

## = The Impossible Astronaut =

" The Impossible Astronaut " is the first episode of the sixth series of the British science fiction television series Doctor Who . Written by show runner Steven Moffat , and directed by Toby Haynes , the episode was first broadcast on 23 April 2011 in the United Kingdom , as well as the United States and Canada . It also aired in Australia on 30 April 2011 . The episode features alien time traveller the Doctor ( Matt Smith ) and his companions Amy Pond ( Karen Gillan ) and Rory Williams ( Arthur Darvill ) , and is the first of a two @-@ part story , which concluded with " Day of the Moon " .

In the episode , Amy Pond , Rory and River Song are summoned to Utah , United States , by the Eleventh Doctor , who is killed by a mysterious figure in a space suit . The dead Doctor is revealed to be an older self , after his younger version returns . They try to understand what the future Doctor said and are sent to Washington D.C. The team deals with the Silence , a race of aliens with the ability to make people forget their encounter with them when they look away .

The Silence was created to compete with other past aliens in terms of " scariness , " including the Weeping Angels . The episode was partially filmed on location at Lone Rock , Utah ; the first time in Doctor Who that principal photography took place in the United States . Before the broadcast , a fan leaked the plot of the episode following a press screening . The episode was seen by 8 @. @ 86 million viewers in the United Kingdom , and received generally positive reviews from critics . " The Impossible Astronaut " gained an Appreciation Index of 88 ? considered excellent . The episode was dedicated to Elisabeth Sladen , known for playing former companion Sarah Jane Smith , who died from cancer on 19 April 2011 .

## = = Plot = =

## = = = Prequel = = =

On 22 March 2011 , a short scene serving as a prequel for the first episode was released on the programme 's website . In the prequel , Nixon receives a phone call from the little girl who keeps calling him in the episode . She begs for the President to look behind him , but he asks how she got that number , which the ' spaceman ' told her . She tells him it is about monsters , to which he replies " Young lady , there are no monsters in the Oval Office . " He then hangs up and leans back . Behind him stands an out @-@ of @-@ focus Silent .

## = = = Synopsis = = =

After a two @-@ month break from their travels with the Doctor , his companions , Amy Pond and her husband Rory Williams , receive a " TARDIS blue " -coloured envelope providing a time , date and set of coordinates leading them to Utah . They arrive to meet River Song ( Alex Kingston ) , who also received an envelope , and the Doctor , now 1 @, @ 103 years old , 194 years older than he was when he last saw them . He takes them to a picnic at a nearby lake , telling them he is taking them on a trip to " Space 1969 . " Amy catches a glimpse of a mysterious figure from a distance , but appears to immediately forget about it after she looks away . Later , a figure in an American astronaut suit emerges from the lake ; the Doctor approaches it but warns his companions not to interfere . The astronaut shoots the Doctor , causing him to begin to regenerate , but his companions are horrified to witness the astronaut shoot him again , killing him before he can fully regenerate . The three are met by Canton Everett Delaware III ( William Morgan Sheppard ) who also received an envelope and was instructed to bring a can of gasoline , which the group then uses to give the Doctor a Viking @-@ style funeral .

Regrouping at a diner , Amy , Rory , and River are speculating about who might have sent the envelopes when they are shocked to see the Doctor walking in , 200 years younger again . He reveals that he too was given an envelope , but does not know who sent it to him . Reluctantly his

companions decide not to tell the Doctor either about his death or that the sender was his future self . The four do a search on Delaware and " Space 1969 " . The TARDIS travels back to 8 April 1969 , and ends up cloaked in the Oval Office . President Richard Nixon ( Stuart Milligan ) converses with a younger Delaware ( Mark Sheppard ) about a series of phone calls he received from a young girl asking for help . The Doctor quickly gains Delaware 's trust , convincing Nixon to give him a few minutes to locate the girl .

While the Doctor works , Amy sees the mysterious figure again , and excuses herself to the restroom . There , the figure , a member of a species known as the Silence , waits for her and kills an innocent woman despite Amy 's pleas . Realising the alien is wiping her memory of their encounters , Amy takes a picture of the alien . When she leaves the restroom , however , she yet again forgets the encounter . By then the Doctor has found the girl 's location , a building near Cape Canaveral , Florida , at the intersection to streets named Jefferson , Adams , and Hamilton . The Doctor and his companions leave in the TARDIS , followed closely by a curious Delaware .

