

VORTEX



THE AVENGERS

PLUS! 

DOCTOR WHO
THE MAIN RANGE

TORCHWOOD
BILIS MANGER RETURNS

THE DIARY OF RIVER SONG
SERIES FOUR



COMING SOON



EDITORIAL

IT'S A funny old world, this Big Finish malarkey.

Through *Vortex*, I have the honour of being able to speak to the people who write, act, produce, create the sound design and music, direct and do the covers for the stories we all love each month.

This month, I discovered that new Big Finish writer Donald McLeary not only lives in Scotland but is actually just seven miles from my house, so we met up and had lunch. And within two minutes, we'd worked out we had a friend in common. Small world! And, fact fans, Donny attended Stonelaw High School, the same school that produced another Big Finish writer, Andrew Smith. (Yes, I love trivia like that!).

Another highlight for me this month has been the preview for *Too Many Targets*, the latest release for **The Avengers**. I've been a big **The Avengers** fan since 1992 and bought the original book that year. I've been re-reading it in anticipation, to get myself ready for John Dorney's audio adaptation. This is *The Five Doctors of The Avengers* – you could alternatively call it *Avengers Assemble*, if you wish. Oh, hang on, has that name been taken?!

All I can say is, if you're a fan of **The Avengers**, you're going to love what John has done – just make sure you keep listening all the way to the end... **VORTEX**

RIVER SONG AND THE MANY MASTERS!

HAVING HAD several adventures with many of Big Finish's classic Doctors, it was only a matter of time before River Song ran into a certain other Time Lord...

The Master – in four different incarnations – encounters the Doctor's wife in *Series Five of The Diary of River Song* in January next year, as Geoffrey Beevers and Sir Derek Jacobi are joined by Michelle Gomez and Eric Roberts.

Getting Eric Roberts to appear in a Big Finish production has been a long-term goal

for executive producer Jason Haigh-Ellery, and he was delighted to finally achieve this ambition – Eric plays the Master for the first time since appearing in the 1996 Doctor Who television movie.

Jason says: "Working with Eric was a complete joy. Firstly, he is such a nice man and so easy to communicate with. Secondly, he likes to work and he likes to work fast. The scenes whizzed by and we were all enjoying ourselves so much that I forgot I was directing an Oscar nominee with over 450 movies under his belt (which should have been intimidating – but wasn't!).

"Eric is very down to earth – no ego or vanity involved. I hope we work together again soon."

Eric features in *The Lifeboat and the Deathboat* by Eddie Robson. Other stories in the set are *Animal Instinct* by Roy Gill, *Concealed Weapon* by Scott Handcock and *The Bekdel Test* by Jonathan Morris.

VORTEX

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IT'S ANOTHER ADVENTURE FOR THE DOCTOR'S WIFE – AND SHE'S MEETING A DIFFERENT INCARNATION OF HER HUSBAND...

River

FOURTH

EVER SINCE River Song became part of the Big Finish family she's been travelling back along the Doctor's timeline, running into different incarnations of our favourite Time Lord along the way.

With Alex Kingston having worked with David Tennant, Matt Smith and Peter Capaldi on television, she's now ticked off Paul McGann, Sylvester McCoy, Colin Baker and Peter Davison over the last couple of years with Big Finish. And now she can add Tom Baker to that list!

Producer David Richardson says: "The idea of bringing the Fourth Doctor into our River Song series was irresistible – I just had to make sure that Alex was happy to travel down to deepest Kent where we record with Tom (of course she was – she was thrilled to be recording with Tom!). This is quite a wild ride for a Fourth Doctor story, and there's a real frisson between the two characters."

But we're getting ahead of ourselves a little. Script editor Matt Fitton explains the ongoing theme

in this box set: "For this series, we wanted to give River an adversary to match her, a real threat, so David and I set about thinking. For a time, we talked about possibly using the Daleks, but in the end decided on something original, so we created the Discordia – one of whom is the handsome devil you can see on the cover.

"With no Time Lords to police things, the Discordia are essentially time pirates who can go back and re-engineer themselves and their evolution, to make themselves



Above (l-r): Tom Baker and Alex Kingston

companions for River, which was, as Spod might say, amazeballs!

“River is just the best fun, despite – or more accurately perhaps, because of – her infinitely complex and tragic past. There is absolutely nothing that can shock, faze or defeat her. Like the Doctor, she confronts danger and heartbreak with confidence, swagger and wit. And yet there’s a heartbreaking vulnerability to her, despite her strength.”

However, Emma found introducing the Discordia a bit tricky. She concedes: “Plotting for the Discordia was... challenging. The brief described them as devilish beings that can control time and can reton any situation so that they come out as the victors – how can anyone fight that? Only the Doctor could ever hope to, but he’s



Above (l-r): Fenella Woolgar and Alex Kingston

as intimidating as possible – and make sure they always win.

“They look like devils in the Hieronymus Bosch tradition, and they have rotating gun arms which spin around to whatever weapon the occasion demands.”

TIME IN *a Bottle* opens this series, written by Emma Reeves and Matt Fitton. Matt says: “I co-wrote the first one with Emma Reeves. My son loved watching *Eve* on CBBC, for which Emma was lead writer



Above (l-r): Alex Kingston and Josh Bolt

and co-creator, and I was very impressed by it. I knew she’d written a couple of **Torchwoods** for Big Finish at that stage, so I approached her and asked if she would be interested in writing for River.”

Emma takes up the story: “Matt’s brief was to take River into a system where time has been removed, investigate the cause and discover that the (literally) fiendish Discordia are to blame. As the writer of the first episode in the box set, I got to create the travelling

RIVER IS JUST THE BEST FUN, DESPITE – OR MORE ACCURATELY PERHAPS, BECAUSE OF – HER INFINITELY COMPLEX AND TRAGIC PAST.

EMMA REEVES

not around, so it’s time for his better half to step up. The lovely detail (from Matt’s brief) that the Discordia had engineered their appearance to resemble that of devils with red skins, horns and tails, was an added bonus. Nothing and nobody can intimidate River – not even the denizens of Hell itself!”

Matt adds: “It was great fun working with Emma as she’s very easy to get on with, and we ended up completing the script together from her storyline.



