

The man in the blue box

As a child, Peter Capaldi played *Doctor Who* in a bedroom wardrobe – now he has a Tardis of his own

THE RT INTERVIEW BY ALISON GRAHAM

PETER CAPALDI SNORTS with laughter as he describes the “BBC Entertainment version of *The Ipcress File*” that surrounded his unveiling as the 12th Doctor in a glittery, dry-iced, peak-time BBC1 show last August.

“There was a lot of cloak-and-dagger stuff on the way to the studio; the BBC genuinely felt it had to maintain secrecy so I was taken to a car park, dropped off by one car and put in another car with a blanket over my head. For all I knew, because I couldn’t see or hear anything, there might have been no one there and it could all have been a load of baloney.”

Surely being treated like a spy in a Len Deighton novel must have been exciting as he shrugged on the mantle of his lifelong hero last year after weeks of fervid speculation? “Yes, if you’re 15... But you just have to go, ‘OK, yeah, if you insist.’”

If this makes Capaldi, whose first, feature-length adventure is unveiled this Saturday, sound a bit grumpy and grudging, it shouldn’t. He’s cheerfully funny and a blessedly good talker. We’re here because Capaldi – an actor, Oscar-winning film-maker, writer, artist – has seized one of British TV’s great roles at the age of 56. He’s the oldest ever Doctor, a devotee of the show from its shaky black-and-white beginnings, who crosses the

threshold of the Tardis after two cute “boyfriend Doctors”, David Tennant and Matt Smith.

When we meet, on a fetid, broiling hot day in London, he’s almost completed filming his first series and is striding onto the *Doctor Who* publicity treadmill that inevitably accompanies what is now, inescapably, a global “brand” sold around the world by the BBC’s commercial arm, BBC Worldwide. It’s a planet-spanning success – last year’s 50th anniversary special was broadcast simultaneously in 94 countries and Capaldi’s launch includes *Doctor Who*’s first-ever “world tour” of five continents in 12 days. “These markets are really, really crazy for *Doctor Who*. It’s huge in South Korea and gigantic in Mexico,” says the new Doctor.

But first, the *Radio Times* photoshoot. Capaldi arrives, breezy and smiling to shake the hands of everyone in the room before throwing himself into various poses for the photographer and RT’s art team. “As you have seen today, I just go where people tell me, because that’s the nature of the operation,” he says later over lunch, as we both dig into a huge bowl of chips. (“How are we going to get through that? That is a huge amount of chips, a vat of chips.”)

We know each other, a bit. I first interviewed him in 2006 on the set of *The Thick of It*, at the height of my unwholesome crush on the long streak of bile that was swearsy government apparatchik Malcolm Tucker, one of Capaldi’s defining >



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< characters. We've since hailed one another across crowded rooms, mainly at Bafta Awards dos from which he has emerged, to my continued bafflement, empty-handed (nominations, but no prizes, for *The Thick of It* and *The Hour*).

Never mind, because now he's the Doctor. As a child growing up in Glasgow with his Irish mum and Italian dad, he was a fan, so did he ever actually see himself, all grown up, as the two-hearted time-traveller? "I never thought I would be in the frame for it because the Doctors were getting younger and younger and that was fine."

A call from his agent tilted his world towards the Tardis. "She said, 'How would you feel about being the new Doctor Who?' And I just started laughing very joyfully. It was such a wonderful idea and even if it never went any further, just getting that phone call was great fun."

But it did, eventually, go much further when

'I'm not an expert on *Doctor Who*, despite being into it as a kid'

he auditioned at showrunner Steven Moffat's house. (Moffat has said since that Capaldi's was the only name on his 12th Doctor wish-list.) Not much later, as he filmed the BBC1 drama *The Musketeers* in Prague, he phoned his agent. "She said, 'Hello Doctor,' and that was great. But I couldn't tell anyone. I was dressed as Cardinal Richelieu and I couldn't say a word to anyone on the set, so I just had to go off into a corner."

