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The Doctor (Matt  
Smith), flanked by  
Amy (Karen Gillan)  
and Rory (Arthur  
Darvill), tackles  
Wild West outlaws

# THE MAGNIFICENT DOCTOR

Matt Smith treads fearlessly in the footsteps  
of Clint Eastwood as *Doctor Who* goes  
way out west... to Spain!

**Doctor Who**  
Saturday 7.35pm BBC1

**T**HE DOCTOR is wearing a Stetson and riding a horse. He looks slightly over-excited. "I've had two lessons and I'm cantering already. I've never ridden before. It's purely for this!" says Matt Smith from his elevated position.

"This" is *A Town Called Mercy*, the third instalment of the new series of *Doctor Who*. "We're in the Wild West! I get to ride horses! I get to play cowboy. Guns! Saloon bar doors... You literally get *Doctor Who* does the Wild West."

*A Town called Mercy* is the first time the Doctor has "done" the Old West since 1966. That story, with William Hartnell as the Doctor, was called *The Gunfighters*, but its working title was *The Gunslingers*. This time round there's just a single Gunslinger to contend with, but as he is seven feet tall and has a Gatling gun in place of his right arm (see overleaf), one is more than enough.

The story follows the arrival of the Tardis in a small desert settlement. "Just crossing the boundary line summons a not-quite-human killer from the desert heat haze," says showrunner Steven Moffat. "The Doctor finds himself not just in the crossfire of an ancient conflict (a cyborg killer and an alien fugitive) but faced with a moral dilemma. Which side should he take?"

Cast and crew are all paranoid about giving anything else away. "I can't really say the reason why the Tardis has taken us to the Wild West but it has," says Karen Gillan, who plays companion Amy. "And as soon as we arrive we realise that there's something

"I get to ride horses!  
I get to play cowboy...  
Oh man it's fun"

MATT SMITH

not quite right about this place - and it's something that needs to be sorted out quite swiftly." Mercy, she adds, is "a small town with a big problem."

Matt Smith really isn't that bothered by plotlines or problems. He is just loving playing a cowboy. "Oh man it's fun. Stetsons and everything. We did a scene last night that was just brilliant. A showdown in a windswept street... It's quite exciting to get to play a cowboy. What's wonderful about the Doctor is, of course, you get to do the narrow-eyed stuff and the posturing, but then two lines later he'll be snapping out of it going, 'Oh this is ridiculous, what am I doing?' So he can be ironic, play a role, wear a hat, then step outside of it and see how silly it all is."

Arthur Darvill, meanwhile, is mildly peeved that, as Rory, he doesn't get to have so much cowboy fun.

"I don't get to burst through any saloon bar doors. I might try to put some in. I've invented a new award, which I think Bafta should give, which is the Best Performance in the Back of Shot. So I'm going to burst through some saloon doors and see if it makes the episode."

And they all get to play with guns, which makes Karen Gillan, in particular, very happy: "I do have a bit of a gun moment in this. But then Amy has had a few gun moments. I'm thinking now she knows >

ADRIAN ROGERS



how to use a gun. Which is going to be fun because we're in the Wild West and I'm going to look like I know what I'm doing."

If you've seen the trailer for the episode you'll know that in fact Amy doesn't know what she's doing with guns at all. It's a running gag in the story. The running gag that's doing the rounds on set is to do with Smith's gait. He is a little bow-legged. "Steven Moffat says that his legs are already in the shape of sitting on a horse anyway," giggles Gillan. "It's like he was born to do it," chips in Arthur Darvill.

The problem comes not when the Doctor is on the horse, but when the scene is done and he gets off it. Caramel, stage name Susan, rears up and heads off, quite literally, into the sunset. "Was it something I said?" says Smith.

**T**HE WILD WEST as we know it is actually about four hours' drive from Benidorm: many of the best westerns were shot in Spain. Situated on the edge of the Tabernas desert about 25km inland from the south coast, Fort Bravo is not a studio complex but a whole town of dust streets and ramshackle wooden buildings, complete with cantina, saloon, church and jail. Parts of it will be familiar to anyone who has ever seen a spaghetti western, the far from accurate name given to the host of cowboy films shot in Spain (see panel below).