Above (l—r): Joe Meiners, Ken Bentley, Nicholas Asbury, Nigel Anthony, Tom Baker, John Dorney, Nathalie Buscombe, Alex Kingston, Elliot the Dog and David Richardson

“I’m really pleased with the result, especially as we’ve got a great cast including Fenella Woolgar as River’s academic rival, Professor Still.”

Emma continues: “Professor Still is an old frenemy (without the fr!) from River’s time at Lunar University. She’s a woman with a grudge. Back in the day, not only did River steal her man but – the ultimate insult – she did it by accident and didn’t even want him. However, in order to break into a time-locked world, Still needs River’s help...”

“Having already created two non-humanoid, quirky companions for River, I thought it would be fun if her third fellow traveller is

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someone she dislikes and can be openly rude to. Perhaps because of the strain of having to keep all those spoilers to herself, River tends to have no time for social filters. I love it when River tells it straight, and Professor Still, played by the wonderful Fenella Woolgar, makes a great sparring partner.”

FOR THE second story in the set, a first (chronological) writing assignment for Big Finish was made by the award-winning Donald McLeary, with *Kings of Infinite Space*.

Matt explains: “This was the first time we had asked Donald to write for us, and he scripted a **Lady**



Christina very soon after too.

“David Richardson put his name across after he had been recommended by Sean Biggerstaff. He’s a very funny writer, and even on the fourth or fifth time of reading, this script was still making me laugh out loud.

“This one is essentially River Song in *The Chase*, on audio!”

Donny is a proper fan. When he meets with *Vortex*, it becomes apparent in the way he discusses the show – with a passion!

He admits: “I was a huge **Doctor Who** fan. When I was about 19, in the wilderness year of 1991, I went to drama school. At that time, you wouldn’t profess an opinion one way or another on **Doctor Who**,

as it was not the done thing.

“By coincidence, I was going out with a girl whose flat mate was a young actor. I was an aspiring actor at the time, and I went back to hers one time when she wasn’t there but her flat mate was kicking about. I saw he had a VHS of *Revenge of the Cybermen*, so I very casually said, ‘Do you like **Doctor Who**?’ He very quickly said, ‘Yes, what of it?’, and then we had a very long chat about how much he loved it. He said his acting goal was to be the Doctor one day – and I said the same thing. He got to take it a bit further than me. His name? It was David Tennant...”

As mentioned earlier, Donny’s won awards for his written work.

He says: “I’m always writing. I have been writing **Fags, Mags and Bags** with my pal Sanjeev Kohli for 10 years now, which is broadcast on BBC Radio 4. We won a Writers’ Guild prize for it back in 2008. More recently, I’ve got into writing feature films. I’m also working as a script editor on a project for Film 4. I suppose it’s quite an eclectic career, with a bit of acting in there too.

“So, I was always a fan of **Doctor Who**, but never in a professional way until now. There wasn’t that much of a crossover, although we did get Sylvester McCoy to come in to **Fags, Mags and Bags**, and we throw in character names like Scaroth, so it’s a super Easter Egg for the fans!

“I had been working on a stageplay, *An Appointment with the Wicker Man*, with Sean Biggerstaff, so he knew I was a **Doctor Who** fan. He passed my name on to Big Finish who were looking for writers, and I submitted some of my non-**Doctor Who** scripts. That was when the idea of writing a **River Song** came up.

“River’s always had an element of comedy to her, but there’s also an underlying darkness that I like. The energy that Alex Kingston brings to River is just magnificent.

“Matt Fitton, who was script editing, suggested we do something like *The Chase*, and that was just perfect. I love the old Hartnells. The thing I really liked about *The Chase* was the robot ‘double’. It’s such a terrible idea! Unless you’ve got lots of money, it’s really hard to pull it off.

“But the great thing about **River Song** being on audio is it’s far easier to do these things than it was on 1960s TV. You can have Alex playing both of them in studio, and you don’t need to worry about getting a lookalike in!

“The other thing I liked was that I inherited some characters and Matt told me I could kill off as many of them as I wanted...

“The enemies we have are



incredibly dark. I love the idea that they look like devils! I'm not a religious person, but I do have an inbuilt fear of angels and demons..."

THE THIRD story of this series is *Whodunnit?*, written by Matt Fitton. He sums up the story, saying: "I wanted to give River a classic murder-mystery, set in a mysterious mansion. It owes a lot to *Clue*, the film with Tim Curry, which was in turn based on the board game *Cluedo!*"

"There's a smattering of recognisable detective characters with similarities to Sherlock Holmes, Scooby Doo, Nancy Drew and Lord Peter Wimsey – plus Franz Kafka!"

"I've thrown a lot of things up in the air – there's some

very familiar tropes – and you'll see where they all land."

THE EVENTS of *Whodunnit?* lead into the final story of the set, *Someone I Once Knew* by John Dorney. Matt explains: "I was really keen to write this one at first, as who wouldn't want to write for characters as big as River Song and the Fourth Doctor?"

"But I thought in the end that I should hand it over as John Dorney would be a good fit for it, having written some of my favourite **The Fourth Doctor Adventures**."

"With the Discordia in the mix, this meeting between the Doctor and River is not quite what you might expect..."

John picks up the story: "Matt sent me an email



THE DIARY OF RIVER SONG

▶ RELEASED AUGUST 2018

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▶ Extras Bonus disc

▶ Director Ken Bentley

▶ Cast Alex Kingston, Tom Baker,
Nicholas Asbury, Josh Bolt

TIME IN A BOTTLE

by Emma Reeves and Matt Fitton

KINGS OF INFINITE SPACE

by Donald McLeary

WHODUNNIT?

by Matt Fitton

SOMEONE I ONCE KNEW

by John Dorney

When River Song visits a place where time has vanished, a genie escapes its bottle... the Discordia are freed – nihilistic time pirates, in devilish form, altering the past to make sure they never lose.

This time, River may have met her match. And involving the Doctor can only make things worse...

about two years ago where he said, 'You can pick any episode you want,' but because he felt I had an affinity with Tom Baker's Doctor, that one was most prominent on the table and I thought it would be churlish not to pick it!

