

THE BIG FINISH MAGAZINE

VORTEX

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FINISH OF STORIES

OPERATION: VENGEANCE

THE DOCTOR EMBARKS UPON
A MISSION OF MERCY, WITH
JO GRANT AT ITS VERY HEART...

SOMETHING WICKED
THIS WAY COMES...

Going back to the Ace early days of the Seventh Doctor.





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UNIT: BRAVE NEW WORLD

THE BRIGADIER'S lost husband is back from Camelot as *Battlefield's* Angela Bruce and Marcus Gilbert are reunited in **UNIT – Brave New World: Knightfall**, due for release in March 2026.

The turn-of-the-century UNIT team – Brigadier Winifred Bambera (played by Angela), Sergeant Jean-Paul Savarin (Alex Jordan) and Dr Louise Rix (Yemisi Oyinloye) – are having a tough old time. And now, after husband and wife have spent some time separated across the dimensions, Ancelyn is back. But this isn't a peaceful reunion as UNIT must venture into Camelot to deal with the threat of the vicious Queen Guinevere (Genevieve Gaunt).

The three adventures in the set are *Deep Water* by Georgia Cook, *Storm over Albion* by Felicia Barker and *Shining Armour* by Robert Valentine.

Producer Alfie Shaw tells **Vortex**: "The series has been building to Ancelyn ever since it started, and it's great to end my run on **Brave New World** by bringing him back. Script editor Robert Valentine and I knew when we were planning the two sets that we had to finish with this.

"**Brave New World** resisted bringing in returning elements while the characters and the world were bedding in, but we couldn't hold off on this forever. The dynamic between Ancelyn and Bambera is one of the highlights of *Battlefield*, and it's been a blast reuniting them.

"*Knightfall* follows on directly from *Fractures* with the two sets essentially forming one really bad week for UNIT! It started with a Kaiju attack and now they've been thrown into the midst of an inter-dimensional Cold War." **VORTEX**

UNIT: BRAVE NEW WORLD KNIGHTFALL

- RELEASED: MARCH 2026
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Above: Natasha Gerson

EDITORIAL

SOMETHING YOU may have heard when listening to the extras on Big Finish releases is how often people talk about the "Big Finish family".

It may sound like a cliché, but I can promise you from first-hand experience, it's absolutely true. Through Big Finish, I've made some amazing friends, for example, Iain McLaughlin, the creator of *Erimem* and writer of *The Eye of the Scorpion*, is now a great mate who attended my wedding.

Big Finish also put me back in touch with Roy Gill when he started work on **Dark Shadows** – we'd known each other in the nineties from the Edinburgh **Doctor Who** group.

I've met up with a host of people I've got to know through Big Finish when they've been in Scotland, people I'm proud to call friends. Hello Nick Briggs, Jason Haigh-Ellery, John Dorney, Seán Carlsen and Jessica Martin, to name a few!

And I also made friends with Natasha Gerson who passed away just before this issue of *Vortex* went to press. She was best known to Big Finish fans for her work on **The Omega Factor** created by her late father, Jack.

We would meet up for a catch-up when time allowed, and she always took a keen interest in how my little one was. It was a real shock when I learned of her passing. Natasha was a firm believer in the supernatural, so next time something goes bump in my house I'll raise a smile and think of her, on her next adventure. **VORTEX**

Kenny

The Doctor, Rose and Jackie are facing a new terror in London...

ESTATE OF PLAY

ROSE TYLER is taking a break from her travels through space and time. She's just met her dad – and seen him die – so has returned home to spend time with her mum.

But of course, with the Ninth Doctor around, things are never going to be completely straightforward as we're about to find out in *The Last Days of the Powell Estate* written by Timothy X Atack.

Producer and script editor Matt Fitton says: "For the first few stories in this series, we wanted to place Rose and the Doctor back

on the Powell Estate as they're set after television episode *Father's Day*. The idea is that Rose wants a little bit of time out, to have the chance to process the emotion of everything she's gone through; she just wants to be with her mum.

"The Doctor understands that – he's been with her long enough to appreciate that Rose needs some time at home – so he's willing to stick around. But he does get itchy feet, and they can't help having little jaunts and excursions! So, in this second adventure, Tim has the Doctor and Rose 30 years in the future, in

a deserted, dilapidated version of the Powell Estate where something cataclysmic has happened.

"We're still also with Jackie Tyler in Rose's present day, and there's a connection between the two strands of the story which will become clear. In this one we meet Brainy Betty, one of Jackie's neighbours, as we're introduced to more of the characters who live on the Powell Estate.

"As they investigate the future version of the estate, the Doctor and Rose meet an urban explorer podcaster, Ellis Coates, who's a bit full of himself. He has a drone that he uses



Above (l-r): Billie Piper and Christopher Eccleston

to make his episodes investigating strange urban phenomena, folk tales and abandoned buildings. He's busy exploring the Powell Estate as Rose and the Doctor turn up, and they uncover a legend – a folk horror story – of a creature who started to attack the residents dating back to Jackie's time. And as they look into the story of Mr Fingers and the mysterious deaths over the last 30 years, the Doctor and Rose realise that they're all in danger, both back in time and in the future."

WRITER TIM was delighted to be involved with this series: "When an email from Matt drops into your Inbox labelled TOP SECRET you can't help but think, 'Is this it? Are Rose and the Ninth Doctor finally back together again?' The absolute joy was followed, of course, by the sheer panic of deciding what to pitch for such an amazing duo, who we saw all too briefly on screen. But then it's double the excitement: a return we've all been waiting for and a playground of possibilities.

I'D NEVER WRITTEN AN EARTHBOUND STORY FOR BIG FINISH, NOT ONCE!

TIMOTHY X ATTACK

"Matt had ballpark descriptions for all the places he wanted this series to go which included, 'Some more stories set on the Powell Estate.' The deal is that all the writers throw a tantalising selection of ideas at Matt and David Richardson, then they curate the ones that will make for a roller-coaster of a series. I wasn't originally thinking of pitching for the estate strand, except my partner pointed out I'd never written an earthbound story for Big Finish, not once! Which got me thinking about how I'd tackle it. And that it also upped my chances of writing for Jackie which, in the end, was the biggest hook for me..."

Tim was also delighted to be writing for Christopher Eccleston and Billie Piper. He says: "I had this sneaky suspicion that somewhere between the TV episodes *Father's Day* and *The Empty Child*, Rose might have received some sort of 'companion training', unofficially. I like the idea that after the incident with the Reapers she wanted to prove herself a more mature time traveller, and in that spirit the Doctor gave her some homework to do.



Above (l-r): Hark! Bhambra and Mandi Symonds

"So in writing for the Ninth Doctor and Rose, I've been introducing more and more arguments over how a good and responsible time traveller might behave... impossible ever to define or resolve but good head-scratching **Doctor Who** stuff all the same. I also felt that it was a great point to start re-visiting that post-Time War angst that the Doctor carries, to have that guilt and shame bubble to the surface again, and for Rose to be very aware of it... asking awkward and all-too-intelligent questions, like she always does! They're such a sparky combination, these two, challenging each other constantly and at the same time beautifully supportive. There's always a sea-saw of emotions between them."

