

= Planet of the Dead =

" Planet of the Dead " is the second of five special episodes of the British science fiction television series Doctor Who broadcast between Christmas 2008 and New Years Day 2010 . It was simultaneously broadcast on BBC One and BBC HD on 11 April 2009 . The specials served as lead actor David Tennant 's denouement as the Tenth Doctor . He is joined in the episode by actress Michelle Ryan , who plays Lady Christina de Souza , a one @-@ off companion to the Doctor . The episode was co @-@ written by Russell T Davies and Gareth Roberts , the first writing partnership since the show 's revival in 2005 .

The episode depicts Christina fleeing the police from a museum robbery by boarding a bus that accidentally travels from London to the desert planet of San Helios , trapping her , the Doctor , and several passengers on board the damaged vehicle . After the bus driver dies trying to return to Earth , the Unified Intelligence Taskforce , headed by Captain Erisa Magambo (Noma Dumezweni) and scientific advisor Malcolm Taylor (Lee Evans) , attempt to return the bus while preventing a race of metallic stingray aliens from posing a threat to Earth . At the end of the episode , one of the passengers delivers a warning to the Doctor which foreshadows the remaining three specials .

" Planet of the Dead " was the first Doctor Who episode to be filmed in high definition , after a positive reaction to the visual quality of spin @-@ off series Torchwood and the financial viability of HDTV convinced the production team to switch formats . To ensure that the desert scenes looked as realistic as possible , the production team filmed in Dubai for three days , sending several props , including a 1980 double @-@ decker Bristol VR bus , to the United Arab Emirates for filming . After the bus was unintentionally damaged in Dubai by a shipping container , Davies rewrote the script to explain the damage in the narrative .

The audience gave the episode an Appreciation Index of 88 ? considered excellent .

= = Plot = =

A young , beautiful , thrill @-@ seeking burglar , Lady Christina de Souza , steals a gold chalice once belonging to King Æthelstan from a London museum and narrowly evades the police by hopping on a 200 bus . The Doctor , who is tracking down a wormhole , joins her shortly before the bus suddenly passes through the wormhole and arrives on the desert planet of San Helios . The Doctor shows the passengers the wormhole and deduces the bus protected them like a Faraday cage . The bus driver tries to go through despite the Doctor 's warnings . Seeing the driver 's skeleton coming out on the other side of the wormhole , the police call in UNIT , commanded by Captain Erisa Magambo and aided by scientific adviser Malcolm Taylor . The Doctor manages to contact UNIT on a passenger 's mobile phone and talks to Malcolm , who impresses him with his understanding of the wormhole .

The Doctor and Christina quickly get to know the handful of other passengers on the bus : Angela , Barclay , Nathan , Lou and Carmen , who has low @-@ level psychic abilities . The Doctor and Christina decide to scout the planet , spotting an approaching storm , while Nathan and Barclay try to fix the bus . The Doctor and Christina encounter a couple of Tritovores , a species resembling anthropomorphic flies , who take them to their wrecked spaceship .

The Tritovores explain that they were making a routine goods collection with San Helios when they crashed , and that the planet very recently housed a hundred billion inhabitants and a thriving ecosystem . At the request of the Doctor , the Tritovores send a probe to investigate approaching cloud and discover a large swarm of stingray @-@ like aliens who create wormholes by flying at terrific speed around planets , and are protected by their metal exoskeletons . They destroy the ecosystems of all the planets they visit as their biological imperative . The Doctor suspects that Earth may be the stingrays ' next target due to the wormhole they passed through before , and makes to hasten their return to Earth .

Christina uses her burglary skills to retrieve a crystal that powers the spaceship , together with the clamps attached to it . During this the Doctor discovers and recognizes the stolen gold chalice in her backpack , telling her that he knows she must have stolen it , but while he disapproves of the theft ,

he admits to her that it would be hypocritical to be too harsh on her about it , because , after all , he stole his TARDIS from his own people back in the day . Meanwhile , Christina accidentally awakens several stingrays that had caused the ship to crash in the first place , costing the life of the two Tritovores . Captain Magambo , who has also worked out that the earth is threatened , and that the wormhole is growing in size , orders Malcolm to close the wormhole but he refuses even at gunpoint to sacrifice the Doctor .

