



PHOTOGRAPHED
EXCLUSIVELY
FOR RADIO TIMES BY
IAN DERRY

Festive Frost

Nick Frost says playing Santa in *Doctor Who* is the perfect present for a fanboy. But why is his Father Christmas such a curmudgeon?

WHEN IT COMES to taking guest roles in *Doctor Who* most actors – from John Simm to Keeley Hawes – have told RT they're doing the Doctor mainly for their kids. Not Nick Frost. The man best known for his comedy collaborations with Simon Pegg plays Santa in the Time Lord's Christmas caper – but has had to keep the whole thing quiet to avoid giving the game away (and we're not talking about the storyline).

"My son is three – a bit young for *Doctor Who*," he explains. "But I think letting him see me in the costume would fry his three-year-old brain – his dad as Santa? To be fair, I do look great. If the acting dries up, I could definitely pitch up outside Westfield shopping centre and make a decent fist of it. Although I went to see Santa when I was a kid at a department store in Ilford and I was terrified of the giant red man with a white beard. So definitely not one for the boy."

In fact, he confesses, he took the part for another little boy: the young Nick Frost. "I'm a big fan of any and all sci-fi," he says, shocking no one. "And growing up in the 80s, being a sci-fi fan meant you were a big fan of *Doctor Who*. I loved the reincarnation aspect, the pain each incarnation had, knowing they were going but also the chance to start again with a clean sheet. It was unusual that

way. Mainly my fandom was because I'm a massive fan of spaceships in particular. When I first watched *Star Wars* and saw the Mos Eisley scene, I thought – well, that's what it's like: it's a documentary! *Doctor Who* was always slightly more about character, though."

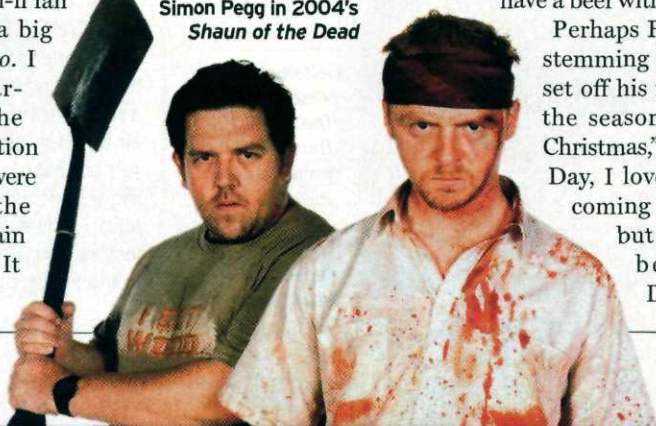
Frost's brief teaser appearance as Santa at the end of *Doctor Who*'s series-eight finale (which had seen a body count closer to a Tarantino movie including nerdy hero Osgood, Clara's boyfriend Danny Pink and possibly the Master/Missy) was potentially the most shocking part of the episode. As the Doctor moped around the Tardis, mourning Clara's departure, Frost barged through the Tardis doors in full bushy beard, red coat and pointy hat.

For *Doctor Who* fans Santa might prove the unlikely ally the Doctor has had yet. Sure they both defy the laws of time and space. Yes, they both strive to make things better for the people of planet Earth. Certainly they both have impressive transport. But all the same... the Doctor and Santa?

"I wouldn't worry about it," Nick Frost tells us. "For a start it's not all 'Ho ho ho!' My Santa is cross, mean and curt as well as cheery and funny. He's got a little bit of Robert De Niro in *Mean Streets*. And he has history with the Doctor: it's not talked about explicitly but they have a beef with each other from way back."

