

THE **BIG FINISH** MAGAZINE

VORTEX

DOCTOR WHO

MASTER PLAN

THEY ARE MASTERFUL...
WILL **YOU OBEY** THEM?

ALSO INSIDE

A MECHANICAL MENAGERIE!
THE DIARY OF **RIVER SONG**
MECHONIDS, K9 AND FE-LINE

ISSUE 142
DECEMBER 2020
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LADY CHRISTINA

ARISTOCRATIC ADVENTURER **LADY CHRISTINA DE SOUZA** IS RETURNING FOR THREE NEW ADVENTURES NEXT SUMMER.

JULY 2021 will see the release of **Lady Christina Series Two**, a new box set starring Michelle Ryan as the jetsetting action heroine who travels to a land down under, discovers historical treasures; and grapples with difficult family decisions.

In *The Wreck* by James Goss, Lady Christina goes on a treasure hunt with her reprobate father in the Indian Ocean. In *Walkabout* by Sarah Grochala, Lady Christina makes a flying visit to the Australian outback in search of a lost Great Aunt. But Sam Bishop and Jacqui McGee of UNIT are on her trail and as one reunion takes a dangerous turn, Christina has a hard decision to make – for the good of the family. The set concludes with *Long Shot* by John Dorney.

Actor Michelle tells us: “Lady Christina is someone who’s very capable and independent. Like a cat I think she does have nine lives! People seem to really respond to her. It’s so great to put her boots back on and get into the studio again and have a little play. Everyone’s bringing their A-game. The writing’s really good, I’ve had a brilliant time.”

Director Helen Goldwyn adds: “The scripts and characters are fantastic, capturing the spirit of the first series but also adding new twists and dimensions to the second. These new stories also do real justice to the multi-layered character of Lady Christina. There’s so much comedy but then there are also lots of dark, gruesome moments...” **VORTEX**



EDITORIAL

THE MASTER has been around for nearly fifty years – what a scary thought! I’m of an age (being 46) where the first Master I saw on television was Geoffrey Beevers in *The Keeper of Traken*, and he absolutely thrilled and entranced me. I’ve had the pleasure of meeting and interviewing him on several occasions for *Vortex*. When we spoke most recently via Zoom, he gave me a greeting of, “I am the Master... and you will obey me...”, which genuinely sent shivers down my spine. My six-year-old self would have melted in terror!

People have said over the years how lovely he is compared to the Master character Geoffrey plays, and it’s absolutely true. Geoffrey has a passion for the part. If you’ve not heard the Big Finish **Short Trips I Am the Master** written by Geoffrey and featuring his Master, it’s well worth a listen – and it’s part of January’s *Masterful* limited edition release.

There’s a real mix of Masters in this set of 50th anniversary adventures. Five Masters from the TV series plus three incarnations created by Big Finish. I’m really excited to hear how this pans out as there’s no sign of the Doctor to stop them this time...

The universe is doomed. Only one person can save us... the Master (and Missy)! **VORTEX**



MASTER PLAN

IT'S EIGHT INTO ONE AS BIG FINISH MARKS FIFTY YEARS OF OUR OTHER FAVOURITE TIME LORD...

“THAT JACKANAPES! All he ever does is cause trouble,” noted the Doctor in the television episode, *Terror of the Autons*, when told that the Master was coming to Earth. ‘Trouble’ is, perhaps, a slight understatement given what his rival would get up to in the intervening years. He’s betrayed the Doctor to the Daleks, tried to destroy Gallifrey, ensured the Doctor fell to his fourth incarnation’s death and tried to prevent the signing of the Magna Carta. He’s dressed as a scarecrow, obtained an army of cats, tried to turn the Earth inside out at midnight, fought in the Time War, converted the last remnants of

humanity into Toclafane, and gleefully killed people whilst skipping along! Yes, the Master, or Missy, has had several lifetimes of mischief and madness.

To mark a half century of the Master, Big Finish has created a special multi-disc limited edition release, in the form of *Masterful*. It features the TV incarnations of the renegade Time Lord, including Geoffrey Beevers, Eric Roberts, Derek Jacobi, John Simm and Michelle Gomez, as well as three incarnations created by Big Finish played by Mark Gatiss from the *Unbound* series, the Seventh and Eighth Doctors’ rival played by Alex MacQueen, and the young Master, played by Milo Parker.

Producer David Richardson says: “It was all Jason Haigh-Ellery’s idea. He’d clocked that the 50th anniversary of the Master was coming in January 2021, and suggested we could release a multi-Master box set.

“The idea was irresistible, and so I set about approaching our Masters, hoping that we could get them and that we might persuade John Simm to join us for his first Big Finish production – and he said yes! What a career highlight this one is for me – so many of my favourite actors, people who I have watched and admired over the years, were there in the studio just being brilliant.”

Script editor Matt Fitton tells *Vortex*: “The very basic premise that

(l-r): John Simm and
Derek Jacobi

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BRILLIANT.**

DAVID RICHARDSON



David pitched to Nicholas Briggs and Jason was something called *The Armageddon Company*. The Master wins as there's no Doctor around to stop him and lets loose a force that threatens everything – and ultimately only he/she can prevent it. A suicide squad of Masters assembles to save or possibly destroy the universe, and maybe each other.”

The first adventure of the box set, *Masterful* by James Goss, is told over CDs 1–3, with a bonus behind-the-scenes disc 8.

Matt continues: “James’s story sees the Saxon Master – John Simm – in triumphant mood and inviting his other selves to a party to celebrate, but in doing so they all find out he has another agenda and there’s a destructive force flowing through the universe that they need to stop. Or not, depending on how chaotic they are feeling!”

