

= The Curse of the Black Spot =

" The Curse of the Black Spot " is the third episode of the sixth series of the British science fiction television series Doctor Who . Written by Stephen Thompson , and directed by Jeremy Webb , the episode was first broadcast on 7 May 2011 on BBC One in the United Kingdom and on BBC America in the United States . It features the Doctor ( Matt Smith ) and his companions Amy Pond ( Karen Gillan ) and Rory Williams ( Arthur Darvill ) .

In the episode , the TARDIS materialises in the 17th century on board a pirate ship whose crew is being terrorised by a Siren @-@ like creature . After receiving an injury , however minor , a black spot appears on their palms and then the creature apparently disintegrates them .

The producers wished to develop a pirate @-@ themed episode for the sixth series and allow the protagonists to " sit back and have some fun " on the adventure . The episode was primarily filmed at a dock in Cornwall and Upper Boat Studios in Wales . " The Curse of the Black Spot " was seen by 7 @.@ 85 million viewers and received generally mixed reviews from critics . It gained an audience Appreciation Index of 86 ? considered excellent .

= = Plot = =

= = = Prequel = = =

On 30 April 2011 , immediately following the broadcast of " Day of the Moon " , the BBC released a " prequel " to " The Curse of the Black Spot " . The prequel consists of a short montage of atmospheric shots of the pirate ship , bridged by a narration in the form of Captain Avery 's journal for " April the first , 1699 ; the good ship Fancy . " Avery describes how his ship has been becalmed for eight days , and the crew are being taken one by one by " an enemy " ; he fears that they are all doomed to die there .

= = = Synopsis = = =

Following a distress signal , the TARDIS lands aboard a 17th @-@ century pirate ship stranded in the middle of an ocean . The ship 's crew have been terrorised by a Siren @-@ like creature ( Lily Cole ) who marks people with black spots on their palms after they are injured . Her song then lulls victims into a trance , making them want to go to her , which apparently disintegrates them . Rory Williams ( Arthur Darvill ) receives a cut during a tussle with the pirates , and finds a black spot on his hand , but is prevented from succumbing to the song of the Siren by Amy Pond ( Karen Gillan ) and the Doctor ( Matt Smith ) .

Surmising the Siren is using water as a portal , the Doctor instructs everyone to seek refuge in the ship 's dry magazine . There , they find Toby Avery ( Oscar Lloyd ) , the son of the ship 's captain Henry Avery ( Hugh Bonneville ) , who stowed away on the ship in order to join the crew after his mother died , unaware of his father 's illicit deeds . He too has a black spot on his palm due to a fever . In an attempt to escape , the Doctor and Avery board the TARDIS , but find it is acting haphazardly , and are forced to evacuate , and they watch as it dematerializes by itself . After another shipmate is taken by the Siren in a dry room , the Doctor realises the Siren is using reflection to appear . In response they rid the ship of reflective surfaces , including the ship 's stolen treasure .

When a storm begins , the crew start to set sail . Toby drops a polished crown while bringing his father a coat . The Siren is summoned and takes Toby . Soon , Rory falls into the ocean , and the Doctor rationalises that the Siren has shown intelligence and will likely get to Rory before he drowns . Believing the victims are not dead , the Doctor convinces Avery and Amy to prick themselves . The Doctor 's suspicions are confirmed when the Siren 's touch actually teleports them to an alien spaceship , invisible in the same spot the pirate ship is located .

The Doctor finds the spaceship 's crew long dead from exposure to a human virus . The trio then

discover a sickbay where Avery 's entire crew , Toby and Rory are in medical care . The Siren turns out to be the ship 's virtual doctor , caring for the injured humans ; the black spots are tissue samples used as references . Amy convinces the Siren to release Rory into her care . Using Rory 's nursing knowledge , Amy and the Doctor remove him from life support and are able to resuscitate him . Meanwhile , Avery decides to stay with his son and his crew , unable to go back to England himself while the ship will care for his crew . Avery takes the helm of the spaceship and , along with Toby and his crew , sets off to explore the stars .

= = = Continuity = = =

The historical pirate Henry Avery was previously mentioned in the 1966 serial *The Smugglers* , which deals with the search for " Avery 's gold " . " *The Curse of the Black Spot* " re @-@ asserts unresolved plot points from the previous two episodes , " *The Impossible Astronaut* " and " *Day of the Moon* " ; Amy and Rory express concern over the Doctor 's future death , Madame Kovarian appears briefly to Amy , and the Doctor again uses the TARDIS scanner to perform a pregnancy test on Amy , the results of which remain unclear .

= = Production = =

= = = Writing and casting = = =

In January 2011 , it was announced that *Downton Abbey* actor Hugh Bonneville would make a guest appearance as a " pirate captain " in an episode of the sixth series of *Doctor Who* . Matt Smith and Karen Gillan felt that working with the actor was " great fun . " He previously played Sir Sidney Herbert and Tzar Nicholas I of Russia in the Seventh Doctor audio drama *The Angel of Scutari* . Later in February 2011 , it was announced actress and model Lily Cole was cast as a sea creature . The producers were looking for an actress who is " beautiful , " " striking , " and yet somewhat " spooky . " Cole came early into the casting suggestions , and accepted the role when she was approached .

