stole the show in 2011 as the obsessive-compulsive BBC executive Randall Brown in *The Hour*. He won awards as the profanity-spouting Malcolm Tucker in 2005. But before that he spent a full year out of work, a defaulting mortgage on the immediate horizon. His wife, Elaine Collins, a producer, kept the wolves from the unemployed actor’s door. What went wrong that year?

“I don’t know,” he says. “In the same way I didn’t know why I started to work again the next year. That was one of the key learning points in my life. I hadn’t done anything different. I didn’t start writing letters or putting myself out in the world. I didn’t start attending parties. I didn’t pull myself together. This work just started coming in and I thought, I have no control over this.”

Before that and before years as a jobbing TV actor (a prime suspect in *Waking the Dead* here, a *Songs of Praise* producer in the *Vicar of Dibley* there), he won an Oscar in 1995 for writing and directing *Franz Kafka’s It’s a Wonderful Life*, a short film starring Richard E Grant doing a *Withnailish Kafka* struggling to start *The Metamorphosis*. Hollywood beckoned for long enough to meet those malevolent forces in Armani suits, but it was not to be.

“There are so many films I’ve tried to get made,” he says. “They’ve collapsed for one reason or another, so why carry on? Your whole existence has to be about that, and even when you eventually get your film made because of the attraction of the two-star review, what do you do then? I respect it, but I’d rather have fun.”

Which brings us to the early years — not the 15-year-old writing to the *Radio Times* to share his love of the Doctor, but after that, when, as he puts it, it was “time to get into sex and drugs and rock’n’roll”. After Capaldi failed to get into drama school, he applied successfully for a place at the Glasgow School of Art. There, he became the lead singer of a punk band which began life as *Bastards of Hell* and soon changed its name to the *Dreamboys*. His drummer was Craig Ferguson, who now hosts the *Late Late Show* in the US. They toured, they cut an album, they put on

drag acts in Glasgow clubs at Christmas (“it was more panto than drag”). They even shared a venue with U2 (“I don’t think we supported them, but we somehow got involved”).

In Ferguson’s bestselling autobiography, the account of his days in the band is thick with nostalgia. “Peter and Roddy [the guitarist] and I took acid or mushrooms together, got drunk, endured hangovers together,” he writes. “We never seemed to have any money and were always dirty, cold and uncomfortable, and I loved it.”

He portrays Capaldi as a born performer, tall, very thin and very handsome, with thick carrot hair, eyeliner and, on their first meeting, “talking to some excited girls who seemed to be fighting over the right to inhale smoke from his menthol cigarette”.

So was Capaldi really a fully fledged pop star with groupies and everything?

“Well, Craig was great,” he says, “but he was from Cumbernauld so he thought Glasgow was a metropolis. None of us were pop stars... we had no money. No one signed us and we were never on the telly.”

We will never know if the *Dreamboys’* big break was just around the corner because Capaldi got his own break at 21. Returning to his flat one night after a gig, he found the film director Bill Forsyth chatting to his

costume designer landlady in the hall (“an extraordinary piece of fate”). Half an hour later, he’d landed a part in the film *Local Hero*, starring Burt Lancaster. Ferguson went off into drug and alcohol addiction. Capaldi gave up the booze, the drugs and the eyeliner to become an actor. Would he have followed the full Johnny Rotten arc from anarchy to butter adverts if it hadn’t been for that break?

“I’d have liked that, but it was just getting too tough,” he says. “It was getting hard to be so unsuccessful. The great thing about being in a band is that you create your own world, your own kind of palette, but I don’t know if I had the stamina to hang on in there.”

The rest is history. Or the future, depending on the direction in which we’re time travelling. Whichever it is, we have reached the point in the day when Capaldi swaps T-shirt and jeans for the full Doctor. On goes the waistcoat, the DMs, the magician’s jacket. On too goes the signet ring, specially constructed to hide his wedding band, which he doesn’t ever like to take off. (“I see you don’t have a wedding ring,” he says, in a tone so gently disapproving that I decide I’ll buy one on the way home. “Very modern.”)

As he changes, a strange thing happens. He’s not on set and our camera is clicking rather than rolling, but his whole body language transforms. By the time he’s got all the clobber on, he’s grown beyond his 5ft 9in. His eyes are firing lasers around the studio and, well, he’s no longer the very relaxed, very happy Glaswegian will-o-the-wisp. He’s a full-on Gallifreyan nutjob. But in a good way.

“Do you feel like the Doctor now?” I ask.

“I do,” he replies, twirling. “I do.”

“Are the twirls a punk thing?”

“It’s graphic shapes,” he says, twirling some more. “That’s why being in black is so great. You can make these spidery shapes. It’s like German expressionism or Sixties caricatures. They’re very graphic lines.”

We have 27 days to wait to see if his German expressionist Doctor, the one conjured from a book of thoughts and half a lifetime of enthusiasm, is a success. Today, I’ve had a sneak preview. I’ve seen the madness behind the eyes, and the joy too. I’ll be surprised if he doesn’t become the most compelling Doctor to date. For now though, he’s back to his T-shirt and jeans. He leaves quietly, via the stairs, not a Police Box ■

*Doctor Who returns to BBC1 on Saturday August 23*

