MOCKINGJAY PART 2: THE PRICE OF WAR

DOCTOR WHO
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LIVING IT UP ON THE TARDIS

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RISE OF THE SUPERVILLAINS

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AS THE SUN BEATS DOWN on the roof of a posh Los Angeles hotel cabana in July, there's happens to be a relaxed duo of note inside taking tea. Peter Capaldi and Jenna Coleman, known to genre fans around the world as the Twelfth Doctor Who and his companion, Clara Oswald, respectively, are looking fresh and gorgeous and still. And that's the surprising element of this scenario, that they aren't running from evil Daleks or desperately working the controls of their time-traveling TARDIS, which is how audiences are used to seeing them. In fact, the world is happily not ending around them as they enjoy a quiet lunch. All of that typical chaos is the domain of their day job at Doctor Who, the 50-year-old British sci-fi institution that paired them together for the eighth season of the modern incarnation of the show. Their first season together was fraught with moral quandaries, life and death decisions, and even less that separated them seemingly forever until the episode "Last Christmas" found them confessing and recommitting to their mission together.

Today they are taking a break from filming the ninth season (after a San Diego Comic-Con appearance) to talk to Sci Fi magazine exclusively about what fans can expect from their characters in the new season.

First off, after being a life-long Doctor Who fan, you now have a season of playing the character on your resume. What floored you the most about inhabiting him?

PETER CAPALDI: I was surprised how tough some of the acting challenges were because in one scene you can have tragedy and comedy so you have to be quite nimble in moving about those emotions. You have to make it look of a oneness. You have to play to an audience that ranges from little kids to old people. Not every show does that so you have to be attentive to their needs so it's quite an acting workout. Also working with Jenna, who is a fabulous actress...

JENNA COLEMAN: I'm one of the challenges! [Laughs]

PC: It is because you don't take the easiest route. I might meander my way through a scene and Jenna comes up with something more complex which means I have to pay attention and work a bit harder. But these are all great things and not complaints.

Do you have a better sense of how to play your version of the Doctor now?

PC: The first year was trying to find out who he is because that's part of the process of regeneration. I don't think the regenerated person knows who he is so he has to discover that. I think the Doctor I played was more conflicted about the cost of his morality. If he was going to do something for the greater good was he okay that other people may die or suffer? He continues to struggle with that but now, this season—even at two and half thousand years old—life is short so I think he's embracing the joy that life's full of being with Clara and running straight into danger. There's a sense of them as a little gang with this fantastic toy box that allows them to explore time and space and they are really going with that.
Last season put Clara through the wringer with some terrible choices laid on her and losing her love, Danny Pink (Samuel Anderson), and seeing him brought back as a Cyberman. Has Clara come through all of that?

JC: I think last series the Doctor was the one who was willing to jump off the cliff and Clara was holding him back, and at times, bringing him to his senses. But since the death of Danny, in this series Clara is on the cliff face with him kind of egging each other to jump.

PC: Clara is very reckless in this and I don’t know if it’s a consequence of the whole Danny thing but she’s much wilder.

JC: I think she realizes how short life is and while she’s here, she wants to spend it with the Doctor and live and see and do as much as she can. She almost doesn’t fear her own mortality as much anymore and that is in the situations they are put in, a dangerous way to live. There’s a sense of freedom and commitment to life on the TARDIS. There’s nothing to hold her back as her life on Earth is not the life she had before. In a way, she’s throwing herself into TARDIS life.

Does their joint embracing of the TARDIS define the purpose of their missions this season?

JC: Yes, they are living it up!

PC: There’s something in that. One of the great things about Doctor Who is it can ask profound questions while having men in rubber monster suits running up and down corridors. It’s a lot about mortality and I think that’s raising a question about how to spend your life. In this season, they’ve decided to extract every sensation from every moment. They have realized they are in this incredibly privileged position so they are running with it. Clara in particular. One of the reasons the Doctor is quite complex to play is that he has a knowledge of all things and all times. With Clara, I think he knows Clara’s fate even though she doesn’t. I think it’s a conscious decision to enjoy things while it’s okay to do that and before the thing comes that stops them from enjoying themselves anymore.

Missy (Michelle Gomez) will return as the most recent incarnation of the Doctor’s nemesis The Master. She really messed with your dynamic last year. How does she impact you this season?

JC: She comes in a way you wouldn’t expect this series. What we explore in the first episodes is the history of her friendship with the Doctor and how far back it goes, and that is a really dysfunctional, weird friendship.

The Zygons are back this season. As a fan, how was it getting to play with them again?

PC: It’s great to have the Zygons back. Although they were there for the 50th, this is a full-on, two-part Zygon invasion. In some ways, it’s very like traditional TARDIS episodes and in other ways completely different. It’s quite satirical in the sense that it reflects some of the conflicts in the world today which was really interesting. Plus we got the great fun of chasing the Zygons around a supermarket. Some days things like that happen and I felt the whole crew’s spirits lift because somehow you are doing something so exclusively Doctor Who, chasing this poor man in an old minicab, hoping he doesn’t stumble into the pizza counter for camouflage. All of it was great.

I remember the Zygons from the first time around with [Fourth Doctor] Tom Baker and the costume design is the same but we have more sophisticated special effects and makeup. We made them look great and that was fun in terms of revisiting a monster and it could only be done this year what we do with them. I always get a thrill when we visit an old monster, or old situation, and there is a deepening shadow that moves through the season but you have to be very astute to spot what it is.

Unlike some seasons, this year feels like its allowing you to really dive into your history and mythology instead of breakneck one-shot episodes. Is that more fun to do?

JC: It’s nice because we’re mainly two-parter this year which means we get to spend more time in the places we get to visit, more time with the villains and the supporting characters. There are cliffhangers so there’s more of an arc and that’s been really good.