

= The Doctor , the Widow and the Wardrobe =

" The Doctor , the Widow and the Wardrobe " is an episode of the British science fiction television series Doctor Who . First broadcast on BBC One on 25 December 2011 , it is the seventh Christmas special since the show 's revival in 2005 . It was written by Steven Moffat and directed by Farren Blackburn . Internationally , the special was shown on BBC America in the United States and on Space in Canada the same day as the British broadcast , with ABC1 in Australia showing it one day later .

In the special , alien time traveller the Doctor (Matt Smith) is the caretaker of recently widowed Madge Arwell (Claire Skinner) and her children Lily (Holly Earl) and Cyril (Maurice Cole) during their holiday vacation away from the London Blitz . The Doctor plans to take them on a treat to a snowy planet through a portal in a present he has placed under the Christmas tree , but Cyril opens it before Christmas and wanders through . While looking for him , the others learn that the trees of the planet are about to be melted down with acid rain for energy .

" The Doctor , the Widow , and the Wardrobe " marked the end of Piers Wenger 's tenure as executive producer , and the debut of Caroline Skinner in the same position . Adapting elements of C.S. Lewis 's children 's novel The Lion , the Witch and the Wardrobe , Moffat intended the episode to be the most " Christmassy " of the Doctor Who Christmas specials , while Blackburn felt there was " magic " in it . It was filmed in September and October 2011 , with some scenes taking place in an authentic Lancaster bomber . " The Doctor , the Widow and the Wardrobe " was watched by 10 @. @ 77 million viewers in the United Kingdom , making it the third most @- @ watched programme on Christmas Day . Critical reception to the episode was mixed , and some felt that the high @- @ profile comedic guest stars Bill Bailey and Arabella Weir were underused .

= = Plot = =

= = = Prequel = = =

On 6 December 2011 , a prequel to the episode was released online . The Doctor (Matt Smith) is seen on a spaceship holding a red button which , when he lets go , will cause the space ship to explode . While holding the button , he has phoned the TARDIS to speak to Amy Pond asking her to rescue him , although he does not have his co @- @ ordinates , Amy cannot fly the TARDIS , and she is not on the TARDIS . The Doctor wishes Amy a Merry Christmas before letting go of the button , and the spaceship explodes .

= = = Synopsis = = =

During the Christmas season of 1938 , an alien spacecraft approaches Earth ready to destroy it when it suddenly explodes courtesy of the Doctor who escapes the ship and then falls to Earth by rapidly donning an impact space suit , though in his haste , the helmet is put on backwards . On crashing to Earth , he is found by Madge Arwell (Claire Skinner) , wife of Reg (Alexander Armstrong) and mother of two children , Lily (Holly Earl) and Cyril (Maurice Cole) . She helps the Doctor to his TARDIS , and the Doctor promises to repay her for her kindness . Three years later , during World War II , Reg is reported missing in action when the Lancaster bomber he was piloting disappeared over the English Channel . Madge is told this via telegram just before Christmas , but decides not to tell her children yet , hoping to keep their spirits up through the holiday . Madge and the children evacuate London to a relative 's house in Dorset , where they are greeted by the Doctor , calling himself " the Caretaker " ; Madge does not recognise him from their previous encounter , as his face had been hidden by the backwards helmet .

The Doctor has prepared the house specially for the children and the holiday ; though the children are pleased , Madge privately explains about Reg 's death to the Doctor and insists he not overindulge the children . During the first night , Cyril is lured into opening a large glowing present

under the Christmas tree , revealing a time portal to a snow @-@ covered forest . The Doctor shortly discovers Cyril 's absence and follows him with Lily ; they eventually track Cyril to a strange lighthouse @-@ like structure . Madge , finding her children missing , soon follows them into the forest , but is met by three miners in space suits from the planet Androzani Major (Bill Bailey , Paul Bazely , and Arabella Weir) . She holds them at gunpoint and is taken back to their excavation walker and told that the forest of the planet they are on is scheduled to be melted by acid rain within minutes , killing anything within it . At the lighthouse , Cyril is met by a humanoid creature made of wood ; it places a simple band of metal around his head like a crown . Lily and the Doctor arrive , followed by another wood creature , but find the creatures have rejected Cyril as he is " weak " , as they do the Doctor . The Doctor concludes that the life forces of the trees in the forest are trying to escape through a living creature , the crown acting as an interface .

