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## RETURN OF THE ROBOTS OF DEATH!

Nicola Walker and Toby Hadoke fight alongside the Seventh Doctor

**PLUS!**

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The writer tells  
**Tales from the Vault**

**James Goss**  
Unleashes his  
**Dark Shadows**

**Rob Shearman**  
**Everyone's Just**  
**So So Special**

# DIMENSIONS

11, 12 & 13 NOVEMBER 2011  
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# EDITORIAL

As you join me today, I'm right in the middle of directing some Bakers. Well, not *right* in the middle of it. I haven't said into the studio intercom, 'Hold on guys! Just hang around for fifteen minutes while I write my editorial for *Vortex*'. No. That would be rude. But I did just finish directing Colin Baker with his exciting new companion Lisa Greenwood (Flip! That's the character's name, not an exclamation) in their first adventure yesterday. Today, I am going through schedules for the next two exciting adventures for the Sixth Doctor and Flip (to be recorded over the next two weeks), and I'm finalizing my plans for the next two days, during which I will be directing Tom Baker in two stories which won't be released until 2013. Yes, we plan ahead at Big Finish, don't we?

Also coming up (but in the past for you now) is Big Finish Day. After I finish recording with Tom in Tunbridge Wells, I'll be dashing back to London to get ready for our convention in Barking. Organized by Tenth Planet Events, hopefully it will be (or will have been, by the

time you read this) an enormous success. We're going to do a 'live' recording of a podcast, with an audience. I wonder if that will work out okay. Actually, I'm quite envious of you, you know. You know the answer to that question. I can only guess what went wrong! Perhaps you're reading this and thinking how ironic it is that I sound so chipper, given that I was about to be booed off stage, or have a microphone stand collapse on my head when I was bending down to press 'play' on iTunes to play a clip during the 'live' podcast.

Not for the first time, and probably in common with many fellow **Doctor Who** fans, I'm wishing I did have a real TARDIS, not just the plastic one off of the front of *Doctor Who Adventures*. You know, the one my two-year-old son takes to bed every night. By the morning, he's perfectly recreated the aftermath of that scene in *The Mind Robber*, when the TARDIS breaks apart. Ah, happy memories.

**Nicholas Briggs**

## SNEAK PREVIEWS AND WHISPERS

### Graceless 2

The wicked sisters return as Abby and Zara's fall from grace continues in the second series of Big Finish's original science fiction adventure, **Graceless**. At the end of the last series, Abby and Zara had escaped the evil designs of the space pirate Kreaqpoll, and had been released into the universe by the Grace, the beings that originally created them. Now the sisters flit through time and space, putting things right to atone for the terrible things they have both done – but this time they have baby Joy and Marek along for the ride. It might be an unorthodox family unit but it works, and Abby and Zara have never been happier. But there are those in the universe who want to find the sisters



– people they have wronged, people who want to harness their incredible powers for their own ends. How long can Abby and Zara stay ahead before their past – or future – catches up with them? Writer Simon Guerrier says of the new series, "So long as they're together, Abby and Zara can go anywhere and when with just a single thought. So where are

they off to this time? The huge city crawling across the surface of a planetoid. The people struggling to save their town from the flood. And the dark world where someone lost is waiting..." The first series was just the beginning of the adventure for Abby and Zara, but if there's one thing they've learnt, it's that the universe is dangerous and unpredictable... (Available December 2012)

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# Sherlock Holmes

## Richard Dinnick reminisces about the week that was Sherlock Holmes, series two

### DAY ONE

Director/star Nick Briggs, director Ken Bentley, producer David Richardson and I are assembled early for the pre-match briefing. Today we're recording *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. Knowing that I adapted the play only adds to my excitement as Richard Earl (Watson) arrives in a flurry of understatement. He's astounding; not only does he spend the vast majority of the time in his booth, he is also so dedicated to getting his delivery spot on, he will often ask to do pick-ups when both Nick and Ken are happy!

**Coincidence of the Day:** Mark Gatiss and Steven Moffat's **Sherlock** also starts production.

### DAY TWO

A compact cast is gathered for today's recording of *The Final Problem* and *The Empty House*, including Alan Cox, playing Moriarty. Alan played Watson in the 1987 Barry Levinson film **Young Sherlock Holmes**. Despite (or because of?) the huge number of innuendos we have located in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's writing, all is going swimmingly.

**Coincidence of the Day:** Edward Hardwicke, who played Dr Watson opposite Jeremy Brett's Holmes, died today. We all paused in the studio to remember this fine actor and his many roles.

### DAY THREE

A vast crowd for the recording of *The Reification of Hans Gerber* by George Mann, including the, ahem, Mann himself. We're joined by Andrew Havill, Rebecca Tanwen, John Dorney and James Albrecht, as well as **Doctor Who** stars Dan Starkey and Terry Molloy. Much mirth and colourful language ensues in the afternoon as



Nick wails about playing Holmes, "If only I could play it as me! But I've got to play it as someone intelligent who speaks insanely quickly!"

**Coincidence of the Day:** As I travelled to the studio, it was announced that Baker Street station was closed due to a security alert.

### DAY FOUR

Today it's my adaptation of David Stuart Davies' *The Tangled Skein*. The book's author arrives early and soon John Banks, Barnaby Edwards and Beth Chalmers are in place alongside Giles Watling (son of Jack and brother of Debbie), who has come in to give us his Dracula!

**Coincidence of the Day:** Last night, **Sherlock** won the BAFTA for best TV drama. This morning I bumped into Mark Gatiss on the Tube. We chatted and passed through Baker Street station, which was actually open today!

