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Paul McGann  
interview

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# EDITORIAL

Many thanks to you for the almost universal praise for the first issue of **VORTEX**. We've received loads of useful suggestions too. Do keep those coming in, because that way we can discover exactly what you'd like us to cover. Something I hope to be writing an article on at some point in the future is the Sixth Doctor and Charley season I'm working on this year. Three stories, *Patient Zero*, *Paper Cuts* and *Blue Forgotten Planet*, bringing Charley's involvement with the Doctor to something of a crescendo, but maybe not the one you were expecting. And along the way, there will be Viyrans, Draconians and Daleks. At the time of writing, I've only just finished directing the studio sessions of *Patient Zero*, and am now in the process of phoning cast members for the next studio session and educating them about the way Draconians speak. Forgive me for being mysterious and not saying which story they feature in, though...

As part of my research, I have, of course, re-watched the 1973 Jon Pertwee story *Frontier in Space*. It's a story that occupies a special place in my heart, as it was the first ever **Doctor Who** story that I tape-recorded off the telly. It was from that moment on that **Doctor Who** was as much an audio as a visual experience for me. You know that scene when the Master has the Doctor at gunpoint and the Draconians board their ship? I almost know it off by heart, I listened to it so many times in 1973 that my old reel-to-reel tape recorder developed a nasty squeak! Thank goodness that doesn't happen with mp3 or CD players nowadays. You can listen to your Big Finish **Doctor Who** audios as many times as you like, without squeaking!

**Nick Briggs** – executive producer

## SNEAK PREVIEWS AND WHISPERS

### Doctor Who: The Companion Chronicles The Three Companions

A multi-Doctor story with a difference. In the present day, Polly Wright (Anneke Wills) tracks down Sir Lethbridge-Stewart (Nicholas Courtney) via the internet. As they swap stories of their travels with the Doctor, so they realize that there is a common thread. And watching them from afar is a certain Thomas Brewster (John Pickard)... Written by Marc Platt, this epic 12-part story is told in 10-minute episodes starting in April. And the great news is, for those who buy the monthly **Doctor Who** range, it's absolutely free and sitting pretty on the end of Disc 2!

**AVAILABLE IN APRIL, WITH THE MAGIC MOUSETRAP**

### Patient Zero

We're building up to the Charley Finale (well, it makes us laugh), with this first story of a brand new season for the Sixth Doctor. Written and directed by Nicholas Briggs, it features Daleks, the long-awaited return of the Viyrans and... Well, plenty of surprises. To reveal more would do the story an injustice, but Colin Baker has said that *Patient Zero* was one of his favourite-ever Big Finish scripts - and who'd want to argue with him?

**AVAILABLE IN  
AUGUST**



### Cyberman 2

*Cyberman 2* finally went into the studio last month. It's been moved around the schedules quite a lot. Originally meant for a November 2008 release, it slipped to January 2009, then to November 2009... where it has finally landed! It's all the fault of Nick Briggs, of course, who's been so caught up on other projects that he has constantly had to delay the studio dates.

James Swallow has crafted a great sequel to the acclaimed first *Cyberman* series, picking up the story of the surviving characters while also inventing new characters with their own, new stories, thus making it accessible to anyone who hasn't heard *Cyberman*. This time, the Cybermen have occupied the Earth, but will the androids and humans be able to unite against them, after decades of war and resentment? Samantha Thorne, Liam Barnaby and Paul Hunt are back, but can any of them survive the epic battle to rid Earth of the Cybermen?

**AVAILABLE IN NOVEMBER**



Above: Will they survive? The cast of *Cyberman 2*  
Left: India Fisher as Charley Pollard

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# THE GLORIOUS REVOLUTION

A day in the life of *The Companion Chronicles*, as producer **David Richardson** shares his diary of the recording of *The Glorious Revolution*, which stars Frazer Hines as Jamie.



**07:45** I arrive at Bromley Station to begin the trek to Ladbroke Grove. Everything's ready for today: scripts and contracts in my bag, everyone briefed. But why are all these people queuing outside the station? And what are these big signs on the screens? Bah! Ice on the rails. Trains running two hours late or cancelled. This eventuality wasn't planned for...

**08:00** With a nifty bit of limbo, I squeeze onto a carriage and feel like a sardine. My mobile beeps. To the consternation of people around me, I have to shift my body to read the

text. It's from Nigel Fairs, who is directing today. He says there's ice on the rails. Trains running late or cancelled. He'll keep me updated but it's looking as though his line from Brighton is much, much more seriously disrupted than mine. I begin to worry about Frazer Hines, who is travelling down from Yorkshire. And I look out the window. I can't see any ice on the rails!

**08:20** Victoria station. I can't resist just popping into WH Smiths to flick through the latest issue of *Doctor Who Magazine*. It has a news item on Season Four of *The Companion Chronicles*, and it feels slightly strange to see the announcement of the story we're recording today. Or should that be the one I hope we're recording today.

**08:25** Cup of coffee in hand, I leap onto the bus to Ladbroke Grove.

**09:10** Arrive at the Moat Studios. Poor Toby is running slightly late and preparing lunch. I stand around being generally useless and fielding text messages from Nigel. His train is stuck outside Gatwick Airport, and he's getting really worried. Meanwhile, actor Neil Roberts arrives. He's been in several Big Finish productions: as Temeter in *Kingdom of Silver*, and in a guest role in one of the upcoming *Stargates*. He's even been in *Babylon 5*, *Charmed*, *Sliders* and a whole host of other TV shows that give him huge genre credentials. Today he's here to trail Nigel as a director, with a view to working on a *Companion Chronicle* later in the run. He may be learning more quickly than he'd planned to...

**09:30** Andrew Fettes arrives, along with writer Jonny Morris. Andrew is no stranger to BF either, having played many roles – most recently he was Harry Randall in *The Magic Mousetrap*. Today he's going to play two roles in *The Glorious Revolution* –

the enigmatic Visitor and King James II. With Nigel contributing via text, we discuss the best way for Andrew to pitch these two characters. He's really come prepared and worked it all out for himself and his two contrasting performances are gobsmackingly brilliant.

**10:00** Frazer arrives, and reveals that his train service to London was fine. I rush around with coffees for everyone. Frazer wants to chat about how we pitch the different characters that he's reading, and we decide not to go for outright impersonation – except in the case of the Second Doctor, which he does effortlessly and stunningly well. Frazer points out that there's much more Second Doctor dialogue in this story than in his last production, *Helicon Prime*. Jonny explains that that's because he does it so well. As for Zoe, we opt for a more 'RP' style reading, without going for a take on a female voice. Poor Nigel is still miles and miles away, and I suggest that we start the recording with Neil directing until he arrives. Nigel is happy and accommodating with this solution, but wants us to start on page five and save the opening scene for him.

**10:15** Neil eases himself into the director's chair, and familiarises himself with the talkback system to the actors. We kick off with a reading of pages five and six. "Och no, it's still raining," says Frazer as he delivers Jamie's first line. And suddenly it's 1968 again, and the world is all black and white and exciting.

