

THE BIG FINISH MAGAZINE

# VORTEX

ISSUE 185  
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BIG FOR THE LOVE  
OF STORIES



# SUSAN'S WAR

**THERE ARE UNEXPECTED ENCOUNTERS FOR SUSAN...**

**THE DEATH AND LIFE OF RIVER SONG**

**PREPARE FOR SPOILERS!**

**THE INCOMPARABLE RIVER SONG RETURNS IN A BRAND-NEW SERIES...**





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# THE SIRENS OF TIME... REDUX

**BIG FINISH** is marking 25 years of **Doctor Who** audio adventures by going back to where it all began. *The Sirens of Time* was originally released in July 1999 starring Peter Davison, Colin Baker and Sylvester McCoy as the Fifth, Sixth and Seventh Doctors.

Now, the production is being given a 2024 makeover as Nicholas Briggs, who wrote and directed the story a quarter of a century ago, is reworking the story from its original digital audio tape (DAT) recordings.

This new release is a "director's cut" of the story. Where the first three episodes of the original release each focused on just one Doctor, this new version intercuts between all of them for a more narratively satisfying experience.

Nick says: "I've managed to rescue the original source material off ancient DAT tapes with the help of regular Big Finish sound designer and composer Toby Hrycek-Robinson who skilfully extracted the material, and I'm working now on creating a version of the story like no other before it... again!" *The Sirens of Time Redux* also features new sound design and music. And in addition there are brand-new behind-the-scenes extras available on the limited editions (selling out fast) with the three Doctor actors reminiscing about their first ever Big Finish recording and the 25 years of audio productions since. **VORTEX**

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# EDITORIAL

**I'VE ALWAYS** loved the audio **Short Trips** range. I used to listen to them when I went on a lunchtime walk from work. I'd start listening when I left the office and some 40 minutes later I'd be back at the door with a complete story told.

As a devotee of the Eighth Doctor, *All Hands on Deck* has become a firm favourite. If you haven't heard it, do yourself a favour and pop onto the Big Finish website and order yourself the download – it's only £2.99! Eddie Robson has written a fantastic adventure in which the Doctor tries to keep Susan away from the Time War. But, of course, in the end he couldn't. Susan will always do the right thing.

To me, it is a great open-ended tale, and for Big Finish where no good idea is ever wasted, the full-cast spin-off **Susan's War** series developed from it. The first box set concluded with Carole Ann Ford and Paul McGann clashing, setting things up nicely for a second release **Susan's War: Family Ties** in which Susan meets the War Doctor.

The War Doctor also returns in his own series with **The War Doctor Rises** starting what will hopefully be a long and exciting run of adventures. I've been lucky enough to become good mates with actor Jonathon Carley, who still freaks me out when chatting normally and then just drops into THE voice! I can't wait for all these to come out – and that's without mentioning the conclusion of the Sixth Doctor's 40<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations! **VORTEX**

*Kenny*



The Time War brings forth unexpected encounters for Susan...

# WAR CHILD

**CAROLE ANN** Ford takes centre stage once again in *Family Ties*, the second series of **Susan's War**. *Gallifrey* has sent a summons to all its children. Every Time Lord, every renegade and prodigal, has been called up for the Time War. Susan has returned home and joined the Gallifreyan war effort against the Daleks.

The first box set saw Susan working with some Time Lords we know from Big Finish's various **Time War** ranges including Veklin and Rasmus – and Paul McGann's Doctor popped up too!

The series **Susan's War** was developed from *All Hands on Deck*, a **Short Trip** written by Eddie Robson in 2017, which saw the Eighth Doctor trying to prevent Susan from becoming involved in the temporal conflict.

This second release, *Family Ties*, features two adventures with the return of Sonny McGann as Susan's son Alex Campbell, and Jonathon Carley as the War Doctor.

Producer Heather Challands tells *Vortex*: "It's a great range to be a part of and it's intriguing to

tackle the character of Susan and where she is at this point in her life. And then, the deal is really sealed when you say: 'and the War Doctor is going to be there as well!' That's just irresistible because it's not been done yet.

"It was brilliant working with Carole – the recording days were really enjoyable. It was so lovely to hear Carole reprise the role and stretch the character of Susan as well. It felt like we were breaking new ground – not bad for a character who's been around for 61 years!"



Above: Carole Ann Ford

**THE LOST** Son by Sarah Cassidy is the first story, set after Susan's encounter with the Eighth Doctor. *Still reeling from meeting her grandfather on Earth, Susan is assigned to assist a mother in search of her son. Vesselina is the new ruler of her world, and a potential recruit for Gallifrey's cause.*

*But strange forces are at work on Materos, and Susan's empathy becomes a weapon to be used against her...*

And that's before you complicate matters further with her son, Alex, who was exterminated by the Daleks...

Heather says: "*The Lost Son* is the story that we open with. We have the previous team from **Susan's War** front and centre in Veklin and Susan who have a nice and established dynamic. They bounce off each other rather well considering they're chalk and cheese.

## IT FELT LIKE WE WERE BREAKING NEW GROUND – NOT BAD FOR A CHARACTER WHO'S BEEN AROUND FOR 61 YEARS!

HEATHER CHALLANDS

"Susan and Veklin are sent to Materos where a little boy has been kidnapped and the Priestess Vesselina, his mother, thinks that the Daleks are responsible – but it might not be them. There's a lot of political intrigue as they try to figure out what's happened

to the boy and, in the course of that, Susan has to confront some very painful memories.

"It was lovely to produce a female-centric script, and it is clear that the theme throughout is mothers and motherhood. I think all of the characters, bar Alex, are women, and it was very enjoyable exploring these different types of women and their interpersonal relationships. They're all very different characters, and it was great to be able to show that sort of breadth."

New to Big Finish writer Sarah tells *Vortex*: "I'd been writing audio for a while before **Susan's War** came along as I co-created and co-wrote a continuing drama series called *Station Road* for a community radio station in Manchester. I learnt loads about writing for audio from that project. Then in 2021, I wrote a podcast episode for the *Tales from Malory Towers* audio series through the CBBC Writers Room. I really enjoyed writing for that – I was a fan of the novels when I was younger. And shortly after that I was introduced to Matt Fitton at Big Finish.

"We had a Zoom meeting as this took place during lockdown and had a conversation about **Susan's War**. I was invited to come up with some story ideas and I did a lot of research before submitting my pitches – *The Lost Son* being the one that was commissioned. Whilst the loss of Alex was a long time ago, I thought it would be interesting to see how Susan could be exploited as a grieving mother.