Upon arrival , they find pieces of a space suit and alien technology . River and Rory explore a vast network of tunnels that have apparently spread across the planet for centuries , unnoticed by the human population . The two find a control room with a design similar to one seen in " The Lodger " but are unaware they are surrounded by the Silence . Meanwhile , Delaware hears the little girl screaming and gives chase . As Amy and the Doctor follow , Amy tells him she is pregnant . When they find Delaware unconscious , a figure in an astronaut suit appears . Quickly , Amy picks up Delaware 's gun and shoots at the suit . However , she realises too late that the helmet 's visor has opened to reveal the little girl .

= = = Continuity = = =

The episode ties into the series five story arc phrase , " Silence will fall . " The phrase was first used in the series five premiere , " The Eleventh Hour , " and repeated through that series , but was left unresolved in the series ending to be carried into this series .

River Song tells Rory that she and the Doctor are travelling through time " in opposite directions . " She comments that a day is coming when " I 'll look into that man 's eyes , my Doctor , and he won 't have the faintest idea who I am . And I think it 's going to kill me . " In the series four episodes " Silence in the Library " and " Forest of the Dead , " the Tenth Doctor meets River for the first time ( from his perspective ) ; at the conclusion of that story , River is killed saving people trapped inside the Library 's core , although only corporeally ; her consciousness is " saved , " preserved in the core , along with those of all her crewmates .

The TARDIS had been previously turned invisible by damage to its visual stabiliser in the Second Doctor story The Invasion . When Canton first leaves the TARDIS , the Doctor remarks , " Brave heart , Canton , " a reference to the Fifth Doctor 's recurrent statement to his companion Tegan Jovanka , " Brave heart , Tegan . " When Amy asks the younger Doctor to trust her , he asks her to swear to him on something that matters . After some thought , she smiles and says " Fish fingers and custard , " referring to events in " The Eleventh Hour , " when Amy first meets the Doctor as a little girl .

= = Production = =

= = Writing = =

The episode was written by Steven Moffat , who took charge of the show in 2010 . Moffat wanted the 2011 season to start with a two @-@ part story in an attempt to begin with more gravity and a wider scope in plot , as well as wanting the episodes to be one of the darker ones in the series . " The Impossible Astronaut " / " Day of the Moon " was the first two @-@ part episode to open a series since the 1985 Sixth Doctor story Attack of the Cybermen .

In the Doctor Who Confidential episode following the broadcast of " The Impossible Astronaut , "

Moffat stated that in his view , it was one of the darker episodes of the series , but still maintained the same level of humour . The inclusion of the Doctor 's death felt like a series ender for some of the producers , but was actually there to " kick it off . " In writing the death scene of the older version of the Doctor , Moffat wanted to acknowledge to the audience that Time Lords are not invincible , and could still die permanently if killed before regeneration . In creating the Silence , the alien antagonists of the episode , Moffat wanted them to challenge past monsters in terms of " scariness . " He felt these creatures are a " much bigger deal . " The aliens ' design was partially inspired by the figure from the Edvard Munch painting The Scream .

= = = Casting = = =

In October 2010 , it was announced that Mark Sheppard , who had appeared in other past science fiction series , including Battlestar Galactica , Firefly , Supernatural , and Warehouse 13 , would make a guest appearance on Doctor Who . Sheppard described playing Canton as a " dream job , " and said he wished to appear in another of Moffat 's works , including Sherlock . Even though Sheppard is an English actor , it was his first appearance in a British @-@ made television show . For the scene depicting the older Canton Delaware , the producers originally planned that Sheppard would appear older using makeup effects . However , Sheppard suggested instead that his father , William Morgan Sheppard , play the role , a suggestion that was accepted .