### DAY FIVE

A bits 'n' bobs day, with David recording lots of interviews. The cast and crew all have plenty to say for themselves; Nick and Richard offer their insights into the characters of Holmes and Watson while, in a mammoth podcast, I remain true to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's unofficial legacy by injecting as much innuendo as possible.

**Coincidence of the Day:** No coincidences today. Instead, as I drive home I reflect on a magnificent week in studio. I can't wait until October to hear the first instalment!

Thank you for bringing back Julie Cox as Mary Shelley for the Eighth Doctor. I'm sure a lot of your customers have been waiting for her return since *The Company of Friends*, and I look forward to listening to the results.

Phil Nadeau

PS: More of Fitz or Izzy wouldn't be seen amiss either.

**Nick:** Cheers, Phil! Julie was brilliant to work with and she and Paul formed a brilliant working relationship. A great recording block, with Barnaby Edwards doing a fine job of bringing some excellent scripts to life.

Just wanted to thank you folks from the bottom of my heart. If I could have Big Finish put directly into my veins, I would! I would buy two of everything you guys make if I could. IOW, sirs, I am hooked.

I've quite a bit of catching up to do. Got divorced and that sort of ordeal can turn one's life upside down. Since then I have built another computer and have begun a monthly purchase of the Eighth Doctor and the Last Colin Baker series. Absolutely wonderful work you all do, and you make this Whovian proud.

Been a fan since *The Ark in Space* scared the tar out of me on a WV PBS station when I was four. Been a huge fan for over thirty years now. Although there was an excitement for the new TV series, I listened in to BBCi as regularly as I could. In the end, I enjoy your work over the new television series any day. No kidding.

So thank you for keeping this old American Whovian tuned in and turned on. It really does mean a lot. Keep up the great work!

JT

**Nick:** Thanks, JT. Your kind of enthusiasm really warms the cockles of our hearts.

Hello there, I wanted you to know that I'm a big fan of your audio dramas, particularly the **Doctor Who** series. On that note, I have a question. Have you ever considered doing a few plays/books with Christopher Eccleston? I know anything near the end of the Eighth Doctor/beginning of the Ninth Doctor era would be a bit sensitive canonically,

but it is clearly implied that the Doctor had at least a few adventures before having met Rose, or even during that instant before Rose accepts his invitation. Christopher Eccleston, like all those who've played the part, is a terrific actor, and I would like to see him involved with Big Finish. I feel he got a little short-changed like Colin Baker, having only one season, and Big Finish seems like the perfect way to explore his particular Doctor a little more. It certainly seemed to be the solution for Colin Baker who, let's be honest, didn't get too many good scripts during his tenure. You fine people at Big Finish changed that, and I would like to see what magic you could work with another fantastic, yet short-lived, Doctor.

Joshua Shelton

PS: Very much looking forward to the new Fourth Doctor adventures.

**Nick:** Chris decided to leave **Doctor Who** and has never expressed a desire to return to it. He was a fabulous Doctor, though, and I would welcome any opportunity to work with him. There are no plans for us to do so, and the terms of our licence with Audiogo do not permit us to do anything beyond the Eighth Doctor. However, never say never!

Just an odd query — does Big Finish think it's likely or possible for the download packs to include PDF versions of the CD booklets in the future? I ask purely out of selfishness — I live in Australia and the CD subscription is just ever-so-slightly out of my price bracket (also, I'm never sure where I'd keep them all).

Just thought I'd ask. Keep up the great work, regardless.

Sean Houston

PS: Sorry if this has been covered in the podcast, I never get a chance to listen to them.

**Nick:** Always happy to cover queries, no matter how many times they've been asked. It's always new for the person asking. We make the CD booklets as a special bonus for our loyal, long-term CD buyers. There are no plans to make them available as PDFs for you lovely downloaders. We'd like to keep something unique for our CD

purchasers, especially since they pay more. Hope you understand. However, all our policies are under constant review.

Just had to write and tell you how delighted I am with the production of *Seven to One*. It was such a thrill to hear something I'd written being performed by professional actors.

It was a great idea to spread the eight sections over the entire disc. Although it made my heart jump when I first listened, I thought something had gone wrong and the rest of the story had been omitted from the disc!

I thought Nicholas Briggs did a great job of capturing the essence of six of the Doctors, William Russell captured the feel of the First Doctor era in his segment and then the two of them did a fine double act as the two entities to end the story and, indeed, the disc. As a fan of the whole series, new and old, I was thrilled to hear William Russell taking part and equally thrilled with the kudos I got with my kids who were amazed that Nicholas 'voice of the Daleks' Briggs was taking part in my story.

The sound design and music was great. Great idea having the distinctive, memorable intro at the beginning of each segment to ease the listener back into the story. The sound of the wind and the squelchy 'thwumps' really captured the cold, damp, grey void.

And I must tell you guys know what a great job the script editor, Xanna, did with her constructive criticism. As I listened to the story, I appreciated how the touches she asked me to make to the story really did enhance it. So please pass on my thanks to all those involved.

Simon Miller

PS: If, after hearing this production, Steven Moffat should get in touch and ask for my contact details, you have my permission to pass them on...

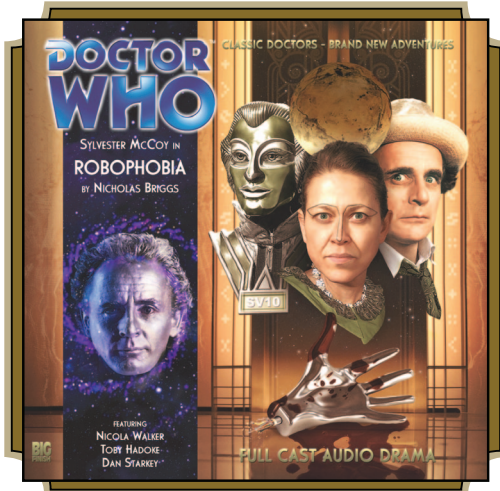
**Nick:** Thanks, Simon. I decided to do the other Doctor sections in that story because William Russell doesn't really know anything about the other Doctors' eras. His First Doctor stuff is excellent, though! And if Steven asks, we'll pass your details on. But... er... join the queue!