"I'd not had much of a chance to write for River and the Doctor together properly before. In *The Crucible of Souls* in *Doom Coalition*, they were part of a larger arc with multiple storylines so their meeting couldn't take centre stage, while in *My Dinner with Andrew*, it wasn't really a River and the Doctor story at all.

"So, to have the chance to put the two of them in a room

together was brilliant, I really enjoyed it. I'd actually worked out the first scene long before I plotted the rest of the story."

How would the writer sum up what happens in this adventure? John pauses, then reveals: "The difficulty with summing up this play is that it's the last of the set – and you don't want to give away the ending!

"It is a story about love, really, with the Doctor and River. This might be one of the last times we'll see them interacting in audio form, so there had to be some aspects to their romance featured.

"The other thing I wanted to do was to subvert the audience's

all manner of quirks that people won't see coming, particularly in terms of how River and the Doctor work, in a way we haven't fully explored until now."

River, of course, is a larger than life character who enjoys cheeky banter, and the Fourth Doctor is hardly a shrinking violet either.

John says: "In terms of the script, I was aware beforehand they were going to have a very bubbly conversation between them. I had an awful lot of fun writing for the pair of them, and had to remind myself to make the dialogue less fruity!

"I was very much looking forward to arriving at the studio, and I don't

I WANTED TO DO WAS TO SUBVERT THE AUDIENCE'S EXPECTATIONS. THERE'S LOTS OF SUBVERSION GOING ON!

JOHN DORNEY



Above: Alex Kingston

expectations. There's lots of subversion going on! Matt told me the situation at the end of episode three, and we both knew what the obvious way to continue it would have been – so I've gone and done the opposite. It's got

know who was more excited to be working with who. Tom was there first and said he was excited to meet Alex, and I know Alex wanted to meet the legend that is Tom!

"The pair of them had a lot of fun, playing up to the script. Alex was riffing off Tom as she wanted to do a line in a rather saucy way, saying, 'If Tom can do it, I want to do it too!' It was a really delightful day.

"You can't help sitting there with a big smile on your face, as these two bring your words to life. You sit back, and let it all wash over you."

Overseeing events in studio was Ken Bentley as director.

He concludes: "There's a lot of humour in the *River Song* series, and as a result also in some of the more colourful villains we've brought to life at Big Finish. The *Discordia* are a great invention. There's something about a demonic voice that works particularly well on audio. And I love working with Nick Asbury, there's such relish in his performance as Dante." **VORTEX**



Above (l-r): Tom Baker and Alex Kingston

KENNY SMITH FINDS OUT WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU BRING JOHN STEED TOGETHER WITH HIS VARIOUS PARTNERS...

TARGET PRACTICE



JUST WHEN you thought that Big Finish had done everything with **The Avengers**, along comes another surprise!

After the audio adaptations of the first series of the TV show, we thought that was it. Then came the comic strip adaptations with Emma Peel, and we thought that was it. And now we have *Too Many Targets* – adapted for audio by John Dorney, Big Finish's go-to man for **The Avengers** – from the 1990 novel by John Peel and Dave Rogers.

Series producer David Richardson says: "It was hugely satisfying to complete the missing episodes, and the Steed and Mrs Peel episodes of **The Avengers** – we loved working in this world and with these actors. So when the opportunity arose for

adapting Dave and John's brilliant novel, I leaped at the chance! It was such fun to have these different teams in the same room – Keel and Peel! – and also fun to cast Cathy Gale and Tara King – Beth Chalmers and Emily Woodward were our first and only choices for them."

John Peel explains: "I had met Dave Rogers at a convention and **The Avengers** was facing its 30th anniversary so I suggested it would be a good time for a new, original novel. Dave was in contact with Studio Canal who owned the rights at the time, and he set it up. I asked, 'What can we do?' and they said, 'Anything you like!' At that time they were convinced the show was dead so they didn't mind what we did with it. I

thought it would be fun to bring back all of Steed's partners in one huge, sprawling adventure – and we got away with it!

"I was a bit surprised that Big Finish was interested in my **Avengers** novel, since I'm probably better-known for my **Doctor Who** ones, but I was pleased they chose *Too Many Targets* as it's long been a favourite of mine."

IF YOU'VE never read *Too Many Targets*, think of **Doctor Who's** *The Five Doctors*. It brings together a host of familiar characters with some recognisable old foes, for a fun adventure.

Script writer John Dorney concedes: "I'd never read the



Above: Julian Wadham

book before, although I'd heard about it and was quite excited by the idea of it, but I'd never managed to get hold of a copy as it wasn't released in Britain.

"The first thing I did when I got the commission was to go onto eBay and track down a copy for a reasonable amount of money. It was tricky but not impossible!

"*Too Many Targets* gathers together all of the previous regulars from **The Avengers** and brings in a few of the villains as well, in order to make it a big, exciting special.

"I dove into the novel with the ambition of making it as plausibly **Avengers**-esque as I



Above: Lucy Briggs-Owen



Above: Olivia Poulet

could, and I won't lie – I had a terrific time on it! It's a lot of fun – I didn't know where it was going to go when I first read it."

Big Finish cast its own Steed (Julian Wadham), Dr Keel (Anthony Howell) and Emma Peel (Olivia Poulet), and new actors had to be found to play Cathy Gale and Tara King, with Beth Chalmers and Emily Woodward taking on the roles.

Director Ken Bentley explains: "**The Avengers** is just a joy to work on. My background is theatre and **The Avengers** is the most theatrical thing we produce at Big Finish. It requires real craft skill to speak the way they used to speak

in the 1960s and 70s on TV, but also great comic timing. It feels effortlessly entertaining when you listen to it – and it is a huge amount of fun to record – but it takes real skill and experience from the cast to play it so truthfully.

"**The Avengers** requires actors with immaculate RP [received pronunciation], but also a good handle on a period style of acting. When **The Avengers** was first broadcast actors were generally classically trained, and trained for the stage, so they knew how to speak crisply. Those skills are not as common these days, particularly in young actors.

THE AVENGERS IS THE MOST THEATRICAL THING WE PRODUCE AT BIG FINISH.