The Doctor throws away the crystal and attaches the clamps to the bus 's wheels and steering wheel . He finds the systems are incompatible and convinces Christina to let him use gold from the chalice of Æthelstan to connect the bus to the spaceship technology . The Doctor reveals that the clamps are anti @-@ gravity clamps . This allows the bus to fly through the wormhole , with the stingrays in hot pursuit . Taylor closes the wormhole but three of the stingrays manage to pass through it . After UNIT shoots down the stingrays and the passengers have been debriefed , Christina pleads with the Doctor to let her travel with him , but he refuses because he has no wish to lose another companion .

The characters part ways again . The Doctor recommends that UNIT hire Barclay and Nathan . Christina is arrested by the police for the theft and Carmen has a premonition that visibly unnerves the Doctor :

You be careful , because your song is ending , sir . It is returning , it is returning through the dark . And then Doctor ... oh , but then ... he will knock four times .

As a final act of kindness , the Doctor uses his sonic screwdriver to release Christina from her handcuffs , allowing her to escape in the bus . The pair part on good terms as she flies away and the Doctor leaves in his TARDIS .

= = Production = =

= = = Writing and casting = = =

Russell T Davies co @-@ wrote the episode with Gareth Roberts , the first writing partnership for the show since its 2005 revival . " Planet of the Dead " was a departure from Roberts ' usual stories ? Roberts had previously only written pseudo @-@ historical stories ? and instead consisted of wild science fiction elements from his literary career and teenage imagination . The episode had no clear concept ? such as Shakespeare and witches in " The Shakespeare Code " or Agatha Christie and a murder mystery in " The Unicorn and the Wasp " ? and instead was a deliberate " clash [of concepts] with many disparate elements " . Roberts explained he was cautious to ensure that each element had to " feel precise and defined ... like we meant that " , citing the serial Arc of Infinity as an example where such control was not enforced . The episode includes a common feature of Davies ' writing in that there is no clear antagonist : the Tritovore are eventually sympathetic to the protagonists and the stingrays are only following their biological imperative .

Unlike the Christmas specials , the theme of Easter was not emphasised in the story ; the episode only contained a " fleeting mention " of the holiday instead of " robot bunnies carrying baskets full of deadly egg bombs " . The episode 's tone word ? " joyous " ? was influenced by Davies ' realisation that " every story since ' The Fires of Pompeii ' [had] a bittersweet quality " and his subsequent desire to avoid the recurring theme . The starting point for the story was Roberts ' first novel The Highest Science . Davies liked the image of a train on a desert planet and rewrote the train as a bus . Davies nevertheless emphasised it was not an " adaptation as such " because tangential elements were constantly being conceived and added .

Michelle Ryan 's casting as Lady Christina de Souza was confirmed by the BBC on 23 January 2009 and attracted media attention owing to Ryan 's recent relatively high @-@ profile roles in EastEnders , Jekyll , Bionic Woman and Merlin . Ryan stated that she is " a huge fan of Doctor Who and [was] very excited to be joining David Tennant and the Doctor Who team . " Davies commented that " Michelle is one of the most sought after young actors in the country " and that they were " delighted to announce that she [would] be joining the team . " Ryan described her

casting as a " real honour " , noting that she " love [s] the character " .

Ryan was rumoured to be in line for a role as full @-@ time companion to the incoming Eleventh Doctor (Matt Smith) and her casting in " Planet of the Dead " , combined with her previous working history with incoming Executive Producer Steven Moffat - the two working together on Jekyll , fuelled speculation that she might return to Doctor Who accompanying the Eleventh Doctor in Series 5 . Ryan herself has said that she is open for a return to the character , however , stating that she is a commitment phobe at the moment and with regards to her character she views her as " someone who is around for this one @-@ time adventure " . " It had been reported that Ryan auditioned to replace Billie Piper in the companion role when her character , Rose Tyler , left in 2006 , but was unsuccessful . Ryan subsequently stated that this was false .

Ryan was interviewed by BBC News about her role as Lady Christina . Ryan praised her colleagues and the " family atmosphere " on set and described Doctor Who as " really something special to do " . On 9 April 2009 , Ryan guested on Steve Wright in the Afternoon on BBC Radio 2 and on The Justin Lee Collins Show on ITV2 to promote " Planet of the Dead " . After a showing of a trailer for the episode on The Justin Lee Collins Show , Ryan described the " fantastic " time she had filming in Cardiff and in Dubai .