AND HE HAD to lie. "I wandered around Prague singing the *Doctor Who* theme to myself with a great beard, which I had to shave off for the presentation of myself as Doctor Who. I had to explain why I'd shaved off the beard so I told them I was doing a pilot for a new show with [*The Thick of It* creator] Armando Iannucci."

When we meet, Capaldi is just finishing his 28th consecutive week of filming. He works in Cardiff throughout the week and returns home to north London at weekends. "*Doctor Who* is a very intense working experience because, like most things at the BBC, there's not quite enough money and money is time and there's really not quite enough time to do it, so you are always on the hoof, pedalling as fast as you can."

The budget question has flapped around *Doctor Who* since its inception in 1963. Most recently, Moffat insisted there'll never be any on-screen evidence of tight funding but admitted the 50th anniversary episode was "extraordinarily difficult. We were making a feature-length *Doctor Who* on the schedule and budget for an hour."

So after a couple of sprightly, tail-wagging Doctors, will Capaldi's be mature and sage-like à la William Hartnell? "I think I'm a more grown-up Doctor, but he's still mirthful. He is serious when he needs to be but he's still quite comic."

On his very first day of filming, Capaldi had to step out of the Tardis: "I'd never been in the police box before, apart from the wardrobe at home when I was a kid pretending it was a police box. I was shocked to find that it *was* just like a wardrobe, like something your dad had

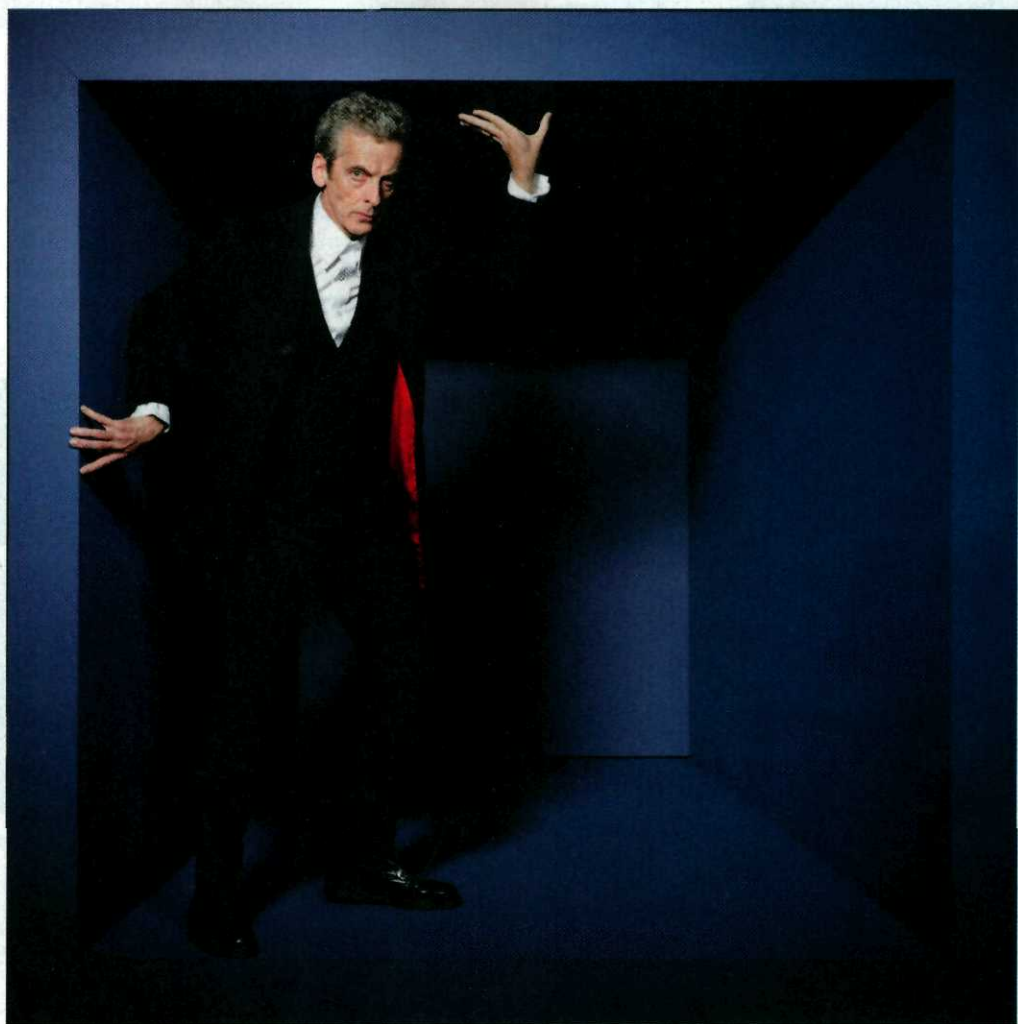
made. And there was a prop bloke and a smoke machine. When I had to step out of it, it was quite nerve-racking, but delightful as well."