# LIV FROM THE STUDIO

Nicola Walker chats to Dan Tostevin about playing Liv Chenka in much-anticipated *Robots of Death* sequel *Robophobia*, and her secret *Doctor Who* past...

Asked whether there are any similarities between her character in BBC spy drama **Spooks** (lonely Ruth Evershed, who for years never spoke of her feelings for her boss) and her character in *Robophobia* (Liv Chenka, who's just lost the only man who ever loved her as the play begins), Nicola Walker replies, "Yeah. I think there's something about me...!"

Neither seems to be very lucky in love. "I think what happens is I tend to play women who are very, very good at their jobs," she suggests. "And then this awful thing seems to be that, in drama, women who are very good at their jobs, if they're not stunningly beautiful, it's like their jobs become the thing that replaces the



relationships in their lives. And I think Liv is a bit like that.

"Although I think being stuck on a ship, I can't imagine how you would become emotionally involved with people. So I can see how you would become withdrawn, and throw yourself into your work. I don't think there's anything wrong with her. She strikes me as someone that you'd have a good time with – she's clever and she's funny. I

don't know why this is the only man to take interest! Maybe he just looked at her a bit more than the others."

How does Liv react to the Seventh Doctor? "It's fantastic, because what's weird is that as an actor coming into it, even if you're not a proper superfan of **Doctor Who**, it's a cultural, iconic reference, so of course I know who Doctor Who is, but you're playing a character who obviously has no idea who he is."

Nicola explained in the booths earlier that she wasn't that familiar with **Doctor Who**, but it seems like she's really engaged with today's script. "I think the truth is, secretly..." she says, before trailing off. "Oh, I'm sure everyone's got the same story about **Doctor Who**, and that's what's amazing about the longevity of it."

No, go on, what's your **Doctor Who** story? "When I was a little girl, I loved **Doctor Who**," she laughs, "but I was terrified of it. I was absolutely, properly frightened."





Nicola Walker with Sylvester McCoy at the recording of *Robophobia*

When did Nicola watch the show? “Tom Baker,” she recalls, before dropping her voice to a whisper to add, “and Sylvester as well!” Have you told him? “No! I’m quite old, I was quite grown-up when I watched him. But I used to hide behind the sofa – until quite a grown-up age!”

Did people actually hide behind sofas? We always assumed that was a myth. “No, it’s true,” Nicola grins. “I was actually terrified. I was properly terrified of Daleks. And you know the cliché of when your dad turns round and goes, ‘Yeah, but they couldn’t get you ‘cos you’d just run up the stairs’ – my dad did all those things, and was merciless to me about how I was frightened of it. He used to tell me to go and watch **Little House on the Prairie** instead if I couldn’t handle it.

“And I do love things that are set in the future. In outer worlds, in other worlds. I have got a real soft spot for that stuff. Because I think you can be epic and operatic and emotional with it, in a way that you can’t be with a kitchen-sink drama. You have to adhere to the rules of everyday, but with this stuff, you can go anywhere. And that usually means you can go somewhere more emotional and funny.”

Has Nicola watched **Doctor Who** since it returned to TV in 2005? “I’ve watched some

of the new stuff,” she nods. “The episode that threw me back to being seven again was the one with the kids – you know, ‘Are you my mummy?’ [2005’s *The Empty Child* and *The Doctor Dances*]. I mean, that has actually slightly haunted me. And I’d just had a baby, and the whole thing of, ‘Oh yeah, children are evil!’ – that was... yes. Not good. And I thought, ‘I’m a grown woman, I shouldn’t find this disturbing!’, but I still do. It was really scary. It was properly scary, wasn’t it?”

Yeah. We like the bit where... “And Dervla Kirwan!” Nicola interrupts, with a sudden gasp. “Her episode! I saw her episode [2008’s *The Next Doctor*]! She was sat like this sort of queen with all these Cyber things. That was good. That was fun. But obviously I didn’t hide behind the sofa.” Really, though? “I swear I didn’t,” she asserts, a little bit unconvincingly.

Before Nicola returns to the studio, we want to know more about *Robophobia*. “It is actually rather beautiful, I think,” she smiles. “You presume you know where this story’s going, but you’re completely wrong. I was completely wrong when I read it! It’s a really lovely moment, when you realise. I went, ‘Oh, that’s rather beautiful’...”

*Doctor Who: Robophobia is out this month*

# Toby OR

**Toby Hadoke looks back on his many guises in Big Finish audios, with gentle prompting from Paul Spragg**

Hello Toby. Today you're in doing *Robophobia*. How did you get the part?

My agent phoned me up and said, 'Those Big Finish people want you back' so I said, 'All right then'. You're supposed to go, 'Oh, well, let me see the script and I'll consider the part' but I was having a **Doctor Who**-y week. I'd done some commentaries on the Sunday, and I'm filming a documentary about a **Doctor Who** story for a DVD on the Wednesday and the dates were the Monday and the Tuesday. And I thought, 'Oh, I'm free!' and I put the phone down and thought, 'I should have gone "Let's negotiate".' And then the script got lost in the post. It's gone the same way as a **Cracker** and **Juliet Bravo** box set I ordered, which also had gone AWOL. So there's a postman somewhere in Crouch End who's enjoying himself watching some old police procedurals whilst reading the sequel to *The Robots of Death!* It's a cracking part. And I'm getting to do lots of dramatic acting and I get a cliffhanger; there's nothing quite like a cliffhanger.