"I'm incredibly grateful to Matt and Heather at Big Finish for allowing me the opportunity to write for this great series. Being given the freedom to create new characters, planets and stories is such a privilege for a writer. **Susan's War** is the perfect show for me to debut as a Big Finish writer because it is female-led, and most of my other stories for audio, stage or screen feature extraordinary women like Susan and Veklin.

"I really enjoyed writing their relationship scenes as I felt that their relationship grew in series one, and it was important to keep on that path when we join them again in series two. It was a definite highlight knowing that Carole Ann would be playing Susan – I really wanted to give her a decent story to open this new series with."

**PETER ANGHELIDES** has written *The Golden Child*, the second story in the set. A key ally to Gallifrey has winked out of existence. When Susan investigates, she finds someone else is also interested in the altered timeline – her grandfather!

around. The War Doctor is not meant to be there, but while he is, he's going to get up to mischief."

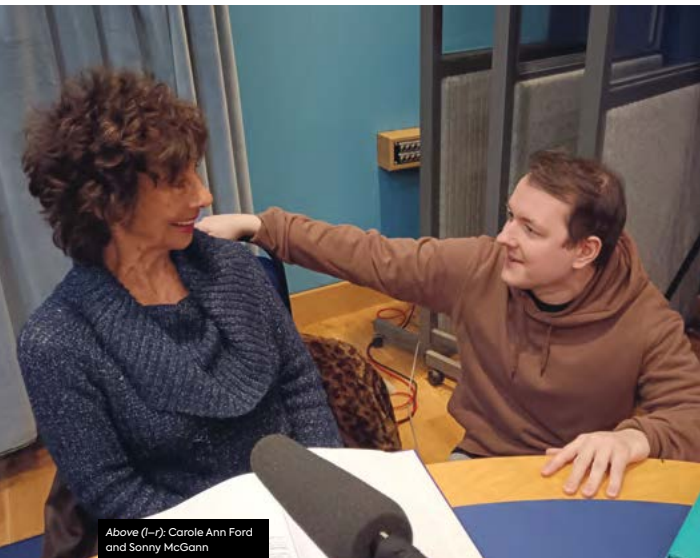
Peter continues: "My brief was for Susan to investigate a temporal incursion and find her grandfather in a form she doesn't know because he's been thrown back in time

"Susan's experiences with her grandfather have been generally positive, whether in *The Five Doctors* on the TV or with the Eighth Doctor in an earlier **Susan's War** story. The War Doctor, however, is a darker, more disreputable character, disavowed even by the Doctors who came after him. Why has he turned up, and should Susan rely on him?"

"Susan's now met half a dozen different versions of her grandfather, but is herself the same person who first left Gallifrey with him. That's an interesting dynamic to play with – is her attitude unchanged over the centuries now that she's returned to their home world, or has her perspective evolved without

## LISTENERS (AND WRITERS) ARE MERE MORTALS WHO CANNOT REVISIT THE PAST OR HOP INTO THE FUTURE...

PETER ANGHELIDES



Above (l-r): Carole Ann Ford and Sonny McGann

*But this version is from the future of the Time War, and he's not the man Susan remembers...*

Heather says: "In *The Golden Child*, Susan gets a call from one of her friends, Andolar – an archivist, who says that one of Gallifrey's future key allies who Andolar has studied for nearly all her life, has gone.

"And suddenly, no one can remember him. They don't know who he is or where he is – and the great events that he's meant to achieve are in flux. So Susan and Andolar go back in time to discover what's gone wrong and they find themselves in the middle of an assassination attempt that shouldn't be happening.

"They try to rectify events, except it turns out that's very tricky to do... especially when somebody's grandfather is involved! The War Doctor has been jolted back through the Time War and has ended up at an earlier point than he exists, so there is still a Paul McGann Eighth Doctor incarnation running



Above (l-r): Carole Ann Ford and Jonathon Carley

during a skirmish in the Time War.

"The Big Finish Time War series does such interesting things with a 21st century **Doctor Who** concept, and bringing back the first travelling companion from the 20th century is a very inventive combination.

having gone through the most radical change of regeneration herself?"

How enjoyable is writing something where time is out of joint, and you can have a bit more freedom to work with changes in history? Peter says: "It's very enjoyable to explore what a Time War means while making it recognisable to listeners as a conflict with meaningful risks, stakes and dangers. If you can simply change the past in an ad hoc manner, then there'd be no jeopardy for your story. You have to establish some understandable rules, so devising those was important.

"Listeners (and writers) are mere mortals who cannot revisit the past or hop into the future – temporal conflicts are outside our experience. So a writer can be inventive about the novel stratagems that an enemy could adopt and weaknesses they would look to exploit. For our heroes, what counter-manoevres should they devise and what spycraft can they adopt to thwart those enemy



Above (l-r): Rosalyn Landor, Sophie Bleasdale, Bath Chalmers, Carole Ann Ford, Heather Bleasdale, Sonny McGann and John Ainsworth

tactics? Urgency and action is a good thing for compelling drama – but in a Time War, what does urgency mean? What's an action you cannot undo?

"In my story, one of Gallifrey's subterfuges has not only made Time Lords vulnerable to a fresh attack, it's also tied their hands for defending against it. Susan recognises that she must take a risky and painstaking initiative – until her impulsive grandfather throws a spanner in the works!"

Heather was delighted to be able to work with a particular friend on this series. She explains: "I've been friends with Jonathon for a couple of years now. We meet at various social gatherings but until now I've not had the chance to work with him, and it was really lovely.

"The War Doctor and Susan are a great combination. It's nice to be able to ask the question of how these two characters would interact, especially when they have changed so much from when they first knew each other, or even since they last saw each other. The War Doctor is very different to the Eighth Doctor, so even if Susan's more or less on

the same path as she was when she last met him, he is wildly different.

"He's quite secretive and antagonistic when Susan encounters him, and she doesn't quite understand. She knows that it's her grandfather, but she can't connect the dots or work out how her grandfather has become this person. He's also placed in opposition

## SHE KNOWS THAT IT'S HER GRANDFATHER, BUT SHE CAN'T CONNECT THE DOTS...

HEATHER CHALLANDS

to her and she can't get a straight answer from him. Susan doesn't know whether he's there to help or to hinder, or if he cares or not.

