

## Interview: Simon Pegg, Nick Frost Partner With 'Paul'

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CHICAGO – Simon Pegg and Nick Frost are a movie team and British treasures. Acclaimed for their previous teaming in “Shaun of the Dead” and “Hot Fuzz,” Pegg and Frost both wrote and star in their latest comedy, the space alien farce “Paul.”

Pegg and Frost are long time friends and collaborators, performing together for the first time in 1999 on the British cult TV show “Spaced.” The popular films Shaun (2004) and Hot Fuzz (2007) came afterwards, both co-written (with Pegg) and directed by Edgar Wright, who was also behind Spaced. Simon Pegg also does character roles, most notably taking over the Montgomery “Scotty” Scott persona in 2009’s “Star Trek.”



Leading the Geek Army: Simon Pegg (Graeme) and Nick Frost (Clive) in 'Paul'  
*Photo credit: Universal Pictures*

The film’s title, Paul, refers to the name of an extra terrestrial alien under government care. Pegg and Frost portray fan boys from Britain going to their first Comicon convention in San Diego. Deciding to also take an RV tour of America’s UFO sites, they literally run into Paul as he escapes from Area 51. The film is directed by American Greg Mottola (“Superbad,” “Adventureland”) and becomes a race between the government versus Pegg and Frost as Paul’s protectors.

HollywoodChicago.com engaged in a lively exchange with the dynamic UK duo, in anticipation the release of Paul on Friday.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Now that most modern actors will have to work on ‘green-screen sets,’ and learn to act towards nothingness or a

ball on a stick, what tips do the both of you have in regard to working on Paul?

**Simon Pegg:** Basically you have to go back to when you were a kid, play acting and dragging out of your imagination. It's hard to be a method actor when you're acting to nothing. But when we were kids we made entire universes out of our bed clothes.

**Nick Frost:** We were very lucky because Paul didn't have much green screen. It was us talking to several different stand-ins. There was a child, a shorter actor, a man holding a grey ball, a lighting puppet and an animatronic puppet. Also red dots for our eye line and sticks with ping-pong balls. You get used to it, we talked to Greg about it, and by the time you get to shoot it, it's all part of the process. Although if Paul had been a human, we would have wrapped it a month earlier. [laughs] The saving grace is that we had Joe Lo Truglio [fellow cast member] doing Paul's lines, so we weren't acting to nothing.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Paul has distinct personality traits after being detained in Area 51 for 65 years. Where did you feel that he got most of those traits, in the aspect of what part of American culture did he specifically absorb in confinement?

**Frost:** He watched a lot of TV, there was not much to do on the base. We were talking the other day about his time on the base, and at first I'm sure there was a lot of tests, then after 15 or 20 years you just see him wandering around with a paper under his arm. [laughs]

**Pegg:** The security guy at night just seeing Paul walking around with a bathrobe on. It would have been nice to do a shot of the evolution of Paul's televisions. From the small grainy ones of the early 1950s, to a huge 63-in. one right before he left. I like to think Paul got here, watched a lot of our science fiction, and said 'this isn't right.' [laughs]

**HollywoodChicago.com:** We've had so many types of outer-space aliens in art and cultural history. Do you think in essence that the citizens of earth desire proof positive of other beings in the universe or would they rather dream of it and get the variety of imagination?

**Pegg:** I think it would be an incredibly sobering thing to discover life on other planets. It would change everything. That's what really interested us about this film, even though it was a comedy, is the idea that we would have to reconsider everything. If the reality came, it might not be as fun.

**Frost:** Yeah, it's nice to imagine them coming down and it being cool, but when they start feeding, it would be 'why did we wish this!' [laughs]

**HollywoodChicago.com:** You've described this film as a valentine to the great Steven Spielberg. In your close encounters with the man himself, what has struck you about his worldview that continues to influence both cinema and culture? And was there anything he wanted to change about his cameo as you first wrote it?

**Pegg:** The thing about Steven is that he is a lover of film, and has a huge understanding of film, but he's not a snob when it comes to popular cinema. He understands you can make great films with slightly frivolous subject matter, such as science fiction, which so-called serious filmmakers might consider ephemera. He's maintained that his entire career. He loves fantasy and magic, not just of cinema but of life. He totally embraces that as a filmmaker. We didn't change anything about his cameo. It was his idea to do it in the first place. He was like, 'what if I call Paul?' We were like, 'okay.'

I think the word 'genius' is bantered around a bit too much about people, but he is it and that is it. We worked out how the scene would work and stuff, but we weren't really sure. Within two minutes, Steven would come in and say, 'okay, we do this and the camera is right there.' And we just said, 'yeah.' That's how he works, and just to see his enthusiasm now, you just want to be around it. After a month, we were referred to as 'his boys.' That was incredible.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** I read online that you both took an actual road trip through America and added those experiences in writing the script. In that context, what do you think most fascinates and creeps out the average American when they encounter a Brit?