You've recently done *Lost Story Hexagora* too. It's based on a story that I read, I remember, in my university halls of residence. *Doctor Who Magazine* had the breakdown of the story by Hazel Adair and Peter Ling and I never thought, 'I might be in that one day'. It's one of those stories rescued from the back of somebody's cupboard, and it's good, it's really nice. I've worked with Sylvester McCoy before in theatre many years ago and I've bumped into Colin loads of times over the years, so it was nice to get one with Peter Davison. I'd not had much contact with him,

so to be with Peter Davison was a bit of a thrill. And to play Janet Fielding's love interest, ha! Brilliant! I really liked her, really warmed to her. She's a force of nature, but a really good-natured one. So she's a force of good nature, and a laugh and a hoot and just had us in stitches. I think it's a good script and it's got a feel of a sort of medieval romp. It's quite a nice mix of styles; it starts off as a bit of a conspiracy thing.

What brought you to people's attention was stage and then radio show *Moths Ate My Doctor Who Scarf*.

The radio version is different to the live show so you should do both. The radio version is Sony award-nominated, which is no small feat for a low-budget BBC7 production; that was an astonishing end to the whole process. The fact that it got a radio thing in the first place, and Colin Baker and Louise Jameson agreed to do it – and, it has to be said, James Quinn, who's got no **Doctor Who** connection at all. He's brilliant, James Quinn is, I think he really makes the show. **Moths Ate My Doctor Who Scarf** is a two-part radio series that's a journey through me starting watching **Doctor Who** as a kid when I was four when my dad was gone, and growing up watching **Doctor Who**. It concentrates a lot on that awful period when **Doctor Who** was ripped from the schedules and mocked by everybody, and then **Doctor Who** coming back when I'd got my own kids and was a dad myself; the story comes full circle.

Yes, it is about **Doctor Who** but it's been described very kindly as a sort of **Fever Pitch** with Daleks and Cybermen, so you don't have to



# NOT Toby

know about **Doctor Who** to enjoy it – although I'm sure that's not a problem for people reading this magazine! And if people haven't heard it, it doesn't take the mickey out of **Doctor Who** at all, it's very affectionate. And I think, from what I've been told, you will recognise elements of yourself in it, which is why it's been so successful. It's shot through with love and affection and it's good. Otherwise I wouldn't still be doing it six years later. I keep saying every year, every year's supposed to be my last. I'm a bit like John Nathan-Turner!

I'm touring a new show called **Now I Know My BBC**, which I did in Edinburgh last year, which is more of the same but it broadens the remit a little bit. It's a heartfelt love letter to the BBC and to popular culture, and I think most **Doctor Who** fans appreciate that to know anything about TV, we get called geeks, whereas if you know a lot about films you're a film buff; if you know a lot about food you're a gourmand. Well, popular culture's there and popular culture's important, and popular culture actually has more influence than anything else. Because it's there, we don't have to go out and get it; it seeps into us. So I'm touring



that, but I'm also touring **Moths Ate My Doctor Who Scarf**. But I am doing it less and less frequently, so I would say, if you haven't seen it, I'd see it pretty soon because the horse is long dead and I can't flog it for much longer.

This month, we can also hear you in the **Drama Showcase** *Unintelligent Design* by Geoffrey Beevers.

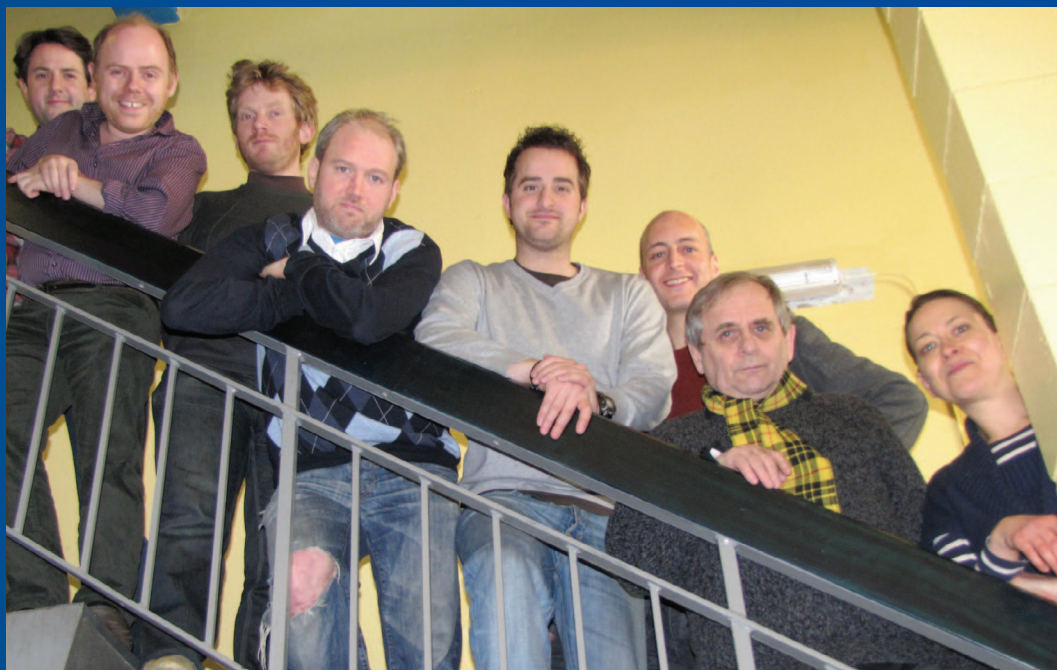
It reminded me of a sketch I'd written for something I used to do called **The Unbroadcastable Radio Show**, which was a monthly satire show at the Comedy Store, and I did that for about five, six years before I got tired and other things took over. And one of my favourite sketches I ever wrote was one where this bloke brings the Earth back to the shop he bought it from because the Earth is faulty, and the shop is God's shop. Mine was just laughs and things; Geoffrey Beevers had done a similar thing but it was about people creating Earth in a lab and entering it into a competition. But it's all about design flaws and taking a slightly sly, satirical look at ideas about creation and humanity and all that sort of thing, and it's a very witty and intelligent idea; there's an intelligent design to the play! Geoffrey Beevers is obviously a master of vocal acting, and part of

doing this job is you always learn from the best, so that was an opportunity not to be missed as well, because he's got an extraordinary voice.