"So there are lots of questions from Susan and a hesitancy on the War Doctor's part to answer them. If you look at it from his perspective, he's engaging in the relationship when he

feels like a different person, so letting himself have a bond with Susan again is tricky for him, although we have got some nice moments of familiarity between the two.

"This the latest that Susan has ever seen her grandfather. It's a new experience for both of them. I feel like we're adding to the canon a little bit. It's very exciting." **VORTEX**

SUSAN'S WAR  
FAMILY TIES



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The War Doctor is rising even higher in his new series, like a...

# PHOENIX FROM THE FLAMES

**WHEN BIG** Finish announced **The War Doctor Begins** was coming to an end, there was great sadness across fandom.

But that despair was soon replaced by joy after it was announced that a brand-new series, **The War Doctor Rises**, would move his story into the next phase.

In the first volume, *Morbius the Mighty*, the War Doctor doesn't have it easy as an old enemy returns.

*The War Doctor has been forced out of the fight and the battle has moved on in his absence. There are new powers, new anomalies, and new excuses from him*

*to keep his distance. With only Cora, his nurse, to keep him company on the forest planet of Lull, the War Doctor is content to leave his old life behind.*

*But something is stirring in the depths of a twisted planet. An old, embittered foe harbours a terrible grudge against the Doctor. And when a chance encounter gives this enemy the chance to escape, nobody is safe in his quest for vengeance.*

*From the depths of the stormy Valley, Morbius will rise...*

*Morbius the Mighty* also serves as a sequel to **Dark Gallifrey: Morbius**, as the tyrannous Time

Lord emerges into a very different era and seeks bitter revenge on his foe. And as if that wasn't enough, a third power with their own agenda watches from the shadows.

Returning to Big Finish to portray Morbius on audio is BAFTA-nominated actor Samuel West (*Slow Horses, All Creatures Great and Small*). And the wonderful Jonathon Carley once again gives voice to the War Doctor played by the late Sir John Hurt on television.

Producer David Richardson tells *Vortex*: "We're journeying through the War Doctor's life in phases. We've





Above: Jonathon Carley

heard what happened immediately after he regenerated on Karn and experienced the subsequent initial adventures in this new form. Now we're some time later on in his life. He has settled into his skin, is more sure-footed and ready to take on all that Skaro (and Gallifrey) might throw at him.

"This first box set is a single three-hour story. The War Doctor rises and so does Morbius – and for him it's after the events of **Dark Gallifrey**. What we have is a battle between two titans, except one of them – the Doctor – is infirm and recuperating from being poisoned. It's a Tim Foley script so of course it's packed with rich ideas, detailed settings and glorious dialogue."

#### DIRECTOR BETHANY

Weimers has assembled a fantastic cast for *Morbius the Mighty*, which also features Sheila Ruskin (**Doctor Who: The Keeper of Traken**, *I, Claudius*) as

THERE'S A  
REAL DELIGHT  
WHEN YOU GO  
INTO YOUR  
OWN WRITING  
TURRET AND  
EMERGE WITH  
A GREAT BIG  
ADVENTURE.

TIM FOLEY

Corax; Gareth Armstrong (**Doctor Who: The Masque of Mandragora**, **Blake's 7**) as Judd; Pamela Nomvete (*Andor*) as 1-8-1; Theo Solomon (*Temple*) as Herving; and regular **Doctor Who** monster voice Nicholas Briggs as the Daleks.

Writer Tim was delighted to be given the chance to write a full box set pitching the old Time Lord

rivals against one another. He says: "David gave me complete freedom to pitch an epic adventure for the War Doctor. He's wonderful like that, and it's great the way he's been pushing this writer-led approach across the Doctor's different ages. I asked if I could write for Morbius again following the events of **Dark Gallifrey** as I felt he was justified a return. He's a military general from the Time Lords' history whilst they're fighting their biggest war yet, it feels like there's tons to explore there!

"I really got my teeth into Morbius in **Dark Gallifrey** – the way he approached everything, that ego of his that was bubbling out over the script. There was just so much more of him that I wanted to share. "Because **Dark Gallifrey: Morbius** was inspired by Frankenstein, it also felt like a natural fit to put Morbius in this new epic story. A large part of *Morbius the Mighty* is inspired by *Star Trek's The Wrath of Khan* which has its genesis in *Moby Dick*. Both are fabulous revenge stories which basically boil down to a one-on-one. I considered what Morbius was angry at the War Doctor for, what was driving him – and that's where the drama stems from."

How did Tim feel about getting to shape the entire box set on his own? He tells *Vortex*: "I loved it, it scratches a different bit of your brain! I enjoy working in a gang on a box set or a mini-series, but there's a real delight when you go into your own writing turret and emerge with a great big adventure.

"The War Doctor is a tricky incarnation to write for! Because he was barely seen on television, everybody has their own idea of who this Doctor is: I was intrigued how dark I'd be allowed to go. The BBC are never going to allow a gun-toting Rambo-style anti-hero, but there are other ways of amping up the ruthlessness. This box set is one of his 'rising' – he's going to be scaling some truly dark heights."

Did Tim particularly enjoy pitting this Doctor against Morbius, especially given his more ruthless side? He says: "I think all Doctors do well with a villainous foil. We have this with the War Doctor and the Barber-Surgeon in Robert Valentine's **The War Doctor Begins: He Who Fights With Monsters**. I think Morbius works as the perfect

antagonist to the Doctor. They're both Time Lord outsiders who've made their mark and they're both in the wrong fight. The Doctor shouldn't be a warrior, and Morbius certainly shouldn't be in this Time War...

"In a nutshell – Morbius wants revenge and he's going to stop at nothing to get it."

**MAKING A** welcome return to the gaitors and battered leather jacket of the War Doctor is actor Jonathon, who has won universal acclaim for his performance. *Vortex* asks him how it felt being back in the part now he has been able to fully establish

**THE MAIN THING FOR ME NOW IS A SENSE OF CONFIDENCE, ACCEPTANCE AND ENJOYMENT.**

JONATHON CARLEY



Above: Jonathon Carley

himself in the role?

Jonathan says: "Without wanting to sound too blasé it just felt like getting back into the flow. When we finished *The War Doctor Begins* we'd recorded 18 episodes, which is a lot, but it meant we had a good rhythm going by that point. The main thing for me now is a sense of confidence, acceptance and enjoyment.

"Having the range renewed was hugely validating – I've known about it for a long time now. Admittedly we've made people sweat a bit, but what greater compliment is there than to have the audience who have been so generous and receptive, all but begging for more! I do apologise to all those I've had to lie to.

