

Should I stay or should I go?

How strong is the lure of the Tardis for *Doctor Who* companion Jenna Coleman?

SINCE SHE FIRST appeared on *Doctor Who* there has always been a question mark hovering just a few feet above Jenna Coleman's mischievous smile and tumbling auburn tresses. In the preceding series it was all about the plot – who is she? Now all anyone is asking is: will she quit?

Over the summer, what started as muttering on fan sites and chat rooms grew until it became a national media story – Clara was off, probably before the Christmas special. Was it because she didn't like filming with Peter Capaldi? Had she been offered a movie deal? All these rumours were tinged with a sense of regret. Initially written off as a lightweight replacement to Amy Pond, played by Karen Gillan, she'd been scoffed at by diehards, irritated by her flirt-ing and quips. Now, she's grown – taking charge of Capaldi's 12th Doctor, facing down cyborgs and solving the puzzle of the injured Dalek.

When I catch up with her for *Radio Times*, I had to ask the burning question: are you leaving? Things seem to be going so well... Is it the potential on-screen love in her life – ex-solider Danny Pink, played by fellow former *Emmerdale* actor Samuel Anderson?

She hedges a little. "Well, we do see her beginning to fall for Danny," she says cautiously. "The series shows her trying to balance this double life and trying to travel with the Doctor while also being a completely normal human being at home. We see the control freak in Clara. She says she'll travel with the Doctor but only if he drops



A DOC'S DINNER
Clara dishes it out to the Time Lord in the season opener *Deep Breath*

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her off back in the same stationery cupboard exactly to the minute that she left so she isn't missing any of her own life. It all becomes rather chaotic, as you can imagine, and that doesn't work at all – it becomes quite impossible."

For Clara – known last series as the Impossible Girl – that's nothing new – but the rumours and the struggle for a normal life suggest she is leaving – right? "There's lots of rumours," she says, with a tinkling laugh. "We've sat down with [showrunner] Steven Moffat and we've all

decided we don't want anybody to know which way it's going. If you know I'm in the next series – or if you know I'm off – you'll know how the story ends."

There's even doubt you'll appear in the Christmas episode? She laughs. "Because there's a surprise we've got coming, it's much better that nobody knows which way it's going to go – so that's where we're trying to keep it at the moment. It kind of leads..." – she pauses, and I lean forward holding my breath – "hmmmm... that's all I should probably say."

We quote an old interview with Steven Moffat saying Coleman and Capaldi would be filming the Christmas special. So if he seems to think you're on at Christmas...? She pauses, then laughs coyly. "Yeah, maybe..."

CERTAINLY THE LEAVING rumours can't have anything to do with her real-life working relationship with Peter Capaldi – whatever the on-screen floundering between Clara and the Doctor. "Peter and me work in a really similar way – we don't like to over-rehearse, we're always running lines off camera together, and we just really click," she bubbles enthusiastically. "Although it's been such a rocky road for Clara. This is a different Doctor – more alien. He really doesn't understand human emotions, which actually throws up quite a lot of comedy as well."

She cites the verbal jousting restaurant scene in the season opener *Deep Breath* – a much longer scene than in previous series. "A lot of the changes come from Peter – they're constantly >

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JENNA COLEMAN



◁ bickering and constantly annoying each other and they disagree all of the time, then suddenly they're thrust together because of an explosion and then they go into the Doctor-and-companion mode and it works."

The duo forged their friendship during August's whistle-stop global tour through seven cities in 12 days promoting the new series to the Doctor's legion of fans worldwide. They wrapped filming on Wednesday, spent Thursday in Cardiff and London, then flew to South Korea, on to Sydney, up to New York, down to Mexico and Rio then back to London.