And let's not forget your readings from Rob Shearman's book, **Love Songs for the Shy and Cynical**.

I've done lots of short story readings. I do a lot of voiceover work, including doing a lot of short stories for Shortbread Short Stories. But let's not kid ourselves, I know Rob very well, I've written a book with him, we've got another three coming out; I would hope he wouldn't have given me the job if I hadn't been able to do it. And I'm quite quick. If my voiceover agent gets a call saying, 'We need somebody, we haven't got much time or money...' 'Oh, Toby will do it in five minutes.' I know Rob, he imagined my voice doing it, and he'd run it by Nick Briggs, who said I had the right sort of tone for Rob's quirky style. Hopefully that's the sort of thing people can take with them on car journeys and listen to on bus journeys; Rob's stories read themselves in a sense, they communicate so brilliantly. And that was another jolly nice day! Or half-day, because I'm quick.

*Doctor Who: Robophobia is out this month*



Matt Addis, Dan Starkey, John Dorney, Toby Hadoke, William Hazell, Nicholas Pegg, Sylvester McCoy, Nicola Walker

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# DARK SHADOWS



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# The Trask at Hand

Writer/producer James Goss discusses his latest foray into the world of **Dark Shadows**, *The Poisoned Soul*

This month sees the release of *The Poisoned Soul*; what's it all about?

**Dark Shadows** is full of brilliant loose ends. One of them is poor Charity Trask. She's the lonely daughter of an evil priest who becomes possessed by the ghost of a Victorian music hall star... and the show moves on and forgets all about her. Poor cow, it's never resolved.

So, the suggestion from producer Stuart Manning was to find out what it would be like forty years on if she was running a school and occasionally bursting into show tunes.

Naturally, it being **Dark Shadows**, she's only possessed at times of great supernatural evil... and this time it's because something is stalking the grounds of her school, sucking the souls from her pupils. And who better to be possessed by at such a time of crisis than dear old Pansy Faye, cockney chanteuse, clairvoyant and good time gal?

This is your second **Dark Shadows** audio; how do you decide which character to write for, and do you find stories easily suggest themselves?

Both my stories have been suggested by Stuart – pointing at a character and going, 'What about her?'. There are so many brilliant, lovely, mad and tragic people littered through the long history of Collinsport, many of them with unfinished tales or wonderfully unexplored back-stories. It's like a supernatural version of that town in **Murder, She Wrote** – undead corpses everywhere!

My first story (*The Doll House*) was based on the fact that they just happened to keep someone's wife up in the attic. As you do. And she went mad. As you would. But it's just one of those details that the show, with its frantic pace, just doesn't have time to explore – I mean, if your husband left you for an Egyptian fire goddess, wouldn't you want your story told?

Have you spent a long time researching through endless episodes of the series?

Oh, it's brilliantly addictive. Especially on long train journeys where you'll go from hooting at some vast, glorious story idea to gasping at a



Nancy Barrett performs the voice of Charity Trask

truly grim death scene. It's a gorgeous treasure trove to discover – a thousand episodes of brutality and madness.

Which character would you like to write for next?

Someone on the Facebook page suggested we do something about *The House By The Sea*. It's this house that people in Collinsport go to, you know, for a break from things, a quiet weekend away raising a demon or reanimating a corpse. I'd love to write something set there... maybe having it as one of those weekend holiday homes with horrific messages from the dead scrawled in the guest book.

Alongside the splendid Nancy Barrett, you've got Roy 'The Invaders' Thinnin in this story...

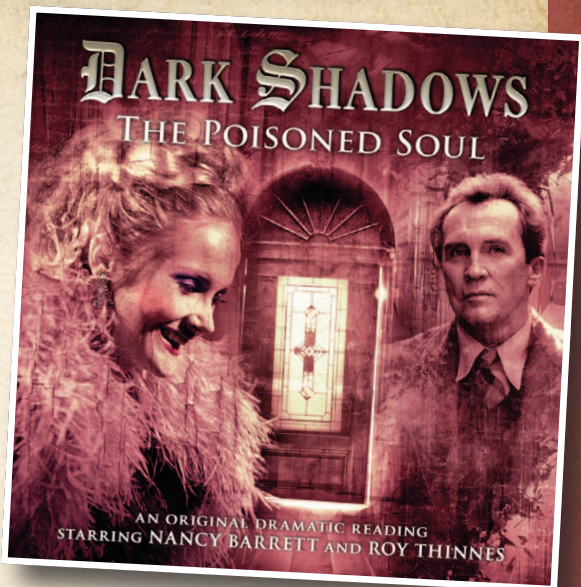
We were so lucky to get Roy. Jim Pierson, who is in charge of **Dark Shadows** in LA, knows everyone and asked Roy if he'd like to do it. He was only too happy. Which is just oddly amazing. Listening to him singing hymns and fighting supernatural forces and thinking, 'But you were a bit of my childhood! You fought aliens!'