“James began writing in the hope that we would get John Simm – there was always a chance we’d need to

switch things round. Because we’re also celebrating the first appearance of Roger Delgado’s Master, we thought about who else was there at the time and Jo Grant sprang to mind – she also first appeared in *Terror of the Autons*. So it was great to have Katy Manning involved as well.

“We looked at other tools the Master has used over the years and it made sense to include Kamelion, and through him we were able to channel the Anthony Ainley Master – among other surprise guests!

“The way the story works out, we have various Masters pairing up in the middle sections. Geoffrey Beevers’s Master has an idyllic retirement interrupted by the Eric Roberts’s Master; John Simm’s and Derek Jacobi’s Masters stalk around each other, working out who’s in charge and whose plan they should follow; while the Alex MacQueen Master is trapped on a spaceship with the young Master played by Milo Parker. This

youthful version gets a glimpse of what he will become when he gets away from Gallifrey...

"It's always fun to have an anniversary celebration. The Doctors have a get together every so often, so it's perfect for the Masters to have one too!"

Writer James Goss says the *Masterful* assignment was: "Utterly bafflingly exciting! I wrote episode one on the Eurostar to Amsterdam and kept waving it at friends going, 'Ooh my word, this is ludicrously fun!' It was

IT WAS A TOTAL SURPRISE TO BE INVITED TO RETURN, AND TO BE PART OF SOMETHING SO HIGH QUALITY, LONG-LASTING AND RICH. I'M DELIGHTED.

ERIC ROBERTS



particularly lovely working from a menu of which Masters and what cameos could be fitted in."

As Matt mentioned, the script sees various Masters pair up – so how did James choose which ones to partner?

He explains: "I put a lot of thought into it. The decrepit and **TV Movie** Masters are a good fit because one's suave and dashing and the other one really isn't. Pairing the young Master up with the more experienced Master allows him to be increasingly horrified. And who wouldn't want to have Derek Jacobi and John Simm together? Plus Missy played by Michelle Gomez and the Mark Gatiss Master are deliciously flirtatious together.

"Matt had already worked out that Katy Manning would represent the Delgado era and Jon Culshaw's Kamelion would fill in for Anthony Ainley. He and producer David had planned it very carefully.

"The idea they had was twofold: *The Suicide Squad* but with the Masters, and what would happen

(l-r) Jon Culshaw and Katy Manning



if the Doctor wasn't around and all the Masters had to come together to save the universe?"

BACK IN the role of the Master for the third time for Big Finish is Eric Roberts, after appearances in *The Diary of River Song* and *Ravenous* ranges.

Following his taking on the role in the TV movie, Eric tells Vortex: "I did not expect to return to a classic like *Doctor Who* after all these years – or any years!

"We see things like this happen with say *The Brady Bunch* or *Full House* where, after decades, the cast is 'unearthed' and back together with more stories to tell – many friends have been involved in these renewed franchises.

"And *Doctor Who* and *Doctor Who* fans are also deserving of eternal life and immortality. Still, it was a total surprise to be invited to return, and to be part of something so high quality, long-lasting and rich. I'm delighted. And I've noticed the fans are too.

"Being part of the big 50 years of 'The Master' celebration release is a gigantic thrill. I'm still in shock. Good shock!"

For James, his personal highlight comes late in the adventure. He explains: "Madly, the last scene with Jo and Missy is something I'm very pleased with, when Jo realises that Missy's secret is that she's always wanted a friend... I'm also delighted by the scenes with Mark Gatiss's Master on a space yacht with Kamelion – there's even a nod to *We Sing in Praise of Total War* (originally sung by Kamelion to the Fifth Doctor and Tegan) in there.

"Overall it was an attempt to encompass all aspects of the Master – their manipulation, their disguises, their audacious constant mad scheming. Especially as they're scheming against each other when they should be saving the universe."

IN ADDITION to the title story, two *Short Trips* are being given their first physical release on the fifth disc of the limited edition *Masterful* box set. The first adventure is *I Am the Master* written by Geoffrey Beavers, who has

OVERALL IT WAS AN ATTEMPT TO ENCOMPASS ALL ASPECTS OF THE MASTER – THEIR MANIPULATION, THEIR DISGUISES, THEIR **AUDACIOUS CONSTANT MAD SCHEMING**.

JAMES GOSS

been with Big Finish since the early days when he returned to the part of the emaciated Master in *Dust Breeding*.

Geoffrey tells Vortex: “*I Am the Master* is a short story and it’s the only time I’ve written for **Doctor Who** as normally my way of thinking doesn’t quite fit! It was fun to do – I often write for myself, so it was great to be asked to do it.

“I’m really pleased it’s getting a physical release – I hope listeners enjoy the special anniversary set. There are so many people involved in it, with all these Masters, it’s good to be able to contribute.”

The second **Short Trip** is *The Switching* written by Simon Guerrier. He recalls: “I wrote *The Switching* in 2002 – it was my first ever professionally published work of fiction. I remember I was utterly thrilled at being commissioned – I rewatched the TV episodes *Terror*

I KNEW ROGER DELGADO’S MASTER WAS **CHARMING** AND **ELEGANT**, BUT ACTUALLY WRITING FOR HIM GAVE ME A FEW NEW INSIGHTS...

SIMON GUERRIER

of the Autons and *The Daemons* in my efforts to accurately capture the Master, the Third Doctor and the UNIT regulars. Of course, I already knew that Roger Delgado’s Master was charming and elegant, but actually writing for him gave me a few new insights such as how still he often is, and how cross he makes the Doctor. I have a physical copy in the form of the 2002 book the story was originally published in. But sadly **Short Trips – Zodiac** is now out of print, so I’m delighted the story is seeing the light of day again.

“The Master escapes from his prison cell by switching places with the Third Doctor – right under the noses of the Doctor’s friends at UNIT.”