The miners are teleported away safely before the rain starts after helping Madge locate her missing children . Madge , using the limited flying skills taught to her by Reg , directs the walker to the lighthouse and safely reunites with her children as the acid rain starts . The wood creatures identify her as " strong " , and the Doctor realises they consider her the " mothership " , able to carry the life force safely . Donning the band , Madge absorbs the life force of the forest , allowing her to direct the top of the lighthouse as an escape pod away from the acid rain and into the time vortex . To get them home , the Doctor directs her to think of memories of home , allowing Madge to revisit her fond memories of Reg , shown on screens within the pod . The Doctor urges her to continue to show even Reg 's death , revealing to Lily and Cyril what happened to their father . Soon , the escape pod safely leaves the time vortex , landing just outside the house in Dorset , and the life force of the forest have converted themselves to ethereal beings within the time vortex . The Doctor steps outside while Madge starts to explain Reg 's death to Lily and Cyril , but he returns to interrupt her and to tell her to come outside . There stands Reg and his Lancaster ; he had followed the bright light of the escape pod into the time vortex and came out safely along with the pod at Dorset . The family has a tearful reunion as the Doctor watches .

As Madge and her family turns to celebrate Christmas , the Doctor attempts to slip away , but Madge catches him , and as she sees the TARDIS realises that he is the man in the space suit from three years before . She insists on his staying for Christmas dinner , but the Doctor reveals he has other friends who believe he is dead . Madge convinces him to go to see them . The Doctor offers Madge his help if she ever needs it again . Later , the Doctor arrives outside the home of Amy (Karen Gillan) and Rory (Arthur Darvill) , two years since he left them there (" The God Complex ") . They invite him to have Christmas dinner , as they had always set him a place at the dinner table . Unseen by them , the Doctor wipes away a tear of joy .

= = Production = =

" The Doctor , the Widow and the Wardrobe " was written by head writer and executive producer Steven Moffat , who wanted it to be " the most Christmassy Christmas special ever " . He stated that " nothing is more fun to write " than the Doctor at Christmas , as he considered it " his kind of day . Everything 's bright and shiny , everybody 's having a laugh , and nobody minds if you wear a really stupid hat " . The story is partly inspired by The Lion , the Witch and the Wardrobe (from The Chronicles of Narnia) by C. S. Lewis . Moffat said that Doctor Who and the Narnia stories " come from the same impulse that children have of escaping to another world . "

The scene in which the Doctor is showing the Arwells around the house originally included a scene in a " haunted coal cellar " . The characters of Ven @-@ Garr and Billis are named after outgoing executive producers Piers Wenger and Beth Willis , both of whom served with Moffat . The three tree harvesters are from Androzani Major in the year 5345 , a planet which features in the serial The Caves of Androzani (1984) . The Doctor mentions the Forest of Cheem , which appeared in the Ninth Doctor episode " The End of the World " . He mentions that one of them fancied him , and during that episode one sacrificed her life for him .

" The Doctor , the Widow and the Wardrobe " marks the debut of Caroline Skinner and sees the end of Wenger as executive producers . The two had previously worked together ; Moffat

commented it " will be the smoothest hand @-@ over we 've done " . The special was directed by Farren Blackburn , who had previously worked with Skinner on The Fades . Blackburn stated that he was " daunted , thrilled and excited at the same time " about the job and that it was " tough " . Blackburn 's favorite sequences to direct was the opening sequence and the scenes set on the winter planet , where he " really felt like [he] was making a movie " . When asked about the tone he wished to create , Blackburn replied ,

I would say there is a kind of mix . It goes through several worlds . It 's most definitely a classic action @-@ adventure but I think it merges into the Edwardian children 's story and there 's a sort of Tim Burton @-@ esque magic about it as well . I think there 's a magic throughout the episode , but there is an underlying suspense and tension and darkness to it as well . So I think it merges those three things with an awful lot of Christmas about it .

The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) announced in September 2011 that production had started for the special and filming was due to be complete by mid October 2011 . Filming was disrupted on 30 September due to a 24 @-@ hour protest at BBC Wales because of compulsory redundancies . The opening sequence set in the corridors of a spaceship was filmed on 20 September 2011 at Uskmouth Power Station . As the conditions were very noisy , the crew had to wear ear protectors . Filming of some scenes involving Alexander Armstrong took place in and around the Lancaster bomber Just Jane at the Lincolnshire Aviation Heritage Centre on 3 October 2011 . External footage of the lighthouse building took place in the Forest of Dean , Gloucestershire . Smith stated , " It was a really tough shoot . Out in a forest , at night , and because there were children involved , some shooting schedules had to change radically , we 'd often have to shoot through , no breaks ? you get lunch at midnight or something . "

= = = Casting = = =

Alexander Armstrong was a regular on the Doctor Who spin @-@ off The Sarah Jane Adventures as the voice of alien computer Mr Smith . Mr Smith appeared in Doctor Who in the crossover episodes " The Stolen Earth " and " Journey 's End " . Paul Kasey is credited as the Wooden Queen ; Kasey has appeared in many Doctor Who episodes as various monsters , including Ood Sigma in The End of Time , Nephew in " The Doctor 's Wife " , and a Cyberman in " Closing Time " . Doctor Who Magazine , in its preview of the special , refers to as Madge , Cyril and Lily as companions , with nine @-@ year @-@ old Maurice Cole 's Cyril Arwell defined as the youngest companion in the history of the franchise .

