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Introducing the New Star of Doctor Who

Daleks! Cybermen! The Return of the Master?

 EW steps inside the upcoming season of the cult hit

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Peter Capaldi takes over the iconic role; Cate Blanchett and Robert Downey Jr. (above)
Jenna Coleman and Peter Capaldi photographed on the set of Doctor Who on June 18, 2014, in Cardiff, Wales.
SCOTTISH ACTOR―AND WHO SUPERFAN―PETER CAPALDI TAKES OVER THE TARDIS TO BATTLE CYBERMEN, DALEKS, AND ANNOYING EARTHLING FOIBLES IN THE NEW SEASON OF DOCTOR WHO.

BY CLARK COLLIS

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JEFF RIEDEL
IN DECEMBER 2012, EW had lunch in New York with Matt Smith, a 30-year-old who was coming to the end of his tenure as the star of the British sci-fi series Doctor Who. The Doctor is a monster-battling alien whose ability to regenerate his physical form has allowed a number of actors to star on the show in its half-century history. Smith was the 11th such actor—and all too aware that he wouldn't be the last. "One day you will be sat opposite another Doctor," he said a tad sadly at the end of our meal. "You will be cheating on me! Right? And I will expect you to always speak fondly of me." Eighteen months later, your writer is in a London photo studio and is indeed about to "cheat" on Smith with Peter Capaldi, whose first season as the star of Doctor Who will premiere on BBC America Aug. 23. Since its 2005 reboot, the show has become a genuine global phenomenon, with a whole new generation of fans following the Doctor in his fight against those metallic maniacs the Daleks; the similarly villainous Cybermen, and all the other monsters of the Who universe. In America alone, 2.5 million viewers tuned in for last year's special Christmas episode, in which Smith's so-called

Eleventh Doctor regenerated into Capaldi's Twelfth. "This is not the show that I grew up with," says Capaldi, himself a die-hard Whovian since childhood. "It's a bigger beast." Given these stakes, it is hardly a surprise that showrunner Steven Moffat says finding a new Doctor was a major headache: "It does feel a bit like you're back to square one. It's exciting in one sense, but on the other hand, it's a whopping great problem." Moffat solved that problem—he hopes—by casting the whippet-thin, 56-year-old, almost-completely-unknown-to-American-audiences actor sitting opposite EW. So who is Peter Capaldi? What foes will his Doctor face off against in the new season? What friends will assist him? And, most important, will EW be allowed behind the controls of the TARDIS? (Spoiler alert: The answer to the last question is "Yes"!)

LIKE SO MANY OF Britain's cultural icons—the royal family, steak-and-kidney pudding, Keith Richards—Doctor Who is both highly eccentric and extremely old. Indeed, Capaldi is likely to be the last Doctor who will be capable of remembering the first actor to play the part, William Hartnell, who originated the role way back in 1963. And Capaldi certainly does. One of his earliest recollections is of watching Hartnell's Doctor in the multi-part 1964 adventure "The Dalek Invasion of Earth" when he was 6. "At the end of the first episode, a Dalek emerges from the Thames and it's such a surprise," Capaldi recalls between bites of his very British-looking cheese sandwich (it's pretty much a hold-the-cheese situation). "I loved the
effort people put into making these strange worlds.

Capaldi became, in his own words, a "geeky fan" of the show. He collected the autographs of the actors playing the Doctors in its first decade and wrote letters to the Doctor Who production office. (In 1976, the Doctor Who International Fan Club magazine published a Capaldi-penned appreciation of the show's title sequence.) The actor's enthusiasm lasted into his teens, but eventually he became distracted by other matters. "You get into sex and drugs and rock & roll, and that becomes more important to you than watching Doctor Who on a Saturday," he reminisces. After a rejection letter from London's prestigious Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts, Capaldi studied graphic design and sang with a band called the Dreamboys, whose drummer was Craig Ferguson (yes, that one). His first big acting break came when he was cast in Scottish writer-director Bill Forsyth's 1985 comedy Local Hero, and over the next two decades he became a familiar face, if not exactly a household name, in the U.K., thanks to projects such as the 1996 TV mini-series (co-penned by future Doctor Who writer Neil Gaiman). In March 1995, Capaldi won an Academy Award for writing and directing the short film Withnail and I (both were created by Scottish TV satirist Armando Iannucci). Capaldi played Malcolm Tucker, a fictional, ferocious, and foulmouthed political employer (typical Tuckerisms: "This is the f—ing Shawshank Redemption, but with more tunneling through s— and no f—ing redemption"). The monstrous Tucker struck a chord with the British public, and over the next few years Capaldi achieved star status in his homeland. "It became clear quite quickly that quite a vocal and large group of people liked this character, and that had never really happened to me before," says the actor, who is as polite and soft-spoken as Tucker routinely is not. "I would be stopped in the street and asked for an abusive bollocking from Malcolm Tucker." Capaldi was also finally making his mark in the Who universe. He was cast as the marble merchant Cassielus in the 2008 David Tennant-era adventure "The Fires of Pompeii" and then as a British politician in the 2009 Who spin-off miniseries Torchwood: Children of Earth. Capaldi further expanded his fantasy/sci-fi portfolio while also becoming a familiar of the Jolie-Pitt clan, playing the king of the fairies in the recently released Maleficent and a World Health Organization doctor in 2013's World War Z. "That was an odd summer," he recalls. "I worked with Angelina on Maleficent—from which I've been cut completely—and then went to work with Brad on World War Z." As for his prophetic credit as a "W.I.O. Doctor?" "Total coincidence."