Matt adds: "Tim is such a great **Doctor Who** writer. He runs with a high concept for each story, which has got its own unique flavour. He's written some great Ninth Doctor adventures, and every one's got a distinct hook. He's so good at character and atmosphere, and this one is a particularly spooky setting."

DIRECTOR HELEN Goldwyn reveals: “The casting on this episode was straightforward as it was only two full guest roles (with the marvellous addition of Dan Starkey’s monstrous noises as Mr Fingers!). Casting Brainy Betty was... a no-brainer! I knew it had to be Mandi Symonds and I was so thrilled

Brainy Betty. I think Tim’s based her on somebody specific in his life who has a particular way of phrasing things. She and Jackie make a really good double act. And, of course, we’ve got Dan as our monster, Mr Fingers. He’s superb, as always.”

Helen continues: “There was a lot of emphasis on setting the

“I enjoyed the fact that this was more of a horror episode which requires a different approach to other adventures. The scenes with Jacqui and Brainy Betty were so much fun – Camille and Mandi have great chemistry – two comedy masters at work! Working with Chris, Billie and Camille is always a joy and to have



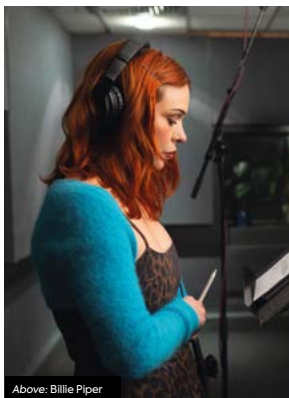
Above (l-r): Billie Piper and Camille Coduri

she was available to do it. I was also really happy when I read the role of Ellis Coates, as Hark! Bhambra sprang to mind. I’ve been wanting to find another role for him since he appeared in a previous couple of episodes of **The Ninth Doctor Adventures**.”

Matt adds: “Hark! has previously appeared as a talking dog but this part is very different! He’s playing an egotistical, swaggering, full of himself podcaster who fancies himself a bit – and I think Rose has her head turned by him. She’s met somebody here who’s kind of northern, into the strange and weird, investigating this and also quite brave. An echo of the Doctor, in a way.

“By now Rose has also met Adam in the TV episode *Dalek*, so there’s a point where the Doctor says, ‘You’re just using the TARDIS to meet boys!’ And so it was great to have Hark! playing a fully-fledged guest character.

“The other guest cast member we have is Mandi playing Jackie’s friend



Above: Billie Piper

atmosphere in this episode because it’s such a spooky premise. That meant reminding ourselves of what the Powell Estate felt and looked like at any given moment, because often it needed to feel rather like a haunted house – which of course affects the performances.

THE DOCTOR SAYS, ‘YOU’RE JUST USING THE TARDIS TO MEET BOYS!’

MATT FITTON

them all in the same episode made for a day of fun and laughter. I always feel lucky to be a part of these projects.”

Tim adds: “Much like Chris playing the Doctor, there’s a moment when you hear Billie in the studio and instantly she nails it: there’s Rose, in all her glory. Pure magic. And to my absolute giddy delight it was exactly the same with Camille. So many air-punch moments. It’s like being a composer and scoring for the best soloists in the business; you just know the whole thing’s going to sing.”

Matt concludes: “Iain Meadows and Howard Carter have done wonders with the sound design and the music, adding so much to the spookiness and weirdness. I can’t wait for listeners to hear this.” **VORTEX**

THE NINTH DOCTOR ADVENTURES THE LAST DAYS OF THE POWELL ESTATE



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THE NEW ADVENTURES OF BERNICE SUMMERFIELD



Above: Lisa Bowerman

EVER SINCE Professor Bernice Summerfield arrived in the New Adventures range of novels in 1992, she's never stopped having exciting exploits.

Created by Paul Cornell, Benny was brilliant – the archaeologist who instantly had the measure of the Seventh Doctor, and an often rather fraught relationship with Ace. Since then Benny's lived a whole load of lives. She's been in scads of books and was Big Finish's first audio range. The first volume of **The New Adventures of Bernice Summerfield** reunited Benny, played by Lisa Bowerman, with the Seventh Doctor and Ace, as well as the Daleks who exterminated her mother, Claire.

The set, produced by James Goss, opens with *The Revolution* by Nev Fountain. Nev says: "I remember that

James wanted a 'romp', something light-hearted like an Indiana Jones adventure. He also fancied the notion that Benny was to have the 'Doctor' role and the Doctor to be the companion. The only other thing he stipulated was that I lead to a big cliff-hanger where the Doctor tells Benny that Ace is missing."

EVERYONE WAKES UP, GLANCES AT THEIR NOTES, AND THEN MAKES THE BEST OF IT.

JAMES GOSS

The second tale is *Good Night, Sweet Ladies* by Una McCormack.

Una says: "James supplied me with a general overview of how the season was going to play out and also a brief for my episode, how it should fit in. So I knew this was a story about Benny's relationship with her mother, also the setting, and that there should be a Dalek.

"The final scene was a real rollercoaster to write. I've lost a parent so I put some of those emotions surrounding that loss into it. It meant a great deal to me and it was wonderfully performed."

Random Ghosts by Guy Adams took Benny to a world with a secret that no-one can remember.

James says: "At first glance, nothing in *Random Ghosts* happens in order. But then again, the

seemingly random scenes are also very carefully organised.

"It's about a planet stuck living the same day over and over again. Everyone wakes up, glances at their notes, and then makes the best of it. There are two problems. Firstly, a lethal force is wiping out everything on the planet. Secondly, everyone is lying."

The set concludes with *The Lights of Skaro* written by James.

He says: "I found a book called *The Lights of Skaro* in a second-hand bookshop. It's an old Penguin classic written by David Dodge, a famous thriller writer of the 1950s. Ever since finding it, I've wondered what story it would be. And thanks to Benny, I've finally had the chance to tell it. There's a lot of childhood enthusiasm in there." Director Scott Handcock tells *Vortex*:

"This was my first time directing a **Doctor Who** audio and, as a fan, it was obviously very exciting. On Twitter I posted a signed photo that Sylvester McCoy had sent me when I was a kid, wishing me good luck and thanking me for my fan letter. It meant a hell of a lot to the eight-year-old Scott Handcock! So actually being in a studio and directing him, along with Sophie Aldred, was a proper treat!" **VORTEX**

THE NEW ADVENTURES OF BERNICE SUMMERFIELD VOLUME ONE



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A BRAND-NEW ADVENTURE
CO-AUTHORED BY THIRD DOCTOR
ACTOR TIM TRELOAR...

OPERATION: VENGEANCE

FOR THE past decade and more, Tim Treloar has donned Jon Pertwee's frilly shirt and cape to play the Third Doctor, and now he's managed something that his illustrious predecessor also hoped to.

For *Doctor Who*'s eighth season on television, Jon and his friend Reed De Rouen submitted an idea for a story, *The Spare-Part People*, which was ultimately never made. Fast forward to today where **The Third Doctor Adventures** *Operation: Vengeance* has been co-authored by Third Doctor actor Tim.