**Frost:** I think our accents. I think they probably think we're gay, and intelligent, for some reason. [laughs]

**Pegg:** A lot of Americans view us as quite antiquated as a people, because we come from a very old country. America is a very young, thrusting and positive, there is a great spirit of purpose and pioneerism. It's a very emotionally honest place. It's young, it feels young. Whereas the UK feels like an old man, and Americans view it as a museum in the sea.

**Frost:** I kind of think they think we're up to something.

**Pegg:** There is this huge, different foreign country, yet we speak the same language. It's kind of deceptive because you think we're the same, but we're not the same. You're as different to us, as we are to the Germans, or whatever. And yet we have this brilliant connection because we speak the same language and share pop culture.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** And I was reading that producers wanted to do an American version of your British TV show "Spaced," and Edgar Wright said it wouldn't work because you were celebrating American pop culture in Britain, but it wouldn't be the same if Americans were just celebrating Americans...

**Pegg:** Yeah, like 'The Office' was a perfect one to remake because it could be lifted out and applied to America. Spaced would have been trickier, and if they had done it, we would have had some say about who wrote it. It would have to be an interpretation of the show, not a remake. It was very much about being in millennial London, and being a slacker there, growing up on a diet of American pop culture.

**Frost:** I'm speaking for Edgar, Simon and Jessica [Hynes, a co-creator of Spaced], I wasn't involved in the creation of the show, but as a man-to-man point of view, it was terribly disrespectful to try to remake something without involving the original creators. Pay a certain amount of respect.



**Pegg:** It wasn't about the money, it was just that our show, which contained a lot of personal details, was somehow a commodity. It wasn't a commodity, but it was our expression of what we felt.



In the Beginning: Nick Frost and Simon Pegg in 'Shaun of the Dead'  
*Photo credit: Universal Pictures*

**HollywoodChicago.com:** You've both opined on your particular viewpoints regarding religion, and have overt references toward Christianity in Paul. In your opinion, what kind of force or dynamic does religion create in our interpersonal relationships and cultural negotiations in the 21st Century?

**Frost:** Jesus Christ, you do know it's a comedy, right? [laughs]

**Pegg:** There are a lot of wonderful things that come out of religion, and it all has to do with cooperation and love. Most religions at their heart promote unity, respect for life and moral correctness. Obviously it can lead into fights because people believe different things.

With Paul, we weren't trying to any kind of statement about religion in that regard, it more like wouldn't it be interesting if we had to rethink our entire belief system, because of one moment. We got the the idea for Kristin Wiig's character from the film 'Pieces of April,' Alison Pill plays a wonderful strait-laced Christian girl in that one. We talked about it the next day at work, and said wouldn't it be great if we had that figure meet Paul, and what that would it do to her. And for us, it wasn't about the relative merits of religion, more about saying silly swear words. [laughs]

I would hope, as a person who has a Christian spirit if not the religion, that people watching the film will have a sense of humor about it. It's a comedy. We're not telling people how to think. We certainly don't look down on anyone's opinion.

**Frost:** I think it would be more insulting not imagining Christians having a sense of humor. I admire the amazing feeling of having faith in something. That is something I miss in my life as well, and I can absolutely believe in that kind of faith. I think, 'I wish I was a bit more like that.'

**Pegg:** Christians will watch this and think, 'silly boys.' [laughs] Who will get the last laugh? They'll be laughing in heaven and we'll be languishing in hell for making a silly film.



Nick Frost and Simon Pegg in Chicago, March 9th, 2011  
Photo credit: Patrick McDonald for HollywoodChicago.com

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Your films tend to be highly romantic...about subject matter, your relationship to each other and of course the genre. How does this high level of romance work in your real world lives?

**Frost:** A lot of flowers get bought. [laughs] We've always been romantics. I've been fortunate enough to meet a woman who is not really a romantic, she is very practical. But I just got her name tattooed on me, it's very romantic, I thought she would really gush when I came in and said, look what I done for you!

**HollywoodChicago.com:** I'm glad you indicated that you were rolling up your sleeve for that.

**Frost:** [Laughs] That's true. Her name is Christina and I wouldn't have gotten all that on there. It would have been Chris...[laughs]

**Pegg:** You spelled it wrong, that was the big problem.

**Frost:** Yes, my wife is now named Christian.

**Pegg:** We're quite sentimental in a way, and British people don't tend to be sentimental. Well, we are, but we tend to be a bit ashamed of it.