Ryan 's character Lady Christina de Souza is an adrenaline junkie and thief . Christina is a typical Doctor Who companion , Davies electing to draw parallels from the Time Lady Romana rather than new series companion Rose Tyler . Roberts described her as an " adventuress " who is " upper class and glam , suited and booted , and extremely intelligent " which the Doctor could relate to because they both rejected their heritages . The episode 's director James Strong described the character as reverting to a traditional romantic @-@ based companionship ? rather than the platonic companionship of Donna Noble (Catherine Tate) in the fourth series ? while still being a unique companion :

It 's back to basics : she 's probably more of a traditional , romantic kind of Thomas Crown Affair kind of heroine , if you like . [...] It echoes to me of Rose , in that there may be a good old fashioned romantic connection between them . She 's young , she 's beautiful , she 's sexy , but whereas Rose was a very ordinary , normal girl , Lady Christina is a lady , she comes from a very privileged , very elite background . She 's different to any of the companions we 've ever had in that she doesn 't particularly want to get caught up with the Doctor . She 's got her own thing going on , so she 's very much a match for the Doctor and very much an equal . Often in an adventure the Doctor will take control and everyone will do what he says . She 's very much in control ? the two of them are in a sparring way , battling against each other to get through this adventure .

Comedian Lee Evans plays Professor Malcolm Taylor , a UNIT scientist devoted to his predecessor , the Doctor . Davies created Evans ' character to serve as a foil for Noma Dumezweni 's pragmatic character Captain Erisa Magambo , who previously appeared in the episode " Turn Left " . Roberts noted after writing the episode that Evans ' character had unintentionally become a " loving " caricature of Doctor Who fandom .

The episode was influenced by several works : Davies described " Planet of the Dead " as " a great big adventure , a little bit Indiana Jones , a little bit Flight of the Phoenix , a little bit Pitch Black . " ; the relationship between the Doctor and Christina was influenced by 1960s films such as Charade and Topkapi , which included Cary Grant and Audrey Hepburn " being witty and sophisticated together , and then running for their lives " ; and the Tritovore were influenced by 1950s and 1970s science fiction B @-@ movies such as The Fly and Davies ' habit of including aliens that were recognisable to the audience as animals from Earth , such as the Judoon . Carmen 's warning evoked memories of the Ood 's warning to the Doctor and Donna in the fourth series episode " Planet of the Ood " . Tennant explained the prophecy meant that the Doctor 's " card [had become] marked " and the three specials would thus be darker ? characterising " Planet of the Dead " as the " last time the Doctor gets to have any fun " ? and that the subject of the prophecy was not the obvious answer :

David Tennant

Really , from this moment on , the Doctor 's card is marked . Because when we come back in " The Waters of Mars " , it 's all become a little bit darker .

Julie Gardner

And as we know , David , he really does knock four times .

Tennant

Yeah , absolutely , and if you think you 've figured out what that means , you 're wrong !

Gardner

But when you do figure it out , it 's a sad day .

= = = Filming = = =

Pre @-@ production on the four specials started on 20 November 2008 ? four days before scheduled ? because the episode 's overseas filming in Dubai required the extra planning time . Two weeks later , the production team was on a recce for the special and the final draft of the script was completed . The production team examined overseas locations to film the episode because they wanted the scenery to feel " real " and thought that they would be unable to film on a Welsh beach in winter . After examining countries such as Morocco and Tunisia , the production team decided to film in Dubai because the area was more amicable to the filming industry and viable filming locations were nearer to urban areas than other locations .

Production began on 19 January in Wales . The special was the first Doctor Who episode to be filmed in high @-@ definition television resolution . The move to HD had previously been resisted for two major reasons : when the show was revived in 2005 , high @-@ definition television had not been adopted by an adequate portion of the audience to be financially viable ; and special effects were considerably more expensive to create in high @-@ definition than in standard @-@ definition . " Planet of the Dead " was used as a switch to HD because of the show 's reduced schedule in 2009 and because the filming crew had become experienced with the equipment while they were filming Torchwood .

Filming began at the National Museum Cardiff , which doubled for the history museum depicted in the episode 's first scene . To portray the tunnel the bus travelled into , the Queen 's Gate Tunnel of the A4232 road in Butetown was closed for four nights to accommodate filming . The last major piece of filming in Wales took place in the closed Mir (formerly Alphasteel) steelworks in Newport , which doubled almost unaltered for the Tritovore spaceship . Scenes set in London 's Oxford Street were filmed at St Mary Street , Cardiff . Filming took place at the peak of the February 2009 Great Britain snowfall , where the sub @-@ zero temperatures slowed filming and had a visible effect on the cast . To accommodate for the adverse conditions , Davies included a line in the script that specified that the Tritovore spaceship cooled as external temperatures increase .