**11:00** We're up to page nine when poor Nigel finally makes it to the studio after his journey from hell. There's a changing of the guard on the director's chair, and we go back to the beginning to do the very opening scene. Neil takes a backseat to observe, having got through his trial by fire with flying colours.

**12:00** I check the Big Finish forums on my iPhone. Someone has read the news in *DWM*, and is worried that *The Glorious Revolution* will be historically inaccurate. We haven't even got it in the can yet, and it's being judged.

**12:45** The end of episode one, and I don't mind saying, it sends shivers down my spine. I love Jonny's script – it's a really clever story and, as we discuss in the green room later, it's a very different Troughton story without being out of place. A really good script has evolved into something very special thanks to two great actors. Frazer is wonderful as Jamie: bright, energetic and hitting every mark. Andrew is superb too as King James II – you really feel that this is a man old before his years, suffering under the weight of illness. And the nosebleeds are historical fact, Jonny tells us all.

**13:00** Time for one of those fantastic Big Finish lunches. You've heard of them many times, and it's all true. We all sit round and chat, and it's lovely and social and actually it feels a bit of a shame that a team of people who get on so well will only be together for one day. But that's showbiz.

**14:00** Back to the studio, and we speed through episode two. Everyone's in their stride and it all comes together, though there's still time for some naughty laughs. Frazer and Andrew have become quite a comedy duo, and there are some hysterical out-takes – what a shame there's no room for them on the CD!

**16:00** It's a wrap. Just as everyone starts packing their bags, I drag them back to the booths to record the obligatory post-recording interview. We're done. *The Glorious Revolution* is over, and it feels good. I'm quietly optimistic that this one will be very well received.

*The Glorious Revolution is out in August.*

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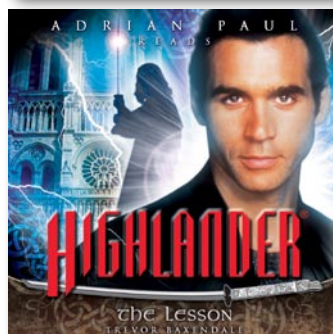


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# MATTHEW SWEET



Matthew Sweet – broadcaster, journalist and author of 2006's Sixth Doctor adventure *Year of the Pig* – chats to **Vortex** about Seventh Doctor tale *The Magic Mousetrap*, out this month.

**What was your starting point for *The Magic Mousetrap*?**

Meeting some tubercular old war veterans in a sanatorium in Davos. I went there to report on the closure of the clinic that's the setting for Thomas Mann's novel *The Magic Mountain*. It was one of those valedictory pieces: the patients were all East Germans who had been coming for their health every year since having had British bullets and shrapnel removed from their lungs, and the post-reunification government had decided that it wasn't worth spending the money on them anymore. So we sat up late eating cheese and talking about the clarity of the mountain air and what it was like to crew a Panzer, and it struck me that this might be a good setting for a **Doctor Who** story.

**You get the chance to turn the relationship between the Doctor and his companions upside down in this. Did that fire your imagination?**

I remember when I was writing *Year of the Pig* how ashamed I felt that so many of Nicola Bryant's lines had a question mark at the end of them. So this was a way of making it more interesting for Sophie and Phil, and hopefully for the listener, too. We're so used to the Seventh Doctor being an arch-manipulator, putting his companions through the mangle for the sake of a psychological experiment or the future of the cosmos. I thought it would be interesting to put the boot on the other foot, and Sylvester at a disadvantage to his companions.

**We see a very different Ace and Hex in this story. How did Sophie and Phil feel about this?**

I think they were pleased. They said they were, but they're very good actors, they could have been lying. Certainly there were a lot of raised eyebrows in the studio when Phil delivered his first lines. We've been asking Sophie Aldred to be Ace for us since I was in the sixth form – we're really lucky that she still wants to do it, and is still as interested in the character as we are. So I think the least that a writer can do is try to prevent her from feeling like Shirley Bassey constantly being asked to do *Goldfinger*. (Although it's a pretty good song, isn't it?)

**What was it like writing for audio – was it limiting or freeing because of the lack of visuals?**

Liberating. I'm developing a drama for BBC Four at the moment and obviously BBC Four budgets are fairly modest and you have to keep that in mind as you write, otherwise you'll just end up having to chuck most of your work away and start again. If I were doing this for television there's no way I would have a mountain and a cable car and the elaborate snowboarding sequence that you'll hear – but not see – in *The Magic Mousetrap*. Sylvester McCoy is the best aural snowboarder I've ever encountered, by the way.

**The play is full of some very vivid, eccentric characters. Did you find they took on a life of their own as you were writing?**

Yes, they tied me to a chair and made me do it. If you don't like it blame them.

**Were any of them based on people you'd encountered in life?**

Some of the details of their lives are lifted from Thomas Mann. On his arrival at the sanatorium, Hans Castorp, the hero of *The Magic Mountain*, encounters the members of the Half Lung Club out for a hike. They are all patients who've had the pneumothorax operation, which was a procedure that relieved pressure on a tubercular lung by puncturing it and allowing air to enter and leave it through a tube. He hears the sound of them whistling. *The Magic Mousetrap* has a character with a pneumothorax tube. Because she's a cabaret artiste she's developed the ability to whistle through it in tune. If you're a pulmonary specialist you're probably tutting right now, but I'm afraid I couldn't resist it.

**The story is a mix of darkness and humour. Is that your favourite kind of storytelling?**

I think it's my favourite kind of storytelling as far as **Doctor Who** is concerned. It's certainly what makes **Doctor Who** richer and more watchable than some of its historical rivals. *Terror of the Autons* has killer gonks and a brilliantly nasty visual gag about a dead body inside a lunchbox. *UFO* has people in collarless shirts and suits standing glumly in white rooms. I know which I'd rather watch with my kids.

**There's a comedy double act among the ensemble. Was it difficult to come up with the gags?**

No, it was easy. I just stole them. Well, maybe I made one or two of them up. The one about the North Yorkshire moors and a mucky 1870 novel by Leopold Sacher-Masoch is all mine. So now you know who to blame if you think it's stupid. Stealing is an art, though. When I was eleven I was caught in *Fine Fayre* with a bag of Minstrels down my trousers. That would be a good example of how not to do it.

**You went along to the studio. What was it like hearing your words performed?**

Well it's nice to hear someone other than me performing them. Though it isn't always – I once wrote the script for a seven-part BBC2 documentary series and had to listen to an actor I really admire kill every line stone dead, to the extent that I couldn't bear to tune in when it went out. Everyone in *The Magic Mousetrap*, however, was brilliant. I'm going to single out the two Andrews as Harry and Herbert Randall, a pair of music hall performers. They were terrifically funny and applied some cold clear actorly logic to a scene which I'd casually written to be delivered as the two characters somersaulted over a series of rolling barrels.