American actor Stuart Milligan was cast as President Nixon , which he said he found exciting , having played other presidents in the past , including Dwight D. Eisenhower . Prosthetic pieces were applied on Milligan 's cheeks , nose , and ears to make him resemble Nixon as much as possible . He also practiced how Nixon would speak , but initially found it difficult since he had to wear fake teeth . Milligan previously appeared in the animated Tenth Doctor special Dreamland as the voice of Colonel Stark . Chuk Iwuji , who played Carl , previously appeared in the Seventh Doctor audio drama A Thousand Tiny Wings , where he played Joshua Sembeke .

= = = Filming and effects = = =

This pair of episodes marks the first time that Doctor Who has filmed principal photography footage within the United States ; the American @-@ produced TV movie of 1996 was filmed in Canada , and some second unit establishing shots of New York and the Statue of Liberty were filmed on Liberty Island for the episode " Daleks in Manhattan " , but none of the cast of the episode were involved in the shoot . Filming took place in the state of Utah . For the opening shot for the location , director Toby Haynes wanted it to be epic so that the audience could recognise where the episode was set . Scenes on the roadway were filmed on U.S. Route 163 ( several miles east of the coordinates listed on the Doctor 's invitations ) . The crew wanted to add as many American icons as they could into those shots , including a Stetson hat , a 1950s Edsel Villager , and a yellow school bus . Moffat , having enjoyed writing episodes featuring River Song , wanted to give her an impressive entrance . Haynes had Alex Kingston block the sunlight from the camera angle and blow smoke from her revolver . The scenes involving the picnic and the future @-@ Doctor dying took place on the shore of Lake Powell . The suit worn by the future @-@ Doctor 's killer was a fabricated replica of an Apollo space suit . In filming the death scene the filming crew noticed that Karen Gillan was genuinely upset and " was acting her heart out . " In filming the " Viking funeral " scene , Haynes wished to film it during the sunset . However , the sun set over the desert , so was instead filmed during sunrise , as the sun rose over the water .

Kingston had to genuinely slap Matt Smith several times in a scene because it was difficult to fake . Kingston recalled that after a few takes , Smith got red cheeked and grew frustrated at having to do the sequence over and over again . The Oval Office set was constructed at Upper Boat Studios in South Wales . Because the production crew had access to several pictures and plans of the real office , they were able to replicate it in almost every detail . The main problem for building the set was the plastering ; the crew normally plaster one wall at a time for normal rooms , but because the Oval Office was round , they had to do the entire set at once . The American @-@ style diner scene

when the companions reunite with the Doctor in this episode is actually located in Cardiff Bay . The Laurel and Hardy film *The Flying Deuces* , in which the Doctor intruded , was done by Smith dancing in front of greenscreen .

= = Broadcast and reception = =

= = = Pre @-@ broadcast leak = = =

At some point before the broadcast of the episode , it and " Day of the Moon " were released in a press screening , where a number of fans were invited to attend . The production team present asked them not to give away any spoilers . However , following the screening a fan gave away the entire plot of the two episodes on an internet forum . News of this angered Moffat . In an interview on BBC Radio 5 Live , Moffat stated ;

Despite this he added that the majority of Doctor Who fans are " spoiler @-@ phobes , " who refused to go online to be spoiled .

= = = Broadcast and ratings = = =

" The Impossible Astronaut " was first broadcast on BBC One in the United Kingdom on 23 April 2011 at 6 pm . It began with a still @-@ caption tribute to actress Elisabeth Sladen , who died from cancer on 19 April 2011 . Sladen had previously appeared in the series as companion Sarah Jane Smith , and as the same character on the spin @-@ off series *The Sarah Jane Adventures* . After the broadcast " The Impossible Astronaut " received preliminary , overnight figures of 6 @.@ 52 million viewers . Final consolidated ratings for the episode increased to 8 @.@ 86 million , with a 43 @.@ 2 per cent audience share . This made the episode the second highest rated programme of the day , behind Britain 's *Got Talent* on ITV1 . The episode was the third most watched on BBC One , and sixth overall for the entire week ending 24 April . An additional 300 @,@ 000 viewed the episode from BBC iPlayer within two days of its original broadcast . It received an Appreciation Index of 88 , one of the higher scores for the weekend .