The Doctor, Sarah Jane Smith

(Sadie Miller) and the Brigadier (Jon Culshaw) – with a bonus appearance from Jo Jones née Grant (Katy Manning) – face a deadly threat in this new adventure.

The Doctor makes an unexpected return trip to the planet Konzomia, this time with Sarah Jane Smith. The traumas of his previous visit, with Jo Grant, are apparently long forgotten.

Except that they are not...

Can a long-defeated danger be rearing up again? And will the plight of a young British soldier, retreating to Dunkirk in 1940, be the catalyst for the unravelling of history?

The Doctor, Sarah and the Brigadier

must embark upon a mission of mercy, with Jo Grant at its very heart.

PRODUCER HEATHER

Challands says: "I was delighted when I heard Tim was interested in writing a story, and it was lovely to pair him with co-writer and director, Nicholas Briggs. It just seemed to be a perfect marriage of Tim's hard work as the Third Doctor and his own personal interests. His enthusiasm for writing *Operation: Vengeance* was infectious and I've certainly been learning things, which is what you want from a historical.

"**Doctor Who** was always meant to be an education programme, so the setting of this script has great importance. For every fact that's in it, there are likely 10 that didn't make it. Tim also wrote a beautiful ending scene for Jo, which made us all emotional when recording."

"*Operation: Vengeance* is a six-part story where the Doctor and Sarah visit a planet that he previously went to with Jo. The foe that they thought had been defeated is rumoured to be back, and Raelchun has his sights set on

NICK SAYS: "Tim was very keen to write a Third Doctor episode, so I asked him to suggest a few potential storylines – and he came back with six completed episodes!

Actually, it was seven, because he didn't realise that the Sarah Jane era adventures weren't seven-parters!"

Tim continues: "I always loved writing at school but didn't pursue it into adulthood, I remember being told I had some talent for telling stories. I've always had a vivid and sometimes surreal imagination, and

wrote a couple of things, but I then didn't have the best experience when they were shared which strangled my enthusiasm and confidence. But I always thought the urge to write would come back one day, and during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in 2020, I wrote a comedy series called *Peter Peter's Positivity Programme*. It's still on YouTube and was featured by The British Comedy Guide.

"Playing the Third Doctor, watching and listening to all of his stories, and immersing myself in that world inspired me with a



Above (l-r): Katy Manning, Sadie Miller, Tim Treloar and Jon Culshaw

causing maximum damage. The Doctor, Sarah and the Brigadier have to travel back to Dunkirk in 1940 to protect Jo's timeline.

"The script has everything: nostalgia and history, scope and scale – we visit something like three planets in multiple time periods! We've got Sarah, the Brig, a little bit of Jo. And we meet her dad, which feels like one of those gifts you get with **Doctor Who**, where, occasionally, you get to colour in the lines with a much-loved character. Plus we've got the Doctor on fine form."



Above: Max Bowden

new story idea. And this is where my passion for the past also came in. A love of history is a big part of me. It enables me to stand back and observe situations from a slight distance, because I believe that in order to understand something fully, you have to see things from all sides, no matter how abhorrent some of those things may be."

Nick continues: "Tim came up with a really good idea for a story but it needed to be turned into something that felt like **Doctor Who**. So I rewrote the first episode and gave it back to Tim for his comments. He wrote

back and said, 'Mate, this is brilliant, you've made it like a proper **Doctor Who** story!' We then continued that process, keeping as much of Tim's original ideas as possible. His World War 2 research was meticulous but I had to tone it down a bit."

TIM ADMITS to being worried after submitting his initial script: "When I sent it to Nick, I knew it wasn't in the classic Third Doctor Big Finish mould. It had philosophical

I WAS EXPLORING THE NOTION OF THE DANGERS OF POLARISED AND ENTRENCHED VIEWPOINTS...

TIM TRELOAR



Above (l-r): Tom Kiteley, Gareth Armstrong and Harry Myers

themes in terms of me saying things about the human experience, and there was a lot of darkness in it. I was exploring the notion of the dangers of polarised and entrenched viewpoints, and the hate that it breeds, and how social media stifles nuance.

"A lot of the text is the same as I originally wrote, but Nick made so much of the story better. I was a bit scared because of being burned before with my writing and I was nervous about seeing the notes come back – I was worried Nick was going to shred my writing to pieces! The suggested amendments were varied, some quite dramatic, but many were very delicate and I went with them as I trust Nick with my life."

Nick admits: "It was a shame but I had to cut a lot of the historical detail to keep the story moving.



Above: Tim Treloar

The first draft was far too long. So, episode by episode I rewrote and rewrote, with Tim giving me notes. We worked together remarkably

well, I really respect his intentions and the brilliant characters he created – and he had total trust in me to make it all better."

When the story went into studio, it was a new experience for Tim. He explains: "We recorded *Operation: Vengeance* over three days and this was the first time I've stayed in the studio for the whole audio. Normally when you finish your scenes, you go to the green room and rest because it's hard work when acting, it's quite tiring."

Nick says: "I've never seen Tim so excited and engaged about a script! He spent most of the time he wasn't acting in the control room with me, helping with script matters."

Tim adds: "This historical is not about the glorification of war in any way. There's no flag waving. This is about ordinary men doing extraordinary things. I can only hope and pray that if I was put in the same situation, I'd be as stoical and courageous as them.

"It's important to remember the terrible things that have happened in real life in our time. In the world of **Doctor Who** there are wars – imaginary wars – but this is real history still just within living memory. A few of the lines spoken by the soldiers in the story are words actually spoken by real people and quoted in full – some of those people didn't come home.

"I hope people enjoy it as I've got another story up my sleeve which is bursting to come out!" **VORTEX**

THE THIRD DOCTOR ADVENTURES OPERATION: VENGEANCE



■ RELEASED: OCTOBER 2025
■ FORMAT: DOWNLOAD/CD

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BLAKE'S 7: AFTERLIFE



WHEN THE Blake's 7 television series ended in 1981, fans were left (a) reeling by the shocking ending as the *Scorpio* crew were apparently gunned down, and (b) wondering what happened next. Their questions were answered in the 1984 novel *Afterlife* written by Tony Attwood, who had previously compiled the definitive *Blake's 7 Programme Guide*.

In the story, developed from an idea by screenwriter Chris Boucher, the surviving members of Blake's

rebellious crew continue their fight against the Terran Federation, while the sinister Servalan tightens her grip on the galaxy.

Afterlife has long been out of print but has now been revived as a Big Finish audiobook with a running time of seven hours and fifty minutes.

After the final catastrophic shootout on Gauda Prime, did Blake's death really mean the end of the fight against the evil forces of the Federation? Was the vulnerable thief Vila killed – or just wounded? What happened to the computer Orac? Would the scheming Servalan regain her old powerbase?

And what of Avon himself, the unbeatable, unpredictable paranoid who had ended it all?