**Do you have any favourite Big Finish plays?**

I've been a subscriber since the beginning, but recently I've really enjoyed Simon Guerrier's Sara Kingdom **Companion Chronicle** *Home Truths* and Eddie Robson's *The Condemned*. Most science fiction imagines its alien invasions as versions of the German or Russian invasions that were anticipated between 1939 and 1989. It's about time some other model dominated. Aliens as smalltime crims might be it...

*The Magic Mousetrap is out in April.*



Top: Drew Fettes and Andrew Dicken as the Randall brothers  
Above: Sophie Aldred, Sylvester McCoy and Philip Olivier.



# KEN BENTLEY!!!



*The Magic Mousetrap* is not a typical **Doctor Who** story – how would you describe it?

Utterly bonkers. I'd like to spend a long weekend inside Matthew Sweet's head, but I'm too scared of what I might find there.

What were the challenges in making it?

It's a very quick witted play, and quite anachronistic. We're more used to this sort of storytelling on stage – it's the stuff of 19th and early 20th century comedy. Casting was the biggest challenge. I needed a company of actors that understood the style and could rise to the challenge. I needed a company of farceurs who could work on audio – a rare combination of skills. Thankfully I've a lot of theatre experience working on just that kind of comedy, so I knew who to turn to.

We've heard from the trailer that Sophie and Philip get to do something different in this story. They must have loved that...

I've been a little bit cheeky lately and in the last few stories we've recorded together I've asked both Sophie and Philip to voice the odd additional character. But in *Mousetrap* it's an integral part of the story and, typical of Sweet, they were asked to do something quite bold. They were over the moon about it. Actors like to have fun (it's called a 'play' for a reason) and Matthew gave them both the opportunity to have a ball.

The production includes a couple of songs doesn't it? How did the actors prepare for these?

Lauren and Richard wrote the music to lyrics Matthew had written in the script. They sent the actors the songs

beforehand so they could learn them prior to recording.

Then I made sure I scheduled time during the recording for the actors to go off with Lauren and Richard to rehearse. Everyone has done a fantastic job and I'm very happy with the results.

As a rule, how long do you work on a production for?

How long is a piece of string? I think we cast, recorded and edited *Forty Five* in about eight weeks. But that was unusually fast. For the Seventh Doctor 2009 season – *Mousetrap* will have taken six months, *Enemy of the Daleks* five months and *Angel of Scutari* probably about three months.

You're directing all three stories in the Sylvester McCoy season. Do you think the policy of doing seasons benefits the storytelling?

The season format has been very exciting for me. I've been lucky enough to sit in the chair for all the Seventh Doctor's adventures over the twelve months, and we've been taking his companions on a particular journey during this time. The 2009 season explores one story thread in much more detail. It's been exciting to engage the audience in this ongoing narrative, and I can't wait to hear what they think of the 2009 season finale!

What can we look forward to in *Enemy of the Daleks* and *The Angel of Scutari*?

We'll see Hex putting his skills to good use in both stories, in *Enemy* the Doctor gets a second chance and doesn't make the same mistake twice, and time itself has a role to play in *Angel of Scutari*...



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# PAUL MCGANN



It's eight years since Paul McGann made his debut at Big Finish, playing the Eighth Doctor in *Storm Warning*. Many, many stories down the line his Doctor is now paired with Sheridan Smith as Lucie Miller, and their brilliant partnership is enjoying another season of new adventures. These new episodes can be downloaded each Saturday night at 6pm, only from [bigfinish.com](http://bigfinish.com)...

*Vortex* recently spoke to McGann, during the recording of *Orbis*...

What was your initial approach to *Doctor Who*?

That's perhaps best explained by my frustration that I'd left the TV film with, and 'thwarted possibilities' is probably the best way to describe it. The TV movie was a pilot, so the possibility was there that we might get to make a series and, should it be successful, I'd go on and examine all these different ways of playing this character and these adventures that we'd talked about. I say we – me and Phil Segal, the producer – and it never happened.

So I felt frustrated. And when the audios came along, it was simply a chance to address that, not right that wrong, but do exactly what we're doing now. And of course with audio the possibilities are even more immediate. That is, the possibilities for different interpretations, because you're not hampered by having to look the part, get in the gear and all that protean skill you need as a visual actor; you can just turn up and it's all in the voice. We can take the Doctor where we like.

So the appeal is the fact that we can take these audio adventures in so many different directions?

That's its main attraction and its greatest strength, certainly from where I'm sat. It's what finally persuaded me it was worth doing because it's what you make of it, it's never-ending. It's as multi-faceted as we are or certainly the actors that are playing it, the people who are writing it. Who knows where this is gonna be in 10 years, 20 years, 30 years.

We were just chatting outside in the corridor about Bill Hartnell and Barry [McCarthy], who's in today, was talking about

having seen the first episode; he remembers sitting watching the first episodes in the Sixties, and we'd been talking about how much has changed since then. The stories have changed, not just in their form, but also in their spirit over the decades. And perhaps – I don't wanna make extravagant claims for these stories, they are what they are, but perhaps they reflect us. The times that we live in. That's the beauty of this kind of fiction, isn't it?

Do you like the fact that you have *Doctor Who* on your CV? If I'm honest I filled a CV in for something, for publicity purposes, only last week and I left *Doctor Who* off. I only say that because there were times when I don't need to mention it, or perhaps, well, let's be brutally honest, it's not so cool to mention it. It depends who I'm talking to. Sometimes it's the first thing I mention. It depends, it just depends. Because it takes all sorts.

Let's take you back to the very first stories you recorded with Big Finish – *Storm Warning*, *Sword of Orion*, *The Stones of Venice* and *Minuet in Hell*. They were made over a week in Bristol. What do you remember of that?

I don't remember a lot about the first wodge of them in Bristol except they came thick and fast. The Bristol lot mainly I remember *Shada*, perhaps because there was a kind of shift in the scope, in the scale, maybe they just spent more money or something on the story, but suddenly there were posh actors in. I'm not denigrating my friends here but it was that kind of thing. So qualitatively it was a bit different. And because the story was an old one; it was a Douglas Adams story, so... So that's what I remember from those early Bristol days, but that's five, six years ago now and my memory's usually terrible about such things. I met my girlfriend at that time as well, I remember that. I have to say that or she'll kill me. But that's about it.

What have you learned about *Doctor Who* since first playing the role?

I'm still only coming to terms with it. Never having been a *Doctor Who* fan as a child; other than seeing them, I was never committed to them, and still I'm surprised year in, year out, at the involvement, the fervour, the zeal that the fans, the adherents, the people who are making the stories, and all these references, all this history, I'm still surprised at how complex and important it is. I say that genuinely, honestly, and every now and again I'm reminded because every now and again I ask, 'Why are we doing this like this?' and I need to be given a lesson, brought up to speed because I simply don't know, it's a gap, and that will continue. For me, anyway. Because I'm the slowest person in the room here in that regard.

