Richard Scully, "Entry on: Doctor Who (Series, S05E12–13): The Pandorica Opens / The Big Bang by Lindsey Alford , Toby Haynes, Steven Moffat", peer-reviewed by Elizabeth Hale and Daniel A. Nkemleke. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/90. Entry version as of November 15, 2026.

Lindsey Alford , Toby Haynes , Steven Moffat

Doctor Who (Series, S05E12–13): The Pandorica Opens / The Big Bang

United Kingdom (2010)

TAGS: Roman Britain Roman History





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General information	
Title of the work	Doctor Who (Series, S05E12–13): The Pandorica Opens / The Big Bang
Studio/Production Company	British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2010
First Edition Details	June 19, 2010 / June 26, 2010.
Running time	50 min (each)
Date of the First DVD or VHS	September 6, 2010 (DVD [Region 2]); July 26, 2016 (DVD [Region 1])
Awards	2011 – Hugo Award, Best Dramatic Presentation, Short Film.
Genre	Science fiction, Television series, Time-Slip Fantasy*
Target Audience	Crossover
Author of the Entry	Richard Scully, University of New England, rscully@une.edu.au
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Creators



Lindsey Alford

Script Editor



Toby Haynes (Director)



Steven Moffat , b. 1961
(Screenwriter, Scriptwriter)

Steven Moffat (1961–) is an acclaimed Scottish TV writer and producer, who has been a significant force in British television and film since the late 1980s. Having studied at the University of Glasgow, he began writing creatively for the stage while working as a teacher in Greenock (near Glasgow). A play – *War Zones* (1985) – and a musical – *Knifer* (1989) – garnered some acclaim, but his big break came with a sample script for a show about a school newspaper. This was picked-up by ITV as *Press Gang* (1989–1993), showcasing much of Britain's up-and-coming young talent. From there, he worked on the series *Joking Apart* (1993–1995) and *Chalk* (1997), before having a huge hit with the relationship-themed comedy *Coupling* (2000–2004). Moffat was a long-time fan of *Doctor Who* – writing a comedy spoof for Comic Relief entitled *The Curse of Fatal Death* (1999) – and when it was re-launched under Russel T. Davies from 2005, he contributed scripts for perhaps the best episodes of the revamped series: *The Empty*

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Child/The Doctor Dances (2005). He contributed *The Girl in the Fireplace* (2006), and *Blink* (2007), as well as the short charity episode *Time Crash* (2007). *Silence in the Library/Forest of the Dead* (2008) followed; and on the strength of this – and his reputation with the outgoing showrunner, Davies – Moffat took over as executive producer from 2010. Moffat hired Matt Smith to replaced David Tennant as the Doctor (the Eleventh incarnation of the Time Lord), writing or editing in some form on almost every series of the programme from 2010 to 2017. Concurrently, Moffat collaborated with Mark Gatiss on the series *Sherlock* (2010-2017); six episodes of Jekyll (2007); and worked with Steven Spielberg and Peter Jackson on feature-film *The Adventures of Tintin: The Secret of the Unicorn* (2011).

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Additional information

Casting	Matt Smith – The Doctor, Karen Gillan – Amy Pond, Arthur Darvill – Rory Williams, Alex Kingston – River Song, Tony Curran – Vincent van Gogh, Bill Paterson – Bracewell, Ian McNeice – Winston Churchill, Sophie Okonedo – Liz Ten, Marcus O'Donovan – Claudio, Clive Wood – Commander, Christopher Ryan – Commander Stark, Ruari Mears – Cyber Leader, Paul Kasey – Judoon, Howard Lee – Doctor Gachet, Barnaby Edwards – Dalek, Simon Fisher-Becker – Dorium, Joe Jacobs – Guard, Chrissie Cotterill – Madame Vernet, David Fynn – Marcellus, Caitlin Blackwood – Amelia, Susan Vidler – Aunt Sharon, Frances Ashman – Christine,

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Barnaby Edwards – Stone Dalek,

William Pretsell – Dave,

Halcro Johnston – Augustus Pond,

Karen Westwood – Tabetha Pond,

Nicholas Briggs – Dalek voice.

Summary

'The Pandorica Opens' and 'The Big Bang' contain numerous mash-ups of Classical myth and history. The two-part story opens with the Doctor (in his Eleventh incarnation, played by Matt Smith) and his companion, Amy Pond, arriving in Roman Britain in AD 102, where they find the Doctor's past and future wife, River Song, impersonating the Egyptian queen, Cleopatra VII. The 'Pandorica' of the title is a direct reference to Pandora's Box: an advanced prison wherein the universe's most dangerous being is to be incarcerated. Faced by an attack from the combined armies of his deadliest enemies (the Daleks, the Cybermen, the Sontarans, and more besides), the Doctor is backed by a cohort of Roman legionaries, commanded by Amy Pond's fiancée, Rory Williams. As 'the Last Centurion', Rory stands guard over the Pandorica for centuries, down to the present day. In a remarkable intertextual narrative device, the whole scenario in which the Doctor finds himself is revealed to be a construct, drawn from Amy's childhood memories of a book *The Story of Roman Britain* (inspired by the real-world *The Romans*, from the *Ladybird Story of Britain* series). The Doctor himself is revealed to be the universe's most dangerous being, and thus is destined for the Pandorica.

Analysis

'The Pandorica Opens' and 'The Big Bang' are significant examples of early-21st century British television drama. Watched by close to 7 million viewers during its initial broadcast (and an additional million or so on catch-up services and other media), the episodes are notable examples of a science fiction appropriation of Classical myth, and history. The time-travelling theme of the program was a handy device for justifying the incursion into Roman Britain; and the Doctor and his companion serve as useful avatars for the audience-members as they

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	are introduced to and familiarised with the historical and mythical context of the storyline (or, rather, reacquainted with matters with which they may already have been; with Latin language and Roman history still being widely-taught in the British education system in the 2000s).
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Roman Britain Roman History
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adventure Humour Intertextuality Travel
Further Reading	Harmes, Marcus K., *Doctor Who and the Art of Adaptation; Fifty Years of Storytelling*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014, esp. pp. 68 ff. Keen, Anthony G., "It's about Tempus: Greece and Rome in “Classic” Doctor Who", in David C. Wright, Jr., and Allan W. Austin, eds., *Space and Time: Essays on Visions of History in Science Fiction and Fantasy Television*, Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2010, 100–15. Keen, Anthony G., "Sideways Pompeii! The Use of Historical Period to Question the Doctor's Role in History", in Ross P. Garner, Melissa Beattie, and Una McCormack, eds., *Impossible Worlds, Impossible Things: Cultural Perspectives on* Doctor Who, Torchwood, *and* The Sarah Jane Adventures, Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2010, 94–117. Potter, Amanda, "Classical monsters in new Doctor Who fan fiction", *Transformative Works and Cultures* 21 (2016), at journal.transformativeworks.org (accessed: August 17, 2018).

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Addenda

Recorded viewers:

‘The Pandorica Opens’ – 7.57 million

‘The Big Bang’ – 6.696 million

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