KEN BENTLEY

"Fortunately we've made a lot of plays in this genre so we knew a small handful of actresses who would be perfect for Tara King and Cathy Gale. Emily and Beth were our first choice and thankfully they jumped at the chance to play these two iconic roles."

With her beautiful voice and all-round class, Beth Chalmers was an easy choice to step into the shoes (or is it kinky boots?) of Honor Blackman.

Beth grins: "I was thrilled to be involved, very pleased indeed. John Dorney did say that as soon as they knew they were going to be doing an Honor Blackman part, they were going to call me!

"I don't remember watching the full series but I do remember seeing some of her in my youth. I went on to YouTube to see how

she played it, but there wasn't very much in the way of clips so I've based it on what I could find."

At this point, Beth gives a vocal masterclass, slipping from her own voice, slowly but surely morphing into Cathy Gale, explaining the changes as she goes along.

"She was very, terribly posh, even posher than normal Honor Blackman, but the thing to do was to find the correct level of Sixties posh, not modern posh. That meant finding a very clipped way of speaking.

So when my agent got a call from Big Finish asking if I would be interested in playing Tara King, of course I was! It's always a joy to work with the team there so I knew it would be great fun.

"I had actually never seen any of **The Avengers** before working for Big Finish but I did some binge-watching prior to recording. And of course over the years I have become familiar with those famous characters and who played them through some form of popular culture osmosis!

THE AVENGERS



TOO MANY TARGETS

JULIAN WADHAM • ANTHONY HOWELL • LUCY BRIGGS-OWEN
OLIVIA POULET • BETH CHALMERS • EMILY WOODWARD
CHRISTOPHER BENJAMIN

BLISS STUDIOCRAFT



THE AVENGERS TOO MANY TARGETS

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▶ Extras Interviews

▶ Director **Ken Bentley**

▶ Cast **Julian Wadham, Anthony Howell, Lucy Briggs-Owen, Olivia Poulet, Beth Chalmers, Emily Woodward, Christopher Benjamin**



Two agents are dead, and their murderers sound worryingly familiar. A killer gorilla is on the loose, a deadly disease is ravaging a distant country and an eminent doctor has been kidnapped. It's all pretty much business as usual.

But when John Steed is called in by his old boss and given an appalling task to complete, at the same time as Tara is given one that's even worse, it becomes clear that the myriad threads of a terrifying scheme are drawing together. The fate of the world hangs in the balance.

Steed won't be able to handle this case alone. The Avengers are needed. All of them. **VORTEX**



Above (l-r): Julian Wadham and Christopher Benjamin

"Cathy doesn't have a lot of emotion on her voice either – sometimes she will have a bit of urgency, but she's always very calm. And I lowered my voice slightly too."

EMILY WOODWARD was delighted to join **The Avengers** family as Tara King, originally played by Linda Thorson.

Emily admits: "I have worked a bit for Big Finish over the years having done **Doctor Who – The Churchill Years** and even another part in a previous episode of **The Avengers** (*Ashes of Roses*).

"Tara is a brave and ballsy young woman – not as worldly-wise as some of the other Avengers, there's more of an innocence about her I think. She has a good sense of humour, isn't too uptight and doesn't take herself too seriously. She also has huge respect for Steed and cares about him very much. She's a lot of fun to play."

John Dorney adds: "When Emily Woodward went into the booth, it was incredible hearing her bring Tara King to life. She was instantly right.

"Beth was always in our minds when it came to



Above: Anthony Howell

Cathy, pretty much from the get-go. If you think about it, Beth Chalmers pretty much is Honor Blackman – she's got that beautiful voice, she has the same toughness about her, and she has that dry, wry sense of humour. And she could easily beat you up!"

THE OTHER major part that required casting was Mother, Steed's boss in the final series of the TV show, played with a blustering, grumpy charm by Patrick Newell. The casting for the Big Finish version is absolutely perfect, with Christopher Benjamin shaking off his more usual Henry Gordon Jago persona.



Above: Beth Chalmers



Above: Emily Woodward

Christopher, of course, appeared in three episodes of **The Avengers** on television opposite Patrick Macnee, in *Honey for the Prince* (series four, with Diana Rigg), *Never Never Say Die* (series five, also Diana Rigg) and *Split!* (series six, with Linda Thorson).

Vortex informed Christopher that he's the first actor to appear in both the original TV series and the audio episodes.

He laughed: "Am I really? Oh, that's jolly nice! It's just a shame there's fewer and fewer of us left these days. I was in three episodes in the original TV series, but it was so long ago and I don't remember them all that well. But I recall I'd

go in for a day or a couple of days, and have a jolly nice time doing it.

"There was one episode with Christopher Lee, and there was another where I was a handwriting expert. But they were happy times."

Christopher has memories of his predecessor in the part, recalling: "I do remember seeing Patrick Newell, who played the original Mother. He was very good, wasn't he?"

"I only did a day as Mother, but it was a good day, and I would love to do some more. Playing Mother was very different from Henry Gordon Jago – and much easier, too.

"I thought Julian Wadham was very good as Steed, he's absolutely ideal. You can see a lot of Steed in him, and he has those wonderful light touches, like Patrick Macnee."

John Dorney adds: "Christopher Benjamin as Mother was inspired casting. The moment I saw his name on the cast list, I just felt that it was perfect, particularly coming right after the end of **Jago & Litefoot**. The idea of getting to work with him again was great as he's a brilliant actor and a wonderful human being – I couldn't be more excited!"

THE CAST had a fantastic time bringing the script to life, and Beth says: "It's nice to delve into this different world where you're allowed to have lots of fun. You do have fun when you do a **Doctor Who**, but **The Avengers** is much lighter and more ludicrous, and I had a great time interacting with Julian, Anthony, Olivia and Emma."

Emily agrees: "I loved it! The cast are fantastic and we always have such a giggle. I wish, along with a copy of the final CD, that we'd also get a CD of 'out-takes and bloopers' – that would be very entertaining!"