Are you a fan of anything?

I'm a fan of plenty. I'm passionate about music; I couldn't live without music, for example. But fiction-wise, literature, though I adore and am passionate about, say, certain poetry, certain books, certain ideas, it might surprise you that I'm a very private individual, temperamentally. I have my own version

of intellectual pursuits and it means a lot to me. I tend not to admit to a lot. I sound like some furtive idiot. For example, I'm not a sci-fi lover, I wasn't from the start. So perhaps I miss that passion for other worlds, other dimensions, that sort of scope and that magnitude of storytelling, that's not my thing though I meet plenty of people whose thing it definitely is. Mine is more Earthbound than that; I prefer fiction, stories, probably more like I was describing before, things that are maybe rooted in our collective traits, simple, human, what makes us tick as human beings; I love a good novel. What do I love? What are my favourite novels? I'm reading James Joyce's *Ulysses* again right now and can't think that there's a better novel written for 100 years. I'm passionate about that, but in my own way. I couldn't talk in a learned fashion about it. I have my own relationship with these things, and I get tongue tied. I'm not an intellectual, but I'm sure I have my own love for these things. I love *The Great Gatsby*. Perhaps I'm quite 20th Century in my tastes. I love David Bowie. I love Ted Hughes. I love Louise Brooks. Liverpool Football Club. Can't get away from that one. Silent movies. Thomas Tallis. William Shakespeare. Probably pretty catholic tastes really.

You've played so many roles in your career so far. Are there any that are milestones to you?

I can't separate the time that I had making something from the work itself. For me it's important. For example, the movie *Withnail and I* is now hugely popular, it's a film I was in 20 years ago. But because it was the first picture I was ever in, it was also the first picture for probably all of us who were in it except Richard Griffiths. I have a particular sentimental attachment to having done it because it was the culmination of an ambition: 'I'm in a movie! Fantastic!' I'd wanted to be in a movie when I was a kid, and there we were in a movie. I was certainly proud of myself in the best way and being cock-a-hoop for having made it into a movie. Even if there'd never been another one I'd still have that.

The film happened to be a good film as well and that's a kind of bonus. There's been times – I think a lot of performers would say the same thing – there's been times when it's felt great, it's felt easy, it worked out, it was a hit, people liked it, and of course it's due to a combination of things, not all of them to do with you. But if I had to put my hand on my heart and perhaps mention the best things I think that I was ever involved in, it would be the earliest things. That one, *Withnail*, the First World War thing, *The Monocled Mutineer*, things that I did when I didn't know better. This is how I see it: things that I did when my enthusiasm for the job, for the game, for the craft, was perhaps more innocent.

Are you happy to keep talking about the roles that have stuck with you over time?

If you did it and you were happy to do it, provided you did it in kind of the right spirit, then you should be prepared to admit it, talk about it. Listen, it's horses for courses. I know some performers that don't wanna talk about them afterwards. Fair enough, people have different temperaments. Again, I can only speak for myself and personally; while we've all been in a few dogs; just by the law of averages you're gonna be in things which perhaps – well, how can we be kind – that perhaps didn't meet the standard that you may have imagined when you read the thing and when you first turned up on set; we've all been in those things. The best thing that can be said is that few people get to see them to spare our embarrassment, but embarrassment certainly happens and you can only laugh about it; they're only pictures, it's only acting, you know?

I'm a private and kind of shy individual. I'm not the easiest person temperamentally, you won't get me doing requests or regaling you with anecdotes or that sort of thing. But that said I don't hesitate to talk about work if people ask me about it. It's good to engage with your audience; it teaches you a couple of things. It's often surprising.

As someone who is shy, how do you feel about Doctor Who conventions?

I was wary of it to start with, through simple shyness, I hadn't a clue what it might be like except I imagined it would be scary to be in a roomful of people having to just make stuff up. I'm like most actors; I'm best when you give me a bunch of words to say, particularly if they're very good words. I'll wear other people's clothes and say other people's words till the cows come home, but when you turn up in your own clothes and have to speak your own words, it's quite a different matter. We end up often tongue tied and embarrassed and I'm no different.

Is there anything you'd like to do with your Doctor at Big Finish that we haven't done yet?

That's a very good question. I wonder. We've taken him to places, and we'll take him to plenty more, but without labouring the point, the place that I keep coming back to and that personally I'm most interested in is the one here inside. It's the Doctor's own psyche. What happens when this person is alone? How does this character live with himself? What is this character's view of themselves? This is the world of the interior, and I tell you what, if you think that this present universe that we fly around in spacecraft is big, it's minuscule compared to that.



## UPCOMING EPISODES AT BIGFINISH.COM

April 4 *The Beast of Orlok*, episode one  
April 11 *The Beast of Orlok*, episode two

April 18 *Wirrn Dawn*, episode one  
April 25 *Wirrn Dawn*, episode two

May 2 *The Scapegoat*, episode one  
May 9 *The Scapegoat*, episode two

May 16 *The Cannibalists*, episode one  
May 23 *The Cannibalists*, episode two

May 30 *The Eight Truths*, episode one  
June 6 *The Eight Truths*, episode two

June 13 *Worldwide Web*, episode one  
June 20 *Worldwide Web*, episode two

Eddie Robson guides us through the writing process behind his 2008 adventure *Masters of War* featuring David Warner's **Unbound** Doctor battling Davros and the Daleks

I didn't think I'd ever get to write an **Unbound**. The first run of them came out long before I was writing plays for Big Finish and, for various reasons, that run seemed set to be a one-off, apart from a couple of sequels which had already been commissioned.

One of those was the sequel to Jonathan Clements' excellent *Sympathy For the Devil*, which had been on the schedule for some time but never materialised, and I was surprised to get a call from Gary Russell in the middle of 2006 to tell me that they were going to make a fresh start with the development of this project. He asked me if I'd like to write the script. I said yes, and not just because I'm a freelancer and I say yes to everything: this was a very exciting prospect.

As I see it, there are two basic approaches to the out-of-continuity story. To use Marvel Comics terms, there's the 'What If?' where the starting point of the story is its difference with established continuity, and the 'Ultimate'

# WAR

where you go back to basics, keep the stuff you want and discard what you don't, resulting in something which may be quite similar to the original but which hopefully benefits from the clarity of hindsight. Now, most of the **Unbounds** have been the former, but with this being a sequel to an earlier **Unbound**, its 'What If?' had already been explored very well by Jonathan. So what else could we do?

Gary gave me a 'What If?' to work with – which was Terry Nation's original ending for the first Dalek story. I won't detail it here because that might spoil *Masters of War* for you. Gary also floated the possibility that we might rewrite the Doctor's past and make this his first encounter with the Daleks. That was an appealing idea, but as I thought about it, I was concerned that this might leave the Doctor lagging behind the audience. The audience knows what the Daleks are like, and logically the Doctor would know them by reputation at least (the fact that he doesn't in the original Dalek story is one of those little **Doctor Who** inconsistencies we always gloss over). Reintroducing them from the Doctor's viewpoint would have felt like reinventing the wheel... unless I decided I wanted to rework the Daleks and reintroduce them anew.