(l-r): Glen McCready,
Abigail McKern and Geoffrey Bevers

Discs 5–7 of the box set feature *Terror of the Master* by Trevor Baxendale, a brand new audiobook starring the Third Doctor, the Master and UNIT, narrated by Jon Culshaw. Trevor explains how the new story came about: “Quite simply I received a very nice email from David Richardson, completely out of the blue, asking if I’d be interested in writing it – and of course I was!

“Well, it was the 50th anniversary of the Master’s first appearance in **Doctor Who** so David wanted a Third Doctor era story featuring Roger Delgado’s Master. It was to be set between the end of Season 10 and the start of Season 11 – Jo Grant has not long left, but Sarah Jane Smith has yet to arrive. The Doctor would be companionless, in effect, although he would have UNIT and the other regulars.

“I approached it as a Target novelisation – it’s about the same length – of a six-part TV story we never saw. The Doctor’s feeling a bit grouchy without Jo... he knows that he should be off exploring space and time again, because he’s perfectly free to do so, and yet he’s still hanging around UNIT. The Brigadier is trying to find him stuff to investigate because he’s worried the Doctor might just



(l-r): Alex Macqueen
and Milo Parker

take off one day and never come back. The problem is UNIT has nothing to pique the Doctor’s curiosity until he spots Dr Derek Drake, a well-known and much-loved scientist, talking on TV about the need to cut down on fossil fuels or the Earth will suffer irreversible environmental damage. Of course, the Doctor completely agrees with Drake – except he’s convinced the man is really the Master...”

How did Trevor find capturing this period of **Doctor Who** – did he watch a few stories to get the mood again? He explains: “No, I didn’t need to – those stories are ingrained on my mind and heart. Jon Pertwee was my first Doctor and I’ve seen his episodes more

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TREVOR BAXENDALE

times than I can count. It was very easy to get the voices of the regulars – the characterisation in **Doctor Who** is always so rich that they practically write themselves. It’s great fun to put, say, the Third Doctor and the Brigadier into any given situation and watch them go! But then it’s also satisfying to up the ante just a little – I give the Doctor and the Brigadier an exciting car chase through London, with hitmen on motorbikes and bullets flying, which wouldn’t have been achievable for the programme on TV. Similarly, it’s nice to give them a few quieter moments together, to show just how fond of each other they are by this stage – even though neither of them would admit it!” **VORTEX**

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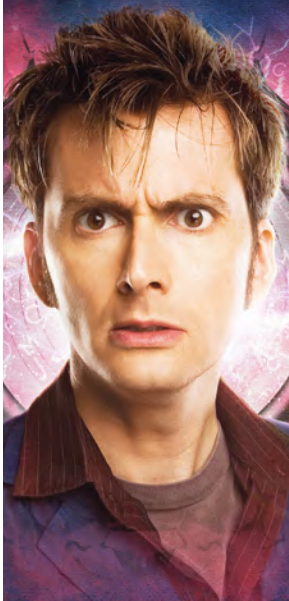


IN CELEBRATION OF THE MUCH-MISSED PAUL SPRAGG...

EVERY YEAR Big Finish commemorates the beloved Paul Spragg in a short fiction writing opportunity. Paul's work behind-the-scenes on contracts, script distribution, proof-reading, cover layout, CD extra interviews, the website and so much more made him vital to Big Finish's every day operations.

Paul's sudden passing in 2014 led to the creation of an annual event in his memory in which budding writers are given a chance to showcase what they can do in the form of a **Doctor Who – Short Trips** submission.

This year's winner is Eugenie Pusenjak – who lives in Canberra, Australia – with her Tenth Doctor story, *Free Speech*. The panel was



"It's definitely a surreal feeling! I hope people enjoy listening to the story just as much as I enjoyed writing it. **Doctor Who** has such a wide fanbase, and I'm really thrilled to have made a contribution (however small) to the **Doctor Who** universe. I'm also honoured to be a part of celebrating the memory of Paul Spragg.

"It shows too, that you've got to be 'in to win it' – so for any aspiring writers out there, don't be shy when it comes to having a go and entering contests such as this one."

Alfie says: "*Free Speech* stood out because of how it plays with the way that we tell stories, as well as featuring one of the Doctor's greatest strengths. Not only was it wittily written with a theme that resonates in the modern world, but it demonstrated a clear understanding of how to create a story that is written to be performed."

How does Eugenie sum up her adventure? "A planet where citizens pay to speak. A high-stakes card game. A skinny bloke with

IN LOVING MEMORY

comprised of Nicholas Briggs (Big Finish's creative director), Alfie Shaw (producer of the **Short Trips** range), Robert Shearman (writer) and Emily Cook (writer and producer of the **Doctor Who: Lockdown** series).

Eugenie tells *Vortex*: "I love **Doctor Who** and I love writing short fiction, so those two things combined seemed like a dream gig. I entered the 2019 Paul Spragg Memorial Opportunity without any success (I wasn't even a runner-up) but I had a lot of fun coming up with an idea for a **Doctor Who** audio story, and writing the synopsis and first page. So I decided to enter again in 2020 – without any particular expectations – and it was a wonderful surprise when I received the email saying that my entry, *Free Speech*, had won.



The inimitable
Paul Spragg

a pin-striped suit and huge gob! Aymius Todd – a young man from a disadvantaged background – is facing police interrogation. Will he have enough words to explain his new-found wealth, recent subversive activities and... the Doctor?" **VORTEX**

Previous winning **Paul Spragg Memorial Opportunity Short Trips** are: 2016 – *Forever Fallen* by Joshua Wanisko; 2017 – *Landbound* by Selim Ulug; 2018 – *The Last Day at Work* by Harry Draper; and 2019 – *The Best Laid Plans* by Ben Tedds.

Free Speech will be available to download from December 29, Paul's birthday.