"Learning about the new direction was exciting. We now know we can really challenge the character and myself, and push the stories to some extreme places."

**THE WAR DOCTOR** *Begins* saw the Doctor finding his feet as he learned that his way of thinking was different, having been engineered to take part in the Time War. In this next set he's



Above: Sheila Ruskin



Above: Samuel West

fully established himself and knows his own mind.

Jonathon explains: “The War Doctor ‘began’ for a long time – I think he’s cooked now! He’s kind of entering his prime, he’s let ‘the Doctor’ go, he’s over the break up. So he’s going to be less precious, and perhaps less arrogant and reckless, and we are pretty much faced with the consequence of that in *Morbius the Mighty* where he’s become a casualty, invalidated and a very bad patient precisely because he is incapable of doing the very job he is determined to see through now, relegated to being an observer. His worst nightmare.

“Finding out the War Doctor was facing Morbius really raised the stakes. But then for me as an actor, I was wondering, is Sam going to reprise the role or will we see a new incarnation? I heard him playing Morbius in *The Eighth Doctor*

**JONATHON AND SAM GOING HEAD TO HEAD. IT’S BREATHTAKING. PROPER, FULL-ON THRILLING DRAMA.**

DAVID RICHARDSON

**Adventures** when I was in college and he really fleshed him out into a more nuanced and complex character, more than just a monster.

“So when it was confirmed that Sam was coming back I was both excited and quite intimidated because it’s Sam West! He’s one of the finest actors in the country. But everyone said how lovely he was and that he was a big **Doctor Who** fan

so I knew I’d be in good company.

“HOWEVER, disaster struck the day before recording when I tested positive for COVID-19 and had to pull out of the session. Ironically, I was genuinely invalidated from the war. So I missed the chance to meet the man, the myth, the Morbius. I was gutted. But I did get to hear some extracts from the recording and you can tell he was having great fun. There’s reason if there ever was one for a rematch. **Morbius Strikes Back!**”

The actor was also delighted to be reunited with the writer of the box set. Jonathon explains: “It was a real treat to have this set written by Tim. We met on my audition day right at the very beginning, and I look back on that encounter very fondly. Tim also lives ‘up north’ so we meet up occasionally and have become very good friends. He’s been teasing me about what he wanted to write. So having Tim alongside to launch this next step of the War Doctor’s journey feels very appropriate.

“But also with the War Doctor being injured, he does deteriorate at points. That gave me a great excuse to play with the energy and also the voice to really get across how worn down he is.”

David had a personal highlight: “Jonathon and Sam going head to head. It’s breathtaking. Proper, full-on thrilling drama.”

And Tim agrees: “Sam was sensational, again. And I love Jonathon’s performance. Just wait for a certain scene in the third hour where they give it their absolute all...” **VORTEX**

THE WAR DOCTOR RISES  
MORBIUS THE MIGHTY



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RIVER SONG IS BACK IN A WHOLE NEW SERIES...

# THE FACTS OF DEATH

## THERE'S SOMETHING

rather Schrödinger's Cat about River Song – she's all over time and space, but she's also 'dead' and stored within the Library... at least until now. The first box set in her new series, **The Death and Life of River Song: Last Words** sees River brought back to life.

*Wrenched from her digital afterlife in the Library, River Song finds herself on sixty-first century Earth, resurrected in a clone body. Billionaire tech mogul Garrison Clay has a mystery to solve, and he's selected River as the person to solve it.*

*Armed with only her sonic screwdriver and a fake ID, River*

*heads out into a world soon to be ravaged by solar flares... where danger stalks her at every turn.*

The story is divided into four episodes – or books – all scripted by Robert Valentine: *Book 1 – Apocalypse*; *Book 2 – Fate & Fatality*; *Book 3 – The Black Hours*; and *Book 4 – Book of the Dead*.

Producer David Richardson says: "Time is running out in many ways in *Last Words*. River's data has been pulled out of the Library and placed in an artificial body – but it has a very limited lifespan and her days are numbered. The same can be said for the entire planet, as the solar flares are about to burn across the Earth.

"Rob has written an apocalyptic story for our times, but one full of both surprises and hope as we weave our way through its four-hour duration. Like the much-loved **The Diary of River Song: Friend of the Family** which was met with great acclaim on its release, this is one writer's vision of a **River Song** box set – an emotional journey through the darkness and the light. It's heart-breaking, exciting and doom-laden and, perhaps when you least expect it, uplifting and inspiring."

The four books together, as well as revealing an important chapter in River's (after)life, serve as a prequel to the 1975 television story *The Ark*

in *Space*, with humanity preparing to flee the doomed Earth. Robert Whitelock guest stars as Lazar and Christine Kavanagh as Vira.

Also joining Alex Kingston in this epic story's cast is Greg Wise, who listeners may know from *The Crown* and *Sense and Sensibility*,

peace with, and I wanted to hear how River manages it. We know she gets an afterlife in the Library, but for a character whose life is so intertwined with the Doctor's, the only thing I felt there was left to explore with her was the human truth that we all have to face eventually,

unless she succeeds, she'll perish.

"It was great having the space to spend time with River Song somewhere she's never been before, and that's with her diary full, the Doctor entirely in her past, wrenched from the Library and having to finally confront the last fact of life from which she has so far been spared. I did notice a bit of discussion online about the idea of taking River out of the Library being a cheat, but there really is only one story worth taking her out of the Library for, and the clue to that is of course in the title."

Director Ken Bentley was delighted to return and take River in a new direction. He explains: "*River Song* is such a great story world and David has found a way to take the series in an exciting new direction. I also really enjoy long-form storytelling, it's always been one of the great things about working with Big Finish, they have the time to explore. So I'm even more excited about the series now than I was when we first started way-back-when!

"I've been listening to the final edits of *Last Words* and you can hear Alex's enthusiasm for the role in every scene. There's no better gift for a writer or director than to have a lead who's invested in the role and keen to keep exploring the possibilities. It becomes infectious in the studio, there's an energy about wanting to be there, wanting to enjoy the work and wanting to do good work that you can't fake. It lifts everybody's spirits. We're so lucky to get to work with Alex!" **VORTEX**



Above: Alex Kingston

playing ultra-rich tycoon Garrison Clay. And Jamie Parker – best known for playing Harry Potter and the Cursed Child as well as roles in the TV series *Treadstone* and *The Crown* – plays Sam Avner, a mysterious man who becomes an ally to River.