Filming in Dubai took place in mid @-@ February 2009 . Two weeks previously , one of the two 1980 Bristol VR double @-@ decker buses bought for filming had been substantially damaged when a crane accidentally dropped a container in Dubai City Port . After an emergency discussion by the production team , they agreed that the damage was unintentionally artistic and decided to include the damaged bus in the episode ; instead of shipping the spare bus from Cardiff ? which would have delayed the already hurried filming schedule ? the production team decided to partially reconstruct the bus in Dubai , damage the spare bus in Cardiff to match the bus in Dubai , and rewrite part of the script to accommodate and mention the damage to the bus . James Strong recalled the reaction of the production team to the damage to the bus in an issue of Doctor Who Magazine :

One morning in the first week of February , I was leaving my flat when Julie Gardner phoned . She said , " there 's been a little accident with the bus [...] it 's a disaster ; the bus is fucked . " When I got into the office , I was handed a photograph ? and my initial reaction was absolute horror . We called an emergency meeting . Russell came in [...] and we discussed our options . We had bought an identical London bus to film on in Cardiff , so could we send that out to Dubai ? We could have got it out in time if it 'd left Cardiff , literally , the next day , but we 'd have had to find a third bus , an exact replica , to film on in Cardiff a week later . It had taken us a month to find the one we had . It was even mooted that we 'd have to forget Dubai and opt for a beach in the UK . But Russell 's response was " Okay , let 's embrace it . Let 's say that the bus was damaged on its way to the alien planet . [...] He wove it into the narrative . We 're not trying to hide the damage at all . In fact , we

show it off , enhancing it with special effects , smoke and sparks . It works rather marvellously . That London bus , damaged and smoking , in the middle of the desert ? yeah , it looks incredible , especially in gorgeous hi @-@ def .

The damaged bus was not the only problem to filming in Dubai : the first of the three days was afflicted by a sandstorm which left most of the footage shot unusable . The production team then struggled to complete three days of filming in two days ; the last day was compared to " filming Lawrence of Arabia " . To complete the episode 's filming , interior scenes in the bus were filmed in a studio in Wales . To disguise the fact they were using a translite , a 360 @-@ degree background image , Strong utilised often @-@ avoided techniques such as muddled windows and lens flares ; the latter also served to create a warmer environment for the viewer . After filming ended , editing and post @-@ processing took place until two days before transmission , leaving the BBC to resort to using an unfinished copy to market the episode .

= = = 200th story = = =

" Planet of the Dead " was advertised as Doctor Who 's 200th story . Writer Russell T Davies admitted that the designation was arbitrary and debatable , based upon how fans counted the unfinished serial Shada , the season @-@ long fourteen @-@ part serial The Trial of a Time Lord , and the third series finale consisting of " Utopia " , " The Sound of Drums " and " Last of the Time Lords " . Davies personally disagreed about counting The Trial of a Time Lord as one serial ? arguing that it " felt like four stories " to him ? and grouping " Utopia " with its following episodes , but agreed that it was only an opinion which did not override any others . Gareth Roberts inserted a reference to the landmark ? specifically , the bus number is 200 ? and Davies emailed the show 's publicity team to advertise the special as such . Doctor Who Magazine 's editor Tom Spilsbury acknowledged the controversy in the magazine 's 407th issue , which ran a reader survey of all 200 stories .

= = Broadcast and reception = =

Overnight figures estimated that the special was watched by 8 @.@ 41 million people , a 39 @.@ 6 % share of the audience . An additional 184 @,@ 000 watched the programme on BBC HD , the channel 's highest rating at that time . The initial showing had an Appreciation Index of 88 : considered excellent . A BBC One repeat , two days later , gained an overnight figure of 1 @.@ 8 million viewers . The special was therefore the second most watched programme of the day , beaten only by the premiere of the new series of Britain 's Got Talent . The final viewing figure for the initial broadcast was 9 @.@ 54 million viewers on BBC One and 200 @,@ 000 viewers on BBC HD , making it the fifth most watched programme of the week and the most watched programme aired on BBC HD at that time . Including repeats in the following week and viewings on the BBC iPlayer , 13 @.@ 89 million viewers watched the episode in total .

