

= A Town Called Mercy =

" A Town Called Mercy " is the third episode of the seventh series of the British science fiction television series Doctor Who , transmitted on BBC One in the United Kingdom on 15 September 2012 . It was written by Toby Whithouse and directed by Saul Metzstein .

The episode featured alien time traveller the Doctor (Matt Smith) and his companions Amy Pond (Karen Gillan) and Rory Williams (Arthur Darvill) visiting the Wild West , where they encounter a town which is cut off from the rest of the frontier until they hand over Kahler @-@ Jex , an alien doctor , to a cyborg called the Gunslinger . However , the Gunslinger is a product of experiments by Jex to win a civil war on his planet , and the Doctor is unsure of what is the right thing to do .

Showrunner Steven Moffat pitched the Wild West theme to Whithouse when thinking of ways to give each episode a distinct theme . Whithouse further developed the theme , including classic Western tropes and a sympathetic villain . " A Town Called Mercy " and the previous episode " Dinosaurs on a Spaceship " were the first to enter production for the seventh series . Much of the episode was filmed in March 2012 in the desert area of Almería , Spain , in Mini Hollywood and Fort Bravo , locations used for many Western @-@ set films . Reviewers noted that the episode addressed a moral debate . " A Town Called Mercy " was watched by 8 @.@ 42 million viewers in the UK . Critical reception was generally positive to mixed , with some critical of the Doctor 's actions and pacing .

= = Plot = =

= = = Prequel = = =

A prequel to " A Town Called Mercy " was released exclusively onto iTunes , and titled " The Making of The Gunslinger " . It depicts the actual making and formation of the Gunslinger , from a normal humanoid body . It also has an explanation of the making of the Gunslinger in voice @-@ over by Kahler @-@ Jex .

= = = Synopsis = = =

The Doctor , Amy , and Rory , while en route to the Day of the Dead festival in Mexico via the TARDIS , instead arrive at the small American Frontier town of Mercy . The Doctor is curious as to a ring of stone and wood that surrounds the town 's border and the availability of electricity to the town ten years too early . They learn from the town 's marshal , Isaac , that they have been kept within town for the last three weeks by " The Gunslinger " , who uses alien weaponry to threaten to kill anyone trying to leave town and blocks the town from receiving any supplies . The Gunslinger has demanded the town turn over " the doctor " , which the Doctor deduces is not himself but a humanoid alien hiding in the marshal 's jail . The alien introduces himself as Kahler @-@ Jex , who had crashed on Earth about ten years earlier , and was rescued from his craft by the town ; in return , Jex has helped the town as their physician , ending a cholera outbreak and providing the town with primitive electricity . However , the town 's food supplies are nearly empty , and while the situation has become more dire , the marshal is reluctant to hand over Jex .

The Doctor offers to get the TARDIS and evacuate the town , riding off on horseback to collect it while Isaac and Rory distract the Gunslinger . The Doctor comes across Jex 's craft and enters it , though in doing so he sets off an alarm heard across the plains . He reviews Jex 's records and discovers that Jex was part of a team of scientists from his war @-@ torn homeworld that experimented on a number of volunteers to convert them into cyborgs , who either died or killed countless people in the battle . Aghast , the Doctor leaves the ship to find the Gunslinger waiting for him , and he realises that the Gunslinger is one of Jex 's subjects . The Gunslinger affirms that he is seeking revenge on those that created him , with Jex being the last member alive ; he further explains that his programming prevents him from harming innocents , creating the ring around

Mercy to protect the townsfolk while Jex is in their care , but demands of the Doctor that the next person that crosses that line must be Jex .

The Doctor returns to Mercy and angrily drags Jex to the edge of town , followed by his companions and the concerned townsfolk . As he forces Jex to cross the line , Amy asserts that the Doctor has changed for the worse from months of travelling on his own . The Gunslinger arrives and holds his weapon to Jex ; Jex tries to offer that he has become better and rejects his past actions , but this does not sway the cyborg . As the Gunslinger is about to fire , Isaac pushes Jex out of the way , taking the lethal shot . Isaac 's final action is to hand his marshal badge to the Doctor and ask him to protect the town . The Gunslinger leaves , warning that he will return at noon tomorrow to collect Jex , even if it puts the townspeople at risk .