This new reading is performed by Alastair Lock who regular Big Finish *Blake's 7* listeners will know as the voice of Orac and Zen. The audiobook comes packaged with a PDF download of the original 2,000-word glossary for the novel.

Producer Peter Anghelides says: "When we released the audiobook of Paul Darrow's prequel novel *Avon: A Terrible Aspect*, we knew we wanted to do the same with Tony's *Afterlife* because it's the other original novel from the time of the TV series that bookends the whole of *Blake's 7*.

"The book was first published by Target Books in 1984. A year that's long associated in literature, appropriately enough, with a dystopian world ruled over by a dictatorial leader. Four decades later, we are revisiting that world of a faceless bureaucracy cruelly directed by an uncaring supreme commander.

"Following directly on from the explosive TV finale, *Afterlife* reveals not only the consequences for our heroes from *Scorpio*, but also what happened to the character most significantly absent from that story – Servalan herself. And now fans can hear the startling events brilliantly read by the familiar voice of Alastair in this brand-new reading."

Alistair has worked as a sound designer and music composer on many Big Finish releases and is looking after the post-production on this release – a novel he hadn't read prior to the recording.

Vortex asks how he prepares for an audiobook reading. Alistair explains: "I read each chapter in advance, marking it up to guide me through. I then make voice notes of what each new original character sounds like so I can refer back to them when they occur again later in the story."

Alistair spoke to *Vortex* again during post-production, saying: "It's going really well, Peter is very pleased with how it's sounding. I'm now going through notes, re-recording passages where there were typos or where I hadn't noticed I'd read something wrong, or added or missed a word or line." **VORTEX**

BLAKE'S 7 AFTERLIFE



■ RELEASED: OCTOBER 2025
■ FORMAT: DOWNLOAD

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THE WAR MASTER RETURNS FOR FOUR NEW ADVENTURES BUT WILL THEY BE A...

TRICK OR TREAT?

SIR DEREK JACOBI is back in his most villainous role as the War Master returns. This latest box set, *His Greatest Trick*, features the Master in a quartet of new tales.

Succeeding Scott Handcock as producer is Robert Valentine, who says: "It was really exciting to be asked to take the baton from Scott on this range. The only daunting thing, really, was the COVID-19 pandemic was still raging at the time I said 'yes', and I was being asked to produce several box sets.

"My very first thought for the **War**

Master series going forward was to make it all about the Master not yet seeing a way out of the Time War. Because he's so evil and so on top of things, the element I wanted to see drawn out of Derek's characterisation was the despair and his vulnerability. So the series moving forwards is set very much in the War Master's troubled middle-years where he's convinced that there's no way out of this conflict. And the only person he cares about – himself! – is doomed."

Lizzie Hopley has written the opener. Rob tells *Vortex*: "*The Grievance Bureau* commences with

the Time Lords and the Daleks agreeing on one thing: that the Master must go! Lizzie's a gorgeously dark writer and huge fun to work with."

Lizzie says: "The scripts I've written for Derek are among my favourites. I've sat in a studio with him and gaped at how many layers he puts into a single word. He is utterly chilling and charming all at once as the Master. Attempting to create dialogue for those skills is a top-level challenge."

Her brief was: "To reintroduce the War Master as a Time War threat. He's realising there's no surviving



Above: Derek Jacobi

this Time War... so why not just help the universe burn? There is an extra layer of evil to Derek's Master in these new stories. He doesn't just kill people, he helps them bring about their own ruin. He's a one-man incarnation of Macbeth's witches.

"Derek is grounded in truth which makes what his Master does even more horrendous. There is a strange depth to this series, he's indulging in sadism to keep his despair about the Time War at bay. I had the idea of the grievance bureau a while ago and I've been looking for the right home. It's a sick and twisted practice hiding under a veneer of philosophical altruism – the perfect playground for the Master!

"My ultimate highlight has to be the word association test by the Dalek Scientist. Rob couldn't get enough of this so I kept adding more and more. I can't wait to hear the Master versus the Daleks – it could be a sketch on its own!"

IT DOES ADD AN EXTRA DOLLOP OF PRESSURE WHEN YOU'RE WRITING FOR SUCH A BRILLIANT ACTOR...

KATHARINE ARMITAGE

Rob continues: "*The Grievance Bureau* is followed by *Last Girl Standing* by Katharine Armitage, who I've wanted to work with for ages. This story is all about how the Master is choosing to spend his remaining time in the face of his seemingly inevitable doom. And thanks to Kat, he's spending it very wickedly indeed."

KATHARINE SAYS: "*Last Girl Standing* is a story about what happens when you put high-achieving, viciously-ambitious students in a jar and shake it!

"The Master is lying low and some fool has given him the job of headmaster at an elite, highly academic all girls' school where he's hoping to wait out the war in luxury. But a fellow professor gets under his skin, prompting the Master to unleash a horrifying game on the unsuspecting students. And some of them are all too keen to play..."

Did she feel any pressure writing for Derek? Katharine tells *Vortex*: "I would have done if I hadn't heard from multiple sources what a completely lovely man and true professional he is – and I discovered both these things for myself when I met him at the recording.

"But yes, it does add an extra dollop of pressure when you're writing for such a brilliant actor, I didn't want to let him down! Plus he's someone who has performed the words of so many greats so you're essentially pitting yourself against Shakespeare and Jack Pulman which is a battle you are very much doomed to lose from the outset. But it is fun to play with words, knowing that Derek is going to make them beautiful."

Continuing, Rob says: "The third story is *The Worst of All Evils* by Ian Winterton. This was Ian's first Big Finish script; I'm always keen to bring in new writers when I can. This adventure is all about hope and despair – the worst of all evils being hope – and how the Master is succeeding (and failing) to cope with the prospect of his own mortality, which is very much what I want to dig into with his character."

IAN REVEALS: "I've long been a fan of Big Finish's output especially the Eighth Doctor range of which I haven't missed an episode. As a writer at Cutaway Comics, I've been attending the Gallifrey One convention in Los Angeles for the past few years and got to know the Big Finish team.

"Rob's brief was for a standalone adventure but one that taps into the Master's growing unease and

sense of despair as he comes to the conclusion that the Time War is going to result in the end of everything.

"I have the Master trying to find somewhere away from the fighting to hide and sit it out. But the Dalek detonation of a time destructor puts paid to that and he flees in his TARDIS, randomly appearing on a planet populated entirely by refugees from the war – and their human overseers.

"I don't want to give anything else away but the main danger hanging over the whole story is that the Master has travelled back in time, but not by much, and hasn't moved very far spatially – so he knows there's a time destructor blast coming. Very soon. He could escape, obviously, if only he knew where his TARDIS was. The Master is almost consumed by a fatalistic pessimism; his usual

editor on the Sixth Doctor *Water Worlds* box set for which I wrote the interlude *The Dream Nexus*.

And on the back of that he invited me to pitch a War Master story. "My brief was pretty simple but also devilishly complicated! I was going to do the finale of the box set, and for that all I had to do was write a story in which the War Master manages to extricate himself from the Time War, the Daleks and the Time Lords once and for all. Easy, right?"

