

TV Review: Riveting Season Premiere of BBC’s ‘Doctor Who’

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on April 23, 2011 - 12:14pm

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CHICAGO – BBC America has been blanketing major markets with advertising for tonight’s premiere of the new season of “Doctor Who,” debuting for the first time on the same weekend as it does in the United Kingdom. Maybe you saw the billboards at the Lake Street station and marveled that a program that first premiered in 1963 was still on the air. Not only is the TARDIS still functioning but the program has arguably never been better.



Television Rating: **4.5/5.0**

It may be coincidental but the season premiere of “Doctor Who” not only marks the first time the season will air on both sides of the pond nearly simultaneously (most BBC America programming consists of episodes that have already aired in the U.K.) but it also marks the first time that a large portion of the show was shot in the States. The good doctor really is taking over the world. And he’s starting in 1969.



Doctor Who
Photo credit: BBC

The premiere of “Doctor Who” is titled “The Impossible Astronaut” and I wouldn’t dare ruin its many surprises. It has already been revealed that this season would mark a darker turn in the tone of the show (although last season featured some dark episodes as well) and that seems clear from the very beginning. A major character dies in the first episode, forcing the action into, of all places, Richard Nixon’s White House in 1969.

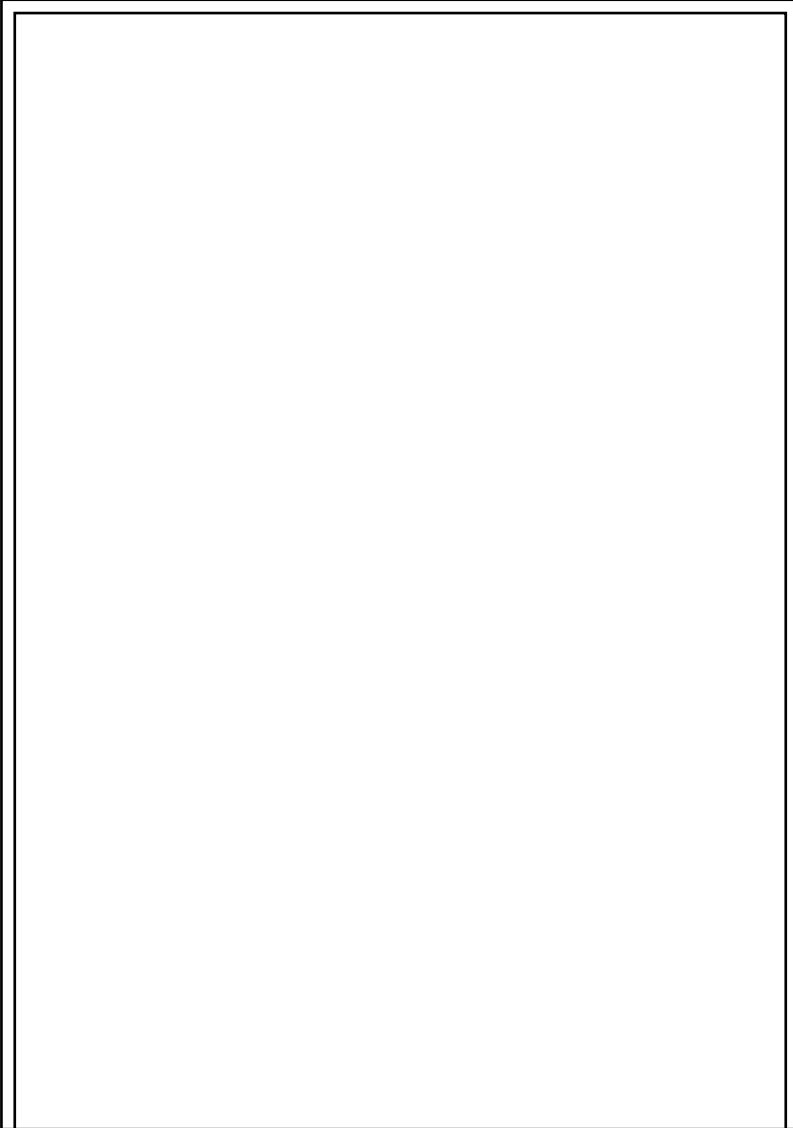


Doctor Who
Photo credit: BBC

Why there? Well, there’s an alien invasion on the way. Isn’t there always? Nixon has been getting phone calls from someone/something, no matter where he may be in the world. The child-sounding thing on the other end of the line sounds scared and Nixon calls in a special agent to try and solve the terrifying situation. That’s when the Doctor (Matt Smith), River Song (Alex Kingston), Amy Pond (Karen Gillan), and Rory (Arthur Darvill) drop in.

Perhaps the most wonderful element of the new incarnation of “Doctor Who” has been the boundless creativity allowed the writers by being able to play with space and time. In the first episode alone, there’s an alien creature with the brilliant little trick in which you don’t remember they exist when you’re not looking right at them. How else could aliens exist among us but in the shadows? Nobody knows they’re invading because no one can remember them. Brilliant.

Finding a way to work the FBI, ’60s alien paranoia, Area 51, Richard Nixon, Amy Pond, River Song, and the Doctor into one episode and make it feel consistently creative instead of just wacky is a feat of a great team of writers. This is the smartest sci-fi show currently on the air and it’s almost like they’re showing off with the season premiere.





Doctor Who
Photo credit: BBC

And it helps to have a cast this uniformly talented. Smith stepped into some very big shoes when he took over for the great David Tennant but he's given this beloved character his own unique personality while also not breaking too far from what works about Doctor Who. Smith is just getting better, blending intelligence, whimsy, and a bit of danger into his performance.

Gillan matches him in the performance department, perfectly imbuing Amy with both infatuation with the doctor and infuriation at some of his behavior. She's both attracted to him and terrified of him. She's great. And, of course, any episode in which the great Alex Kingston can guest star is probably a good one.

The season premiere of "Doctor Who" runs a little long as most two-part, two-hour episodes do, but the fatigue usually encountered by feature-length premieres is only barely here. With several unpredictable twists and turns, especially in the even-stronger second half, this premiere is a statement — "Doctor Who" is back, possibly better than ever, and ready to treat the sickness of boring TV.

The new season of "Doctor Who" premieres on BBC America on Saturday, April 23rd, 2011 at 8pm CST. It stars Matt Smith and Karen Gillan and guest stars Alex Kingston. It was executive produced by Steven Moffat, Piers Wenger, and Beth Willis.



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