During the night , Jex explains his guilt to the Doctor , trying to repent for his past knowing what will await him in his afterlife : his culture believes that upon death , one must carry the souls of everyone they have ever wronged up a mountain , giving Jex an unbearable load . An angry mob of townsfolk arrive to demand Jex , but the Doctor warns by doing so they would have not honored Isaac 's death . Further discussions with Jex provide the Doctor with an idea for a plan . The next day , when the Gunslinger arrives the Doctor distracts it by amplifying the electricity sent through town , while other townsfolk , wearing makeup applied in the same fashion as Jex 's facial markings , dash between buildings to confuse the cyborg . Jex flees out of town to his ship as the Doctor planned , but instead of returning to space , Jex initiates the ship 's self @-@ destruct . Before he dies , Jex explains that no matter where he goes , the Gunslinger will follow and more innocents will be caught in the crossfire . Truly wishing to repent of his past actions , he declares that his last act will be to end the war for the Gunslinger and go to face the souls of those he wronged . The Gunslinger becomes desolate with his quest for revenge complete and the realization that Jex was no worse a person than he is . Recognizing that there is no need for a creature of war during a time of peace , the Gunslinger announces his intent to self @-@ destruct far away from town , but the Doctor suggests that he could become the protector of peace as the new marshal . The Doctor takes Amy and Rory home , while the Gunslinger stays on to watch over Mercy .

= = Production = =

In looking to give each episode of the series a distinct feel , showrunner Steven Moffat pitched the Wild West theme to writer Toby Whithouse , suggesting that the episode could be about a town terrorised by a robot . Moffat was keen on putting Matt Smith in a Western setting , who he called one of the last people one would expect to replace Clint Eastwood . Whithouse had previously written the Doctor Who episodes " School Reunion " (2006) , " The Vampires of Venice " (2010) , and " The God Complex " (2011) . Moffat had been planning for the first five episodes of the series to have " movie marquee " themes . Whithouse noted that it was a genre he had not written before , but he " absolutely [loved] it " . The Wild West has not been a setting for a Doctor Who episode since the 1966 third season serial The Gunfighters . Whithouse was advised not to watch The Gunfighters by the other writers , who said it was " not exactly the jewel in the crown " . Whithouse felt obliged to include common Western tropes , such as the Doctor riding a horse and a face @-@ off . He stated the hardest scene to write was where the Doctor is forced to use a gun ; the Doctor is a pacifist and he would need " the right sort of emotional journey " .

Whithouse preferred the cyborg villain to be three @-@ dimensional and sympathetic , which would require it to have a " living consciousness " rather than simply be a " soulless automaton " . He wanted its look to be reminiscent of Frankenstein 's monster , and later called the design " fantastic " . It took about three and a half hours for Andrew Brooke to have all the make @-@ up applied . Due to the costume , Brooke had to act with just his left eye . Smith had praise for guest actors Ben Browder , who he said " [made] a good cowboy " with " that great drawl " , and Adrian Scarborough , who he said " steals the whole episode " . Browder was offered the role and gladly accepted ; he was aware of the show as his children had watched it , and he also wanted to do a western . Whithouse was " thrilled " with Browder 's performance , as it was how he imagined the character .

" A Town Called Mercy " and the previous episode , " Dinosaurs on a Spaceship " , were the first

episodes to be produced for the seventh series , and both were directed by Saul Metzstein . The two episodes are Metzstein 's first Doctor Who credits . Much of the episode was filmed around the desert area of Almería , Spain , where studios have built Wild West @-@ style streets that have been used in the making of over 100 Western @-@ set films , such as A Fistful of Dollars . Filming the episode in Spain was cheaper than constructing a set in the UK . Moffat stated , " We knew from the start we need some serious location shooting for this one , and given the most iconic American setting imaginable , there was only one place to go ? Spain . " They reportedly filmed there from 8 March to 17 March 2012 . Filming took place at Oasys / Mini Hollywood , and Fort Bravo / Texas Hollywood . While Smith was allowed to try riding the horse , most of the action shown in the episode was done by his stuntman . Composer Murray Gold mimicked Western @-@ style scores when creating the music for the episode .

= = Themes = =

James F. McGrath of the religious website Patheos found that " A Town Called Mercy " had strong religious themes and moral messages , writing that it " really is about mercy , about forgiveness , about war crimes , about vengeance , and about justice " . He interpreted Amy 's comment about how the Doctor 's behaviour was due to him being alone for too long to mean that " when we loosen our ties to other human beings , we can begin to treat matters of mercy and justice , and the fate of other persons , differently , impersonally " . McGrath also noted a " take @-@ home religious message " in the scene near the end where the town gathers in the church while the Gunslinger and the Doctor face off ; he felt that it emphasised the importance of valuing human life .