And ultimately, although the opportunity was there, I found I didn't want to change the Daleks that much. They're such a great, iconic monster that I didn't want to do anything radical to them. I thought of some little twists, but found that these worked better in the context of the Doctor and the audience knowing what the Daleks are usually like. And they fitted very neatly with the idea of *The War Games* as a point of divergence for the Warner Doctor – everything established in the stories up to that point is 'true', but I was free to add bits in and around Dalek history, including the Thal/Dalek wars and Davros himself. These Daleks would be less like the Nazis of Nation's original conception and more like the Stasi – not simply destroying everything that's different to them, but obsessively trying to control it through data and surveillance.

With those boundaries established, I determined to write a story on a nice big scale. Dalek stories work well with our cast limitations at Big Finish, because Nick voices all the Daleks, so you can have as many as you like. I decided to use the two-city Skaro familiar from *Genesis of the Daleks*, but throwing off the restrictions of 1970s television. It always seemed a bit odd that two cities within walking distance of each other were apparently the only inhabited spaces on the planet, especially when they'd been at war for a millennium – so in our version, you need a bullet train to get from one to the other. I also tried to pack a lot in: wanting to delay the arrival of Davros and the Quatch until the situation was already



# STORIES

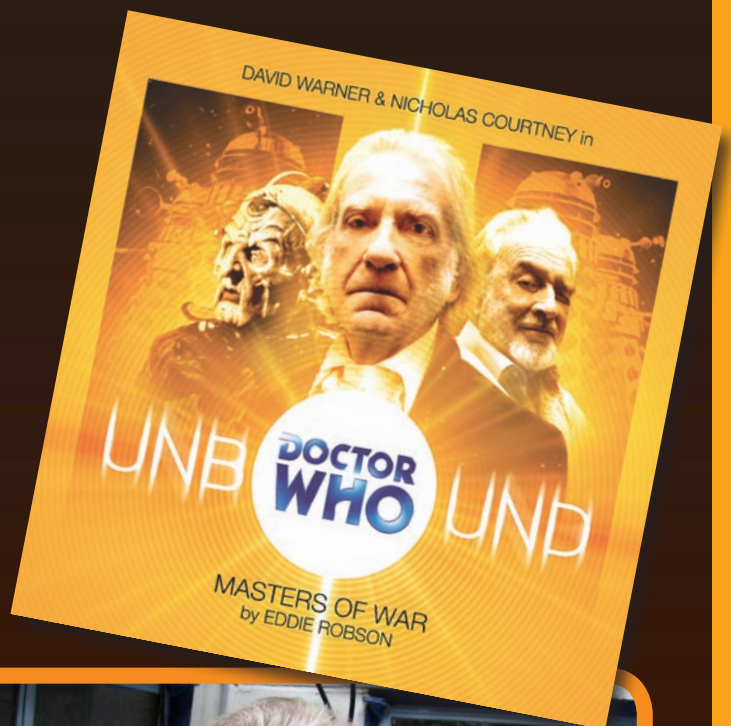
quite tumultuous, I concocted a Dalek civil war plot. Writing a scene where two factions of Daleks face off against each other in the street, then start blowing lumps off each other, was the most fun I'd ever had writing anything.

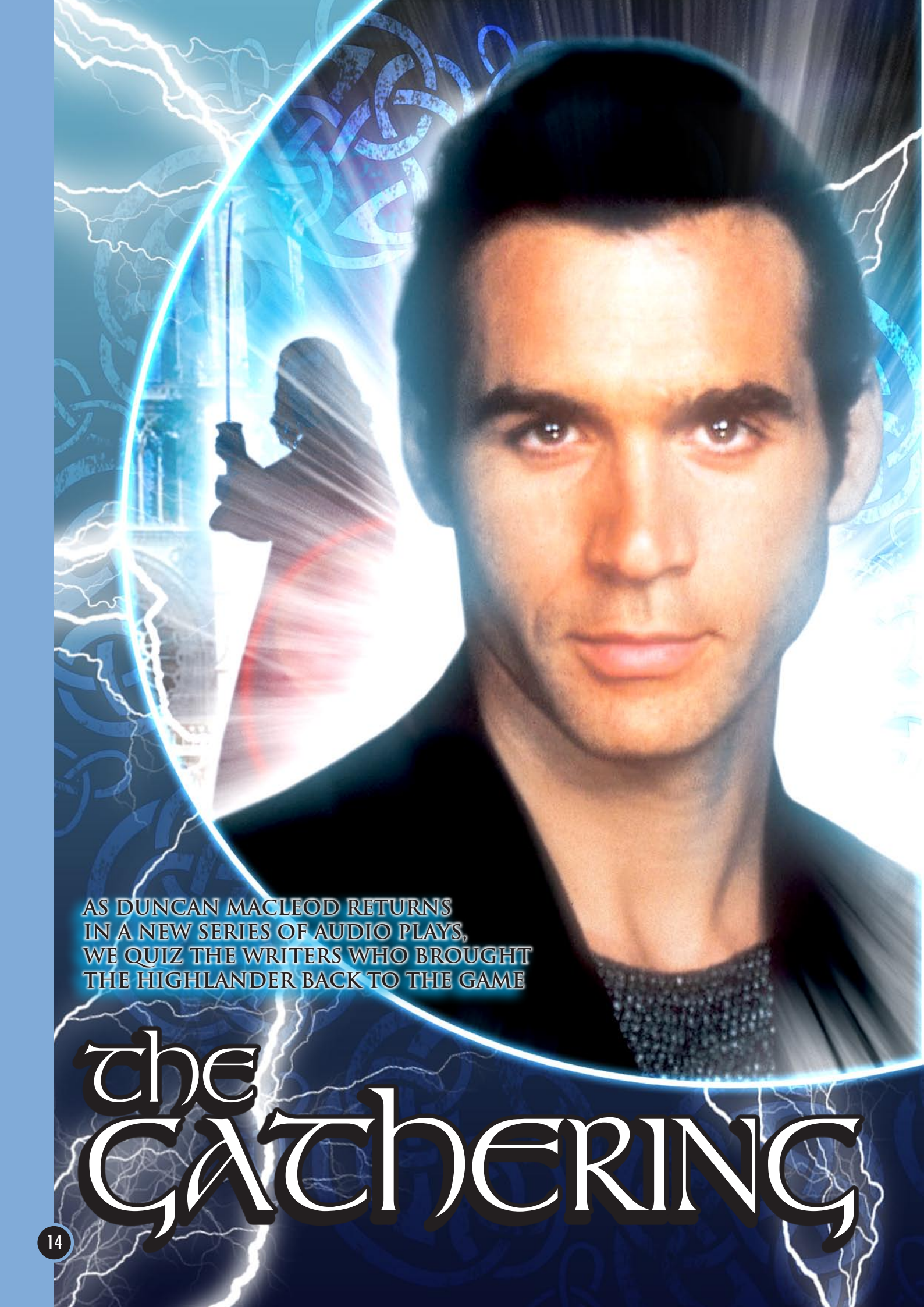
One thing I found tricky was trying to pin down the character of the Warner Doctor. The character we see in *Sympathy For the Devil* seems a little adrift, aware that he has arrived late and lost his place as a result. That worked very well in the context of that story, but we couldn't put him back there: we needed to move him on. As I worked on the script, I started to think of him as a man who would always be trying to make up for lost time, working at breakneck speed and not always bothering with social niceties – even, at times, using dubious methods. I've always thought that the justly famous *Genesis of the Daleks* 'Do I have the right?' scene is slightly undermined by the fact that the Daleks get blown up by accident, saving him from dirtying his hands, and I determined not to let him off the hook on stuff like that. However, when I came to do a redraft after editorial feedback, I was alarmed at a couple of the things I had the Doctor doing and decided to rein it in slightly.