Nancy Barrett is a **Dark Shadows** stalwart and plays the dual roles of Miss Trask and Pansy Faye the showgirl with gusto, vim and vigour. She's certainly not restrained and has kept the perfection of Pansy Faye's cockernee accent from the original 1960s shows. **Doctor Who** fans will know exactly what I mean if I say, 'Coo, I've never seen anything like it in all my puff. You wouldn't want that served up with yer liver and onions.'

You and fellow producer Joe Lidster have been trying to make **Dark Shadows** accessible to newcomers; what will **Dark Shadows** virgins find to enjoy in this story?

Well, firstly, if they're **Doctor Who** fans they're utter fools if they haven't already bought Nicola Bryant in *The Blind Painter* and Matthew Waterhouse in *The Creeping Fog*. Nicola was wonderful and really enjoyed playing an entirely different kind of femme fatale, and Matthew is an utter revelation in *The Creeping Fog* – it's a wonderfully silky performance full of mystery and vague menace. No, really, buy them both.

The whole attempt with this batch of **Dark Shadows** is to try where possible to do some stories that bring in people from the other Big Finish ranges while being great tales for existing fans. We really, really want Big Finish regulars to be all ready and excited before the movie comes out next year.



*The Poisoned Soul* is an example of this – at heart it's a good old spooky mystery set in a haunted school. But it also forms part of a much larger, weirder, wonderfuller narrative – the terrible story of the awful Trask family. Charity has the worst dad in literature – a truly slimy priest with a habit of disposing of wives and making pacts with dark forces... but at the start of this story, she thinks he's safely in hell. She could well be wrong about that one. There's a rule in **Dark Shadows** which is also true about **Doctor Who** – if you're fabulous, you don't stay dead for long...

There are also plans for more full cast dramas and a special audiobook, *The Crimson Pearl*; what can you tell us about them?

This year is the 45th anniversary of **Dark Shadows**. And, while I can tell you very little about the full cast drama as that's Stuart Manning's looming province, it features the return of **Dark Shadows'** most audacious villain ever, the utterly magnificently potty Count Petofi.

*The Crimson Pearl* is something very different – it tells a story spanning three centuries and involving as many characters from the vast history of **Dark Shadows** as possible. It's a bit like *Dimensions in Time* but without the gherkins. It's a good old spooky romp, with a cursed jewel and a very high body count.

*Dark Shadows: The Poisoned Soul* is out this month



# Rob Seeker's Allowance

He's back! Award-winning writer extraordinaire Rob Shearman introduces his latest opus: **Everyone's Just So So Special**

Your last book, **Love Songs for the Shy and Cynical**, took an off-centre look at the ups, downs and oddities of humanity's finest emotion. What links this new collection of short stories?

Aha! Well, this time around it's history. You see, when I was a little kid, I absolutely loved history. I sort of loved the *certainly* of it, that I could look in an encyclopaedia, and there were all these Facts that had taken place, with Dates attached to them. I used to find it very reassuring – and I'd learn by heart long lists of all the kings and queens of England, and recite them in order at a moment's notice.

(I can still do it, actually. Oh yes. From 802 AD, with King Egbert of Wessex onwards, I can rattle them out at great speed. And sometimes still do, in my head, if I'm trying to take my mind off ongoing dental surgery.) All these people in the history books, all with their self-contained stories to tell, all very neat and easy.

Then, when I got just a little bit older, it began to occur to me that these people were all *dead*. And that made them all

just that much more exciting still. Especially if I could read in the history books that they'd died in particularly spectacular or painful ways. (I wasn't necessarily a very nice child.)

It was only around the time I studied history as a teenager that I began to realise I'd got it all wrong. That there was no certainty to history at all. That the essays I was being required to write for A-level weren't about all those Facts and Dates, but about arguing instead my interpretation of records that were often biased, contradictory, or unexplained. Henry VIII married six wives, but no two books

I studied ever seemed to agree whether he was a nice jolly fat man with bad luck in the romance stakes, or some gout-ridden psychopath with a penchant for cutting people's heads off. And suddenly I found out that everything had changed – that all that past that I'd taken such comfort in and made lists out of, it was all up for grabs.

I still adore history, but now I'm fascinated by the very ambiguity of it. That some theories pass in and out of fashion – that



some *people* pass in and out of fashion, actually, even though they're still all utterly dead and haven't the faintest idea about it. My stories are usually somewhat weird, and there's nothing much weirder than this – that the past is so *fluid*. So it seemed like a particularly exciting thing to write about. To come up with twenty-one stories (one for each of the Anno Domini centuries) and to have them be *about* history. Not set within historical periods – there's not a one that's not either modern day or futuristic – but instead to be concerned with the way we perceive the past. The way that our memory keeps on changing about things we see around us, let alone the change of things before we were even born.

So you'll have comedy stories, about kittens which start developing a taste for hunting only endangered species. You'll get horror stories, about a particularly nasty Christmas present a little girl gets that transforms her into her dead grandfather. There are tales of past selves stripped from your body each birthday and kept as zombies in your attic, or of every year in history preserved as a painting within some apocalyptic art gallery. Children who fall in love with the dying patches of sky above their house, grown-ups who develop fetishes for Jehovah's Witnesses, and plagues of children at magic shows eating their own heads off.

And, just for fun, I'd link each of the stories with a time chart, chronicling a history of failure and mediocrity and error, from 0 AD right up to the modern day – and the story of that chronicler himself, and how he's driven ever more mad by the weight of all those mistakes, and by all those people who have been lost and forgotten through the centuries. Because, really, when you think about everyone, and our standing in the unfolding of time, we're all just so so special.