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BOOK CLUB



TORCHWOOD: FALL TO EARTH

IF YOU had the chance to travel into space, would you do it? Many of us would say a definite yes, but after his experiences in **Torchwood**: *Fall to Earth*, Ianto Jones would most definitely say no.

In this second **Torchwood** release from Big Finish, Ianto boards the vessel of a billionaire philanthropist posing as a 'sky butler', but his experience is more than memorable – for all the wrong reasons.

Writer James Goss explains the inspiration for the adventure: "Part of it was an unused notion from my first Radio 4 **Torchwood** where Captain Jack Harkness would be helped by a call centre operative called Soraya. Cold calling was an absolute plague in 2015 and at the same time there was a lot of news about private space flights, so it seemed appropriate to combine the two. When is the very worst time to have someone cold calling you to sell insurance? When you're on a crashing spaceship!"

Fall to Earth is a brilliant two-hander starring Gareth David-Lloyd and Lisa Zahra. James



Gareth David-Lloyd

recalls it was: "Just enormous fun. I actually wrote some of it on a plane (possibly not the greatest forward planning), and I enjoyed writing it enormously – seeing **Torchwood** from an outsider's point of view and falling in love with Ianto all over again.

"Ianto is such a great character and Gareth is so, so good in this. I know some people think that two-handers are limited but they make for absolutely splendid audio as you realise that there's a real need for everyone to be there."

Director Scott Handcock adds: "I remember *Fall to Earth* really clearly – partly because it was our first time working at Bang Post Production in Cardiff. What's lovely is that Bang Post are not only brilliant (you just have to walk past their shelves of BAFTAs and Emmys for confirmation) but they already had a history with **Torchwood** and its cast having provided a lot of post production work on the television

series. So it felt like we were instantly extending the family! "Plus, of course, it was our first time working with Gareth – and the first time he'd played Ianto since 2009. I think Gareth was a bit nervous about how Big Finish worked and finding the character again; whereas we were in a new studio with a new team wanting to make a good first impression! Looking back, it's mad to think it ever felt new! But more so than the previous release, *The Conspiracy*, where we recorded with John Barrowman down the line, this felt like **Torchwood** was really happening in Cardiff – with Ianto right in front of us – saving the world via a call centre." **VORTEX**

TORCHWOOD: FALL TO EARTH

- RELEASED: OCTOBER 2015
- FORMAT: CD/DOWNLOAD

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**RIVER SONG ENCOUNTERS ROBOTIC LIFE FORMS
IN HER LATEST BOX SET OF ADVENTURES...**

CURRENT AFFAIRS

RIVER SONG has had an interesting time at Big Finish. She's met several Doctors, she's encountered various incarnations of the Master, and she's been on the scene before the Doctor in four classic **Doctor Who** stories. This time, there's a slightly different encounter in **The Diary of River Song Series Eight**, as producer David Richardson explains: "This isn't the **River Song** box set we'd first planned. The global COVID-19 pandemic made us change course and our original ideas had to be re-examined for recording

remotely. Some episodes of that original box set remain, while others are new and hugely exciting as River goes up against the Robots!

"It was irresistible to pair River with K9 (and indeed more than one K9), and I love a Mechnoid so I couldn't help suggesting that we bring them back. The final episode, *Queen of the Mechnoids*, is also of note because it's part of our **Dalek Universe** arc – the Tenth Doctor saga coming later in 2021. If you want to find out what Anya Kingdom and Mark Seven were up to before they met the Tenth

Doctor, here's the answer..."

The Diary of River Song Series Eight also sees the return of Rachel who featured in the story *Five Twenty-Nine* in the second **The Diary of River Song** box set. She happens to be played by Salome Haertel, the daughter of the series's star, Alex Kingston.

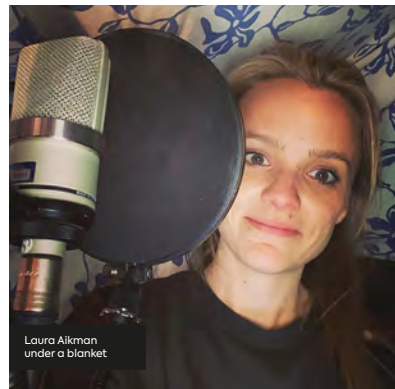
Script editor Matt Fitton tells us: "We had plans for this series to have quite big stuff going on but lockdown put that on hold and so we commissioned River meeting a variety of robot chums instead. And since Alex was locked



is a journey through the civilisation of a planet and Tracy Ann Baines's script, *A Brave New World*, follows a colony ship through the stars as Rachel decides her future.

"Using K9 was David's idea, and Alfie Shaw came up with *A Forever Home*, a story which reverses the owner/pet relationship. 'What if K9 adopted River from a pet pound?' was his starting premise! We also meet FE-LINE, a robotic cat addition to the family – and, of course, something goes wrong...

"It was also David's suggestion to use the Mechnoids, along with Anya and Mark Seven, adding another android into the mix, so in *Queen of the Mechnoids* by Jonathan Morris



Laura Aikman
under a blanket

I LOVE A MECHONOID SO I COULDN'T HELP SUGGESTING THAT WE BRING THEM BACK.

DAVID RICHARDSON

down at home with Salome, it made sense to feature Rachel.

"The first script for the originally planned *Series Eight* had Rachel in it, and now we've expanded that into two stories showing what happens next to Rachel the robot girl, who has outlived everyone else on Earth. As a time traveller, River gives her a lesson in coping with eternity, so

she can choose her own destiny.

"I called her Rachel as a nod to **Blade Runner**, as she's slightly detached and has a separate android-y quality to her, but she's got emotions and is learning how to develop them and work out who she wants to be and what she wants to do.

"The first story of the set, *Slight Glimpses of Tomorrow* by James Goss,

we have a prequel to the upcoming **Dalek Universe** stories. It happens in between *The Dalek Protocol* and the Tenth Doctor stories. Anya and Mark Seven are space security agents off on a rescue mission – and find more to deal with than they bargained for."

