

= The Fires of Pompeii =

" The Fires of Pompeii " is the second episode of the fourth series of the British science fiction television series Doctor Who . It was broadcast on BBC One on 12 April 2008 . Set shortly before and during the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in AD 79 , this episode depicts alien time traveller the Doctor (David Tennant) and his new companion Donna Noble (Catherine Tate) on a trip to Pompeii , where they uncover an alien invasion . Their clashing worldviews present an ethical dilemma for the Doctor .

The episode was filmed in Rome 's Cinecittà studios , and was the first time the Doctor Who production team took its cast abroad for filming since its revival . The production of the episode was impeded by a fire near the sets several weeks before filming and by problems for the production team crossing into Europe .

Critics ' opinions regarding the episode were generally mixed . The premise of the episode ? the moral dilemma the Doctor faces , and Donna 's insistence that he save a family from Pompeii ? were widely praised . However , the episode 's writing was criticised , in particular , for the characterisation of the supporting cast : The dialogue was described as " one @-@ dimensional " and Peter Capaldi and Phil Davis 's dialogue as " whimpering and scowling " .

= = Plot = =

The Doctor and Donna arrive in what the Doctor believes to be Rome in the first century AD . After an earthquake and witnessing a nearby mountain begin to smoulder , he realises he has in fact materialised in Pompeii one day before the eruption of Mount Vesuvius . When he and Donna return to where the TARDIS landed , he discovers that a local merchant sold it to sculptor Lobus Caecilius . The Doctor and Donna go to Caecilius 's house to retrieve it . Unknown to them , they have been followed by a soothsayer who reports to the Sibylline Sisterhood that the prophesised man in the blue box has arrived , and the Sisters fear the prediction that his arrival brings fire and death .

At the house , the Doctor is surprised by Caecilius 's daughter Evelina , who seems to have extrasensory perception (ESP) and knows personal details about the Doctor and Donna . They are interrupted by the local augur , Lucius Petrus Dextrus , who has arrived to collect a sculpture he commissioned . The Doctor is intrigued by the sculpture , which resembles a segment of an oversized circuit board . Lucius Petrus reveals that he also has powerful ESP and calls out the name of the Doctor 's home planet , Gallifrey . The Doctor wishes to learn more about the sculptures and enlists Caecilius 's son Quintus to help him break into Lucius Petrus ' house . Inside , the Doctor deduces that the circuits will make an energy converter , but he is caught by Lucius Petrus . The two escape , but Lucius Petrus beckons a large stone creature to attack and kill them . The stone creature appears in Caecilius 's house and attacks them , but Quintus saves them by dousing the creature in water and killing it . In the confusion , the Sisterhood kidnap Donna , and the Doctor sets off to rescue her . He meets the high priestess of the Sisterhood , who is revealed to be transforming into a stone creature . The Doctor discovers that they are being controlled by the Pyroviles , volcanic creatures whose home planet of Pyrovia was lost (see Story arcs in Doctor Who # Medusa Cascade) . The Doctor is attacked by the Sisterhood , but he escapes with Donna into an underground tunnel that leads into the heart of Mount Vesuvius .

The Doctor discovers that the volcano is being used by the Pyroviles to convert the human race and conquer Earth . The Doctor realises the volcano will not erupt if the energy converter is running , and tells Donna that the volcanic eruption is a fixed point in time and must always happen . The Doctor and Donna get into an escape pod and together press a lever which overloads the converter and triggers the eruption , killing the Pyroviles and launching the pod clear of the blast . The Doctor and Donna run for the TARDIS and the Doctor coldly leaves Caecilius and his family cowering in their home and dematerialises . Donna tearfully begs him to go back and at least save one person . The Doctor finally relents and goes back for Caecilius and his family . He leaves them on a hill overlooking the destruction , and together with Donna slips out quietly as the family mourns Pompeii . The Doctor comments to Donna that she was right - he does need someone to stop him .

Six months later in Rome , Caecilius 's family are shown to be successful . He is running a profitable business , Evelina has a social life in comparison to her seclusion in Pompeii , and his son Quintus is studying to become a doctor . Before Quintus leaves , he pays tribute to the family 's household gods (in marked contrast to his disrespectful attitude towards them at the start of the episode) , a bas relief depiction of which are in the form of the Doctor , Donna and the TARDIS .

