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 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 unlike-liest 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...
“My Santa is cross, mean and curt as well as cheery and funny.”

NICK FROST
Whatever you see on screen on the whole time..." it somewhere with Peter giggling Christmas Day, there's a version of Capaldi is such a giggler. Trust me. something I bet you didn't know: Peter set and push things out a bit. 

"And he was happy to allow me to improvise on 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 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..."

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Santa's little helper

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

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Larry's 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."

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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
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.”

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**TEAM OF DREAMS**

Peter Capaldi and Jenna Coleman with showrunner Steven Moffat

**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