"We didn't even stay in a city long enough to get jet lag," she says, still sounding a little amazed. "We crossed the International Date Line at one point, so we went back to the future – we were literally time travelling," she laughs. "We had our families along and went business class, sleeping on the planes as we went – we did photoshoots on the Rockefeller Centre and Christ the Redeemer in Rio, so me and Peter were saying, 'This is the closest to being rock stars that we're ever going to get.'"

THEY WERE MOBBED at airports by fans in fancy dress – or cosplay, as she corrects me. She stepped off the plane in South Korea to see thousands of fans wearing the Matt Smith fez. In Brazil, the screening was raucous, with the audience shouting and throwing lines in as if they were part of the show. She was blown away.

"I've started writing a journal – which I've never done before – because there are so many things that I don't want to forget," she explains. "Right from a storyline with the Tardis on a cloud to having Prince Charles and Camilla on the Tardis, to travelling around the world with my parents and Peter's family, to these kids who are from the Starlight charity on the Tardis one day... this just such a really cool job."

The part seems to be a little meatier this series as well – she's stronger, making decisions, taking control, no? "It's more that you're finally getting to know her," insists Coleman. "Initially we couldn't know too much about her because the Doctor was trying to figure her out. Now we're exploring her school and home life. We're just getting to see a lot more of her."



GOING GLOBAL
Promoting the show in Brazil on a whistle-stop world tour

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And this Doctor is harder work," she laughs. "So she has to work a lot harder. She's the person who knows the Doctor best in the world at a stage where he doesn't know himself."

Last series, Clara could always rely on the Doctor when she was in danger. She could always take a step back because she knew she'd be caught. "With this guy, not so much," she explains. "If he decides to go and inspect a cliff, he might well jump off it..."

"The Doctor is always curious but this is a different kind of curiosity. I think it becomes an addiction – that's something we've started to explore a lot, actually. What happens when his addiction to knowledge, curiosity, exploring puts people in danger." She gives a satisfied beam. "That's our theme."

And does that mean the real Clara is from Blackpool, like Coleman? Her natural accent has been noticeably stronger this series... "Yeah," she laughs. "I think it's the

Lancashire Clara that we're seeing more of now. Her roots are showing."

She sounds ridiculously happy. And why shouldn't she be? Having started acting at school in Blackpool her route through soaps and TV dramas like *Titanic* and *Dancing on the Edge* was healthy enough. But now she's a global megastar after *Who's* 50th anniversary story was shown simultaneously in 94 countries.

HER RELATIONSHIP WITH *Game of Thrones* actor Richard Madden is flourishing – she's been papped cuddling him recently and pottering around north London together – although she's not really talking about that today, sticking with a polite "Yes, thank you" when asked if things are going well. Indeed, if there's anything about her soaring fame that's she's not so happy with, it has to be the photographers on her doorstep.

"It is weird isn't it?" she says softly. "I don't think it's something I'll ever get used to, being taken by surprise by someone with a camera, with a plastic bag in my hand having been to the grocer's... it's quite a strange sensation. But the benefits far outweigh the very few negatives."

She's yet to feel the Clara career uplift that's bound to come from casting directors' offices around the world – her role as Lydia in *Death Comes to Pemberley* last Christmas was thanks to her pre-*Who* role in *Room at the Top*. "I've been working too hard," she exclaims. "There's not even time for auditions or anything. I'm filming till October."

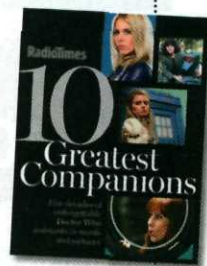
"And when do you start on the next series?" I ask – a sly attempt to see if she'll reveal her presence or absence. But you don't get to travel with a Time Lord if you fall for tricks like that. "They start filming in January," she says innocently – and leaves me struggling to work out exactly what that means... You could almost curse her, but she does it with such impossible charm that you have to forgive the girl.

STEPHEN ARMSTRONG

WHO'S THE BEST?

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COMPANIONS
With her boyfriend, *Game of Thrones* actor Richard Madden