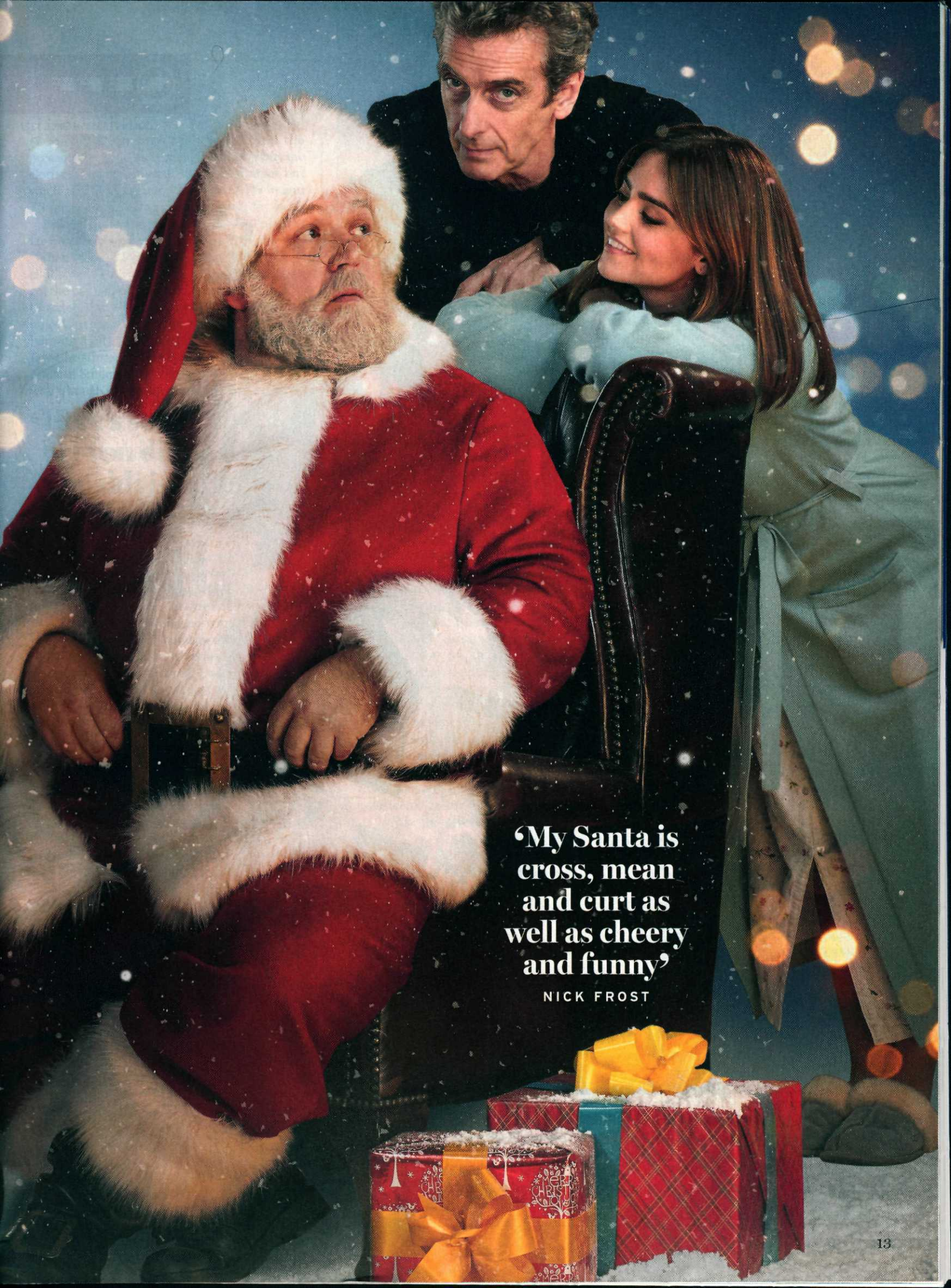
Perhaps Frost's own beef with Santa stemming back to the Ilford incident set off his first niggling doubts about the season. "I'm a bit 50/50 about Christmas," he admits. "I love Christmas Day, I love cooking, I love everyone coming round and feeding them – but I love working. That gap between the 22nd of December and the 4th of >

HORROR-STRUCK
Frost with his friend
Simon Pegg in 2004's
Shaun of the Dead



NO TIME LIKE THE PRESENT

Santa (Nick Frost) teams up with the Doctor (Peter Capaldi) and Clara (Jenna Coleman) for this year's Christmas special



**‘My Santa is
cross, mean
and curt as
well as cheery
and funny’**

NICK FROST

< January seems too long to me. And the presents are great but... well, look, never buy me clothes. I hate clothes at the best of times but you'll probably buy me clothes that don't fit and I'll spend the morning worrying about my size."