"Ken Bentley has directed me in everything I've ever done for Big Finish and I really enjoy the way he works and what he gets out of the actors, especially in a series like this. It is obviously a



Above (l-r): Beth Chalmers, Lucy Briggs-Owen, Julian Wadham, Olivia Poulet and Emily Woodward
Below (l-r): Olivia Poulet and Julian Wadham



show that people have very fond memories of, and Ken said that he wanted us to get the feeling of the characters but not feel like we had to do 'impressions'. He wanted us to have our own take on them, which gave us a lot more freedom.

“*The Avengers* is a crazy world but that’s what makes it so wonderful. It’s a total escape from this world. You get whisked into a bygone era of utter Britishness – stiff upper lip, cracking one liners, surviving multiple near-death experiences... it’s an absolute classic and one that I’m very proud to be a part of.”

John Dorney concludes: “I’m really looking forward to hearing it – it’s been nearly a year since I finished the script. There’s lots of back references and callbacks to the TV series with appearances from characters like Brodny, played by Warren Mitchell on TV.

“I’m excited by the final scene, and what the reaction to it will be like. I have been teasing on Twitter,

saying it is a little bit mad, even by my standards. I hope people buy into it. I wanted to do a very specific thing that’s not in the book, and I hope people like it.”

Vortex has learned what the scene is and now has a huge grin. You’ll love it. You can depend on it.

VORTEX



VORTEXMAIL

A TOP TEAM UP

I had never listened to any Big Finish before the release of *The Diary of River Song*. Being my favourite companion in the series, I had to get into them and now love them, as well as **The Eighth Doctor** box set arcs. My top two wishes were River and Missy, and River and Jack. One is already confirmed and I'm so excited for it, but has the idea of a Jack and River team up been considered?

Radocto Predicto

Nick: I'm pretty sure that idea has crossed at least one of the many creative minds we're lucky enough to have at Big Finish. No firm plans for that yet, though.

SENSATIONAL CICERO

I've been listening to **Cicero** this week and wanted to offer my thanks and congratulations to all involved. I really enjoyed the pilot story last year, my Big Finish listening is usually **Doctor Who** and its related tie-ins so it was nice to try something new. I was pleased when a full series of **Cicero** was announced. It's definitely one of the most satisfying Big Finish releases. David Llewellyn's scripts have real range. There's warmth and humour but also tension and adult themes that are light years from my habitual listening. In particular the events concerning Iris and the way they all played out and resolved were very involving and I really cared what happened to her. Marcus and Quintus who were established in the pilot episode were also given plenty of development as characters to the extent that I became invested in them too. I hope there's going to be another series. I really want to know how their lives progressed. After

ATA Girl, Cicero is another success for the Big Finish Originals. I'm glad that BF are branching out and creating their own series. After so many years of working with licenced properties, it's absolutely right that your expertise is now involved in creating your own new stories.

David Steel

Nick: Praise indeed from such a long-term, loyal Big Finish listener as yourself, David. So glad you've enjoyed our Big Finish Originals so far. All I can say is that we'd love you to spread the word high and low throughout the land, and that way there may be a second series for all of them.

FULL CREDIT

I'm a bit behind at the moment in my listening but today I worked my way through the utterly delightful **Doctor Who** Monthly Range 236 – *Serpent in the Silver Mask*. And I must say that I am absolutely torn. On one hand this is a perfect story and need never be re-visited. It really is an absolute credit to the cast and crew. Dazzling good fun! On the other hand I thought that there was so much potential with **Argentia** and the **Mazzini** Family that I could easily listen to three or four plays about them. Especially if they were to feature the same **TARDIS** team, **Samuel West** in multiple roles, and were directed by the sublime **Barnaby Edwards** and written by the superb **David Llewellyn**. Actually on balance, more **Argentia**, please!

Michael Evans

Nick: What can I say, Michael? Such a lovely team working on that story. No plans for more Argentia yet, but at Big Finish sometimes it feels like anything is possible...

STRIPPED BACK?

A while ago in **Vortex** you mentioned that a **Doctor Who** comic strip adaptation was potentially in the pipeline. Is there any more news on this, and what it could be? Personally, I'd love *The Iron Legion*, *Star Beast* or *The Tides of Time*. Or better still, all three!

Steven Wylie

Nick: It's all still under wraps, Steven, but you're thinking along the right lines!

BOXED UP

With releases 1 to 50 in the **Doctor Who** Monthly Range deleted and now 51 to 100 are not being repressed, wouldn't it be a great idea to re-release all these with the individual **Doctors** as box sets? Box sets of the first 10 years of Big Finish **Doctors** would be lovely gifts and it's another way of revisiting stories like one of my favourites, *Phantasmagoria*. I would certainly purchase them again.

Michael Parsons

Nick: Cheers, Michael. Those first 1 to 50 are, of course, still available as downloads. Just thought I'd make that clear. We have no firm plans for re-releasing in box sets, but it's certainly something we've considered. For years, as our recent announcement makes clear, Big Finish has bucked the trend of a general audience switchover to digital rather than CDs. But just recently the tide has begun to turn quite sharply in favour of downloads. Even an old fogey like me has finally stopped receiving the CDs and I've switched to download only. But all that said, I wouldn't rule out special, limited edition box sets in the future. We'll give you plenty of warning if it's going to happen. VORTEX



AWAY WITH A MANGER

KENNY SMITH DISCOVERS THAT **TORCHWOOD'S**
MOST POPULAR VILLAIN IS BACK...

MURRAY MELVIN is an actor with a long and proud career behind him. If you're a fan of **The Avengers**, you'll have seen him in the only surviving part of the first episode of the television series, *Hot Snow*. His appearance, over 40 years later, as the mysterious Bilis Manger in **Torchwood** has won him a whole new audience and fanbase.

Although the character only appeared in two first TV season episodes, *Captain Jack Harkness* and *End of Days*, Bilis very quickly became a fan favourite, going on to

appear in original novels, comic strips and, of course, Big Finish audio episodes.

Deadbeat Escape sees Bilis Manger return, now the manager of the Traveller's Halt. But why is he there? What could a man with the ability to effortlessly travel through time, want in a hotel?

Writer and series producer James Goss says: "He's such a great character and it's lovely that his creator, Cath Tregenna, is letting us play with him.

"It's fascinating having him as a central character – if you look carefully he's actually always honest and straightforward.

But everything he says is hidden under so many layers.