Writer Rob tells *Vortex*: "To be honest, when I was writing *Last Words* I was under the impression I was writing the very last River Song story *EVER* – hence the title! But I'm delighted that the magnificent Alex isn't putting down her sonic trowel any time soon.

"The brief on this one was to write a prequel to *The Ark in Space* but the thing I wanted out of it was to explore how River negotiates her life after the Doctor is no longer in it. How you deal with your great love behind you is something a lot of us do have to make

**TO BE HONEST, WHEN I WAS WRITING *LAST WORDS* I WAS UNDER THE IMPRESSION I WAS WRITING THE VERY LAST RIVER SONG STORY *EVER* – HENCE THE TITLE!**

ROBERT VALENTINE

the fact that all relationships end and eventually we all die.

"*Last Words* is a detective story in four chapters. River Song has been ripped from her digital afterlife and put in a temporary cloned body in order to solve a mystery. But that body has a six-week lifespan and

THE DEATH AND LIFE OF RIVER SONG  
LAST WORDS



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The Sixth Doctor is set to encounter some very familiar foes with new...

# TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS

**TO MARK** 40 years of Colin Baker as the Sixth Doctor, Big Finish's celebration has featured two box sets of adventures. The first, *The Quin Dilemma*, was released earlier this year and plays on a pun of Colin's first television story, *The Twin Dilemma*. And the second box set plays on the title of Colin's last TV season, *The Trial of a Time Lord*.

Out for release this August, *The Trials of a Time Lord*, sees the Doctor team up with both of his original TV companions, Peri (Nicola Bryant) and Mel (Bonnie Langford) – as they face off against several of his greatest foes.

Leading the charge are Davros and the Cyber Leader, with Terry Molloy

and David Banks reprising their roles. And, for their first appearance since appearing in the TV episode *The Two Doctors*, the carnivorous Androgums will feature with Jon Culshaw playing the bloodthirsty celebrity chef Stunrib.

*Responding to a distress call from an old friend, the Doctor and Mel find themselves in 'Cyberia', a prison camp run by an even older foe. But this time, the Cyber Leader's machinations are just the tip of one very sinister iceberg, one that will test the Doctor to his very limit, and beyond...*

*The Trials of a Time Lord* is a six-part story told over three discs, with the first two episodes scripted by Rochana Patel, the third and fourth by Katharine Armitage, and

the final two by Stewart Pringle.

Jonathan Powell, who has succeeded Jacqueline Rayner as producer on the series, tells *Vortex*: "This was a thrilling and surprisingly freeing brief to be given straight out of the gate as producer for **The Sixth Doctor Adventures** – celebrate 40 years of the character in pretty much any way you see fit! The only steer was the potential title *The Trials of a Time Lord*, intended to act as a bookend to the already in the works anniversary box set *The Quin Dilemma*.

"Script editor Robert Valentine and I had never worked together before this release. Fortunately, we got on like a house on fire, and after about an hour's excited chatter on Zoom we'd



Above: Colin Baker

managed to beat out the bare bones of what we wanted this box set to be.

"I was especially keen from the off on bringing David back as the Cyber Leader. His performance really sums up 1980s **Doctor Who** for me and everything we're celebrating here in *The Trials of a Time Lord*: familiar territory boldly reinvented. That's the Sixth Doctor era in a nutshell, a show acknowledging and celebrating its past while venturing bravely to pastures new.

"Our three fantastic writers were also seamless in their collaboration, fleshing our outlines out in really unexpected ways to produce an epic script beyond anything Rob and I could have hoped for."

Rob says: "Jac came up with the title *The Quin Dilemma* for the first of our two Sixth Doctor fortieth



Above: Bonnie Lamford

anniversary stories, and it seemed obvious to me that its companion piece should be called *The Trials of a Time Lord*. So this one was a title-first idea that suggested a series of Herculean labours, and then Jon and I had a long brainstorming session where we came up with the basic storyline to give our writers.

"We've got the Sixth Doctor, Peri, Mel and Cybermen – could there be a more explicit celebration of 40 years of the Sixth Doctor? The Doctor's birthday party certainly continues with this adventure, and it's one we've thrown as much of his era into as we possibly could."

**ROCHANA HAS** written the opening two parts and says: "The brief for this one was quite different to the normal process of writing for Big Finish. The over-arching concept for the six episodes was already in place with a

## EPISODE ONE IS A VERY TRADITIONAL CYBER-TALE, RAMPED UP TO THE MAX...

ROCHANA PATEL

basic treatment provided. So very much like the original *The Trial of a Time Lord*, each writer could deliver their separate episodes which would then be combined to make one much larger story.

"I was given the Doctor, Mel and the classic 1980s Cybermen. While the main plot-points were mapped out by the treatment, I still had a lot of freedom to flesh-out the details and make the episodes my own. And so that's what I did..."

"The Doctor and Mel arrive on an alien world, and discover a horrific prison camp run by the Cybermen... but that's just the start. This is an epic story filled with countless surprises!"

"I really wanted to make the most of the elements provided. Episode one is a very traditional Cyber-tale, ramped up to the max so I could make the most of the nostalgic thrills. And for episode two I really wanted to push the narrative in a different direction and do new things. Hopefully my episodes will

provide both old-school thrills, and something new and different.”

Rochana particularly enjoyed researching the Cybermen when writing this script. She explains: “I really loved writing for the 1980s Cybermen and deliberately set out to tell a story that highlighted how different their versions are.

“Rewatching the 1980s TV episodes,

**KATHARINE IS** the writer of the third and fourth episodes. She admits: “It was beyond exciting to be asked to be a part of *The Trials of a Time Lord*. I’ve wanted to write for the beloved Sixth Doctor for years and to get to work on his anniversary story was so much fun and such a privilege. The things I got to write were the perfect

hit, but there was loads of space for creating our own interpretations of the story and to do some world-building. There was a lot of back and forth between the writers, the script editor and the producer as we expanded the world and tried to weave our narratives together.

“From the start we each had two cliffhangers so that shaped the stories



Above (l-r): Jon Culshaw, Rufus Jones, Bonnie Langford, Jonathan S Powell, Samuel James, Robert Valentine and Holly Jackson Walters

**I LOVED GETTING TO PLAY WITH THAT DELICIOUS COMBINATION OF FUN, HUMOUR, SATIRE AND DARKNESS WHICH, FOR ME, SUMS UP THE SIXTH DOCTOR.**

KATHARINE ARMITAGE

you’ll see everything from anger, to panic, to paranoia – and it makes for a very different enemy. They’re conspicuously emotional, despite their claims to the contrary! Most modern stories focus on them as ‘emotionless silver giants’ and as a result they often get reduced to stomping robots, but that’s not what makes them terrifying.