= = = Cultural references = = =

The Doctor identifies himself as " Spartacus " , to which Donna replies " So am I. " This is a reference to a scene in the film Spartacus , where all the slaves shield Spartacus by each shouting " I 'm Spartacus ! "

= = Production = =

= = = Writing = = =

Executive producer Russell T Davies originally planned to include a serial set in Pompeii in the first new series of Doctor Who , after seeing the documentary Pompeii : The Last Day . That episode 's position was given to " Boom Town " and the idea was shelved for three years .

The episode was written by James Moran , who previously wrote the film Severance and the Torchwood episode " Sleeper " ; Moran was requested to write the episode as a consequence of the latter . Moran had difficulty writing the episode , and had to rewrite the Doctor 's opening line over twenty times . The Pyrovile were also edited during writing : they were previously called Pyrovillaxians and Pyrovellians .

Moran worked closely with Davies because of the constraints imposed by filming . Davies encouraged Moran to insert linguistic jokes similar to those in the comic book series Asterix , such as Lucius Petrus Dextrus (" Lucius Stone Right Arm ") , TK Maxximus , and Spartacus ; the use of the phrase " I 'm Spartacus ! " refers to the 1960 film . Moran based the ancillary characters of Metella (Tracey Childs) and Quintus from Caecilius 's family in the Cambridge Latin Course ; the character of Evelina was the only member of the family created by Moran . At the end of Book I of the Cambridge Latin Course , Caecilius and Metella perish in Pompeii on the day of the eruption , but Quintus survives . This episode creates an alternate ending to their story , where they are all rescued by the Doctor and move to Rome . The line " You must excuse my friend , she 's from Barcelona " was a reference to an apologetic catchphrase from Fawlty Towers , attributed by the production team to Sybil Fawlty (and forming a meta @-@ pun on the Sibylline Sisterhood) , but also harks back to previous mentions of Barcelona by the ninth and tenth Doctors .

The episode was heavily based on a moral question posed to the Doctor by Donna : whether to warn the population of Pompeii , or to recuse themselves from the situation . Moran also had to deal with the intensity and sensitivity required when writing about the eruption . Davies and Moran both appreciated Catherine Tate 's performance , and cited Donna 's ability to humanise the Doctor and help him deal with " lose @-@ lose situations " as the reason the Doctor travels with companions .

The series ' story arc was hinted at by the Doctor 's invocation of the Shadow Proclamation , an intergalactic code previously invoked in " Rose " , " The Christmas Invasion " , " Fear Her " and " Partners in Crime " , and referencing the " Medusa Cascade " , which executive producer Russell T Davies stated in Doctor Who Magazine would " come back to haunt us " later in the series . Moran also added continuity links independent of the story arc : as a " fun continuity thing " , the script includes a scene in which the Doctor admits partial responsibility for the Great Fire of Rome , as depicted at the end of the 1965 serial The Romans ; and the sale of the TARDIS as modern art refers to the 1979 serial City of Death , which includes a scene in which the TARDIS is appraised in a similar fashion . Additionally , Lucius Petrus , while under prophetic influence , informs Donna that " there is something on your back " ? a foreshadowing of the story development in the season 's later episode " Turn Left " .

== Filming ==

The episode was filmed at the Cinecittà studios in Rome in September 2007 . The filming reused some of the sets from the show Rome . Other locations suggested were in Malta and Wales , but the size of the project , the biggest since the show 's revival , resulted in production taking place in Italy . This was the first time the majority of an episode was filmed abroad and the first time the cast had filmed abroad since 1996 ; the television movie was filmed in Vancouver and pick @-@ up shots had previously been made in New York City for " Daleks in Manhattan " . Cinecittà had accepted the BBC 's request in order to promote the studios , despite the show 's small budget .

Filming an episode abroad had been suggested in 2004 , but the episode was the first such occasion . Planning began in April 2007 , before Moran had written the script , and continued until the production team travelled to Italy . Several weeks before filming started , a fire disrupted the production . Moving to Rome caused problems for the production team : the equipment truck was delayed for several hours at the Swiss border ; the special effects team were delayed for twenty @-@ four hours at Customs in Calais . The production team only had 48 hours to film on location . The aftermath of the eruption was filmed on the same night as the location shots . To create the falling ash , the special effects team used a large mass of cork , with a " constant supply of debris raining down " . Scenes set at the Temple of Sibyl were filmed at the Temple of Peace , Cardiff on 18 and 19 September 2007 .