When I handed the script in, I gauged it to be about two hours long, with the second disc a little longer than the first. So I was a bit surprised when sound designer Martin Johnson asked me to make about five minutes' worth of cuts in order to get Part Two to fit onto the CD! I always find it hard to judge how much time to allow for FX and with Part Two having so many spaceship battles, I obviously underestimated.

The last thing I had to do was think of a title. Gary had put the working title 'The Engines of Destruction' on it back when we'd started out, but the elements of the story that related to that title had long since fallen by the wayside and I'd always meant to put a new title on it. Ideally, I wanted another Rolling Stones song title to match *Sympathy For the Devil*, but none of them worked. So I expanded my frame of reference to include all 1960s music. Couldn't find anything there either. I spent many hours looking through lists of songs from the 1960s until eventually a friend lent me a copy of *The Freewheelin'*

*Bob Dylan*, and there it was: *Masters of War*. Much as I'd love to claim that I used this title because David Warner was in the long-lost BBC play *The Madhouse on Castle Street*, which also starred Dylan, I actually didn't find that out until later. Which is a shame, because I'd love to have asked David about it at the recording!





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THE HIGHLANDER BACK TO THE GAME

# the GATHERING

## THE LESSON BY TREVOR BAXENDALE

Were you a fan of **Highlander** before working on the audio series?

Very much so. I loved the film, and the TV series did a very good job of expanding that universe and establishing quite a lot of the background mythology for the Immortals.

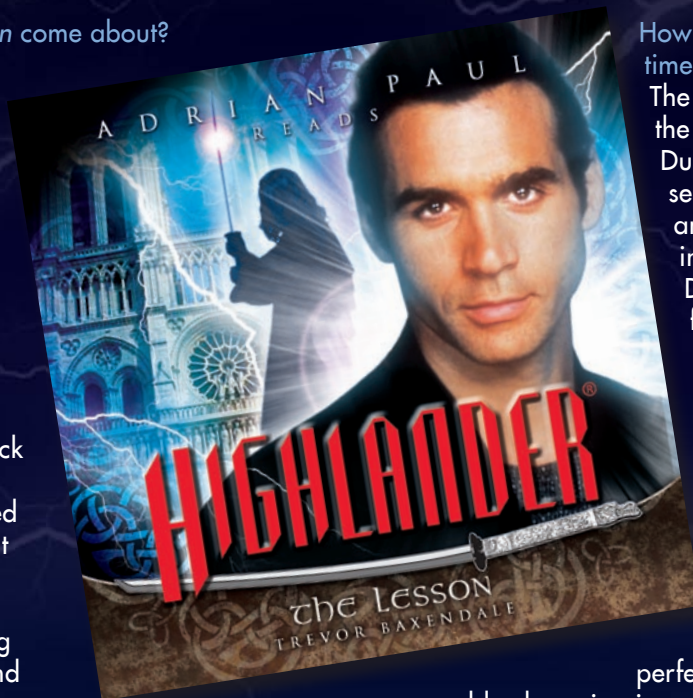
How did *The Lesson* come about?

I was asked if I'd like to contribute to the series and jumped at the chance. I could scarcely believe my good fortune. One of the aspects of the series I enjoyed the most was the occasional flashback to Duncan's past, and I knew I wanted to write a story that would take place over his entire life – a regular meeting between himself and another Immortal through the years, and a reason why one never took the other's head. I was also fascinated by the idea that the older an Immortal gets, the wiser and more powerful he becomes – often at the expense of others. This would be the key to the relationship between Duncan and his enemy in *The Lesson*.

The majority of the story is narrated by Duncan. How easy was it to get under the skin of Duncan?

Very easy. It wasn't difficult to hear Adrian Paul's distinctive voice when writing, but an important part of Duncan McLeod's story is how he changes as the centuries pass. I wanted to be able to bring this journey to life through Duncan's on-off sparring relationship with Pieter Gatlan. And even though most Immortals are by definition enemies, there is also a bond that they share with one another: only they know what it's like to be Immortal.

What is the magic of **Highlander**? Why do people still come back to the clan MacLeod after 23 years? Because it's a fascinating concept, the sense of 'wouldn't it be great to live forever', coupled with a feeling that it might be a curse. How do you spend a long life fighting to survive when you know that the prize is to be the last of your kind?



## LOVE AND HATE BY COLIN HARVEY

Where did the idea for *Love and Hate* come from?

The idea that hatred might actually consume an individual in a literal rather than metaphorical way. I also wanted to do a love story, so I put the two ideas together. **Highlander** is great for exploring emotional extremes.

How did the story develop over time?

The more I worked on the story the more intrigued I became by Duncan's psychology. The story is set between the movies *Endgame* and *The Source* and it was interesting to explore how the Duncan we see in the earlier film becomes the Duncan we encounter in the later movie. What happens to a hero who is forced to consume all the evil he defeats?

Why do people love the character of Duncan MacLeod of the Clan MacLeod?

I think Duncan is far from perfect. He's struggling to be the noble champion in a world which is altogether more complex than 17th century Scotland. He's damaged and vulnerable, so we can all empathise with him even though his life is so fantastic.



# FEATURE



## SECRET OF THE SWORD BY JONATHAN CLEMENTS

You've written for a number of different series now. How did your approach to writing **Highlander** differ to that of **Doctor Who** or **Judge Dredd**?

It's very liberating writing modern dialogue. Part of the action in *Secret of the Sword* is set in a regular police interview, which I rarely get to do, because I'm normally out in space, or chasing mutants around the Cursed Earth.

Why did you choose to write a direct sequel to a story from the original series?

It was actually script editor Cavan Scott's idea. He wanted to explore Duncan's Japanese past, but continuity's pretty tight on this. Japan was essentially closed to foreigners until the 1850s, not a place Duncan could have just wandered in and out of whenever he felt like it.