In the United States the episode aired on BBC America on the same day it was released in the United Kingdom , as was the case in Canada for Space . 1 @.@ 3 million viewers saw " The Impossible Astronaut " on BBC America , making it the highest rated telecast in the history of the channel . It was reportedly up by 71 @,@ 000 from " The Eleventh Hour " . When Live + 7 day DVR ratings were added , the total rose to 1 @.@ 8 million . In Canada , the episode was seen by 538 @,@ 000 , making it the most watched Who episode for the channel , and its most watched telecast in 2011 . It was shown on ABC1 in Australia on 30 April 2011 , and was viewed by 860 @,@ 000 from the five capital cities , matching the ratings from " A Christmas Carol " on Boxing Day 2010 .

Audience measurement service Kantar Media reported that " The Impossible Astronaut " is the most recorded television event of all time . Analysis of BARB data revealed that 4 @.@ 11 million people recorded and viewed the programme within a week of broadcast , accounting for 46 % of the episode 's total viewers . A total of 1 @.@ 38 million requests were placed on iPlayer for the month of April , placing it at number one for the month .

= = = Critical reception = = =

The episode was met with generally positive reviews from television critics . Dan Martin of *The Guardian* reacted positively towards the episode , believing the cast performed better than the previous fifth series . He stated " Steven Moffat has thrown away the rule book and made Doctor Who as , you imagine , he 's pictured it should be his whole life . Killing the Doctor leaves the shape of the series mapped out , raises the bar so that no one is safe , and sees Amy , Rory and River facing a terrible dilemma . " Martin liked that " Amy 's numbed horror ramps things up to a series @-@ finale level on intensity from the off , " and then switches " into an Oval Office comedy of

manners , " and " morphs into gothic horror and finally flings you to the ground with its cinematic cliffhanger . " He was also positive towards the American setting , and " our eccentric British foursome bumbling through it , " believing the series raised its game with this . With regards to the Silence , Martin believed it was " a standard Moffat psychological trick , but the most refined to date . " Martin later rated it the second best episode of the series , though the finale was not included in the list .

Morgan Jeffery of Digital Spy called the episode " a fantastic launch for the sixth series , " adding " the Doctor Who team 's US location shooting has certainly paid off , lending these early scenes a grand scale that the series could scarcely have expected to achieve in 2005 , let alone in 1963 . " Commenting on the future @-@ Doctor 's death , Jeffery said " seven minutes in , a nation 's collective jaw dropped as The Doctor ? this show 's lead ? is mercilessly gunned down . This plot twist is simply stunning , and it 's difficult to imagine even casual viewers not sitting up to pay attention at this point . " Jeffery also believed that the series regulars were on " top form , " adding " the more abrasive aspects of Amy Pond 's personality seem to have been toned down this year , and Karen Gillan responds with her best , most sympathetic performance to date . Arthur Darvill also lives up to his recent promotion to full @-@ time companion . His comic timing is simply superb , but he excels too in the episode 's darker moments . " Jeffery rated the episode five stars out of five .

Gavin Fuller of The Daily Telegraph believed it was " a cracking start to the first part of the 2011 series , with the shocking ending of Amy seemingly shooting a girl making one keen wait for the conclusion next week to see how it all resolves itself , " as well as enjoying the concept of the Silence . Rick Marshall of MTV believed that " Steven Moffat and the Doctor Who crew offer up yet another great episode , " but also said the " big cliffhanger will likely cause more than a few fans ' heads to explode . " In addition , Marshall believed the alien antagonists " give the Weeping Angels a run for their money in scare factor . " Simon Brew of Den of Geek thought the episode was " a triumphant return for Doctor Who , bubbling with confidence and throwing down story strands that hint at an engrossing series . " Brew liked Sheppard 's performance as Delaware and Darvill 's increasing presence as Rory . Brew also complimented Haynes ' work in the United States , saying it was an improvement from " Daleks in Manhattan " , which featured British actors attempting to play with American accents . Tom Phillips of Metro said the 1969 US setting were " beautifully used , " and enjoyed the " spookiness " of the Silence . However Phillips felt the episode would be " a bit hard to get into " for new viewers . Kevin O 'Sullivan The Sunday Mirror was more negative towards the episode , stating it was " impossible to understand , " and for " strictly sci @-@ fi nerds only , " adding that Smith " remains a derivative Doctor who brings nothing new to the party . "