To give one example, as Adrian Scarborough takes a break from filming his guest role to put on some sun cream, the arch he's standing under is the one where Henry Fonda hangs Charles Bronson's brother in *Once Upon a Time in the West*. It's nigh-on impossible to walk down the main street without a hand on your imaginary holster.

"This place is just amazing," says Smith. "I love westerns and when you look at the history, this is where they were all made. I rode my horse up

## A FISTFUL OF EUROS

Scraggy, barren and hot, the Tabernas desert in southern Spain covers more than 108 square miles and resembles the American West in both climate and landscape. Hundreds of spaghetti westerns were filmed in the dusty Andalusian province of Almería, which means this region has become as much a part of our vision of the Wild West as anywhere in America.

Fort Bravo is one of three film sets in the area, and the only one still in use. They became well known thanks to the Italian director Sergio Leone. He filmed scenes there with Clint Eastwood for *A Fistful of Dollars* and then most of *For a Few Dollars More*. When the Franco regime introduced tax breaks for film-making in 1964, the industry exploded: *Once Upon a Time in the West* and *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* were just two of the classics shot here.

Now Fort Bravo is something of a ghost town itself. Not only have westerns fallen out of fashion, but Ouarzazate in Morocco has taken over as Hollywood's go-to desert backdrop – the extras work for just six Euros a day, says one frustrated worker at Fort Bravo! **BW**



## WHO IS... THE GUNSLINGER?

The Doctor's latest nemesis stands seven feet tall, wears a black cape, has a massive gun for a right arm and looks like a cross between The Terminator and The Man With No Name. In fact he hasn't got a name – he is known only as The Gunslinger.

He is, of course, a relentless cyborg (with tattoos), but less clear is what exactly it is that he wants. Do the townspeople of Mercy need protection from the Gunslinger (with the Doctor as stand-in sheriff) or is he trying to protect them?

Matt Smith, for one, isn't giving anything away: "The Gunslinger? It's sort of a surprise. What I will say is that he looks amazing, because he was in prosthetics all morning every day and they worked on everything – his hands, his face and that arm."

So does Smith think the Gunslinger will join the pantheon of great *Doctor Who* baddies? "We'll have to see. What I said to him as he was suffering in the make-up trailer for hours was, 'You know what, dude? You look good enough for them to make a toy of you. And if you can have a toy of yourself, it's all good!'" **BW**

## "The Wild West as we know it is actually about four hours' drive from Benidorm"

the main street in the town yesterday and felt like Clint Eastwood."

He says that not only do they all enjoy going on location but that, when done right, it can bring a fantasy world to life. "It's like the Utah stuff we filmed last time round – it gives it a real grounding. You're not going, 'This is the Wild West but in a studio with a backdrop or something.' It's unmistakably, tangibly the Wild West."

Except of course it isn't – it's a fabrication, too, just the best there is. "I had no idea anything like

this existed. I knew there'd be film sets, but I didn't realise they were in Spain," says Karen Gillan.

We walk out of the town, under the swinging wooden sign announcing its name, Mercy, and up a dusty track into the desert. This being *Doctor Who*, a few hundred yards away an egg the size of a Ford Fiesta is half-dug in to the sand. The Gunslinger, otherwise known as actor Andrew Brooke (above), is waiting for an encounter with the Doctor. The prosthetic arm, his gun, weighs more than 20kg. It is brought in to be attached by three men, and then the Gunslinger points it straight at the Doctor. "Don't shoot, don't shoot!" says Smith. "I know who you are."

**B**UT ANYWAY, WHY do a *Doctor Who* western? "Why not do a *Doctor Who* western?" was how it came about," says the show's new executive producer, Caroline Skinner. "We didn't want to design a series of movie clichés, but to see the Doctor in this environment was just a fantastic opportunity for some brilliant storytelling. Just look at it!" she says, spreading her arms to take in the town below and the wide horizon beyond.

"It's thrilling to be out here where they shot the original westerns. Ordinarily you'd build a lot of things as sets but we've got the brilliant opportunity of actually being here. I've just got off the plane and driving through this landscape just blows you away. We haven't seen Matt's Doctor do anything like this before." *Benji Wilson*

Read about the Doctor's first Wild West adventure, *The Gunfighters*, at [radiotimes.com/blog/doctor-who-story-guide](http://radiotimes.com/blog/doctor-who-story-guide)