So I looked at the Season Three opener, *The Samurai* by Naomi Janzen. It left me with questions that a new story could answer. How did Duncan get out of 18th century Japan after those events? And in the modern timeline of that episode, Duncan kills a fellow Immortal who has boasted that the sword in his hand is a Muramasa. It's just a throwaway line in the episode, but it creates all sorts of story possibilities.

Will people have to watch the original episode to make sense of it all?

*Secret of the Sword* has Duncan stuck in Japan, but the events that brought him there aren't relevant. The crucial thing is that being a foreigner in 18th century Japan was a capital offence. If he doesn't get out, he could be beheaded. If you know *The Samurai*, this episode is a sequel. If you don't, it stands alone, as a view of Japan that is far removed from cherry blossoms and the tea ceremony – a brutal police state where Christians and foreigners were ruthlessly persecuted.

## KURGAN RISING BY CAVAN SCOTT & MARK WRIGHT

This series sees you script editing and script writing. Which role do you enjoy more?

They're incredibly different jobs, each rewarding and challenging in their own right. There's something very satisfying about sending writers off with ideas and seeing what they come back with. There's always something new and unexpected. That said, *Kurgan Rising* was the first script we've written ourselves for a while, so it was great to roll up our sleeves and get stuck back in.

Where did the idea for *Kurgan Rising* come from?

Like most of our ideas, it came from a chat in a pub. We had just come from Jason's swanky Soho pub when he'd first asked us to work on **Highlander**, and we were buzzing with ideas. Most of all we wanted to see what we could get away with. **Highlander**, by its very nature, is based on a series of rules. We wanted to see what would happen if one of those rules were broken and if we were going to break one, we might as well try to break the biggie. So we had to find a way that Duncan would fight on Holy Ground.

Was it daunting to bring back a character such as the Kurgan?

Absolutely, but one thing we wanted to try was to continue tying the universes of the TV series and the original movie together. The Kurgan had already been mentioned in the TV show, and you always wondered what would have happened if it had been Duncan not Connor who faced the MacLeod's traditional enemy. This was our chance to find out. Of course, this isn't the only link to the original movie you'll find in *Kurgan Rising*.





# UPCOMING RELEASES

## APRIL

- Doctor Who – The Magic Mousetrap (120, Seventh Doctor/Ace/Hex)
- Doctor Who: The New Eighth Doctor Adventures – Hothouse (3.2)
- Doctor Who: The Companion Chronicles – The Magician's Oath (3.10, Mike Yates)
- Iris Wildthyme – The Two Irises (2.3)
- Highlander – The Lesson (1.1)
- Robin Hood – The Witchfinders (1.1)
- Robin Hood – The Tiger's Tail (1.2)

## JUNE

- Doctor Who – The Angel of Scutari (122, Seventh Doctor/Ace/Hex)
- Doctor Who: The New Eighth Doctor Adventures – Wirrn Dawn (3.4)
- Doctor Who: The Companion Chronicles – The Stealers from Saiph (3.12, Romana I)
- Bernice Summerfield – Glory Days (10.1)
- Stargate Atlantis – Impressions (2.2)
- Highlander – Secret of the Sword (1.3)
- Robin Hood – The Deer Hunter (1.5)
- Robin Hood – The Siege (1.6)

## AUGUST

- Doctor Who – Patient Zero (124, Sixth Doctor/Charley)
- Doctor Who: The New Eighth Doctor Adventures – The Cannibalists (3.6)
- Doctor Who: The Companion Chronicles – The Glorious Revolution (4.2, Jamie)
- Bernice Summerfield – Venus Mantrap (10.3)
- Stargate Atlantis – The Kindness of Strangers (2.4)

## OCTOBER

- Doctor Who – The Castle of Fear (127, Fifth Doctor/Nyssa)
- Doctor Who: The New Eighth Doctor Adventures – Worldwide Web (3.8)
- Doctor Who: The Companion Chronicles – The Cholarian Effect (4.4, Romana II)
- Stargate Atlantis – Meltdown (2.6)

## DECEMBER

- Doctor Who – The Ancients (129, Fifth Doctor/Nyssa)
- Doctor Who – An Earthly Child (**Subscribers only**, Eighth Doctor and Susan)
- Doctor Who: The New Eighth Doctor Adventures – Death in Blackpool (Christmas Special)
- Doctor Who: The Lost Stories – Mission to Magnus
- Iris Wildthyme – The Claws of Santa

## MAY

- Doctor Who – Enemy of the Daleks (121, Seventh Doctor/Ace/Hex)
- Doctor Who: The New Eighth Doctor Adventures – The Beast of Orlok (3.3)
- Doctor Who: The Companion Chronicles – The Mahogany Murderers (3.11, Jago and Litefoot)
- Iris Wildthyme – The Panda Invasion (2.4)
- Stargate SG-1 – First Prime (2.1)
- Highlander – Love and Hate (1.2)
- Robin Hood – Friendly Fire (1.3)
- Robin Hood – The Dam Busters (1.4)

## JULY

- Doctor Who – The Company of Friends (123, Eighth Doctor + Benny/Fitz/Izzy/Mary Shelley)
- Doctor Who: The New Eighth Doctor Adventures – The Scapegoat (3.5)
- Doctor Who: The Companion Chronicles – The Drowned World (4.1, Sara Kingdom)
- Bernice Summerfield – Absence (10.2)
- Stargate SG-1 – Pathogen (2.3)
- Highlander – Kurgan Rising (1.4)

## SEPTEMBER

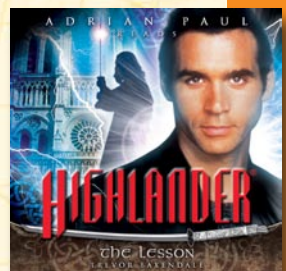
- Doctor Who – Paper Cuts (125, Sixth Doctor/Charley)
- Doctor Who – Blue Forgotten Planet (126, Sixth Doctor/Charley)
- Doctor Who: The New Eighth Doctor Adventures – The Eight Truths (3.7)
- Doctor Who: The Companion Chronicles – The Prisoner of Peladon (4.3, King Peladon)
- Bernice Summerfield – Secret Origins (10.4)
- Stargate SG-1 – TBA (2.5)

## NOVEMBER

- Doctor Who – Eternal Summer (128, Fifth Doctor/Nyssa)
- Doctor Who: The Lost Stories – The Nightmare Fair
- Doctor Who: The Companion Chronicles – Ringpullworld (4.5, Turlough)
- Cyberman 2 (Box set)

## JANUARY

- Doctor Who – TBA (130)
- Doctor Who: The Lost Stories – Leviathan
- Doctor Who: The Companion Chronicles – The War of Words (4.6, Benny)



*Ever wondered what the people who work regularly on Big Finish productions are really into? Even if you haven't, here's a current snapshot of what's entertaining and amusing the team! In no particular order...*

**Alan Barnes (writer/script editor and cheerleader) on... Red Riding (Channel 4)**

I've been watching this in an aura of insufferable smugness, having written in a *BFI Television Yearbook* article about TV crime series, four long years ago, that "BBC2 or Channel 4 might do well by adapting David Peace's so-called *Red Riding Quartet*." Commissioning executive, drama? Gissa job, I could do that.