Not that Capaldi thinks he's found his feet just yet, even as the end of the first series hurtles towards him. "I don't know if it's quite fallen into place yet. I think it's a mistake to get it to click, to get into a groove. I've tried to avoid finding a way to do it and then just repeating that. I'm trying all the time to see what works and what doesn't work, though I'm trying to bring back some of the Doctor's mystery and strangeness, which is hard to do given that the show is 50 years old." Even as a lifelong fan he insists: "I'm not an expert on *Doctor Who*, despite being a kid who was really into it."

CAPALDI IS, OF COURSE, a serious man who's serious about his work (he's been all over British TV for decades in *The Crow Road*, *Prime Suspect 3*, *Peep Show*, *The Devil's Whore*, *The Vicar of Dibley*) but mercifully he doesn't imprint *Doctor Who* with great cosmic, existential purpose.

"*Doctor Who* is monsters, corridors to run up and down, sets that shake occasionally, some over-the-top acting, some under-the-top acting, some magic, some Grimm's fairy-tale darkness." >

WHO'S THAT?
Capaldi as Richelieu in *The Musketeers* and Malcolm Tucker in *The Thick of It*



◁ As a boy until his early teens he avidly watched the Saturday-evening adventures of the first four Doctors – William Hartnell, Patrick Troughton, Jon Pertwee, Tom Baker – until he found other pursuits as a teenager. “I loved it from the start and stayed with it until I was 17, then, probably about halfway through Tom Baker’s reign, I checked out.”

Young Peter Capaldi even wrote a letter to *Radio Times* when he was 15, praising our “excellent Dr Who Special”. He cringes when I bring this up: “Yes, that’s embarrassing, do you really want to see your 15-year-old self..?”

IN THE OLD days, *Doctor Who* episodes couldn’t be subjected to the pinprick levels of scrutiny they receive today from fans. “Nowadays, with DVDs and all that sort of thing, things are available and you can watch programmes over and over again, but in those days, that wasn’t the case. They went out on a Saturday evening and if you missed them, you missed them. If you saw them, you saw them, you couldn’t rewind them, you couldn’t see the joins, which is why I don’t like looking at the old episodes now.

“I can see that they’re struggling with a lack of money and time. But what you also see is a great creativity, you see people working and coming up with great ideas, notions and costumes. Sometimes they can’t deliver because they don’t have the resources. But to see other worlds being brought to life in the corner of your sitting room as they flicker on the telly is just magical.”

Doctor Who was never, and will never be, buff and shiny. “It’s not sci-fi, it’s not *Star Trek*, all gleaming corridors and smart American people walking around sorting things out. *Doctor Who* is more crumbly than that, darker, more tobacco-stained and creepier.” It is also “just great fun, a big, daft popular TV show with lots of wonderful things in it that people either like or they don’t like, or they pass through it and they like it occasionally.”