Still, when it was announced in the summer of last year that Smith was leaving Doctor Who, Capaldi's name was notably absent from the list of rumored replacements, including Benedict Cumberbatch, Daniel Radcliffe, and Tennant's Broadchurch co-star Olivia Colman, who would have been the first woman to be cast in the part. Capaldi followed the media coverage of the Who race with interest but with no idea he might be asked to audition for the role. "I didn't think of myself at all in that kind of race but was quite entertained by the whole thing playing out because I'm a fan of the show," he says, adding that he thought he was out of the running due to one simple factor: "My age. I would have thought they were automatically heading younger."

Capaldi's reasoning was sound. The age of the actors playing the Doctor has varied wildly over the decades, and Hartnell was, like Capaldi, in his mid-50s when the series debuted. But since its 2005 relaunch, the show's male leads have all been younger than Capaldi—and have gotten younger over time. The first of the new Doctors, Christopher Eccleston, was 41 when he first appeared on the show; while his successor, Tennant, was 34. Capaldi—and have gotten younger over time. The first of the new Doctors, Christopher Eccleston, was 41 when he first appeared on the show; while his successor, Tennant, was 34.

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Smith himself was just 20 when he was cast. Of course, the actor playing the Doctor can't keep getting younger—the show isn't called Doctor Who-ser. And it turned out that what Capaldi perceived to be an obstacle to his casting was actually an advantage as far as Moffat was concerned. "I did say, 'No, we probably won't end up with another quicky young man,'" he recalls. "I very quickly thought about Peter." Capaldi reveals that when his agent called to ask how he would feel about playing the new Doctor, the actor "laughed for about two minutes—because the idea was just so joyful," he remembers. In an attempt not to tip off the media that Capaldi was in the frame for the part, Moffat auditioned him at the exec producer's house in London. "I'd written some scenes for him to do, and I sort of maximized the daffiness of them," says Moffat. "You know, 'Can you do all this stuff without giggling?'" He was instantly in command of it, and he looked and sounded right for that part.

Last fall, Capaldi traveled to the Doctor Who studios in Cardiff, Wales, to shoot his scene for the 2013 special Christmas episode. "The night before, I thought, 'I don't know how to do this at all,'" he says. "[I was] just pacing up and down in my hotel bathroom. But you just have to throw your self into it." Jenna Coleman, who plays companion Clara, describes filming the regeneration scene as a "surreal" experience. "Matt finished his scene and then Peter arrived," says the actress, 28. "They shook hands and then crossed paths, and it's literally as brutal as that. You carry on filming the exact same scene with a different actor. Peter must have done that scene about 55 different ways, throwing things in the air and seeing what sticks." Fans got to see the result of Capaldi's experimentation on Dec. 25 when his Doctor suddenly appeared before Clara in the TARDIS to ask, "Do you happen to know how to fly this thing?"

Capaldi says the first time he really felt like the Doctor was when he did get to fly the TARDIS after the new season began shooting in January. "Of course there's a lot of people, prop guys, very kindly telling you how to work the TARDIS," he says. "But I thought, 'I know how to work the TARDIS, you don't have to tell me how to work the TARDIS!'"

THE DOCTOR'S GUIDE TO STYLE

EVEN TIME TRAVELING ALIEN ADVENTURERS LIKE TO LOOK GOOD, AND FORMER STAR OF DOCTOR WHO HAS HIS OWN SIGNATURE STYLE.

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<tr>
<th>PERIOD</th>
<th>DOCTOR</th>
<th>OUTFIT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1963-68</td>
<td>William Hartnell</td>
<td>tweed suit, bow tie</td>
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<tr>
<td>1968-70</td>
<td>Patrick Troughton</td>
<td>baseball cap, lab coat</td>
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<tr>
<td>1970-74</td>
<td>Jon Pertwee</td>
<td>cape, scarf</td>
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<tr>
<td>1974-81</td>
<td>Tom Baker</td>
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THE DOCTOR'S HOME PLANET OF GALIFREY

The Paternoster Gang, a trio of Victorian detectives and fan favorites made up of the green-skinned Madame Vastra (played by Neve McIntosh), her human wife, Jenny Flint (Catrin Stewart), and the dome-headed, hilariously dim-witted Strax (Dan Starkey), is back this season. "Some people have asked if the Paternoster will carry on," says the actress, 36. "The answer is 'yes.'"