**What things have inspired you in this collection? Where have the ideas come from?**

I've travelled around a lot! I've been around the world researching this book for a few years now. To some of the great historical civilisations – Egypt, Rome – to see this collision between History Then and Modern Day Now. I took on a job as a lecturer in Dostoevsky just so I could get to visit Russia, and see first-hand how the people of St Petersburg react to the mighty shadows of their grim

past now being propped up by Kentucky Fried Chicken and Pizza Hut.

**Is it your intention to come up with something quirky and strange every time or does it just always seem to happen?**

Oh no, it's never necessarily the idea at all! And there is space for several stories in the book that are really a bit more sober and realistic. But part of the fun is – especially if you read it in order, because the tales do often bounce off each other and reflect back – that you should never really *know* whether what you're reading will mutate into something funny and bizarre, or scary and shocking, or keep its feet squarely on the ground and be quite sweet. It's the not knowing that makes them all a bit quirky, even the unquirky ones.

**What endears you so much to the short story form?**

It's just so playful. If you write longer stories, you're committing your readers to an established tone, to a stable plotline, to



characters they need to be reassured by. But with the short story, you can be just that bit more surprising, and you can try to dazzle a little with so much more variety. Safe in the knowledge, I think, that like a box of chocolates, if you aren't enjoying one with a nut in it, there'll be something with a chewy centre just around the corner. I've spent the last few years championing the short story – it's so often seen as the poorer stunted cousin of the novel. But within just a few thousand words you can create entire new worlds – strange, absurd, funny and frightening worlds – and they're just so much richer for the way you have to concentrate on them with economy. Every word matters.

### Which stories are you most proud of in this collection and why?

I think *Cold Snap* might amuse a lot of people. I think that's a nice mixture of funny and scary, with a very sinister Santa Claus and weird reindeer stuff in it. *Dead Romans* was written on holiday visiting the Vatican and Coliseum, and I hadn't meant to work at all – my wife was very patient whilst I kept on slinking away from her as we pored over thousands-of-years-old ruins to write down jokes in my notebook. *The Big Boy's Big Box of Tricks* requires a very impossible facial expression to be used at great length, and I wrote most of it in St James' Park – the gurning required for me to try to describe it made people leave my park bench. My favourite at the moment may

be *A History of Broken Things*, which feels very sweet and personal, but still gets in a chance to mock the Leonardo di Caprio **Titanic** movie for a thousand words or so.

### Which stories do you think will raise an eyebrow or two?

*Granny's Grinning* is a very dark and disturbing story, which has already been published in the world-renowned annual **Best New Horror** anthology alongside Stephen King. *Taboo* is a strange one, as the title suggests trying to confront head-on what aspects of love we historically find unacceptable, and why – and does involve a marriage between a woman and a very unromantic camel. (Technically it's a civil partnership, really.) I was very honoured recently when *History Becomes You* was nominated for the *Sunday Times* EPG Award, which is the biggest award for short fiction in the world – and that's a very controversial story about recent historical events, and the way that if we refuse to move on from them and let them be history, we'll forever live within their shadows.

### You've won multiple awards for both **Love Songs** and its predecessor, **Tiny Deaths**. Are you preparing for a hat trick?

You can never write for awards. It's madness. It's hard enough just writing stories as it is, hoping they're funny and fresh and entertaining, without looking over your shoulder wondering whether you'll get special attention for them. I've been extraordinarily lucky. **Tiny Deaths** winning the World Fantasy Award in retrospect feels a bit like a life-changing thing; it meant that I found an audience for a medium that doesn't get a lot of attention in literary circles, and I could write short stories to my heart's content. (It's an extraordinarily ugly award, by the way – it's HP Lovecraft's head cast in silver resin, and Lovecraft was not an attractive man. Indeed, his head looks not unlike a squidgy bum.) I thought that would be my one bite of the award apple, so I'm especially delighted that **Love Songs** did so well on both sides of the Atlantic, picking up the Shirley Jackson Award, the British Fantasy Award, and the Edge Hill Reader's Prize. I'd love **Everyone's Just So So Special** to excite the judges again, of course I would. But principally I just hope that it excites the readers. The Big Finish audience for my last book have been so kind and supportive, and I've been so touched by their enthusiasm. I think I owe them another good read, and I just want this next book to pay that debt.

*Everyone's Just So So Special* is out this month





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# FORTHCOMING RELEASES

## JULY 2011

**Doctor Who:** *Robophobia* (149, Seventh Doctor)

**Doctor Who - The Lost Stories:** *Earth Aid* (2.6, Seventh Doctor, Ace & Raine)

**Doctor Who - The Companion Chronicles:**

*Tales from the Vault* (6.01, First, Second, Third and Fourth Doctors)

**Dark Shadows:** 19 - *The Poisoned Soul* (Nancy Barrett)

**Dark Shadows:** 20 - *The Lost Girl* (Kathryn Leigh Scott)

**Drama Showcase:** 4 - *Unintelligent Design*

**Everyone's Just So So Special** by Robert Shearman (Special Leatherbound, Leatherbound and Hardback)

## AUGUST 2011

**Doctor Who:** *Recorded Time and Other Stories* (150, Sixth Doctor and Peri)

**Doctor Who - The Companion Chronicles:** *The Rocket Men* (6.02, First Doctor)

**Doctor Who - Short Trips:** *Volume 4* (2 CDs, various readers)

**Doctor Who - The Companion Chronicles:** *The Specials Box Set* (*The Three Companions, The Mists of Time, Freakshow*)

**Dark Shadows:** 21 - *The Crimson Pearl*

## SEPTEMBER 2011

**Doctor Who:** *The Doomsday Quatrain* (151, Seventh Doctor)

**Doctor Who:** *House of Blue Fire* (152, Seventh Doctor)

**Doctor Who - The Companion Chronicles:**

*The Memory Cheats* (6.03, Second Doctor)