**Frost:** We do it under a blanket when no one is looking.

**Pegg:** Americans are must less inclined to do that, they are less ashamed of their emotions and are less repressed than we are. American culture is much more sentimental than British culture. If someone is on a chat show in America and they start crying, there is applause, and not a hint of giggling. Which there would be in the UK, and also shut up, can it.

By taking on the great American tropes, like zombie and action movies, we've been able to embrace that love of emotion and also indulge in it as well. I'm going to sound like a hippie now, but it's so much more positive to infuse what you do with love, than scorn or spite.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Now that you're one of the great movie teams, which of the other pairings in film history fascinate you the most, both in greatness and decline?

**Frost:** Laurel and Hardy.

**Pegg:** Yeah, I love Laurel and Hardy growing up. I would never be as bold to compare ourselves to them, but I love Laurel and Hardy for their fantastic chemistry and amazing adept comedy awareness that they have. I also loved Richard Pryor and Gene Wilder.

**Frost:** In Britain, there's only one left now, but 'The Two Ronnies,' Ronnie Barker and Ronnie Corbett. Morecambe and Wise was another team. We look at them and admire what they do. With Morecambe and Wise, you look at what they did in the 1970s and think it would be amazing now.

**Pegg:** It's nice to be able to work with your friend, and I think a lot of those relationships were like that in cinema teams. Nick and I were friends for six years before we actually worked together. That still infuses what we do. We're first and foremost, we're friends.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Let's talk about the songs you use in your film soundtracks. I'm always amazed that you seem to get the right song for the right moment. What is the process for that, do you hear it in your head when you're writing a certain scene or does it emerge later?

**Pegg:** We listen to a lot of music when we write. It's on all the time. On the soundtrack for Paul, it was the director Greg Mottola. We can't take all the credit for soundtrack choices, because the director is at the helm, and he's in the edit.

**Frost:** We got together, us and Greg and Chris Dickens the editor. We had our iPods and would make suggestions.

**Pegg:** It was Greg that was the mastermind behind Electric Light Orchestra for Paul.

**Frost:** Which has a resonance with sci-fi because of that amazing album cover.

**Pegg:** That’s why we got Greg in the first place, is that he had exactly the sensibility we were after. We knew he would make the film we wanted to make. One, Edgar Wright wasn’t available and also we knew that Edgar wasn’t quite the right man for the job. We needed the approach to be a little more restrained. Edgar’s approach is a character in itself. Greg had given ‘Superbad’ a wonderful subtle comedy. A really classy edge, which could have been a gross-out teen comedy. ‘Daytrippers,’ his first film, was a great road movie. The idea of doing Daytrippers with an alien was really appealing to us. [laughs]

**HollywoodChicago.com:** A question specific to you, Nick. In Paul there is overt references to your and Simon’s partnership, as being so close together that people mistake you for gay. How come the typical Nick Frost character never gets to make out with a woman in the films you two are paired in?

**Frost:** I don’t know, I think it’s easier for a cinema audience to watch Simon getting it off with a girl than a big fat lug like me. [laughs] It’s just the way it works with our partnership.

**Pegg:** From the outside looking in, ‘Shaun of the Dead’ was about a love triangle, there could only be three of us. In ‘Hot Fuzz,’ neither of us had a love interest, because it’s for each other. But in Paul we decided quite early that Nick’s character had a thing for short women dressed as Ewoks.

**Frost:** Who wants to see a big man getting off with an Ewok. Hello! [laughs]

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Finally, Simon, the inevitable ‘Star Trek’ question. After creating a mostly perfect Valentine to that universe, what geeky suggestions did you give Abrams as your addition to making either your character Scotty or the whole thing work?

**Pegg:** There is a lot of love and respect in that movie. I hope that it disarmed some of the more worried fans, that it was in the hands of someone who cared about it. You could disagree with the decisions, but you couldn’t disagree that it was done seriously.

All I said to J.J. Abrams is that, ‘can we do it again?’ I also said jokingly can Scotty have a love scene with an Orion girl. [laughs] What I do know the crew is still new to each other. The next film will still be exploring the process of getting to know each other. There won’t be just now there’s a new adventure. We’ve only just met.

My prediction is that Alex [Kurtzman] and Roberto [Orci] will write a lovely character piece, as well as a good sci-fi romp. I’m very excited about it. As far as filming goes, we’re all hoping for August or September.

*“Paul” opens everywhere March 18th. Featuring Simon Pegg, Nick Frost, Jeffrey Tambor, Jane Lynch, Seth Rogen, Jason Bateman, Kristen Wiig, Sigourney Weaver and Bill Hader. Screenplay by Simon Pegg and Nick Frost. Directed by Greg Mottola. Rated “R”*



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