**Toby Hrycek-Robinson (sound engineer and chief chef) on... Who Killed Mrs de Ropp? (BBC Four, 2007)**

Three ever-darkening short stories by Saki adapted and directed by Sam Hobkinson with extraordinary invention. It should have been a mess – several different animation techniques dropped sporadically through the live action, characters that turned narrator for a few lines here and there... Somehow it stayed entirely natural and un-gimmicky.

**Alex Mallinson (designer and barefoot bike rider) on... Star Fleet**

This 1980s Saturday morning children's sci-fi puppet epic had a plot worthy of *BSG*, chunky, satisfying miniatures and stars with more charisma than most recent telefantasy. Thanks to the long-awaited DVD, I'm effortlessly transported back to my childhood every time the triumphant music kicks in and stuff starts exploding. Commander Makara is also quite hot.

**Jason Haigh-Ellery (director/executive producer and West End Wendy) on... House**

I love Season Four of *House* – an established show which is very successful takes a huge risk by effectively sidelining three of its lead characters and running the season as if it's a reality TV show... genius!

**David Richardson (producer and hair specialist) on... Mad Men (BBC Four)**

Not wishing to name drop, but as I was saying to Colin Baker yesterday, there's too much good stuff on the telly at the minute. Colin isn't watching *Mad Men*, so I recommended it to him as I'll recommend it to you: a beautifully crafted show that's dripping in exquisite period detail, to the extent that it almost looks like it was shot 45 years ago. This slow-burning drama about the alcoholic, womanizing ad men of Madison Avenue in the 1960s is purely centred on characters and dialogue. There's not a lot of plot, but when something big happens you finally realize that it's been building oh-so-subtly for weeks. But on this show, the journey is much more important than getting there.

**Nicholas Briggs (writer/director/sound designer/executive producer and pitiless machine creature) on... Party Animals (BBC Three)**

I don't want to sound all 'on message' here, but I caught a couple of episodes of this political drama on BBC Three, just by chance. Apart from the fact that the scripts are gripping and beautifully acted across the board, it really did strike me what an inspiring actor Matt Smith is. He has such an incredible range. You feel like anything is possible. Bodes well for the next Doctor, doesn't it? I should say so!

**Barnaby Edwards (writer/director/casting director/producer and well known intellectual) on...**

**The Lady Vanishes (1938)**

I can't think how I managed to get to nearly forty without having seen this gem. It's a wonderful little espionage caper directed by Alfred Hitchcock and starring the incomparable Margaret Lockwood and Michael Redgrave. They really don't make them like this anymore.

**Paul Spragg (producers' assistant and office clown) on... The Mentalist (Five)**

Ever wondered what it would be like if Derren Brown was a detective for the California Bureau of Investigation? No, neither have I. But watching the magnificently charismatic Simon Baker playing Patrick Jane, former 'psychic' and master manipulator turned criminal-catcher, it's easy to see what a laugh it would be. From the creator of the excellent *Rome*, Bruno Heller, *The Mentalist* is a new, fun and clever take on the police procedural, and rightly the biggest new show from the States this season.

**Paul Wilson (web master and Australian song expert) on... Psych**

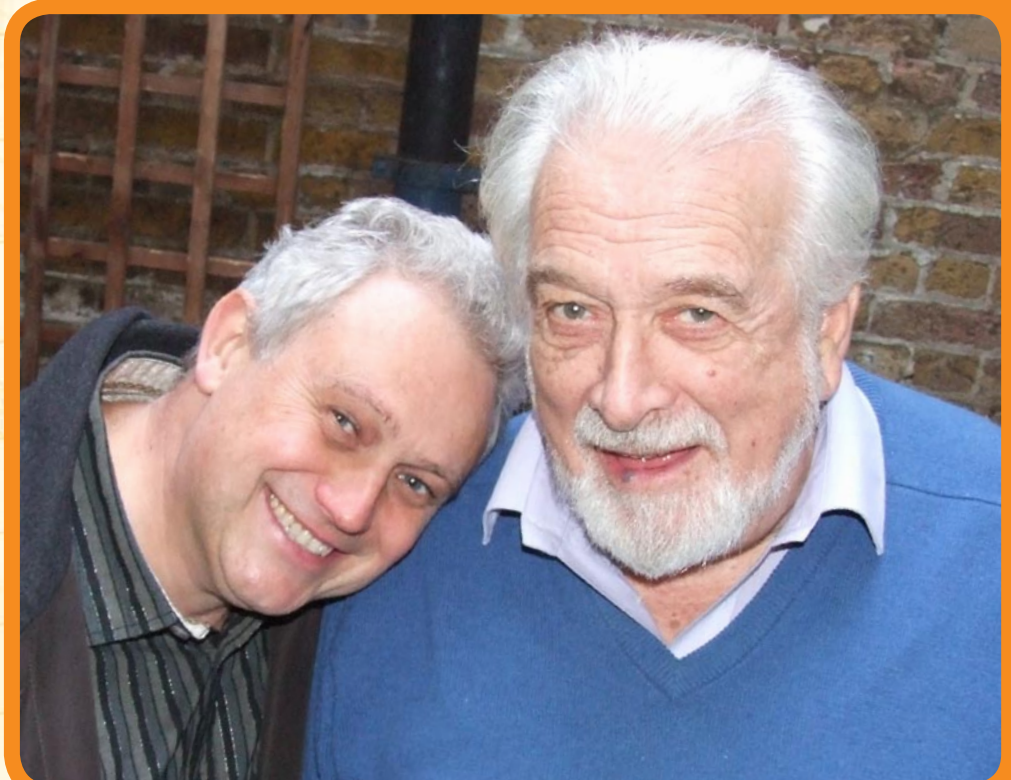
I was speaking with Paul Spragg the other day about programmes we enjoy and *The Mentalist* came up, so I thought to myself "This might be a good thing to talk about in *Vortex*...", but the clever little chap got in before me. This kind of left me at a loose end until I remembered that there is another programme of similar ilk called *Psych*. The series follows the exploits of Shawn Spencer (James Roday), who has developed a keen eye for detail and is now posing as a psychic, which of course is a recipe for disaster. *Psych* is grossly entertaining, extremely funny and well worth checking out.

# THE THREE COMPANIONS



Above: (from left) John Pickard, director Lisa Bowerman, Anneke Wills, writer Marc Platt and producer David Richardson at the Moat for the recording of *The Three Companions*. Marc Platt is kindly holding the wall up to prevent disaster

Right: Russell Floyd and Nicholas Courtney are the best of friends off mic. Floyd plays the villain, Gerry Lenz, facing the Brigadier (Rtd.) in Marc Platt's epic tale



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