== Cast notes ==

Two of the cast members of " The Fires of Pompeii " were later cast in starring roles for Doctor Who . Karen Gillan returned in the fifth series to play Amy Pond , full @-@ time companion of Matt Smith 's Eleventh Doctor . Casting director Andy Pryor suggested her to new executive producer Steven Moffat based on her performance in this episode as one of the soothsayers .

Peter Capaldi was cast as the Twelfth Doctor in 2013 , and made his first appearance in the 2013 Christmas special " The Time of the Doctor " (with an uncredited cameo appearance in the anniversary special " The Day of the Doctor ") Capaldi also played John Frobisher throughout Children of Earth , the third series in the Doctor Who spin @-@ off Torchwood .

Tracey Childs and Phil Davis have also performed on Doctor Who audio productions for Big Finish .

== Broadcast ==

Overnight figures estimated the episode was watched by 8 @.@ 1 million viewers , with a peak of 8 @.@ 5 million viewers . The consolidated figure was 9 @.@ 04 million . The episode was the second most watched programme on 12 April ; Britain 's Got Talent was viewed by 9 @.@ 44 million people . The episode was the tenth most @-@ watched programme of the week and received an Appreciation Index score of 87 (considered Excellent) .

== Critical reception ==

The episode received generally mixed reviews . Ian Hyland , writing for News of the World , said that Tate " was almost bearable this week " . He also complimented the " TK Maxximus " joke . He was ambivalent to Donna 's reaction to the Doctor leaving Caecilius 's family to die : he criticised her acting , comparing her to The Catherine Tate Show character Joannie " Nan " Taylor , but said " top again if that was intentional " . He closed saying " this week was a hundred times better than that lame opening episode . Scarier aliens , stronger guest stars and a proper adult @-@ friendly storyline involving sisterhoods and soothsayers . "

Scott Matthewman of The Stage said that Donna 's insistence to change the past " formed the emotional backbone of this episode , producing some truly heartbreaking performances " . He liked

the joke about the TARDIS 's translating the Doctor 's and Donna 's Latin phrases to Celtic , saying it was " subtly played throughout the episode [...] in a way that builds the joke without trampling it into the ground " . His favourite part was Donna 's attempts to divert the population of Pompeii away from the beach ; the scene was " the emotional highpoint of a series of heart rending scenes " . However , he criticised Moran 's writing , specifically , Quintus 's and Metella 's dialogue , saying the former " remained pretty much one @-@ dimensional throughout " . Alan Stanley Blair of SyFy Portal also gave a positive review . He was highly appreciative of Tate , saying " [she] moved even further away from her " Runaway " character that initially joined the show . " The phrase " TK Maxximus " and the Doctor 's use of a water pistol to subdue the Pyrovile were complimented , as were the special effects used to animate the Pyrovile . However , he disapproved of the use of Cockney colloquialisms in the episode , most notably the Stallholder (Phil Cornwell) saying " lovely jubbly " .

Ben Rawson @-@ Jones of Digital Spy gave the episode three stars out of five . His opening said " Fantastic effects and a well developed moral dilemma bolster ' The Fires Of Pompeii ' , although the episode fails to erupt . " Rawson @-@ Jones felt that Moran 's script took " too long to actively engage the viewer and tap into the compelling premise of the time travellers arriving in the doomed city shortly before ' volcano day ' . " and that " the subplots are unsatisfyingly muddled for the majority of the narrative . " He also complained about the characterisation of the supporting cast , saying that " Peter Capaldi and Phil Davis [deserved] better " . However , he said the moral dilemma the Doctor faced was " compelling " and the Doctor 's use of the water pistol " adds a pleasing sense of fun to counterbalance the impending stench of death and harks nicely back to the Tom Baker era of the show . " Overall , he appreciated the premise of the episode , but thought the episode " deserved better writing " .

= = = Reviews = = =

" The Fires of Pompeii " reviews at The Doctor Who Ratings Guide