"*Deadbeat Escape* is a bit different from normal. I love **Sapphire & Steel** – we've already done *Sapphire & Steel But Starring Jack Harkness & Jackie Tyler (The Lives of Captain Jack)*. This is basically *Sapphire & Steel But Starring Bilis Manger!* He's sort of – and I hate to say it – but he could just be the hero in this."

Director Scott Handcock asks: "Is Bilis a villain? I'm not sure quite how best to describe him. But as a character, he's certainly interesting because of that ambiguity, and I do enjoy that as



Above (l-r): Gareth Pierce, Cara Chase and Murray Melvin



a director. It's a bit like the War Master or Dorian Gray – there are layers of charm and civility that mask far darker impulses, and that's a fascinating balance to play, particularly when you're working with an actor that relishes that. Much as we'd hate to admit it, we all have selfish impulses, however much we may try to be good in life, so exploring that in characters like Bilis is always fun..."

Before appearing in this **Torchwood** monthly range tale, Bilis had appeared in the show's fifth season, which was produced by Big Finish. Scott says: "We'd already had Murray in for an episode of *Aliens Among Us* – I think it was because of a throwaway comment I made to James Goss about having familiar elements alongside the new team – but he blew us away, and we had so much fun that James

IS BILIS A VILLAIN? I'M NOT SURE QUITE HOW BEST TO DESCRIBE HIM. BUT AS A CHARACTER, HE'S CERTAINLY INTERESTING BECAUSE OF THAT AMBIGUITY.

SCOTT HANDCOCK

instantly wrote a Bilis-centric story for the monthly releases.

"I think we must have hinted at more as Murray kept in touch after that first session. Needless to say, he was thrilled to be coming back. 'Heads will roll,' he warned us!"

J

AMES HAS been impressed by how much Murray has bought into the character



Above: Murray Melvin

AT THE END OF THE RECORDING HE SWEEPED OUT THE STUDIO SHOUTING, 'RETRIBUTION, I SHALL HAVE RETRIBUTION.'

JAMES GOSS

of Bilis, and the relish he brings to the part in the recording studio.

He says: "Murray is utterly stunning. He fits us in between his globetrotting adventures, and is full of energy and enthusiasm. He still leads an active life, but adores talking about **Torchwood**."

"He's utterly unlike Bilis – but that doesn't stop him from playing the part off-mic. At the end of the recording he swept out the studio shouting, 'Retribution, I shall have retribution.' We can't wait to bring him back!"

And as the director, Scott finds the actor to

be a perfect gentleman. Scott adds: "Murray's an absolute dream to work with. Personally, he's a gentleman through and through. Professionally, he's always so well prepared and truly loves the character. He knows Bilis inside-out, which projects a kind of infectious enthusiasm. It's chilling to hear the change in manner between green room and recording studio!"

Scott concludes: "Like all the **Torchwood** sessions, this one was an utter delight. I'm probably safe in saying

it wasn't as raucous, but still quite lively and jovial. The script itself is incredibly dark and eerie, and those are the sessions where you need to let off steam.

"The more people relax, the more comfortable they are, and the more they can trust each other with the heavier material. But it was a small cast, and a really lovely dynamic – particularly between Murray and Gareth Pierce, who carry the bulk of it. They just suck you in to a very claustrophobic environment and never let go." **VORTEX**



TORCHWOOD DEADBEAT ESCAPE

▶ RELEASED August 2018

Download/CD

▶ CD £9.99 Download £7.99

▶ Extras Interviews

▶ Director **Scott Handcock**

▶ Cast **Murray Melvin, Gareth Pierce, Cara Chase**

"Welcome to the Traveller's Halt. You're in luck – we have one room left. My name is Bilis Manger. Let me show you to your room"



Above (l-r): Cara Chase and Murray Melvin

LISTEN AGAIN



TORCHWOOD: ONE RULE

▶ RELEASED December 2015

Download/CD

▶ Extras Interviews

▶ Director Barnaby Edwards

▶ Cast Tracy-Ann Oberman,
Gareth Armstrong, Rebecca Lacey,
Dan Starkey, Catrin Stewart

THESE DAYS, the Torchwood universe is one big place with offices in Cardiff, London, Glasgow – and beyond. We're also seeing more of one larger than life character, the former head of **Torchwood One**, Yvonne Hartman.

Producer James Goss recalls that Yvonne's return was: "Suggested by Matt Nicholls, the then brand manager for **Doctor Who** and **Torchwood** for BBC Worldwide. We had a meeting about what we could do for the first six **Torchwood** plays and he suggested Yvonne. It was

such a brilliant idea. 'Yvonne in London?' I said, fizzing. 'No, have her go to Cardiff and have her have a really awful time,' Matt said, and I fizzed even more! Russell T Davies thought it was a wonderful idea and off we went. The only big change was that the working title *Army of One* (because Yvonne is an army) had been used for a BBC audio so we couldn't use it. And I think if we'd decided there would be a third **Torchwood** episode called *Day One* we'd have been lynched!"

Tasked with writing Yvonne's return was Joseph Lidster.

Joe says: "I adore the character and so I jumped at the chance to write for her. She's such an interesting person because while, technically, she's a baddy in **Doctor Who**, despite some dubious personal beliefs she's actually doing lots of things for the right reasons. She's ruthless and she's powerful and she's dangerous and she's absolutely an antagonist for the Doctor, but she's also very human, funny and charming, and she's absolutely someone you'd want to sit and have a drink with. And, of course, she's played by the amazing Tracy-Ann Oberman.

"James Goss gave me a one line brief, 'Yvonne has a bad night out in Cardiff' which is such a great starting point for a writer. My first thought was that I didn't just want to write her as the glorious, camp creature she absolutely is, but that I wanted to ensure she had that humanity that you saw in the television series. So she's brave and funny and compassionate but she's also got this absolute focus on getting what she wants. When

she first learns about the murders she has zero interest in helping find the killer because it's not part of her plan. But, later, having got to know and like one of the soon-to-be victims, she's ruthless in punishing the murderer."

At this point Yvonne was just back for one appearance, long before ideas formed for **Torchwood One** and *Aliens Among Us*.