Gavin Fuller of The Daily Telegraph wrote that the Western concept was " effectively window @-@ dressing for Toby Whithouse 's powerful morality tale , where not everything was quite as it seemed and went on to explore issues of morality , ethics , conscience and justice " . The A.V. Club reviewer Keith Phipps noted that the " never @-@ ending struggle between order and chaos " was common in Westerns , and the episode represented this with the question of " what should win out : Lawless revenge or civilized justice ? " . Ian Berriman of SFX interpreted the border around Mercy as a metaphor for the Doctor nearly " crossing [the] line " and " [breaking] his own moral code " . He likened the Doctor 's debate to that of the Fourth Doctor (Tom Baker) in Genesis of the Daleks (1975) and the Fifth Doctor (Peter Davison) in Resurrection of the Daleks (1984) . In addition , reviewers noted that the episode presented its characters with " shades of grey " , rather than black @-@ and @-@ white villains typically seen in the show .

= = Broadcast and reception = =

" A Town Called Mercy " was first broadcast in the United Kingdom on BBC One and BBC One HD on 15 September 2012 and on the same date on BBC America in the United States . Overnight ratings showed that it was watched by 6 @.@ 6 million viewers live , the highest overnight figure of the seventh series thus far . It was the third most @-@ watched programme of the day , and was also the most popular programme the next day on BBC iPlayer . It later came in third on the iPlayer chart for September with 1 @.@ 4 million requests , behind the first two episodes of the series . When final consolidated viewers were taking into account the figure rose to 8 @.@ 42 million , also beating " Asylum of the Daleks " to be the highest rated of the series . It also received an Appreciation Index of 85 , considered " excellent " .

= = Critical reception = =

" A Town Called Mercy " received generally positive to mixed reviews from critics . IGN 's Matt Risely rated the episode 8 @.@ 5 out of 10 , calling it " a weighty , progressive , sumptuous and entertaining adventure " . He praised Whithouse and Metzstein for setting the right mood and found the highlight to be the Doctor 's moral uncertainty . Dan Martin of The Guardian described it as " a complex morality dilemma fizzing with sharp dialogue " . He wrote that it was Gillan who " emerged

as the real star of the episode " , citing Amy 's conversation with the Doctor about how travelling alone had affected him . The A.V. Club reviewer Keith Phipps gave the episode a B + , enjoying that it spent most of the time discussing the morality issue .

The Telegraph 's Fuller awarded " A Town Called Mercy " four out of five stars , calling it " an absorbing , thoughtful , adult piece of drama " . He praised Smith 's toned @-@ down performance and his conversations with Jex . Though he also praised the " well @-@ crafted " scene between the Doctor and Amy , he felt that the episode was " a waste of Gillan and Darvill 's talents " as the two did not feature much . Digital Spy 's Morgan Jeffery also gave it four stars , commending the Western atmosphere and the way the Doctor 's darkness was handled . He also found Browder to bring an American authenticity to his role that a British actor would not have accomplished . However , like Fuller , he called Amy and Rory 's sidelined role " one of the few downsides " .

Slant Magazine reviewer Steven Cooper described it as " a very enjoyable episode " , though he noted that " the conclusion of the story is a slight let @-@ down after the excellence of what has preceded it " because the issues between the Doctor and Jex were left unresolved . Neela Debnath , writing for The Independent , praised the " brilliant twist " in having Kahler @-@ Jex be the villain rather than the Gunslinger . She found the Doctor holding Jex at gunpoint as " completely uncharacteristic " , but interpreted it as foreshadowing Amy and Rory 's departure . Likewise , Charlie Jane Anders from io9 felt that the Doctor 's decision to let Jex die was " out of character " . She criticised the Gunslinger for neither simply using its presumably advanced targeting systems to kill Jex or making the townspeople leave so that he would not have human shields . Additionally , according to her , the episode in general " felt [...] like a Deep Space Nine episode transplanted to the Wild West " .

SFX reviewer Ian Berriman gave " A Town Called Mercy " three and a half out of five stars . He commented that the ethical debate made it " a surprisingly mature story " , but otherwise the Western tropes made it " occasionally feel a little over @-@ familiar " . He also felt it was missing " another twist or two " , as most of the episode was dedicated to figuring out what to do with Jex rather than discovering more about him . Berriman also had two " nitpicks " that arose with the plot ; the Gunslinger could just walk into the town and take Jex away , or the Doctor could take Jex away in the TARDIS . Dave Golder of the magazine labelled " A Town Called Mercy " as a " disappointing " science fiction Western episode , writing , " There are some great things about this episode ... But in a show that usually has a lot of fun reinventing TV tropes , too much of " A Town Called Mercy " feels a bit been @-@ there , done that . " Patrick Mulkern of Radio Times was more critical , writing that he did not " believe " or " feel " it . He felt that Westerns and Doctor Who were two things that " never quite gelled " and also criticised the " languorous pace " the fact that Rory had little to do . However , he did praise the " gorgeous " set and the " cleverly constructed a morality play " .