Capaldi has had many supportive chats/texts/lunches with his immediate

predecessors, David Tennant and Matt Smith. What advice did they give, can I ask? “No, that’s exclusive to the small club of Doctor Whos.” Whatever they told him, he found it useful: “Sometimes you’re in the middle of a big production that has a lot of BBC politics and administration at work and it’s a big commercial vehicle. But you’re an actor and sometimes have to compare notes to see how the others might have felt about the things I am going through or am being asked to do. It’s good to be able to chat to people who have been in the same situation.”

More prosaically, it’s good to chat about the workload: “It’s nice to talk to people who know what it’s like to get back to your flat at 7.30 at night and still have five pages of dialogue to

learn for the next day and the hours are ticking away, and you’ve still got to get some sleep. It’s good to have something to do with people who you have seen triumph in that situation.”

Of course, where there is a Doctor, there is a companion, in this case the sensible likeable Clara (Jenna Coleman). At 27, she’s under half his age, so a pretty young woman and an older man rattling around in a police box, time for a bit of queasy inter-generational hanky-panky..?

BUT NO, CAPALDI is emphatic, there will be no funny business in the Tardis. “It’s not a romantic relationship. Clara has to keep him in line, he’s not good at getting human beings. That includes her. At first she doesn’t know him. He has completely changed and she struggles. But he has a deep affection for her and wants to make sure she’s looked after.”

As we talk, we are still a few weeks away from the two-pronged “world premiere” of the first episode, which was screened, accompanied by Capaldi, Moffat and Coleman press conferences, on the same day in Cardiff, where *Doctor Who* is filmed, and later in London. Capaldi was rapturously received – I somehow ended up holding

his Coca-Cola as he signed autographs for children at the after-screening party in the British Film Institute.

At our interview, he says: “I have been in the bubble of making the show for seven months so I’m not really aware of how it functions in the world, I don’t quite know what is going to happen to me now. Maybe nothing will happen to me. That would be fine but life may change dramatically. I hope it doesn’t, but David and Matt made clear to me that there are things that will change, that you have to be prepared for, like your visibility.”

With this in mind, before accepting the role, Capaldi and his wife, Elaine Collins, a TV producer ▷

‘It’s embarrassing to see your 15-year-old self’

Dalek-builders

May I congratulate you on your excellent Dr Who Special. The articles, photos, and especially the Terry Nation Dalek story with the twist in the tail, were excellent. The Dalek construction plans will have no doubt

inspired many a school to build their own Daleks. Who knows, the country could be invaded by an army of school Daleks! Ah, but we’d be safe, as we’d have Dr Who to protect us! Your Special has certainly made the year for Dr Who fans. A rather sad year due to the untimely death of the Master, alias Roger Delgado. But I hope that in 15 years’ time, in 1988, you will publish another Special to celebrate 25 years of wandering in time with the Doctor.

Glasgow

Peter Capaldi (aged 15)

BACK TO THE FUTURE

Look who wrote in to RT in 1974, congratulating us for our *Doctor Who* Tenth Anniversary Special

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STEVEN MOFFAT’S GUIDE ▶

◁ (the couple have a grown-up daughter), talked about what they could expect, including press intrusion. "We had a big talk. I've been very lucky. My life has been blessed and I had to think whether I wanted to change that. I was happy walking down the street doing what I want to do without having paparazzi there. And yes, we agreed there'd be pluses and minuses but so much of it was unknown."

Is he ready for the potentially enormous, distorting focus on his personal life? "My personal life is quite dull, there's not much to be interested in. I think that's one of the advantages of being this age, I'm not going to be running around clubs or buying a Ferrari."

OF COURSE, the early Doctors didn't have to throw up their arms against the instant criticism of social media and, particularly Twitter. Is Capaldi worried he might get a flaming? "I'm not on Twitter or Facebook, I don't feel like a fuddy-duddy because I don't care and I don't have time. It's impossible for me to escape people's opinions, I don't go out there looking for them, but it would be impossible not to know whether one is generally favoured or unfavoured."