Joe adds: "I certainly assumed it would be a one-off appearance but I'm so pleased it helped pave

I CERTAINLY ASSUMED IT WOULD BE A ONE-OFF APPEARANCE.

JOE LIDSTER

the way for further adventures. Tracy is such a brilliant actress and the character is so fascinating. There's still so much left to explore both with her and the various branches of **Torchwood** and I can't wait to see where James and Scott take her next."

James adds: "At the recording, Joe and I went for a walk around the car park (because it all got a bit overwhelming for us) which was when I said, 'You know, Ianto would have been at **Torchwood One** with Yvonne... – and Tracy-Ann loves Gareth...' and a dynasty was born!" **VORTEX**



THE SEVENTH WANDER

Kenny Smith finds out what happens as Sylvester McCoy's Doctor continues his travels...

THE SEVENTH Doctor and Ace have discovered there's far more to their old friend Mel than they previously thought, since she rejoined them on their travels in the **Doctor Who** Main Range. Sylvester McCoy, Sophie Aldred and Bonnie Langford continue their adventures in a new trio of stories which have been script edited by Guy Adams.

OUT FOR release in August, the trilogy kicks off with *Red Planets*, written by Una McCormack.

The story is set in London, 2017. Except... it isn't. It's Berlin, 1961. But it isn't that either.

Una says: "As I recall, the brief was for something historical. Guy and I bounced several ideas around but found that they were

either 1. done already; 2. were too close to Mark Morris's script; or 3. didn't really fire either of us up. When I suggested 1950s/60s Le Carre, Guy, who has written spy books, was immediately interested. So we went with that."

Writing for Sylvester McCoy's incarnation was: "Lots of fun. I'd written for the Seventh Doctor before,



Above (l-r): Sophie Aldred, Sylvester McCoy and Bonnie Langford



in the **Bernice Summerfield** range, but it was great fun to write 'officially' for what is my favourite era. I'm really looking forward to hearing what they all make of these parts."

As the opening part of the trilogy with interlinked stories, Una adds: "I was given a very limited amount to set up. As I recall, it mostly came down to including a scene at the end!"

Following on is *The Dispossessed*, by Mark Morris.

Guy says: "Mark offered us a tower block taken out of time and space, a terrible, surreal, haunted place that the Doctor, Ace and

BUBBLING WITH FUN AND PACE AND COMEDY AND YET, UNDERNEATH...

GUY ADAMS

Mel will be lucky to survive."

Mark reveals: "The brief was very open. Guy simply asked me to throw a few ideas at him, and said he would work out a balance of stories once he saw what everyone had come up with. I tend to favour

darker/contemporary Earth stories, so my three story ideas – although all very different – had a similar setting. Guy went for an idea which was initially titled *Hungry*, but after much tweaking it eventually ended up quite different to what I had originally proposed, which is often the way.

"Again, Guy was very keen that each story should be strong enough to stand alone, so the 'trilogy' element was minimal. It's really only the very end of my story that relates to the ongoing arc, so I wrote a fairly open ending, and then Guy rewrote/added elements to the last scene that enabled it to dovetail into the beginning of story three."

Mark adds: "The problem with having two companions – especially two companions of the same sex – is giving them both distinctive roles to play rather than simply dividing the lines you might write for one companion between two companions.

"Fortunately their characters are such that they both complement and contrast with one another. Not wishing to simplify it too much, although they're both tough and resourceful, Ace is more bolshy and instinctive, whereas Mel is considered and diplomatic. And the Seventh Doctor, of course, is the Seventh Doctor – fiercely intelligent, morally incorruptible, playful and gentle, but also sly, mercurial and steely in his resolve."

Things conclude in this trilogy with *The Quantum Possibility Engine*, which has been written by Guy Adams.

He tells *Vortex*: "*The Quantum Possibility Engine* is all about making the Solar System great again. The new President has brought peace and prosperity – does it really matter how he achieved it? Especially if he can manage to avoid the war that's about to tear the worlds apart.

"The stories are only very loosely connected, Una and Mark tolerating my demands

for scenes in their stories that would place the Doctor and friends where I wanted them by the start of mine.

Oh the power of a script editor, it makes one giddy!

"The Quantum Possibility Engine is a story I very much enjoyed writing though. Hopefully it feels very much like a Seventh Doctor tale, bubbling with fun and pace and comedy and yet, underneath..."

C HARGED WITH bringing the adventures to life was director Jamie Anderson.

the TV series, while taking the stories to epic scales – across planets, solar systems and realities.

"It was also my first time working with Bonnie Langford. Bonnie's very busy on **EastEnders**, so sometimes our time with her was limited. But she is such a pro that she's brilliant when working at breakneck speed – and a couple of times recording large runs of scenes completely by herself, though you'd never know it from the edit.

"Sylvester and Sophie are such a pleasure to



Above (l-r): Sophie Aldred, Genevieve Gaunt, Matt Barber, Sylvester McCoy, Chris Dale, Bonnie Langford and Elliot Levey

He says: "It was the first time I'd worked with any of these writers, so it was fantastic to get three such varied stories. *Red Planets* and *The Dispossessed* are a great build up to Guy Adams's hilarious *The Quantum Possibility Engine*. It means that that trilogy covers every type of story we might have seen in

work with too. As such an established pairing in the **Whoniverse**, they made every day fun, as well as bringing brilliant performances to the table for every story. "Great adventures. A top-notch trio. Super guest stars. What's not to like? I have a feeling people are going to love this trilogy." **VORTEX**



DOCTOR WHO RED PLANETS

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▶ Director **Jamie Anderson**

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JULY 2018

- DW • THE MONTHLY ADVENTURES: **HOUR OF THE CYBERMEN** (240, SIXTH DOCTOR)
- DW • THE FIRST DOCTOR ADVENTURES: **VOLUME TWO** (BOX SET)
- DW • THE EIGHTH DOCTOR ADVENTURES: **THE TIME WAR: SERIES TWO** (BOX SET)
- DW • SHORT TRIPS: **THE DARKENED EARTH** **DLO** (8.7, SIXTH DOCTOR AND CONSTANCE)
- TORCHWOOD: **INSTANT KARMA** (23)
- TORCHWOOD ONE: **MACHINES** (BOX SET)
- CALLAN: **VOLUME ONE** (BOX SET)
- BIG FINISH ORIGINALS: **JEREMIAH BOURNE IN TIME** **DLO**