WRITER JAMES Goss sums

up *Slight Glimpses of Tomorrow*

as: "How does a time traveller teach another time traveller about time? It tells the story of a planet from the dawn of civilisation to the end of it, but through the lens of River teaching Rachel about the rules of time, and how to break them.

"A lot happens in this – there are pyramids, courtly intrigue, Venetian balls, corrupt politicians and dinosaurs. But it's also about River and Rachel finding one tiny

moment in a planet's history and changing it for the better. And there's a star chart that keeps turning up.

"Rachel's fascinating in that she's sort of a mirror to River's amorality, which River finds chilling. She reflects River's delight at eternity, but she also shares River's ability to bend and break rules, going further than River would ever go."

A BRAVE *New World* by Tracy Ann Baines continues Rachel's journey. Tracy reveals: "I was asked to write an episode that could follow on from *Slight Glimpses of Tomorrow*. We join

the story when River and her robot protégé Rachel arrive onboard a colonists' ship. Other than that specific jumping off point, the brief was open to any interpretation.

"I wanted to write something that really put Rachel's character at the centre of the story and to explore the idea of what it is to be human. Although Rachel is an artificial intelligence she has feelings and emotions and they were intrinsic to the plot.

"River Song and Rachel make a precision jump to the colonists' ship *Armis*, which is destined for a planet millions of miles away on a journey which will take nearly 500 years. When the skeleton crew realise that Rachel is a robot they are eager to welcome her as part of their team. But while Rachel forms a friendship with a crew member others plot against her and decisions are made that lead to a dangerous situation that threatens everyone's lives."

Tracy adds: "It was lovely writing for River but I particularly enjoyed having the opportunity to bring Rachel's character centre stage. It was great to have two independent, strong minded female characters to write for, and both of them very different.

"I enjoyed exploring Rachel's character and it was great fun to write some of the action scenes. Not to give away any spoilers but it gets quite messy!"

RIVER MEETS the Doctor's best friend in *A Forever Home* by Alfie Shaw, who says: "The brief was literally 'K9 and River', and that was it! But as soon as Matt said that, I had a passing thought of



(l-r): Alex Kingston and Salome Haertel

PROBABLY THE SCENES WHERE K9 HAS TO WALK RIVER ARE MY FAVOURITE.

ALFIE SHAW

'robot animals adopting people as pets', and put it to him on that initial call. He loved that as a kick-off point so we took it from there. Once we'd agreed to go with the robotic animals, the idea of FE-LINE sort of had to happen. I'm not a big fan of puns, but if you're committing to it, I think you have to go all-in on it. I know Kit10 would have been consistent with the number puns, but canine and feline felt like a cleaner and more accurate mirroring.

"River's been attacked and the Doctor has sent K9 in to look after her while she recovers. It's a story that

focuses on the unspoken relationship that they have, about their trust and – very different – forms of love for the Doctor, even though they are meeting for the first time."

How did Alfie find being given K9 to write for, as well as River? He laughs: "Oddly delightful! They're not two characters I would normally put together, but in the weird family unit that the Doctor has with River and the Ponds, K9 becomes the family pet. It was that commonality that I found a useful starting point, as once you know what they have in common, you can

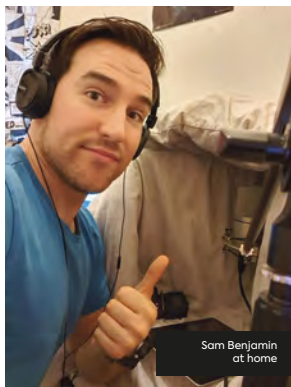


(l-r): Alex Kingston, Isabella Inchausti, Salome Haertel, Stephen Critchlow and Stewart Clarke

Given that on TV, the robots had dialogue as diverse as, “Mechonoid... English... Input...”, Jonny had his work cut out as they aren’t the most vocal of creations.

He confirms: “The Mechonoids were very tough. I worked out that in their one, brief television appearance they only say 19 different words. I knew I would have to expand their vocabulary a little, but even then there was the problem of their fairly slow delivery and the voice effect which makes them a little incoherent. My solution was to tell a story not just featuring the Mechonoids but about the Mechonoids, so even if they weren’t in a scene they were informing the dialogue and the action.

“And I was in a very Terry Nation frame of mind writing this one, addressing each problem with the thought of, What would Terry Nation do? And, of course,



Sam Benjamin at home

IT CAN ONLY BE A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE WE DO THE CHUMBLIES... JONATHAN MORRIS

unusual. It was to tell a story with the seventh Doctor, Mike Yates, K9 and the return of the villainous Ogri, so Big Finish was pretty surprised when I submitted a storyline featuring River Song, Anya Kingdom, Mark Seven and the Mechonoids, and my storyline was so exciting and original that they went with that instead...

“No, not really! The brief was, of course, to write a story with those characters and the Mechonoids. I would never go wildly off-brief like that. My starting point was the idea that Anya and Mark Seven pick up a distress signal and investigate. They discover it is coming from a Mechonoid city, and they ask the robots to take them to their leader. Their leader turns out to be River Song, who has made herself queen of the Mechonoids. That idea made me laugh and gave me a title and the first few scenes. But, of course, it’s not the whole story.”

he would address the problem of the Mechonoids by including a humanoid villain to handle the exposition. So, out of a sense of authenticity, that’s what I did.”

When *Vortex* asks Jonny for his highlight of this script, he grins: “It would have to be the casting of Derek Griffiths. An absolute legend for everyone of my age. A third of the great children’s TV triumvirate – Brian Cant, Floella Benjamin and Derek Griffiths!