The episode received average critical reviews . Simon Brew of science fiction blog Den of Geek said the episode was " by turns ambitious and predictable " but " still quite entertaining " . The first part of the review mentioned an objection from his wife that the bus trapped in the sand " [looked] really fake " , despite the episode being actually filmed in Dubai , and then mentioned Brew 's appreciation of the concept of people stranded in the desert and concluded that " made a fair fist of it " . Brew positively reviewed Michelle Ryan 's performance ? comparing her performance to be on par to her role in Bionic Woman rather than her role as Zoe Slater in EastEnders ? and Lee Evans ' performance as Malcolm Taylor , calling him the highlight of the episode because of his dialogue . He closed his review by saying that " ' Planet of the Dead ' was passable enough " : he thought it " never really gelled " for him ; but he thought it was overall entertaining and was excited for the remaining three specials as a result of Carmen 's prophecy .

Charlie Jane Anders of io9 " mostly loved ' Planet Of The Dead ' " , commenting that it was a standard Russell T Davies script :

POTD was pretty much everything you 've come to expect from Russell T. Davies ' Who : crazy

adventures , slightly cartoony characters , clever dialogue , moments of sheer silly fun , a childlike solemnity , a miraculous save , bombastic music , and one woman who 's held up as being the most special person ever .

It didn 't hurt that POTD had all the elements of a cracking good story : The Doctor and friends trapped on an alien planet , on the other side of the universe , with no easy way to get home . Alien creatures who might be hostile . A deadly swarm coming to tear our heroes apart . And UNIT on the other side of the wormhole , trying to come to grips with this almost unimaginable threat .

She compared it to two previous episodes , " The Impossible Planet " and " Midnight " , both of which she enjoyed . She criticised three aspects of the episode : Lady Christina , who was the " first [Russell T Davies] heroine who actually filled [her] with revulsion " , leaving her hoping that the character would be killed off @-@ screen , Malcolm 's reluctance to close the wormhole and the implausibility of only three stingrays travelling through it . She thought that the episode was " a pretty solid adventure with a cool set of monsters " .

Ben Rawson @-@ Jones of entertainment website Digital Spy gave the episode two stars out of five . He characterised the episode as being " as hollow as a big chocolate Easter egg " because it was " lacking in the enthralling drama and compelling characterisation that has been the lynchpin of the Russell T Davies era " . His main criticism was towards Ryan 's character , describing the romantic tension between Christina and the Doctor as " feeling forced " and arguing that Ryan was " utterly unconvincing " as Christina . Conversely , he was appreciative of Strong 's direction and the UNIT subplot . Specifically , he approved of Evans ' performance , noting that " the fact that Malcolm names a unit of measurement after himself is both inspired and hilarious " . His review ended by describing the episode as " lifeless for much of the hour " and expressing his hope that the ambiguous entity from Carmen 's premonition would " hurry up " .

Orlando Parfitt of IGN gave the episode a 7 @. @ 1 (Good) rating out of ten . Parfitt called it a " straightforward story " that did not elevate to the level of excitement typically seen in Doctor Who until the episode 's climax , instead describing the majority of the story as being " taken up with Tennant and Ryan standing in the desert , swapping flirtatious banter in between proclaiming how dire their situation is " , and criticised the writing of the part of the episode where the bus was on San Helios , claiming that plot devices such as the Tritovore or Taylor being held at gunpoint and ordered to close the wormhole as " feel [ing] forced and unnaturally shoe @-@ horned into the script " . His praise of the episode went to Ryan and Evans : although he thought of Christina as a " shameless Lara Croft ripoff " , he said that the character " still proves a sexy and wise @-@ cracking counterpart to the Doctor " ; and Evans ' acting alongside Dumezweni highlighted his " undeniably great comic acting " as opposed to his " love @-@ it @-@ or @-@ hate @-@ it " stand @-@ up comedy . The last paragraph of his review focused on the climax , which he thought was " a cracker [that] just @-@ about makes up for the previously plodding plot " , and described the entire episode as having " enough enjoyable moments " to entertain fans before the transmission of " The Waters of Mars " .

" Planet of the Dead " was nominated for the Hugo Award for Best Dramatic Presentation , Short Form , but lost to " The Waters of Mars " .

= = = International broadcast = = =

The special aired in Canada in July on Space , and in the US on BBC America on 26 July 2009 . In Australia , the Special aired 31 May 2009 , on ABC1 . In South Africa , the Special aired on 18 October 2010 , on BBC Entertainment .

= = Soundtrack = =

Selected pieces of score from this special , as composed by Murray Gold , were included in the specials soundtrack on 4 October 2010 , released by Silva Screen Records .

= = = Filming locations = = =