"I figured the only way he could do that was to fake his own death. I came up with several pitches, and Rob and I settled on the ultimate cataclysm – the only way for the War Master to fake his own death would be to destroy the entire universe, right?"

"*The Blue Shift Ritual* – which takes its name from the end of the universe as mentioned in Paul Cornell's *Timewyrm: Revelation* – is the War Master's ultimate cunning plan, quite literally. Pitting the Daleks and Time Lord against each other, he manipulates both sides as only he can to take full advantage of a paradox that has, coincidentally, landed right in his lap. His escape route is all thanks to a suicide squad of warriors from Ancient Gallifrey, that forbidden era where time travel was as much about magic as temporal engineering."

Rob concludes: "It's all sounding fantastic in the edits, and it's been a joy and a privilege to work with Derek on these. He's one of the greatest actors that Britain has ever produced and he's simply a wonderful person on top of it. As kind, generous and brilliant as you'd hope he'd be." **VORTEX**



Above (l-r): Derek Jacobi and Nicholas Briggs

MY BRIEF WAS PRETTY SIMPLE BUT ALSO DEVILISHLY COMPLICATED!

ADAM CHRISTOPHER

drive for survival almost gone. But he teams up with a human aid worker called Carla Zheng who's the direct opposite: she's an optimist who never, ever gives up."

Rob says: "The last adventure is a script by another writer new to Big Finish, *The Blue Shift Ritual* by Adam Christopher. Adam is best known, I think, for his work in the *Star Wars* universe and it was great asking him to create a Time War story which not only concludes this box set but sets off the rest of the range in a very particular direction."

Adam says: "Rob was the script



THE WAR MASTER HIS GREATEST TRICK



■ RELEASED: OCTOBER 2025
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MEET THE MAKERS

VORTEX CONTINUES ITS IRREGULAR SERIES TALKING WITH THE PEOPLE WHO BRING AUDIO ADVENTURES TO LIFE IN MEET THE MAKERS – WITH **MARK B OLIVER**.



Above: Mark B Oliver with his dog, Cally

BIG FINISH works with people all over the world who have jobs like writing, composing and sound designing. One of these people is Mark B Oliver, a Brit who moved to the United States.

Mark recalls: "In the 1990s I wrote two children's comics for many years – *My Little Pony* and *Polly Pocket* – which taught me how to create stories with a very limited word count.

"Many years later, I was with Scott Handcock and a few others when he mentioned that he wanted to commission a festive short story for **The Confessions of Dorian Gray**.

"The first December after I moved to Manhattan a large snowstorm blanketed the city and on Christmas afternoon I walked through Central Park. It was eerily quiet, the only sound

DOCTOR WHO WAS SIMPLY HUGE AND I FELT THE PRESSURE.

MARK B OLIVER

being the snow crunching underfoot. No people, birds or other animals to be seen and even the trees were still. It was both unsettling and thrilling.

"I suggested to Scott that the setting might be a good one for a confrontation with Dorian. He liked the idea, and to my surprise he offered me the chance to write it. Utterly terrifying!"

The Confessions of Dorian Gray: *Frostbite* was released on Christmas Eve 2014. Further commissions such as *Iris Wildthyme: Murder at*

the Abbey, **Doctor Who Short Trips: Dark Convoy** and another **Dorian**, *Inner Darkness*, quickly followed.

Mark also has experience of working for the BBC's **Doctor Who** website. He says: "My first direct BBC commission was to write a two-part story for their website that would directly precede and tie-in to David Tennant's (then) final story *The End of Time*. **Doctor Who** was simply huge and I felt the pressure. Thankfully *The Advent of Fear* was well-received and I went on to write for Matt Smith's Eleventh Doctor many times.

"When I was asked by producer Peter Angelides to write **The Worlds of Blake's 7: Zero Point** novel I was exhilarated. I found the initial plotting flowed quickly and, thankfully, Peter liked my ideas. Then it was simply a matter of sitting down every day and making sure I hit 2,500 words so I could meet my tight deadline. It was a thoroughly enjoyable experience despite it being the longest work of fiction I'd ever written."

MARK, WHO has also worked on the animated versions of missing **Doctor Who** episodes, has recently been involved in the Big Finish continuation of American TV classic **Irwin Allen's The Time Tunnel**.

He says: "Rather than dwell on an idea for too long I'm able to rely on sage counsel from the script editor or producer. Gary Russell recently said to me, "That's a great idea, but perhaps a little complicated for a one-hour audio," and how right he was!

"Irwin Allen's The Time Tunnel is well remembered here in the US as indeed it is in the UK, so there's an added layer of pressure when such a storied franchise is being relaunched. Of course, most of that fell on producers Gary and Dominic G. Martin.

"With Irwin Allen's The Time Tunnel you're going back in time and that brings with it the responsibility to be as historically accurate as possible. And that afforded me the opportunity to conduct lots of research which I found engrossing.

"I'm hoping listeners enjoy **Irwin Allen's The Time Tunnel** as much as I enjoyed writing for it – there are lots more exciting stories to tell..." **VORTEX**



BY THE PRICKING OF MY THUMBS...

SINCE 1991 and the advent of the **New Adventures** range of novels, the Seventh Doctor and Ace have been constantly moving forward. BBC Books picked up the baton, and Big Finish has continued their journeys with a handful of adventures set during the television adventures.

But now, we're about to find out what happened after the events of the television episode *Dragonfire* in **The Seventh Doctor Adventures: Wicked!** The three exciting adventures are *Backwards and in Heels* by Alison Winter, *The Price of Snow* by Katharine Armitage and *The Ingenious Gentlemen* by Alan Ronald.

Producer Emma Haigh says: "I loved script editor Matt Fitton's idea to go back to the beginning and explore Ace's adventures with the Doctor, and hear what happens directly after *Dragonfire*.

"Our three fabulous writers have really set the scene for these early days, where we see Ace finding her way in a brave new adventurous world. With 1920s flappers from Ali, who takes us on a treasure hunt across London, to Katharine's snowy slopes where Ace is starting to find her feet with the Doctor. And then Ali's brilliant idea of the Doctor meeting Don Quixote. This final story is an excellent four-hander with two intrepid adventurers and their trusted companions.

"Director Samuel Clemens assembled a wonderful cast across all three stories and we couldn't have been more thrilled when Simon Callow agreed to be our Quixote – what a joy it was to have him, Sylvester McCoy, Sophie Aldred and Ekow Quartey as Sancho in the studio together."

For *Backwards and in Heels*, writer Ali says: "Matt contacted me to say they wanted to do a box set based early in Ace and Seven's travels, and he invited me to pitch for an adventure for a very young Ace. This wasn't my first Seventh Doctor story, but it was my first script for Ace, which was a huge moment for me as she was my companion when I was a child.

fan, most like to hear? My earliest memory of enjoying a full **Doctor Who** TV episode was *Remembrance of the Daleks*, but Ace has been travelling with the Doctor for a while at that point and they are in full swing as a duo. Although we see her enter the TARDIS briefly in *Dragonfire*, Ace's full introduction to the TARDIS, and indeed her first trip, were never seen on screen. So then it became life and death to me to write that!