“There’s a living person behind every steel mask who is still alive, in pain and desperate to be free – and that is what I wanted to explore here; to make sense of the contradictory nature of these Cybermen, who still seem to be connected to the emotions yet are always led by the same distinctive leader.”

pick ‘n’ mix of everything I adore about this Doctor’s era. I’m still buzzing I got to work on it!

“The brief had some key things that each of us three writers needed to

and, hopefully, gave the whole thing a feeling of constant momentum and increasingly bonkers twists!”

Summing up her story, Kat says: “The Doctor is trapped in a TV show with a million things that want to kill him. Meanwhile, Mel wants to find the rebels fighting back against the shows. Both of them want to find out who’s the real power behind it all... I’m not sure I can say any more than that without entering Spoiler City!

“Everything on this one was a highlight! I loved getting to play with that delicious combination of fun, humour, satire and darkness which, for me, sums up the Sixth Doctor. It’s a multi-coloured world with shadowy depths and it was brilliant to get to



swerve between the two. It was also fun building in bits of satire about contemporary TV: I love telly but I also like pointing out how daft it can be (and, by extension, how daft we humans can be). My favourite bits, though, are probably the jokes I got to write for all these amazing characters – and everyone gets a ‘hero moment’ which were all joyous to create.”

### STEWART HAS

the concluding two parts. He says: “I was so thrilled when Rob asked me to be involved with *The Trials of a Time Lord* particularly as I had only just finished a big old rewatch of Season 23 via the Collection Blu-rays, and been reminded of how brilliant so much of it is. This story feels as much of a tribute to Season 22 as 23, but I love that the way it has been conceived reflects something of the process behind 23, although a lot less tortured!

“There was *so much* in my brief. I was wrapping the whole story up and there’s a real sense of constantly gathering momentum and accretive twists throughout the whole thing,

## I'M NOT GOING TO PRETEND THERE WEREN'T MOMENTS OF BLIND PANIC...

STEWART PRINGLE

which meant that by the time episodes five and six come around, there is a huge amount in play – a lot of balancing and quite complex plotting and structuring. The challenge with anything like this, where you’re one third of a writing team and you want to do justice to a lot of incredible actors, characters and the ideas which have gone before you, is finding the space to fit everything in while at the same time giving it your own twist.

“I’ve obviously read all about Robert Holmes and his dislike of a ‘shopping list’ brief, but this was the first one I’d actually faced for myself. I’m not going to pretend there weren’t moments of blind panic, but there

were also those where the pieces slipped perfectly together and you think, in the immortal delivery of David Banks, ‘Excellent!’.

“I hope it’s a true love letter to Sixie, and most particularly to Seasons 22 and 23, two of the most inventive, ambitious, original series

fun everyone was having. Colin couldn’t put the script down when I first sent it to him, and though we all worked our socks off in studio there was a lot of laughter between (and sometimes during) takes, and I think we all felt we were making something very special.” **VORTEX**



Above (l-r): Bonnie Langford and John Banks

of TV ever made. I’m aware that it’s a great honour to walk in the footsteps of those writers – of Bob Holmes, Pip and Jane Baker, Philip Martin, Eric Saward and Glen McCoy (and Paula Moore!) – so I don’t take the task at all lightly. I hope we’ve done that brilliant era justice.”

Jonathan adds: “The recording days themselves were the most complicated sessions I’ve ever run, as you’ll understand when listening, *The Trials of a Time Lord* is a mad, mad ride! Rob and I also came in a scene as a pair of bar flies called Broodmaw and Zee-Zox, so listen out for that.

“But the most wonderful thing about the sessions were how much

### DOCTOR WHO THE TRIALS OF A TIME LORD



■ RELEASED: AUGUST 2024  
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THE ADVENTURES FOLLOWING  
TV'S *THE WAR GAMES* CONTINUE...

# OH MY WORD!

**THE SECOND** Doctor and Jamie have been reunited in their travels through time and space – and now they're about to be joined by another old friend.

Michael Troughton has effortlessly slipped into the role made famous by his father in **The Second Doctor Adventures** audio range, with Frazer Hines as Jamie at his side. And two will become three with the release of the next box set, *Conspiracy of Raven*, in which they will be joined by Wendy Padbury as an older Zoe.

Producer and writer Mark Wright – one of the two writers on this new trio of adventures with Nicholas Briggs – has been delighted with the reaction to the first two box sets: *Beyond War*

and *Games* and *James Robert McCrimmon*.

Mark says: "Both Nick and myself have been really bowled over by how this run of **The Second Doctor Adventures** has landed. People seem to be really enjoying it. They're investing in Michael's performance and they're investing in our new regular character of Raven and the return of Jamie.

"Such a lovely reaction gives us a burst of energy to keep moving the narrative onwards in really exciting new directions. I'm really looking forward to what we've got coming up and to see how this box set is received because *Conspiracy of Raven* pushes the arc into new territory."

Director and co-writer Nick adds:

"I'm enormously pleased, Michael's performance has gone down really well. And it's been great to have Frazer playing an older version of Jamie joining the Second Doctor on his missions. The series feels like it's got real momentum now."

*Conspiracy of Raven* features three closely-linked adventures.

Mark says: "We've approached this set differently to the previous two box sets, and Nick and I took it forward by planning and writing it ourselves. We felt for this release that we needed to do that.

"So as writers we have really been a tag-team on this one. Throwing ideas backwards and forwards and seeing how it's come

together has been fascinating.

"It's a big six-part adventure that is split into three different stories, as is the nature of an arc. But they're done in a different way to *James Robert McCrimmon* which was also three separate stories."

Nick has written the first adventure in the set, *Kippers*. He explains: "I wanted it to be a bit of a character study where the Doctor and his Time Lord 'handler' Raven are stuck working with each other against a new, malevolent force. The theme is one of powerlessness. The Doctor is used to feeling ineffective and outnumbered, but it's an entirely new thing for Raven. And how they both cope with it and each other's response to their respective reactions forms the core of this story. It's also very important for the ongoing story arc, introducing the strange Kippers. Definitely something fishy about them!"