“And now we’ve done the Mechonoids, it can only be a matter of time before we do the Chumblies...” **VORTEX**

start to explore relevant themes, and see how you can play around with it.

“I mean, probably the scenes where K9 has to walk River are my favourite. It’s just a weird *Planet of the Apes*-style inversion that I knew I had to get in there once we knew the basic set-up. It just really tickles me. There’s other stuff that I like, but we venture into the realm of spoilers if I say more.”

QUEEN OF *the Mechonoids* by Jonathan Morris finishes the set, giving the Mechonoids their second Big Finish appearance after 2005’s *The Juggernauts*. Jonny says: “The brief was quite

THE DIARY OF RIVER SONG SERIES EIGHT

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**THE FOURTH DOCTOR
AND LEEA RETURN FOR
MORE ADVENTURES IN
SPACE AND TIME...**

TEN TO FOUR

TOM BAKER and Louise Jameson have been bringing their roles as the Doctor and Leela to life on audio since the launch of **The Fourth Doctor Adventures** in January 2012. January 2021 sees the release of the tenth series of adventures starring Tom, and in this set he's back with Louise.

Up to and including *Series 8*, **The Fourth Doctor Adventures** range features single stories. That changes in 2020's *Series 9* releases for the adventures with the Doctor, Romana, K9 and Adric in E-Space, as it mirrors television season 18 by being in four parts.

Series 10 features another quartet in the same 4 x 25-minute episode

format but script editor John Dorney reveals: "This particular series is entirely four-parters, but after this the format of **The Fourth Doctor Adventures** gets mixed up with a few two-parters in it too. I don't think there's the same set-up for any two seasons – they all get split up to varying lengths after this."

Series 10 will be released in January and February, beginning with *The World Traders* written by Guy Adams.

John says: "There's quite a wide mix of stories in this season starting with *The World Traders*, a prequel to *The Sun Makers* TV episodes. It features the Usurians, and the villain is played by the magnificent Sián Phillips, who is in the same vein as Henry Woolf. It's great fun with

twists and turns, and filled with all manner of crazy ideas from Guy.

"I remember reading it while I was waiting for an incredibly late audition for an advert. There is a fish tank in the script, and I realised, 'THERE'S ONE HERE! THIS IS AN OFFICE WITH A FISH TANK TOO!' I didn't have to give many notes on it. Guy's totally nailed Tom Baker's Doctor and tells an exciting story with lots of things going on."

The second adventure is *The Day of the Comet* written by Jonathan Morris. John reveals: "*The Day of the Comet* is probably a bit darker than people would expect from Jonny. It's quite a bleak story about a potential apocalypse which feels quite appropriate now but perhaps



Siân Phillips

Do they have the right to choose who deserves to live and die?

“So I thought about it, and each character basically embodies a particular view; some are resigned to their fate, others maintain false hope, others think they must fight the dying of the light. But of course, that’s only the beginning of the story; it turns out there is one last Arkship being prepared to evacuate the remaining population while the fate of the planet holds a special significance for the Doctor...”

Jonny adds: “The Doctor has a lot of scenes with a stiff-upper-lip character called Verkuvia, and it was wonderful to hear the legendary Janet Henfrey bringing her to life.

ON A WORLD WHERE EVERYONE KNOWS THE END IS NIGH, HOW WOULD PEOPLE LIVE?

JONATHAN MORRIS

didn’t when it was being recorded. I’ll be looking at Jonny’s future scripts to find out what else he’s got in there, just to see what he’s predicted!

“Jonny has a lot of experience in writing **Doctor Who** and knows how to structure it. It’s a gloriously enjoyable piece of work with a dark heart and a dark tale to tell, but with his trademark sense of humour.”

Jonny tells us: “Producer David Richardson wanted something a bit gritty, something grim with a character dilemma for Leela. So I came up with the ever-topical idea of a world that is about to face imminent destruction. I had this image of the painting ‘Pandemonium’ by John Martin; an ancient city about to be consumed by lava. I thought, wouldn’t it be cool to do a story set in that city...”

“The idea was quite simple. On a world where everyone knows the end is nigh, how would people live? Would society break down into chaos or would people just



(l-r) Tom Baker and Janet Henfrey

give up? Would some people try to hold things together until the bitter end? And putting the Doctor and Leela on that world immediately creates a strong dramatic situation; they can save anyone they like. But should they?

It’s one of those pairings like the Doctor and Professor Rumford from the TV episodes, *The Stones of Blood*; the Doctor dealing with an older woman who gives as good as she gets. And there are a few scenes where the characters face terrible life-or-death choices which felt really powerful during the recording – I’m looking forward to hearing them again!”

IN FEBRUARY, the Doctor and Leela have a ticket to ride in *Tribulations of Thadeus Nook*, written by Andrew Smith. John says: “Andrew has gone for something more playful and extravagantly structured than you would expect from him with *Tribulations of Thadeus Nook*. It’s very entertaining – even from the title you can tell it’s light-hearted. Thadeus Nook runs a temporal tourist agency and we have the various shenanigans they get up to. It’s set across several different time zones and it all builds



(l-r): Tom Baker
and Jon Culshaw



(l-r): Louise Jameson
and Tom Baker

together and connects, with a definite sense of humour at the heart of it. It's got one of my favourite suggestions that I've ever made as a script editor which involves an umbrella - but I won't spoil it!"

Andrew continues: "I think the brief was simply 'Tom and Louise', and David liked the idea for Thadeus Nook. He is an Arthur Daley kind of character [Arthur Daley was a shady but likeable entrepreneur in the 1980s British TV series **Minder**] - it's the most light-hearted thing I've written for Big Finish.