"Ace is all but feral in *Dragonfire* and although trusting she's also streetwise, and I thought she was unlikely to blindly follow the Doctor into just anything so soon. Ace is often called the first modern companion and it's possible to draw a straight line from Ace to Rose.

"I always loved how Rose was written in her second TV episode *The End of the World*, in particular, because it rang true for me that she would have a 'stranger danger' wobble having jumped in a blue box with an older man she'd just met. I couldn't see Ace not having the same thought process despite her impressive acclamation to an alien world.

"So this is a story of how the two come to trust each other just with flapper, dapper and danger. It's also Ace's first trip backwards in time, and although she's relieved to have left Iceworld, she finds she's no less out of place and no more at home."

THE PRICE of Snow by

Katharine continues the early voyages. Katharine says: "My very first Big Finish script was for the Seventh Doctor and Ace so I might have been dropping decreasingly subtle hints to Matt about writing another. And eventually he just had to shut me up!

"One of the best things about the Seventh Doctor and Ace is that the brief is always really open. As seasoned travellers they've been to many places, so your main goal is to find somewhere they haven't been or a challenge they haven't faced quite yet. Once again, I could've taken them anywhere in the universe but I was drawn to Earth, in the near future after a holiday in the mountains, as an idea came to me almost fully formed in one of those rare, rushing moments of inspiration!

"It is glorrrrious fun writing for



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

Sylvester's Doctor! He enjoys language so much and that is just a gift for a script writer. It was really fun to write an adventure in a world I know a bit about (an Alpine ski resort) – it meant I had to do way less research than usual! And I felt really free to play within the world. I am really pleased with the monsters I've created (about which I will say no more) and hopefully the finished piece will give a sense of the strange and magical world to be found above a certain altitude...

"My top top highlight has to be a moment involving an old Olympic centre and the Doctor's hitherto undiscovered special skill..."

THE INGENIOUS Gentlemen

concludes the set, written by Sylvester's fellow Scot, Al. Al says: "This was my first commissioned Big Finish script (though in typical timey-wimey fashion not the first to be released) so exciting doesn't cover it. A thrill? An honour? A lifelong ambition realised? All of the above and more apply. I can't thank Matt enough for taking a chance on me.

"And not only was I writing for the Doctor and Ace, two of my favourite characters, but also for Don Quixote and Sancho Panza – another set of my favourite characters. It was two bucket list projects in one!

"The brief was simply to pitch for **The Seventh Doctor Adventures**. The idea of the Doctor meeting Don Quixote is one I have had for years. I collect copies of Don Quixote and am

quite fascinated by it as a story, and I feel as though whatever it is that appeals to me so much about it, is very similar to what I love about **Doctor Who**. The parallels are incredibly interesting and I hope that comes across in *The Ingenious Gentlemen*.

"In this set, Matt and Emma wanted to focus on Ace and her early days in the TARDIS, so it seemed like a great opportunity not only to compare the Doctor and Don Quixote but their 'assistants' too. I wanted Ace to begin to doubt whether she had made the right choice running off with the Doctor.

"This adventure is really about Ace coming to terms with who the Doctor is and what he stands for. Deciding whether or not she wants to risk her life travelling with this 'madman'. Don Quixote and Sancho represent the best and worst of the Doctor and his companion, and through them, Ace gets to see it all and must answer the question: is it worth it?"

Al adds: "The recording was one of the best days of my life. Director Sam made me feel so confident in my story by showing how much he believed in it through the cast he assembled. Ekow Quartey is an absolutely stunning actor and a lovely man. He brought Sancho to life in such a unique and inspired way, an absolutely pitch-perfect performance. Modern yet, traditional.

"And, of course, when I found out the incredible Simon Callow would be playing Don Quixote, my jaw almost hit the floor. One of the finest British actors. It doesn't get any better, and it was such an honour to hear him embody my version of Don Quixote. I still can't quite believe it!" **VORTEX**

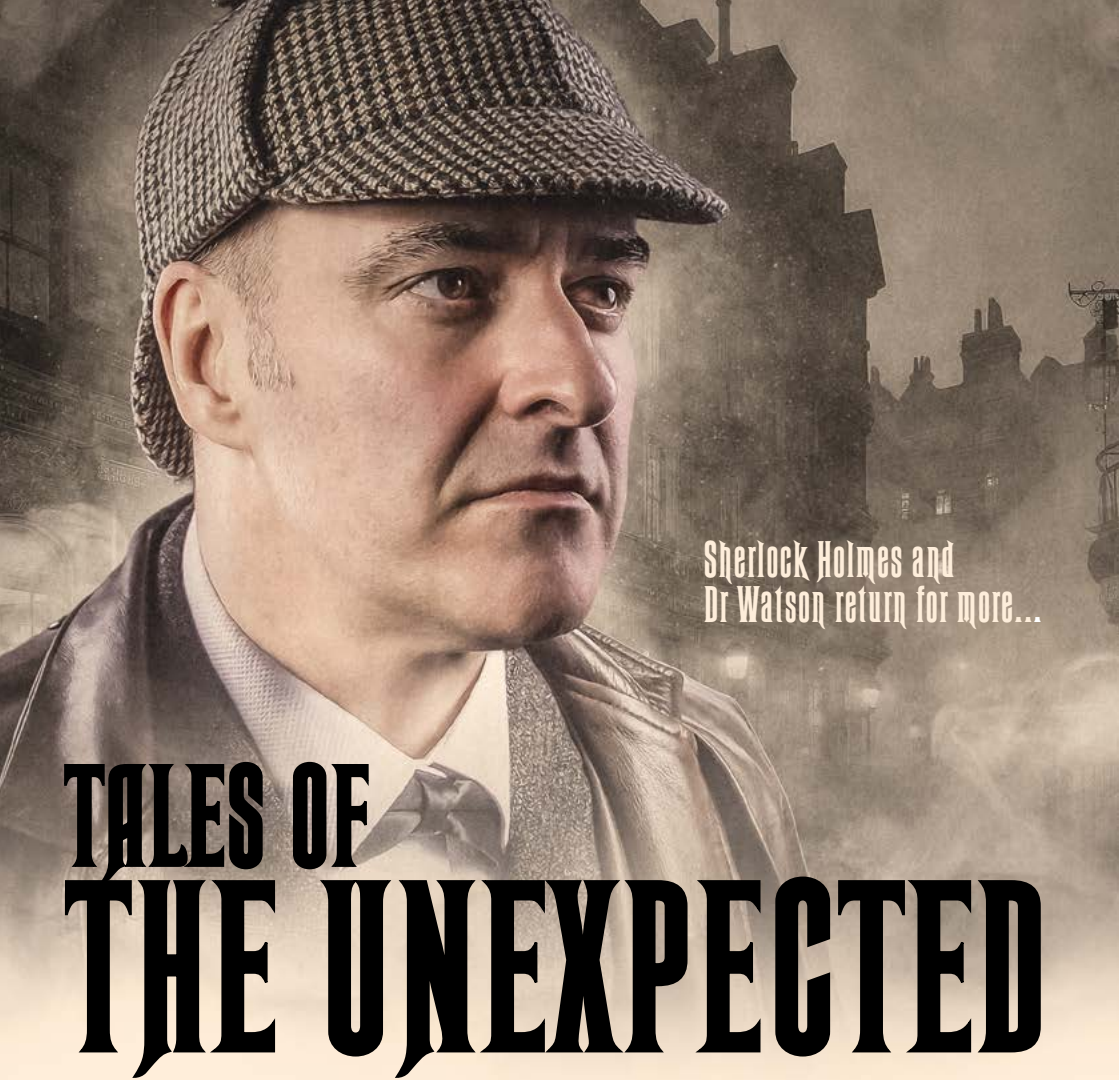
THE SEVENTH DOCTOR ADVENTURES WICKED!