Indeed, his favourite Christmas was about as far from carols, trees and tinsel as you could get. "When I was 18 I worked in Israel for a while on a kibbutz," he recalls. "On Christmas Day we all got the day off and they said, what would we like to watch? We all said James Bond, so we had a huge Christmas lunch and a James Bond triple bill with the sun streaming in. Later on, I spent a few Christmasses with my old friends [actor] Michael Smiley, Simon Pegg and a few mates. It was a bunch of blokes, men together, having a

'Here's something I bet you didn't know: Capaldi is a giggler'

NICK FROST

laugh and cooking and watching films. Odd to think we've all now been in *Doctor Who*."

Which, coupled with working on Steven Spielberg's 2011 movie *The Adventures of Tintin* with Steven Moffat (Moffat co-wrote the screenplay and Frost played Thomson the detective), is probably why he felt so at home on set. "Moffat is a very clever man – taking *Doctor Who* somewhere completely different isn't easy," he argues. "And he was happy to allow me to improvise on set and push things out a bit.

"I've agreed not to leak any spoilers but here's something I bet you didn't know: Peter Capaldi is such a giggler. Trust me. Whatever you see on screen on Christmas Day, there's a version of it somewhere with Peter giggling the whole time..."

STEPHEN ARMSTRONG

HEAVENLY PEACE

Frost felt very at home on the *Doctor Who* set



Santa's little helper

Who boss Steven Moffat reveals how Peter Capaldi won over his US critics

STEVEN MOFFAT, THE dark lord of Christmas telly, likes to toy with our expectations, but *Doctor Who* meets Santa Claus... is he for real? "Rest assured, I haven't completely lost my marbles here," he says.

When we last saw the Time Lord in the season finale, he was as startled as we were to find Father Christmas tapping on the Tardis door. It topped a series that hurled a barrage of wacky ideas at viewers, from killer graffiti, to the Moon being an egg, to archenemy the Master becoming a lady. Surely the showrunner had qualms about bringing a jolly figure such as Santa, beloved of children big and small, aboard the Tardis. "It does look like the most insane moment when

Santa turns up," he concedes, "but we haven't gone off our rockers. No, Santa is written in properly, in a science-fiction way, into *Doctor Who*." So he trusts there'll be no "crying children and parents trying to kill me – again".

Perhaps it's a miracle that Santa's sleigh and the police box haven't collided in the night sky before. At this time of year, of course, Santa is actually rather busy, far too busy to help out a lonely Time Lord, so for the purposes of television he's played by Nick Frost. Moffat has worked with the comedy actor before on the *Tintin* film, but he didn't write Santa with Frost in mind.

"I've always had a very clear impression of Santa, but when

we got Nick Frost, well, first of all how perfect is his name! Nicholas Frost. It's the nom de plume that Santa Claus would use, isn't it? I was really tempted to write in a line where he passes himself off as Nicholas Frost, but it's too fourth-wall-breaking. Nick is ideal. He's what Santa should be in *Doctor Who* land."

Moffat is keen to reassure anyone whose heart sinks at this daft-sounding premise. "I sense that the very people who think they might hate this, won't hate it at all. Of all the Christmas specials I've done, it's the one most like the paradigm *Doctor Who* episode." They've bundled up the festive content in what he describes as "a big lump of goodness" in the form of Frost's Santa, but Moffat promises: "The rest is actually a scary, tense and claustrophobic adventure – as hopefully you saw from the trailer. It's not selling you a dummy there."

In a nutshell, this year's special, *Last Christmas*, is about scientists beset by monsters at the North Pole. Plus Santa. "It's *The Thing* meets *Miracle on 34th Street* – the movie we've all been waiting for. It's certainly the strangest bloody thing I've ever written."

IT WILL BE Moffat's fifth yuletide yarn, matching his predecessor Russell T Davies's tally. Indeed, since taking over as executive producer in 2010, he's overseen 57 individual episodes and will overtake Davies's round 60 next year. But Moffat remains undimmed, insisting fresh ideas are never a struggle – for his own scripts or those he commissions from other writers.

"If you're a writer, you're supposed to have ideas. Whether they're any good or not isn't up to me. It's whether you're still excited by it – jumping up and down about the idea you've just had. You've got to bring energy into the >

TIME WEIGHS HEAVY

A candid moment on set – on 3 October, the final day of filming, Peter Capaldi reflects on his first year in the Tardis

CAPALDI'S HIGHS

1 EMOTIONS IN CHECK

"I'm not sure I'm a hugging person now," says an awkward 12th Doctor, as Clara embraces him in the opening episode. In the finale, he's only slightly keener: "Never trust a hug. It's just a way to hide your face."