"But, you know, I was alive for 50 years before Twitter, empires grew, the Roman Empire came and went, in World War Two the Allies managed to defeat the fascist menace without Twitter, so I think I will be OK."

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STEVEN MOFFAT'S EPISODE GUIDE

THE LAST TIME we saw him, the brand-new Doctor was clinging to the Tardis controls, asking, "Do you happen to know how to fly this thing?" But what happened next?

Those famous engines are roaring in the sky. The madman in the box has never looked madder, and Clara Oswald has never been so scared. The time of Capaldi is upon us!

1 Deep Breath

Written by Steven Moffat

Directed by Ben Wheatley

"Who frowned me this face?"

In late-1890s London, swashbuckling detectives Vastra, Jenny and Strax are summoned to the banks of the Thames for a big surprise, and then an even bigger one. A new Doctor is in town, with mayhem in his wake. As Clara struggles to recognise the man she thought she knew so well, killers stalk the capital. A slaughterhouse restaurant and a buried spaceship lead the Doctor into a confrontation with a long-forgotten foe... but how far is this new man ready to go to protect his friends?



2 Into the Dalek

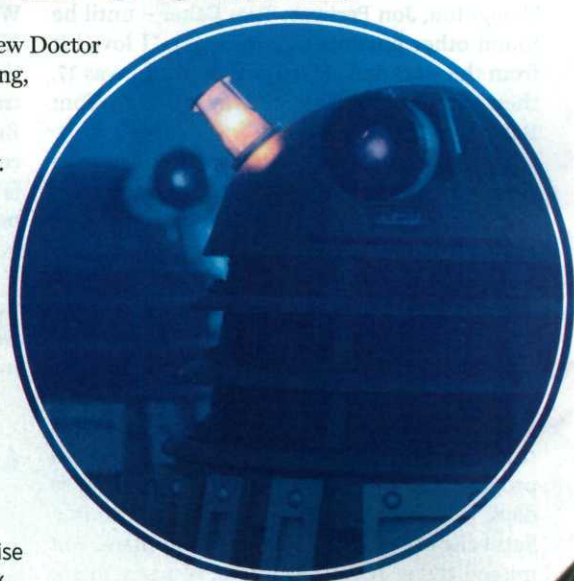
Written by Phil Ford and Steven Moffat

Directed by Ben Wheatley

Introducing Samuel Anderson as Danny Pink

"Imagine the worst thing in the universe, and then don't bother because you're looking at it right now. This is evil refined as engineering."

What's the most dangerous place in the universe? Where is the last place the Doctor should ever stand? He's faced with his deadliest mission yet – a journey into the heart of darkness, one even he is scared to make. In the dying days of a bitter war, a



beleaguered human army has one last hope: a Dalek so damaged it has become good. But can it be trusted? To find out, a miniaturised team, led by the Doctor and Clara, embark on a fantastic voyage into the Dalek itself...

3 Robot of Sherwood

Written by Mark Gatiss

Directed by Paul Murphy

Guest stars Tom Riley (Robin), Ben Miller (Sheriff)

"There's no such thing as Robin Hood!"

They meet at last! This island's greatest hero and defender of the innocent comes face to face with the Doctor. Robin Hood can't be real. In a sun-dappled Sherwood Forest, the Doctor discovers an evil plan from beyond the stars. But with all of Nottingham at stake (and possibly Derby), there's no time for the two adventurers to get into a fight about who is real and who isn't – which is probably why they do very little else!

4 Listen

Written by Steven Moffat

Directed by Douglas Mackinnon

"What's that in the mirror, and the corner of your eye? What's the footstep following, but never passing by?"

What happens when the Doctor is alone – pacing the Tardis by candlelight, poking the shadows with a stick, listening for a footfall among all those endless, empty rooms. What scares the grand old man of space and time? What horrors lurk under his bed? Ghosts of the past and future crowd into the lives of the Doctor and Clara: a terrified caretaker in a children's home, the last man standing in the universe, and a little boy who doesn't want to join the army...