In addition to showing off the redecorated TARDIS, Pickwoad gives a behind-the-scenes look at the Doctor's home planet of Gallifrey. "Peter Capaldi, he's more of a thinking Doctor," says Pickwoad. "He's a bit different. The Moffat-enned season premiere, for example, features the return of the Paternoster Gang, a trio of Victorian detectives and fan favorites made up of the green-skinned Madame Vastra (played by Neve McIntosh), her human wife, Jenny Flint (Catrin Stewart), and the dome-headed, hilariously dim-witted Strax (Dan Starkey). "The first episode is all about meeting the Doctor," says Moffat's
fellow executive producer Brian Minchin. "Clara is lost in Victorian England and lovely young Matt Smith has disappeared and Peter Capaldi is now the Doctor and she's discovering what he's like and we're with her going on that journey." So far, so normal—at least for fans accustomed to the idea of crime-solving interspecies lesbians. However, the premiere was directed by the hot British filmmaker Ben Wheatley, a die-hard Who fan who's known for making extremely violent films, including 2012's occult horror movie Kill List. "He's made the show quite scary," says Capaldi. "Ben has a wonderful eye and a sensibility about dreadfulness, in the sense that his films are all full of dread. You know, 'What terrible thing is about to befall these characters?' He's brought an element of that to the show, which is great."

Last season, Smith's and Coleman's characters enjoyed something of a flirtatious relationship. But with an almost-30-year age gap between Coleman and her new costar, Clara has been gifted with a more generationally appropriate love interest, Danny, played by Who newbie Samuel Anderson. "He's a teacher at the same school as Clara," says Minchin. "Clara decides she's not going to leave her life behind to go travel in time and space. She's starting this relationship with Danny, so she'll have to explain why her hair's grown longer or she's got seaweed in her dress." Beyond the Cybermen, this season will bring back the Daleks, while this year's list of guest stars includes the singer Foxes, British comedian Frank Skinner, and Keeley Hawes (MI-5) as a character called Mrs. Delphox. "She's playing this naughty but nice, really sexy villain who kind of kills you but with a sweet smile," says Coleman.

MAKE NEW ENemies, BUT KEEP THE OLD

PETER CAPALDI ISN'T JUST THE NEW DOCTOR, HE'S ALSO A WHO EXPERT—SO WE ASKED HIM WHICH CLASSIC FOES HE'D LIKE TO FIGHT. —CLARK COLLIS

DALEKS AND CYBERMEN are coming in the new season. But if Peter Capaldi had his pick of vintage Who villains, he'd pit the Doctor against two other old foes: the Axons from 1971's "The Claws of Axos," and the original 50s-era Cybermen. "Axons appeared as these godlike creatures, but underneath they were festering bags of flesh. I'd love to see a modern version of that," says Capaldi. And the Cybermen were "absolutely terrifying, with cloth faces. That was really creepy." Unfortunately, showrunner Steven Moffat describes both foes differently. "I always thought the Axons had a natural resemblance to a BAFTA," he says, referring to the British version of the Oscar. As for the old-school Cybermen? "We're not bringing those back, because they look like boys with [sweaters] pulled over their heads. But Peter and I are not having a fight about which Cybermen are better."

Of course, the show's most important new element is Capaldi's Doctor. "He's more alien than we've seen him for a while, and he is less patient with the foibles of human beings," says the actor. "Somewhere in his regenerative process, human beings have lost their charm for him. But they begin to work their magic eventually." In last year's special 50th-anniversary show, the Doctor's many incarnations worked together to save Gallifrey—and in a real-life echo of that, Capaldi reveals he has sought assistance from his two immediate predecessors, Tennant and Smith. "Matt and David have both been very helpful," says Capaldi. "We text a lot, if there is a problem I need some advice on. It's a very small club, the amount of people who have played the part when the show's been at this scale."

Coleman says Capaldi could hardly be a more enthusiastic costar: "He especially likes it when things get blown up and [there are] Daleks and Cybermen. He's absolutely loving getting to play the Doctor." Capaldi is fully aware that the role of the Doctor is not a job for life. "It's funny Matt saying that," says Capaldi when told about Smith's comments to EW in 2012. "One of the things that hits you when you get the part is that it is finite. It's not like the series winds up—you get replaced."

For now, though, Capaldi admits he is very much the cat who got the cream—or, rather, the Doctor Who fan who got his hands on the TARDIS. "I feel guilty that my job is so fantastic," he says. "You wake up in the morning and you're Doctor Who. What a reason to get out of bed!"