"There's a scene in episode one and when we were recording it, we were laughing so much. There's no Doctor or companion in the scene, and in fact the characters only appear in that episode, but it was a lot of fun. It's the eve of D-Day and some aliens turn up in Normandy. One is captured and questioned by a German officer but this alien is a bumbling idiot tourist, and is being told, 'You're a spy, admit it!' and he's saying, 'Oh my wife would love to hear you saying that - I'm just here to see the invasion! Oops, sorry, I shouldn't have said that..'

"It's comedic at the start but it gets more serious as it goes on though. If you want a comparison of sorts, it's a bit like Donald Cotton in his **Doctor Who** stories, *The Myth Makers* and *The Gunfighters*, which start off like sitcoms but by the last episode are far more serious with more threat and greater consequences."

The titular character in the story is one who struck the author in a flash of inspiration. Andrew agrees: "Thadeus Nook just came to me. He finds himself in possession of a time machine (as you do) and decides to be totally reckless with the laws of time, as he just wants to make some money and take tourists to famous points in history.

"The Doctor and Leela arrive in Normandy and see the alien tourist traipsing around and getting caught. They stumble upon this wide boy, Thadeus Nook, who's making a few quid taking people to various points in time and the Doctor's not going to put up with that. Leela goes off with Thadeus and the Doctor has to follow to get her back as they run roughshod over the time lines. There's also a warlord who wants to overturn a certain point in history."

The second story of the set is *The Primeval Design* by Helen Goldwyn. It centres on fossil collector Mary Anning, recently portrayed by Kate Winslet in the 2019 film *Ammonite*.



IT'S GOT ONE OF MY FAVOURITE SUGGESTIONS THAT I'VE EVER MADE AS A SCRIPT EDITOR WHICH INVOLVES AN UMBRELLA...

JOHN DORNEY

(l-r): Tom Baker and
Sophia Carr-Gomm

I'm writing. I love writing for her!
"I hadn't heard of Mary Anning beforehand, but my step-mother had as there was a piece on the radio. Many well-known historical figures have already appeared in **Doctor Who** stories – I think I suggested a couple of others that have already been done. But knowing little about Mary Anning, I became fascinated by her."

Helen adds: "I've always been intrigued by the idea of who was the first person who found a complete fossilised skeleton? They must have thought it was a dragon

I WOULD HOPE THAT IT'S A REALLY CLEAR PRESENTATION OF WHAT A REMARKABLE PERSON MARY ANNING WAS...

HELEN GOLDWYN



John says: "*The Primeval Design* features Mary Anning. We originally intended it to be a purely historical story but it kept veering towards sci-fi in terms of the plotting, becoming a celebrity historical. We've done a lot of work with Helen over the years, and we were all asking, 'Why have you never written a **Doctor Who** adventure for us?', so I had a chat with her when

we were at another recording, and I asked if she'd like to draft one. I really love her writing and the emotional heart she brings, and because Helen doesn't come from a **Doctor Who** background, she brings a new angle to it. It had all of her requisite style and heart which I was hoping for."

But it wasn't a straightforward commission for Helen. She tells *Vortex*: "I really struggled with it to start with as it began as a pure historical, and the 'pure' definition means it's an adventure in history without any aliens – but I wasn't able to make it work without them. So I took the brief and I adapted it."

"I would hope that it's a really clear presentation of what a remarkable person Mary Anning was – that was my starting point. I did lots of research about her and her life, as well as her legacy. She was unrecognised in her time but she was so unusual for the era, being an independent woman, and when she meets Leela she sees a lot of parallels in herself with another strong woman. I can always hear Louise Jameson's voice when


or some mythical creature! We don't have a record of it. Mary was extremely advanced for her time in her thinking – she had a strong concept of what was going on.

"I had to do quite a lot of research into the beach and shoreline in Lyme Regis as there's a wall out in the bay that was around in her time, and that features in the drama. I had to make sure I got my facts correct because anyone who lives there would know if I'd got it wrong!" **VORTEX**

THE FOURTH DOCTOR ADVENTURES

SERIES TEN: VOLUME ONE


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THE FOURTH DOCTOR ADVENTURES

SERIES TEN: VOLUME TWO

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BLAZING FEAR

THREE FANTASTIC stories kick off the **Doctor Who The Monthly Adventures** range in 2021. The year begins with Roland Moore's *Colony of Fear* featuring the Sixth Doctor and Constance Clarke.

Producer John Ainsworth reveals: "*Colony of Fear*, as it was eventually called, had quite a long evolution and went through several, quite different story outlines. Unusually it had its genesis in what you might call the *secondary* plotline – the one that has more personal relevance to the Doctor.

"Without giving too much away, *Colony of Fear* is an exciting adventure which plays with some traditional **Doctor Who** concepts, but raises questions about the Doctor's actions and his responsibilities to the people he meets and how he changes their lives."

Roland says: "The Doctor, gifted with longevity, has travelled with a lot of human friends – and this episode was always about one

companion he couldn't remember. The storyline changed a bit during development while always retaining the idea of a forgotten human, examining the Doctor's 'duty of care' to his companions.

"At first the story was much more time travel orientated, but aspects of that clashed with a story that had already been done. Then I had a human colony suffering from an unknown contagion – but we didn't think the idea of a malevolent virus was something people needed right now..."

"So having read about the Emerald Cockroach Wasp – a creature that stings a cockroach and then controls it using chemicals – I thought that something with those properties would be a good (and unsettling) replacement for the virus in the story.

"I hope the final adventure is an effective body horror/base under siege story with the added intrigue of us learning about a forgotten period of the Doctor's life..."

A CREATURE THAT STINGS A COCKROACH AND THEN CONTROLS IT USING CHEMICALS...

ROLAND MOORE

Colony of Fear takes place before Flip returns to join the Doctor and Constance on their travels. Roland continues: "I've always enjoyed Constance as a companion and for this I prepared by listening to her early solo adventures with the Doctor – to get the timeline and their behaviour right. Actually she is the perfect companion for this story because she's forced to examine her relationship with the Doctor – and that was interesting given how emotions simmer under the surface with her."