5 Time Heist

Written by Stephen Thompson and Steven Moffat
Directed by Douglas Mackinnon
Guest star Keeley Hawes

"Welcome to the bank of Karabraxos."

The Bank of Karabraxos is the deadliest bank in the cosmos – only a fool or a genius would attempt to rob it. Fortunately for the Doctor, he's both. With the help of a beautiful shape-shifter and cyber-augmented gamer, the Doctor and Clara fight their way past the most dangerous security system ever devised. But nothing even the Doctor has encountered can prepare them for the Teller: a creature of terrifying power that can detect guilt.

6 The Caretaker

Written by Gareth Roberts and Steven Moffat
Directed by Paul Murphy

"Human beings have incredibly short life-spans. Frankly, you should all be in a permanent state of panic. Tick tock, tick tock!"

Clara has it all under control: her life at school, her life in space; her new boyfriend and her mad old Time Lord. Everything is humming along just fine, so long as everybody never actually meets. And then, one morning, just before assembly, Coal Hill welcomes a new relief caretaker with a Scottish accent. With Clara's world about to explode around her, terrifying events near the school make it clear that the rest of the world is about to do the same. The Skovox Blitzer is ready to destroy all humanity – and worse, any second now, Danny Pink and the Doctor are going to meet...



7 Kill the Moon

Written by Peter Harness
Directed by Paul Wilmshurst
Guest stars Hermione Norris, Tony Osoba

"This little planetoid that's been tagging along beside you for a hundred million years, which gives you light at night and seas to sail, is in the process of falling to bits."

In the near future, the Doctor and Clara arrive on a decrepit shuttle making a suicide mission to the Moon. Crashing on the lunar surface, they find a mining base full of eviscerated corpses, spider-like creatures scuttling in the dark, and a terrible dilemma. When Clara turns to the Doctor for help, she gets the shock of her life. Is the man she's trusted so long really a hero after all? Is he even her friend?

8 Mummy on the Orient Express

Written by Jamie Mathieson
Directed by Paul Wilmshurst
Guest stars Frank Skinner, Foxes, David Bamber

"Start the clock!"

Aboard the most beautiful train in history, speeding among the stars of the future, a legend is stalking the passengers. Once you see the Mummy, you have 66 seconds to live. No exceptions, no reprieve. As the Doctor races against the clock to defeat this mythical foe, Clara sees him at his deadliest and most ruthless – and finally realises she's made the right decision. Because this is their last adventure: it's time to say goodbye to the Time Lord.

9 Flatline

Written by Jamie Mathieson
Directed by Douglas Mackinnon

"Look, your house isn't going anywhere. And neither is mine until I figure this out."

Separated from the Doctor, Clara discovers a new menace from another dimension. But how do you hide when even the walls are no protection? With people to save and no madman in a box to help, Clara goes against an enemy that exists beyond normal human perception.

10 In the Forest of the Night

Written by Frank Cottrell Boyce
Directed by Sheree Folkson

"D'you like the forest being in Trafalgar Square? I think it's lovely."

One morning in London, and every city and town in the world, the human race wakes up to the most surprising invasion yet: the trees have moved back in. Everywhere, in every land, a forest has grown overnight and taken back the Earth – an impossible stranglehold of vegetation. The Doctor soon realises that the final days of humanity have arrived...

11 Dark Water 12 Death in Heaven

Written by Steven Moffat
Directed by Rachel Talalay
Guest stars Michelle Gomez, Chris Addison, Sanjeev Bhaskar, Jemma Redgrave, Ingrid Oliver

"You betrayed me. You betrayed my trust, our friendship, and everything I've ever stood for. You let me down."

In the mysterious world of the Nethersphere, plans have been drawn. Old friends and old enemies manoeuvre around the Doctor, and an impossible choice is looming before him. Death is not an end, promises the sinister organisation known only as 3W – but, as the Doctor and Clara discover, you might wish it was.



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