**IT'S ONE WHERE THE TITLE DROPPED INTO MY HEAD FIRST AND THE STORY CAME FROM THAT. THAT'S NOT ALWAYS A GOOD WAY TO WORK BUT IT REALLY HELPED...**

MARK WRIGHT

**MARK IS** the writer of the second adventure. He says: "For my story, *Catastrophe Theory*, it's one where the title dropped into my head first and the story came from that.

That's not always a good way to work but it really helped me on this one to have this image of supposed catastrophe theory.

"It's a bit like chaos theory where a butterfly beats its wings on one side of the Earth and a hurricane happens on the other side – and trying to kind of map that onto time, really.

"In *Catastrophe Theory*, Zoe makes her return. But the question is, is it really Zoe? We'll find that out very quickly. I wanted to make it a very traditional Second Doctor adventure. I wanted Zoe being



Above (l-r): Emma Noakes, Jacqueline King, Callum Pardoe, Frazer Hines and Wendy Padbury



Above: Mickey Knighton

brilliant and the wonderful scientist that she is. And now, she has all this life experience that she didn't have when we saw her on TV. So I was really keen for the Doctor and Zoe to be working together in the same way we had Jamie and the Doctor in the last box set.

"I also wanted to look at the nature of the Doctor's missions, so this title suggests many different things. The Doctor's starting to see the threads of the conspiracy,

hence the *Conspiracy of Raven*.

"We were delighted when we found out that the collective noun for ravens is a conspiracy! Emma Noakes, who plays Raven so brilliantly, was really excited about that. Raven has really become an integral part of this range now. We weren't sure initially whether we were going bring the character back after *Beyond War Games*, but Emma has taken to the role and is loving playing the different facets of Raven."

**NICK AND** Mark collaborated for the final story in the set, *The Vanishing Point*. Nick explains: “The writing process for the box set worked thus: I wrote the first one and Mark script edited it.

Mark wrote a plot line for the second one, I reworked that a bit and then he wrote a script based on that reworked plot. Then I reworked the script to make sure it fitted neatly between the first and third stories, because I’d already written the third story, *The Vanishing Point*, by the time Mark was delivering *Catastrophe Theory*.

“*The Vanishing Point* came from a storyline by Mark which I substantially reworked. Then I wrote a script based on that storyline and Mark gave me some notes on the script!

“Clear as mud? A real team effort and very rewarding.”

Mark adds: “With *The Vanishing Point*, again, it was the title that we started from with the idea of

**THE VANISHING POINT CAME FROM A STORYLINE BY MARK WHICH I SUBSTANTIALLY REWORKED. THEN I WROTE A SCRIPT BASED ON THAT STORYLINE AND MARK GAVE ME SOME NOTES ON THE SCRIPT!**

NICHOLAS BRIGGS

an observatory that sits outside time and space. That concept and the title really came together.

“I don’t want to spoil things and reveal too much about *The Vanishing Point*, but again it takes us into new territory. It opens up what has really been going on with the Doctor’s missions for the Time Lords and leaves it on... well, an outrageous cliffhanger! I can’t say much more, except that the whole box set is very traditional.

“This is something you could film on a Friday night at Lime Grove, Studio D, trying to keep some of the writing quite modern but to have



Above (l-r): Susan Harrison, Gary Turner, Frazer Hines, Wendy Padbury and Emma Noakes

a late 1960s, early 1970s feel of it being shot in a studio. I’m thinking of those sound effects now!”

Nick adds that his highlight was: “Having Jamie, Zoe and the Doctor together. That’s been great. And it’s been really lovely to spend time with Wendy again. I haven’t worked with her in a while, and I’ve known her for ages. She’s so good and she really enjoyed the freedom of not having to sound 21 years old! Michael is always just such a joyful presence.

He’s becoming more and more like his dad since doing the part and talking about it. He really engages with the scripts. It’s so rewarding when your Doctor is as excited about the stories as you are. And his performance just gets better and better. I really look forward to directing him.”

Mark adds: “Michael continues to delight, he works in such a clever way. He’s got the essence of the Second Doctor but he’s not doing an intricate impression of his dad. And I think that’s key to it. He’s capturing the spirit of him. He’s bringing his own playfulness to it, but he’s also bringing that

connection to the 1960s.”

*Vortex* can exclusively reveal that rather than one Second Doctor set a year, there will now be two.

Nick adds: “Because it’s been so well received we’ll be increasing the frequency of **The Second Doctor Adventures** box sets to two a year in the not too distant future. But more news on that later!” **VORTEX**

DOCTOR WHO  
CONSPIRACY OF RAVEN



■ RELEASED: JULY 2024  
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## DOCTOR WHO THE HIGHEST SCIENCE



**WHEN PRODUCER** Cavan Scott was asked to take on **The Novel Adaptations** range, he quickly tested the waters to find out which of Virgin Media's *The New Adventures* and *The Missing Adventures* were most popular.

Cav explains: "It was one of those no-brainers. When I was asked to take over as producer of **The Novel Adaptations**, I started asking people which ones they would like to hear, and *The Highest Science* by Gareth Roberts was on every single list.

"Everyone remembers it really fondly: it was Gareth's first published **Doctor Who** story. It introduces the Chelonians, and there are lots of events which shouldn't happen but are interconnected by the Fortean Flicker. It really does sum up that era of *The New Adventures*.

"The other reason I thought *The Highest Science* would be a good choice is that I wanted to

give Bernice Summerfield a story on her on with the Doctor.

"We've tried to keep this adaptation as near to the original book as we possibly can. We had to change some things for modern sensibilities but we found a way around them. Otherwise we've kept it as pure as possible."

The adaptation was handled by Jacqueline Rayner, who has previously adapted *Love and War* by Paul Cornell as well as several other early Big Finish audios starring Lisa Bowerman as Benny.

## I WANTED TO GIVE BERNICE SUMMERFIELD A STORY ON HER ON WITH THE DOCTOR.

CAVAN SCOTT

How handy was her previous experience of adapting *The New Adventures*? She explains: "Well, it means I'd at least had some practice! But the challenge is always the same – keeping the shape of the original while taking into account any restrictions posed. What you'll find with authors like Gareth and Paul is that everything in their stories is intertwined – nothing happens in isolation so things which may initially seem ripe for cutting turn out to be essential to the story. Great for the reader, but aaaaargh for the adaptor! Then, because you have a limited duration in which to tell the story, you need to make

sure everything in the adaptation is necessary but at the same time you need to keep in character stuff, or what's the point of dramatising it?"