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Sherlock Holmes and
Dr Watson return for more...

TALES OF THE UNEXPECTED

SHERLOCK HOLMES is back with an exciting new series of adventures in a thrilling new format. Get ready for eight new episodes featuring Nicholas Briggs as the legendary sleuth with Richard Earl at his side as Dr John Watson.

England, 1913. The horizon is darkening with the prospect of war when Dr John Watson confronts embattled Prime Minister Jasper Cranfield with evidence of a crime that has been spread over decades. A sequence of interconnected mysteries, from the fate of a music hall murderer, to a man driven mad

by a worm unknown to science, to a bizarre and sinister society which meets in a furniture warehouse, these untold cases hint at something larger. What is the purpose of the enigmatic organisation which calls itself "The Lighthouse"? How much does the Prime Minister know? Is Sherlock Holmes truly retired? And what final confrontation do they face?

Producer Emma Haigh says: "I was really intrigued when writer Jonathan Barnes and director Ken Bentley told me their idea for **Sherlock Holmes – Untold** – bringing together the stories mentioned in passing by Arthur Conan Doyle into

one thrilling tale. There are lots of strands to this production that take us down many paths, but are they connected – and if so, how? There's only one way to find out..."

Vortex asks writer Jonathan what defines an untold story. He explains: "When Conan Doyle wrote the **Sherlock Holmes** stories he would often drop in references to other cases as a kind of aside to the main investigation. These are the most tantalising things, always full of flavour and promise. Watson generally tells us that these adventures contain elements that are too sensitive to be revealed now

SHERLOCK HOLMES

UNTOLD

THE ADVENTURE OF THE REMARKABLE WOMAN

Aboard the Prime Minister's train, Dr Watson is telling a story, long suppressed, about a troubled young journalist, a dead man walking and a creature unknown to medical science.

THE ADVENTURE OF THE MUSIC HALL HEARTIES

A young man by the name of Bert Stevens is accused of committing the most appalling crime and languishes in Newgate Gaol. He has but days left to him before he is due to hang.

THE ADVENTURE OF THE AMATEUR MENDICANT SOCIETY

Christmas, 1887. A grieving widow receives a curious invitation from a club of which her late husband seemed to be a member: the Amateur Mendicant Society.

THE STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE OF JAMES PHILLIMORE

A man returns indoors to fetch his umbrella only to disappear, seemingly forever.

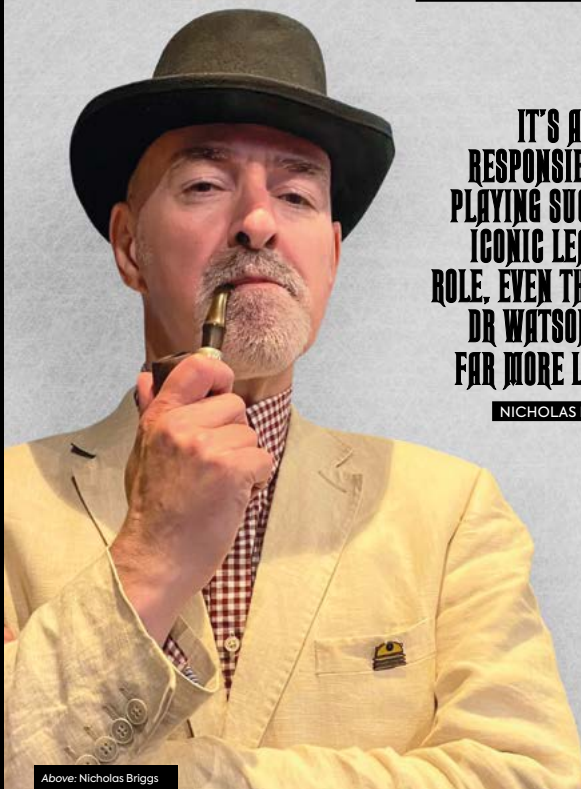
THE ADVENTURE OF THE BODY IN THE BARROW

At a picturesque town on the English coast, Holmes and Watson are taking a much-needed holiday only to encounter, in this most unlikely of spots, a resurgence of an old acquaintance and the return of a name from the past.

THE ADVENTURE OF THE POLITICIAN, THE LIGHTHOUSE AND THE TRAINED CORMORANT

On the Prime Minister's train, as the world stands on the brink, Dr Watson's stories are reaching their crescendo.

Yet before then there is one more account to be revealed – the truth about that tentacular organisation known as the Lighthouse!



Above: Nicholas Briggs

IT'S A REAL
RESPONSIBILITY
PLAYING SUCH AN
ICONIC LEADING
ROLE, EVEN THOUGH
DR WATSON HAS
FAR MORE LINES!

NICHOLAS BRIGGS

or – in the case of the Great Rat of Sumatra – simply full of events 'for which the world is not prepared.' Others were apparently unsolved or unfinished. It's long been a game of **Sherlock Holmes** enthusiasts to imagine what these cases might have contained (Doyle's own son, Adrian, had a go at this). And now it's Big Finish's turn to 'just imagine'!

"**Sherlock Holmes – Untold** is one big story really, made up of smaller ones. It starts in 1913 on a train that has the British Prime Minister on board. There's also a stowaway there – Dr Watson! – who is oddly determined to relate to the politician a range of adventures from the past. There's a link running through them all, he says, even if it's not obvious at first, and it involves both the PM and the fate of the nation. Where is Sherlock Holmes? What is all this heading to? The truth gradually emerges over eight cliff-hanging instalments. It's designed to be an ideal stepping

on point for new listeners as well as having plenty of Easter eggs for long-term listeners of the range.

"The brief was a kind of collision of two ideas, really. I've long wanted to write some of the untold stories from the canon for myself, and I had a notion that we could link some of them together in a bigger, broader plot. Ken, meanwhile, wanted to do something close to an old movie serial – all cliffhangers, dynamism and melodrama – we were able to slot these separate thoughts together quite nicely. The form of it using half-hour episodes has really given the series a fantastic sense of momentum."

Nick says: "We've designed this as a series packed with intrigue and cliffhangers. We wanted to make a bit of noise for the return of **Sherlock Holmes** to Big Finish, and thought that releasing an episode a week might be a good way to do it. There'll be after show discussions

with a panel of Holmes experts on the Big Finish podcast and story teasers before each episode. It'll be wall-to-wall Holmes!