Arabella Weir previously appeared as an alternate incarnation of the Third Doctor in the Doctor Who Unbound audio drama Exile . Weir was " genuinely surprised and completely thrilled " to be offered the part . Bill Bailey was pleased to be given a comedic human character , explaining , " The fact that I am almost playing a human means the expressions are easier to do . If I was an Ood , with a face full of tentacles , that would have been harder to bring the funny " .

= = Broadcast and reception = =

" The Doctor , the Widow and the Wardrobe " was first broadcast in the United Kingdom on 25 December 2011 , Christmas Day , on BBC One and on the same date on BBC America in the United States , and Space in Canada . In Australia it was shown on 26 December on ABC1 . In the UK , overnight ratings showed that the special was watched by 8 @.@ 9 million , coming in fourth for Christmas Day . The final consolidated rating was 10 @.@ 77 million viewers , ranking Doctor Who third for both Christmas Day and the entire week . On BBC 's online iPlayer , " The Doctor , the Widow and the Wardrobe " was watched 434 @,@ 000 times by 6 January 2012 . The special received an Appreciation Index of 84 .

= = = Critical reception = = =

The special has received generally good reviews . Dan Martin of The Guardian noted that it was "

the smallest ? yet perhaps the most enchanting ? Christmas special we 've had to date " . Noting that it featured a typical " doomed spaceship " , the threat was not to the universe but one family 's happiness , and the only enemies were " some misguided and underdeveloped polluters " , he concluded that " Any other time of year I would gnaw holes all over this , but it 's Christmas , and today it felt perfect " . He felt that Skinner held the episode together and the appearance of Amy " made Christmas all the more special " . However , his " major niggle " was that everything was the Doctor 's fault , as he left the present while knowing that most children would open their presents before Christmas . Michael Hogan , writing for The Telegraph , gave the special four and a half out of five stars . He thought that the cast of comedians were " rather under @-@ utilised " but thought that Skinner " excelled " and Smith was also " brilliant " .

Neela Debnath of The Independent described the episode as " the perfect recipe for a Christmas special " , particularly praising the touching moments . In the same paper 's DVD review , Ben Walsh gave " The Doctor , the Widow and the Wardrobe " four out of five stars , calling it " best Doctor Who Christmas Special for some years " . He commented that " the eco @-@ message is a bit laboured , but the central tragedy that powers this scatty episode is a poignant one " . Radio Times reviewer Patrick Mulkern was pleased , despite noting that he had low expectations for the special . He particularly praised Smith 's performance , although he noted that the " heart @-@ warming " scene with Amy and Rory called for a " companions shake @-@ up " next series . Keith Phipps of The A.V. Club gave " The Doctor , the Widow and the Wardrobe " an A- , feeling that it could stand proudly beside " A Christmas Carol " , the previous Christmas special .

IGN 's Matt Risley rated the episode an 8 out of 10 , calling it more " classically , indulgently , infectiously Christmassy " than the previous Christmas specials . He praised the production design and special effects teams for " creating some dazzlingly memorable special effects , and a winter wonderland that was both recognisably , fuzzily Christmas incarnate and unerringly , tensely alien " but thought the supporting cast " triumphed above and beyond " the plot devices . Like Hogan , Risley commented that the comedian cast of Bailey and Weir as well as Armstrong " felt lacking " . However , the next year , Risley wrote that he " got a little carried away with the festive funtimes ... On reflection , the overwhelming Christmassyness of it all was overcompensating for a pretty flimsy , frivolous plot . " Nick Setchfield of SFX gave the special four out of five stars , praising Smith 's acting and Blackburn 's Doctor Who directing debut as well as the special effects . However , he thought that the lack of a villain was an " interesting experiment , but maybe not ideal for Christmas Day " and Bailey and Weir 's forest rangers " felt like bolt @-@ on comic relief " .

== DVD release ==

The ten Christmas specials between " The Christmas Invasion " and " Last Christmas " inclusive were released in a boxset titled Doctor Who ? The 10 Christmas Specials on 19 October 2015 .

== Soundtrack ==

Selected pieces of score from " The Doctor , the Widow , and the Wardrobe " and the following Christmas special , as composed by Murray Gold , were included on a soundtrack released on 21 October 2013 by Silva Screen Records .