"There were particular challenges on *The Highest Science* as it had to be written for a pretty small cast so a lot of characters had to be dropped or merged. We managed to stretch it out by doubling up some voice-treated roles and by having some characters on just one recording day – but that added extra challenges as it restricted the characters' interactions (I made lots of spreadsheets!)."

Director Scott Handcock adds: "It's always tough taking a story produced in one medium and converting it to another. Cav's been instrumental in overseeing that Jac's adaptation focuses on all the right areas which makes it a cracking audio adventure in its own right. Howard Carter's provided us with the most sublime score, leading the listener through the various layers and really helping to guide the story, and I've worked with sound designer Neil Gardner on loads of projects before now – he's an absolute genius."

*Goth Opera*, a new adaptation of a *Missing Adventures* **Doctor Who** novel, is out for release this month. **VORTEX**

### DOCTOR WHO THE HIGHEST SCIENCE



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## CURRENT AFFAIRS

I noticed on the news page of the release of *Star-Crossed* that it said it will be Christopher Eccleston's final box set in the 'current' **The Ninth Doctor Adventures** range. Current. The wording of that interested me. Does that mean the range will be going through a revamp, like the **Classic Doctors** ranges? I hope we don't have to wait too long to hear Christopher Eccleston as the Ninth Doctor again, but it was absolutely fantastic to have him back for three more seasons.

**ADAM PARKIN**

*Nick: I'm tempted to invoke my unofficial catchphrase, Adam, 'Just imagine'!*

## SUPER SIX

We have just finished listening to **Star Cops: A Cage of Sky**, it's definitely the best so far, from a series which has been hugely entertaining. Please can you confirm that this type of release for the **Star Cops** series is going to continue? I look forward to another fantastic six-episode release for next year.

**RALPH AND CLAIRE BONNETT**

*Nick: Am I under caution?*

## MORE TRIPPING?

I was just wondering if there were any plans to put out more **Short Trips** beyond the Paul Spragg ones in the future, not that I don't love



those as well as I always get an unusual amount of excitement from seeing new writers. I only ask because since *The Hoxteth Time Capsule* there hasn't been another volume announced which is a shame as I enjoy this range due to the unique nature it possesses amongst the many ranges at Big Finish.

**CALA KING**

*Nick: Plans are afoot, Cal.*

## NEW SERIES, LOST STORIES?

The announcement of the release of *Deathworld* and *Operation Werewolf* is very exciting - I'm fascinated by the **Lost Stories** and the opportunity they give us to hear what might have been. I do wonder, though - are there any plans for releases based on unmade 21st century **Doctor Who** scripts?

**DAVID STEEL**

(AT LIBERAL DEMOCRAT HQ)

*Nick: There are currently no plans, David (not to be confused with the other David Steel!).* **VORTEX**



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DW | THE LOST STORIES  
*Deathworld*

DW | THE LOST STORIES  
*Operation Werewolf*

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*The War Master: Part 1*

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*Family Ties*

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*Last Words* (BOX SET)

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DW | THE FOURTH DOCTOR ADVENTURES  
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DW | THE FIFTH DOCTOR ADVENTURES  
*The Great Beyond* (BOX SET)

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*The Eternity Club 1*

DW | DARK GALLIFREY  
*The War Master: Part 3*

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*The Eternity Club 2*

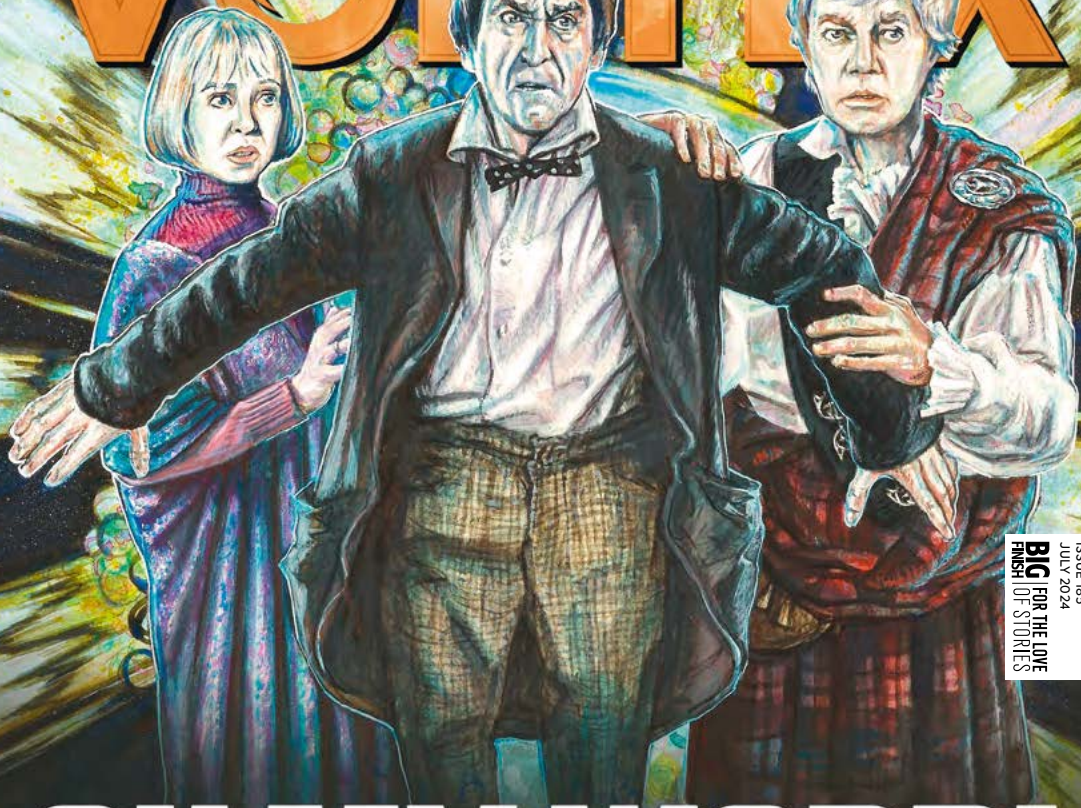
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THE BIG FINISH MAGAZINE

# VORTEX



ISSUE 185  
JULY 2024  
BIG FOR THE LOVE  
FINISH OF STORIES

# OH MY WORD!

THE ADVENTURES FOLLOWING  
TV'S *THE WAR GAMES* CONTINUE...

THE DEATH AND LIFE OF RIVER SONG

**PREPARE FOR SPOILERS!**

THE INCOMPARABLE RIVER SONG  
RETURNS IN A BRAND-NEW SERIES...