"It's a real responsibility playing such an iconic leading role, even though Dr Watson has far more lines! He does loads of narration whereas I just crash in with my 'brilliant' deductions. It's such a great role to play."

Asked for his highlight, Nick says: "The fact that Jonathan has



Above: Christopher Naylor

thrown in a number of the stories that true Holmesians will recognise as adventures that Holmes and Watson experienced but that were never published. That's a real treat."

DIRECTOR KEN adds: "We do have a lot of fun working on this range. There are often a lot of variables in drama – new writer, new script, new cast – but we've been doing this for quite a few years now so it's all bedded in. We know Jonathan will write a great script, there are always returning characters so we have an ensemble cast who know each other well, and it's heightened drama so it's a lot of fun to play."

"The period requires actors with immaculate received pronunciation and also period regional accents, which aren't as easy to do as you'd think; dialect has changed considerably over time. Casting is

always challenging but fun. There are two French characters in this. I always try to find actors who can speak the language fluently. If it's their second language, you normally find they've spent time in the country and have a good ear for the accent even when speaking in English. It's a lovely surprise when I discover an actor I've already worked with is bilingual."

Ken continues: "I grew up watching the *Flash Gordon* serials with Larry 'Buster' Crabbe. The short episodes are very similar to popular podcast drama formats and I thought that would be the perfect way to tell these untold stories. But the episodic format is a logistical and technical challenge. Hopefully it sounds effortless, but it's been the most forensic post production process I've ever worked on!"

Emma concludes: "It was a joy to be back in the studio for this



Above: Richard Earl

production, having recorded the last Holmes set (Audie award winning *The Seamstress of Peckham Rye* and *The Fiends of New York City*) virtually during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"To hear the world of Holmes and Watson coming to life once more is such a thrill, and it's a privilege to work with this wonderful cast and production team. Jamie Robertson has done a brilliant job on both the sound design and music – you can almost smell the steam train coming down the tracks..." **VORTEX**

SHERLOCK HOLMES
UNTOLD

- RELEASED: OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2025
- FORMAT: DOWNLOAD

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CONQUER AND DESTROY

BERNICE SUMMERFIELD ENCOUNTERS THE DALEKS AT THE ETERNITY CLUB...



Above: Lisa Bowerman

PROFESSOR BERNICE

Summerfield is continuing to try and thwart the dastardly Daleks from achieving their latest master plan. Benny, played by Lisa Bowerman, comes face to eyestalk with her hated enemies in **The Dalek Eternity 2**. They were, after all, responsible for

the death of her mother Claire when she was a youngster, before losing contact with her father Isaac during the Dalek Wars.

Producer James Goss says: “*The Winner’s Tale* by Alex Hewitt is a painful satire about what happens when two sides insist on fighting a war rather than working things out. It features a Sontaran and a Draconian backseat driving with terrible consequences.”

Can a Sontaran and a Draconian stop an endless war? And can Bernice Summerfield find the last survivor of a Dalek invasion?

Draconian Altazar is played by Shai Matheson with Dan Starkey as Sontaran Starll.

The second adventure of this release is *Oversoul* written by Melissa F Olson.

Bernice arrives on an idyllic world of crystal seas and floating palaces. She has a terrible warning – the Daleks are coming. Will their god believe her?

James adds: “In this story we have wonderful performances

both from Lisa and Nicholas Briggs as the Daleks where Benny has to convince a whole world that they’re in terrible danger from invasion, from a race that no one seems to fear. The climax is quite extraordinary...”

Lisa says: “*Oversoul* is so well written. When the script is this good, it isn’t hard to key into the mood of a piece – and it’s always fun to have

IT’S ALWAYS FUN TO HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO LET RIP!

LISA BOWERMAN

the opportunity to let rip! Benny’s righteous anger came right off the page and, odd as it may sound, it was a very enjoyable day’s recording!

“Meeting up with the Daleks is always a challenge for Benny, knowing her backstory. She has justifiable anger and righteous indignation towards them. What’s not to like about shouting at Daleks? But she’s also been known to use humour which has always confused things.”

Nick too very much enjoyed the experience. He says: “It was great to act with Lisa again. We’re the same age and have worked together from the beginning of Benny. What a magnificent leading lady she is.” **VORTEX**

THE NEW ADVENTURES OF BERNICE SUMMERFIELD THE DALEK ETERNITY 2



■ RELEASED: OCTOBER 2025
■ FORMAT: DOWNLOAD/CD

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REIGN OF THE RANI?

I have been absolutely loving the **Dark Gallifrey** series. What is it about villains that is so compelling? Hearing many of my favourite baddies done well is making me long for the return of the Rani to Big Finish. Siobhan Redmond was utterly fantastic in the role, having her (or another legendary actress) playing one of the all-time best renegade Time Lords again would be a delight! Is there any chance of having her return?

Ross Chmiel

Nick: I will say this, Ross... it's a very good idea!

CLASS ACTS

As a huge fan of **Class**, I wanted to show my appreciation for what Big Finish has been able to do with the series. I was very disappointed when the [television] show was

cancelled, so it's been great hearing how Big Finish has been able to expand on the world and characters. Hopefully we'll get to hear more from the Coal Hill crew in the future?

Tim Foulkes

Nick: It's certainly something we'll keep under consideration, Tim. Just imagine...

CD REPRESSES

I love Big Finish so much and am a huge fan of **The Eighth Doctor Time War** range. I was wondering, why you won't press any more CDs for some sold out titles? I'm only missing **Time War 3** from my collection and it's unbelievably hard to try and find a copy of it. Again, I love Big Finish so much – just saying that this would make my love so much more.

Callum Mahon

Nick: Unfortunately, there are economic concerns that we have to take into account, Callum.

FORWARD PURCHASING

I would like to purchase the **Torchwood** releases for next year as I have with the other Big Finish ranges, but they are not yet listed on the website. I prefer to purchase in advance as this helps me to keep track of my finances.

Ralph Bonnett

*Nick: Productions are typically put up for pre-order once they've had a press release, Ralph. When the press releases for **Torchwood** have been approved and the announcement has been made, next year's **Torchwoods** will be up for pre-order. Apologies for the delay.*

TIME FOR MORE?

In lieu of **Irwin Allen's The Time Tunnel** possibly returning on TV services as a new show, will Big Finish keep making more **Time Tunnel** audios? And is there any chance of other Irwin Allen productions? **Lost in Space** was already done by Netflix as a mini-series.

Charles Mento

*Nick: All future plans for **Irwin Allen's The Time Tunnel** are currently under review, Charles.* **VORTEX**





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VORTEX

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BIG FOR THE LOVE
FINISH | OF | STORIES

THE LAST DAYS OF THE POWELL ESTATE

IF YOU FEEL A HAND ON
YOUR SHOULDER: DON'T
LOOK AROUND...

SOMETHING WICKED
THIS WAY COMES...

Going back to the Ace early days of the Seventh Doctor.