The episode was written by Stephen Thompson . The producers wished to develop a *Doctor Who* episode set on " the high seas . " The episode was also made to allow the Doctor and his companions to " kick back and have some fun . " As the episode was pirate @-@ themed , the producers wanted to fit in as many elements as possible from pirate fiction , including treasure , mutinies , a stowaway boy , walking the plank , storms , swords , and a pirate with a " good heart " who " isn 't really evil . " " *The Curse of the Black Spot* " was originally planned to be ninth in the series , but was moved forward prior to filming as executive producer Steven Moffat felt the first half of the series was too dark .

= = = Filming and effects = = =

Filming took place primarily in Cornwall and the Upper Boat Studios in Wales . The exterior of the pirate ship was filmed at a dock in Cornwall , while the lower decks were built from a set at the studio . The principal challenge to film at the dock was to ensure the audience would not see it . The crew set up smoke machines to simulate fog . To create the storm the crew used wind and rain machines , the latter of which went through 15 @,@ 000 litres of water . The loud noise from the wind machines caused communication difficulties during takes . Anticipating they would get soaked , the cast present on the deck wore dry suits underneath their clothes . Before filming began on the storm sequences , Darvill heard that he would perform the stunt where he is thrown into the sea , and was willing to perform it . The stunt would later be performed by a double .

The scenes in which Cole appeared on the ship were done by using a harness as if she was flying . Because the actress wore green dress and makeup , the normal greenscreen was replaced by bluescreens in the studio . Cole felt it was fun to fly on the harness , but found it painful after a few

hours . Gillan was allowed to perform several of her own stunts in the episode . She was excited to learn that her character would fight pirates with swords , and was taught how to handle one with basic moves . Gillan was also allowed to swing across the ship . However , a stunt double was required to film the sequence where Amy is thrown across the deck by the Siren . The sickbay set was also built in a studio . Because the beds were attached to strings , they were prone to swaying . The cast members who were asked to lie on the beds were instructed to stay still and not breathe heavily to limit movement .

= = Broadcast and reception = =

= = = Broadcast and ratings = = =

" The Curse of the Black Spot " was first broadcast on BBC One in the United Kingdom on Saturday , 7 May 2011 , from 6 : 15 pm to 7pm . It was shown on BBC America in the United States the same day as the UK broadcast . In the UK , the episode received preliminary overnight ratings of 6 @. @ 21 million viewers . Based on these estimated figures , viewership was up by 800 @, @ 000 from " Day of the Moon " . Final consolidated ratings for the episode increased to 7 @. @ 85 million viewers , with a 35 @. @ 5 per cent audience share . It was the second largest audience of the night , behind Britain 's Got Talent on ITV1 . In addition nearly one million viewed the episode on BBC iPlayer . It was given an Appreciation Index of 86 , placing it in the " excellent " category .

= = = Critical reception = = =

The episode was met with generally mixed reviews from television critics . Dan Martin of The Guardian thought that " The Curse of the Black Spot " was " a little bit anticlimactic " in comparison to the opening two @- @ part episode of the series , though it was " a nice old @- @ fashioned runaround bolstered by some high concepts and cute moments " , much like the classic episodes . He praised Lily Cole as the Siren but criticised the character of Avery . Martin later rated it the worst episode of the first twelve of the series ( the finale , which had not aired at the time , was not included in the list ) . IGN 's Matt Risley gave it an overall " good " score of 7 out of 10 , admitting that there were " some great lines " and the " Space Pirate " twist was " a refreshingly sci @- @ fi spin on the well @- @ worn genre plot " , but he criticised the Siren for lacking qualities to become " a credible and terrifying Who villain " .

Gavin Fuller of The Daily Telegraph did not feel the episode was believable enough , citing Bonneville 's performance , saying he " didn 't come across as a ruthless , greedy killer despite what his crew claimed of him , " and if the crew had been " nastier , " it could have given more potency to the Siren threat . Fuller felt that Cole did " a decent enough job , " claiming that the Siren was the " best @- @ realised thing " about the episode , " only slightly ahead of Karen Gillan looking very fetching in a pirate outfit . " Simon Brew of Den of Geek started by comparing the episode to Lost 's " massive , intriguing " cliffhangers , " and then sauntered off to other less interesting stuff , " mainly criticising that the little girl 's regeneration in " Day of the Moon " was left unresolved . However , Brew " still enjoyed " " The Curse of the Black Spot " , reacting positively to the episode 's production values and the reveal of the black spots . Nick Setchfield of the science @- @ fiction based magazine SFX opined that the high points of the episode were that it was " high on shivery maritime atmosphere , " and the Doctor for not being " in instant possession of all the facts , but who reloads his thinking as events unfold . " However , Setchfield was critical of the story , claiming " pirates and Who should be as combustive a mix as gunpowder and a trusty flintlock , but ultimately this grog @- @ time yarn falls short of its promise . "

Morgan Jeffery of Digital Spy wrote " following on from that game @- @ changing two @- @ part premiere , this week 's Doctor Who provides us with a real change of pace , with a moody and atmospheric pre @- @ titles sequence setting the scene for a far more traditional adventure . " Jeffery praised the performance of Bonneville , but was critical of Cole 's role for her not being "

given much to do except float around and look ethereal , " but added " the English model certainly looks the part , with well @-@ judged special effects aiding her performance as the beautiful yet unsettling Siren . " Jeffery also thought that Amy 's revival of Rory was " well @-@ acted by both Karen Gillan and Arthur Darvill , " but criticised the series for the numerous " Rory 's dead " scenes , negatively comparing Rory with the South Park character Kenny McCormick . Jeffery rated the episode three stars out of five for being somewhat underwhelming in comparison with " The Impossible Astronaut " and " Day of the Moon " .