(l-r): Rakie Ayala
and Donna Berlin



FEBRUARY SEES the release of *The Blazing Hour* by James Kettle which features the Doctor and Turlough. By coincidence or clever planning, the second monthly **Doctor Who** release featured Peter Davison and Mark Strickson, and now the second from last also stars the duo!

Producer David Richardson tells us: "I love this script. James pitched the idea to me and I instantly said yes – it's just such a different kind of story and yet it feels totally suited to **Doctor Who**. At its core, *The Blazing Hour* is about a group of characters faced with

– and some denying – the oncoming apocalypse. It never lets up, takes brilliant turns, and puts the Doctor and Turlough into the most precarious circumstances. It's just thrilling."

James recalls: "I remember David emailing me about this when I was in the studio for Joe Lycett's **Got Your Back**, while I was trying to think of some more offensive and funny things to say about consumer fraudsters! All I was asked was would I like to write a Fifth Doctor story. And as someone who worshipped Peter Davison's Doctor to the extent of dressing up like him as a child, it was as much as I could do to contain my excitement enough to be able to type, 'yes'. I said, 'yes, I will, yes.'"

"I think the first idea I suggested was an alien invasion of Earth centred around the creation of breakfast television in 1983 but both David and script editor John Dorney were keen that I do something less stupid!

"So now we're in the far future and the Doctor's dealing with humans who in some ways are very different from 21st century people, but depressingly

share a lot of the same faults! I guess a lot of **Doctor Who** is about trying to avert disaster, but *The Blazing Hour* is about what the Doctor does when the disaster has already happened. It's a story full of tough choices and shocking events – but it's also got a shop that sells snowglobes."

James very much enjoyed writing for the Doctor and Turlough as a pairing. He confirms: "I think it's fair to say that Turlough could sometimes be underused on television – and actually, in this era, so could the Doctor! Not that



Mark Strickson

I don't love the era, but I was keen here to give the characters – and the actors – plenty of interesting things to do. Whether I've achieved that, I leave to others to judge. You can guess from the cover alone that Turlough goes on quite a journey in this story, and the Fifth Doctor has some big challenges to face too.

"I spend so much of my professional life writing comedy, it was exciting to tackle something that has the shape and feel of a thriller. Not that there aren't any jokes in *The Blazing Hour*, but they aren't what drives it." **VORTEX**

DOCTOR WHO: COLONY OF FEAR

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SUPERB SLIP

I thought I should drop you a note to say thank you for the **Timeslip** plays. They were completely true to the unique, original TV series in terms of atmosphere and content; I listened to them on two four-hour long drives and they made the journeys seem to pass much more quickly than that! Well done Andrew Smith and Marc Platt, and indeed everyone involved in these

productions. Sarah Sutton's performance was particularly enjoyable. Is it too much to ask for more...? The door has very much been left open for this plot wise, so I really hope that this series gains the (paying!) following that it deserves.

STEVE MAGINN

Nick: Thanks, Steve, everyone involved did a fantastic job. And it was so great to have the original Simon and Liz back, wasn't it? Let's hope we can do more.

LOST WOOD

It's great listening to all the **Doctor Who Lost Stories** that could have happened on TV. Are there any plans on adapting **Torchwood** stories that never made it to TV in a **Torchwood Lost Stories** range?

DOMINIC HASLAM

Nick: There are no plans for that yet, Dominic, but it's certainly something

worth bearing in mind. I'll mention it to James Goss... if he's not already reading this and thinking about it!

NEW TWO?

I have really been enjoying **The First Doctor Adventures** range with David Bradley and the rest of the cast from **An Adventure in Space and Time**. Would you

guys ever consider recreating the Second Doctor era with Reece Shearsmith in the lead role? I understand that he only had a small cameo as Patrick Troughton at the end of the film and he has not yet appeared as the Second Doctor in the new series but it might be a fun idea.

BEN CALLINICOS

Nick: Hi Ben, we've got a whole revamp of our First and Second Doctor ranges coming up in 2022, so expect some news on those next year.

STAGING MORE

Is there any chance of Big Finish adapting the **Doctor Who Live** stageplay from 2010? It seems like such a fun, wacky story and I never got to see it, much like all of the stageplays range Big Finish has adapted. A great way to experience things long past!

SCOTT MCGEE

Nick: You know that'd never really occurred to me, Scott, since it was really a concert with a few bits of nonsense in between! I really enjoyed being in it though so food for thought. As I always say, I'd never rule it out.

TIME TEAMS

Just finished listening to **[The Tenth Doctor Adventures] Out of Time** – a great story with humour and touching moments. I never would have thought 15 years ago that I would be hearing Tom and David together. Thanks for keeping their Doctors alive long after their televised appearances.

MIKE CIAVARELLA

*Nick: Thank you Mike, it's fantastic that we can make these things happen. We're so grateful to Tom Baker and David Tennant for taking part. A great, celebratory moment, all achieved in spite of the difficulties of lockdown... **VORTEX***

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Mutually Assured Destruction
(3, EIGHTH DOCTOR)

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ADVENTURES:
The Tribulations of Thadeus Nook
(10.3) **DLO**

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ADVENTURES:
The Primeval Design (10.4) **DLO**

DW | TIME LORD VICTORIOUS:
Echoes of Extinction
(EIGHTH AND TENTH DOCTORS) **DLO**

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MARCH 2021

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(27, FIFTH, SIXTH, SEVENTH, EIGHTH DOCTOR)

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Return of the Cybermen
(6.1, THE FOURTH DOCTOR)

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(6.2, THE FOURTH DOCTOR)

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Lived through their vocations."

THE **BIG FINISH** MAGAZINE

VORTEX

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