2 COSMIC AWARENESS

In *Kill the Moon*, he heartlessly leaves Clara and her pupil to decide the Earth's fate. Later, he pictures eternity and says their positive actions will lead humankind out across the stars enduring to the end of time.

3 WHO AM I? All season he questions whether he's a good man. In *Death in Heaven*, he's delighted to realise, "I am not a hero. I am an idiot with a box and a screwdriver. Just passing through, helping out." **PM**

'There was an increase in ratings, so hooray for the stern older man!'

STEVEN MOFFAT

◁ script and production process. And I still do. When you're in a constant stream for several years of just doing *Doctor Who* all the time – even though I do *Sherlock*, too – you get into the rhythm of it. Everything looks like a *Doctor Who* idea and I would say, conceitedly, that I can solve a narrative problem very fast."

Doctor Who traditionally lightens its tone at Christmas, serving something "markedly different" for a broader audience still digesting their roast turkey, parsnips and pud. All Christmas specials to date have had a seasonal element, albeit with a twist: killer conifers, fiendish snowmen, even Michael Gambon and Katherine Jenkins on a shark-drawn sleigh. Would he consider one without these trappings? "I prefer the specials to be Christmassy, and I know Russell did, too. I don't want to see a summer day. I cringe when people watch them on a day that's not Christmas. Because they really are meant to be watched on that day, oversugared, much more sentimental and daffy."

The *Last Christmas* cast includes Michael Troughton, best remembered as Rik Mayall's sidekick Piers in the political sitcom *The New Statesman* (1987–94). In 2011, he wrote a biography of his dad, the second Doctor Patrick Troughton. "He doesn't play son of Doctor Who or anything," laughs Moffat, "he plays a scientist."

But did they natter on set about Troughton senior? "No, I just kept priming Capaldi with questions."

The public reaction to Peter Capaldi's first term has been

generally positive, with respectable ratings (a total of 7.6 million watched the finale), even up against *The X Factor*. For Moffat, the big challenge was "people freaking out in America about casting an older Doctor because it's simply not part of their tradition. It isn't here either any more. But there was an increase in ratings, so hooray for the stern older man. We've been thrilled by it."

BUT WHAT OF Capaldi's second series next year? Wicked fantasies are already swirling and coalescing in Moffat's mind but he remains tight-lipped on specifics. Any tiny hints? "There are various ones I could give but I'm not sure yet which surprises I want to tease. One reason is I want to make sure they don't become part of the plan that falls apart. That does happen."

Filming resumes in January but there's not a peep yet about Capaldi's will-she/won't-she-be-leaving co-star, Jenna Coleman (who is at least in *Last Christmas*). Michelle Gomez, a massive hit in the finale as Missy, the

"regendered" Master, has announced her intention to return, and Moffat confirms: "That's true. I've already asked her to come back."

The self-styled "Queen of Evil" was last seen being zapped by a Cyberman version of the Brigadier (the Doctor's old ally). But, says Moffat, "I can't imagine anyone who's ever watched this genre being convinced that she's dead. The Master is never dead, no matter what happens to him or her. She's entirely unzappable!"

Moffat, who recently turned 53, is married to *Sherlock* producer Sue Vertue and they have two sons, Joshua and Louis. The family will watch *Doctor Who* together on Christmas Day. "Sometimes it's harder during the broadcast of the actual series because on Saturdays the household can get a bit busy, so I watch it on catch-up, which is terrible. But no, I always watch it on Christmas Day."

So what's top of Steven's Christmas list from Santa? It's a tough one. Last year he received a Dalek, the year before a Weeping Angel – not an actress painted grey and clad in rubber. "The one I've got at the end of the garden is made of fibreglass. It looks great. So what's left...? I don't know what ridiculous life-size action figure I'll be in for this time."

Maybe a CyberBrigadier? He loves the idea. "That's right! A full-size, operational Brigadier. With remote control. That would be very cool." **PATRICK MULKERN**

TEAM OF DREAMS
Peter Capaldi and Jenna Coleman with showrunner Steven Moffat

Don't miss...

Peter Capaldi's interview in *RT's* double issue, on sale 6 December