AUGUST 2018

- DW • THE MONTHLY ADVENTURES: **RED PLANETS** (241, SEVENTH DOCTOR, ACE AND MEL)
- DW • THE DIARY OF RIVER SONG: **SERIES 4** (BOX SET)
- DW • SHORT TRIPS: **FLIGHT INTO HULLI** **DLO** (8.8, META-CRISIS DOCTOR, JACKIE TYLER)
- DW • CLASS: **VOLUME 1** (BOX SET)
- DW • CLASS: **VOLUME 2** (BOX SET)
- BERNICE SUMMERFIELD: **TREASURY** (BOX SET)
- THE AVENGERS: **TOO MANY TARGETS**
- TORCHWOOD: **DEADBEAT ESCAPE** (24)

SEPTEMBER 2018

- DW • THE MONTHLY ADVENTURES: **THE DISPOSSESSED** (242, SEVENTH DOCTOR, ACE AND MEL)
- DW • THE EARLY ADVENTURES: **THE DALEK OCCUPATION OF WINTER** (5.1, FIRST DOCTOR, VICKI AND STEVEN)
- DW • **LADY CHRISTINA** (BOX SET)
- DW • SHORT TRIPS: **A SMALL SEMBLANCE OF HOME** **DLO** (8.9, FIRST DOCTOR, IAN, BARBARA AND SUSAN)
- BERNICE SUMMERFIELD: **THE STORY SO FAR VOLUME 1** (BOX SET)
- BERNICE SUMMERFIELD: **THE STORY SO FAR VOLUME 2** (BOX SET)
- BIG FINISH ORIGINALS: **SHILLING & SIXPENCE INVESTIGATE** **DLO**

OCTOBER 2018

- DW • THE MONTHLY ADVENTURES: **THE QUANTUM POSSIBILITY ENGINE** (243, SEVENTH DOCTOR, ACE AND MEL)

- DW • THE EARLY ADVENTURES: **AN IDEAL WORLD** (5.2, FIRST DOCTOR, VICKI AND STEVEN)
- DW • THE EIGHTH DOCTOR ADVENTURES: **RAVENOUS 2** (BOX SET)
- DW • **ELEVENTH DOCTOR CHRONICLES** (BOX SET)
- DW • SHORT TRIPS: **I AM THE MASTER** **DLO** (8.10, THE MASTER)
- BIG FINISH ORIGINALS: **BLIND TERROR: THE GODS OF FROST** **DLO**

NOVEMBER 2018

- DW • THE MONTHLY ADVENTURES: **WARLOCK'S CROSS** (244, SEVENTH DOCTOR, ACE AND MEL)
- DW • THE EARLY ADVENTURES: **ENTANGLEMENT** (5.3, FIRST DOCTOR, VICKI AND STEVEN)
- DW • SHORT TRIPS: **THE MISTPUDDLE MURDERS** **DLO** (8.11, FIFTH DOCTOR, NYSSA AND TEGAN)
- UNIT – THE NEW SERIES: TBA (7)
- SURVIVORS: **SERIES 8** (BOX SET)

DECEMBER 2018

- DW • THE MONTHLY ADVENTURES: **MUSE OF FIRE** (245, SEVENTH DOCTOR, MEL, ACE AND IRIS)
- DW • THE MONTHLY ADVENTURES: TBA (246)
- DW • THE EARLY ADVENTURES: **THE CRASH OF THE UK-201** (5.4, FIRST DOCTOR, VICKI AND STEVEN)
- DW • SHORT TRIPS: **THE DEVIL'S FOOTPRINTS** **DLO** (8.12, SEVENTH DOCTOR AND MEL)
- BERNICE SUMMERFIELD: **IN TIME** (NOVEL, EBOOK AND AUDIOBOOK)
- STAR COPS: **MOTHER EARTH PART 2** (BOX SET)

JANUARY 2019

- DW • THE MONTHLY ADVENTURES: TBA (247)
- DW • THE FOURTH DOCTOR ADVENTURES: **SERIES 8A** (8.A, FOURTH DOCTOR AND ANN KELSO)
- DW • THE FOURTH DOCTOR ADVENTURES: **THE SINESTRAN KILL** **DLO** (8.1, FOURTH DOCTOR AND ANN KELSO)
- DW • THE FOURTH DOCTOR ADVENTURES: **THE ENCHANTRESS OF NUMBERS** **DLO** (8.2, FOURTH DOCTOR AND ANN KELSO)

- DW • THE FOURTH DOCTOR ADVENTURES: **PLANET OF THE DRASHIGS** **DLO** (8.3, FOURTH DOCTOR AND ANN KELSO)
- DW • THE FOURTH DOCTOR ADVENTURES: **THE FALSE GUARDIAN** **DLO** (8.4, FOURTH DOCTOR AND ANN KELSO)
- THE DIARY OF RIVER SONG: **SERIES 5** (BOX SET)
- CALLAN: **VOLUME TWO**

FEBRUARY 2019

- DW • THE MONTHLY ADVENTURES: TBA (248)
- DW • THE FOURTH DOCTOR ADVENTURES: **SERIES 8B** (8.A, FOURTH DOCTOR, ANN KELSO AND K9)
- DW • THE FOURTH DOCTOR ADVENTURES: **TIME'S ASSASSIN** **DLO** (8.5, FOURTH DOCTOR, ANN KELSO AND K9)
- DW • THE FOURTH DOCTOR ADVENTURES: **FEVER ISLAND** **DLO** (8.6, FOURTH DOCTOR, ANN KELSO AND K9)
- DW • THE FOURTH DOCTOR ADVENTURES: **THE PERFECT PRISONERS PARTS 1-2** **DLO** (8.7, FOURTH DOCTOR, ANN KELSO AND K9)
- DW • THE FOURTH DOCTOR ADVENTURES: **THE PERFECT PRISONERS PARTS 3-4** **DLO** (8.8, FOURTH DOCTOR, ANN KELSO AND K9)

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