**Bernice Summerfield Box Set 1:** *Epoch*

## OCTOBER 2011

**Doctor Who:** *The Silver Turk* (153, Eighth Doctor and Mary Shelley)

**Doctor Who - The Companion Chronicles:**

*The Many Deaths of Jo Grant* (6.04, Third Doctor)

**Doctor Who - The Lost Stories:** *The Elite* (3.1, Fifth Doctor, Tegan and Nyssa)

**Sherlock Holmes:** *The Final Problem/The Empty House* (2.1)

## NOVEMBER 2011

**Doctor Who:** *The Witch from the Well* (154, Eighth Doctor and Mary Shelley)

**Doctor Who - The Companion Chronicles:** *The First Wave* (6.05, First Doctor)

**Doctor Who - The Lost Stories:** *Hexagora* (3.2, Fifth Doctor, Tegan and Nyssa)

**The Big Finish Companion:** Volume 1 by Richard Dinnick (hardback)

**Sherlock Holmes:** *The Raification of Hans Gerber* (2.2)

## DECEMBER 2011

**Doctor Who:** *Army of Death* (154, Eighth Doctor and Mary Shelley)

**Doctor Who:** *The Five Companions* - Subscriber Special (Fifth Doctor, Nyssa, Ian, Steven, Sara and Polly)

**Doctor Who - The Companion Chronicles:** *Beyond the Ultimate Adventure* (6.06, Sixth Doctor)

**Doctor Who - The Lost Stories:** *The Children of Seth* (3.3, Fifth Doctor, Tegan and Nyssa)

**Sherlock Holmes:** *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (2.3)

**Graceless:** *Series 2 Box Set*

## JANUARY 2012

**Doctor Who:** TBA (155, Sixth Doctor and Flip)

**Doctor Who - The Fourth Doctor Adventures:** TBA (1.1, Fourth Doctor and Leela)

**Doctor Who - The Lost Stories:** *The Fourth Doctor Box Set* (*Foe From the Future* + TBA; Fourth Doctor and Leela)

**Doctor Who - The Companion Chronicles:** *The Anachronauts* (6.06, First Doctor)

**Sherlock Holmes:** *The Tangled Skein* (4.4)

## FEBRUARY 2012

**Doctor Who:** TBA (156, Sixth Doctor and Flip)

**Doctor Who - The Fourth Doctor Adventures:** TBA (1.2, Fourth Doctor and Leela)

**Doctor Who - The Companion Chronicles:** *The Selachian Gambit* (6.07, Second Doctor)

**Bernice Summerfield Box Set 2:** *Road Trip*

## MARCH 2012

**Doctor Who:** TBA (156, Sixth Doctor and Flip)

**Doctor Who - The Fourth Doctor Adventures:** TBA (1.3, Fourth Doctor and Leela)

**Doctor Who - The Companion Chronicles:** *Binary* (6.08, Third Doctor)

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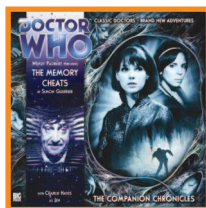
## APRIL 2012

**Doctor Who:** TBA (156, Fifth Doctor, Tegan, Nyssa and Turlough)

**Doctor Who - The Fourth Doctor Adventures:** TBA (1.3, Fourth Doctor and Leela)

**Doctor Who - The Companion Chronicles:** *The Wanderer* (6.08, First Doctor)

**Iris Wildthyme Series 3 Box Set** (Three full cast adventures)



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**BBC**

# ALL MY VAULT

Writer Jonathan Morris brings news of a rather different kind of Companion Chronicle, *Tales from the Vault*

Hello Jonny. What exactly is *Tales from the Vault*?

Hello Vortex. *Tales from the Vault* is the first release in the sixth series of the **Companion Chronicles** range of **Doctor Who** audios.

However, unlike most of the stories in the range, it's not based around one of the Doctor's companions relating an adventure. Instead, it concerns two members of the UNIT special ops team, Captain Ruth Matheson and Warrant Officer Charlie Sato. Charlie has just

been assigned to UNIT's secret archive of extra-terrestrial artefacts, informally

known as 'The Museum of Terrors'. We join

the story as Ruth, the curator of the

museum, takes Charlie on a

guided tour of the exhibits –

four of which concern the

Doctor and his companions.

The companions in question being Jo

Grant, Zoe Heriot, Romana and Steven

Taylor (as portrayed by Katy Manning, Wendy

Padbury, Mary Tamm and Peter Purves respectively), each

of whom makes a cameo appearance in this story. Jo Grant's tale concerns a military jacket bought on the King's Road, Zoe's features East End gangsters, Romana's involves a surrealist painting, and Steven's finds him at the Battle of Spion Kop during the Boer War.

Essentially it's an anthology of twist-in-the-tail stories, along similar lines to **Rod Serling's Night Gallery** or Orson Welles' **The Black Museum**. So for your money you get four stories with four **Doctor Who** companions. Bargain!



Daphne Ashbrook and Yee Jee Tso are back; how did you decide what types of character they should play?

Are there any similarities with Grace Holloway and Chang Lee?

Ruth is the voice of experience; she's seen good people die, and has become quite tough and cynical as a result. Charlie

is a new recruit, keen to impress but naive

and foolhardy. While Ruth can instruct Charlie about the



*Yee Jee Tso and Daphne Ashbrook, working together again*

dangers and responsibilities of curating UNIT's secret museum, Charlie brings a sense of wonder to the proceedings.

When writing it, I didn't really think in terms of Grace Holloway or Chang Lee; I daresay there will be echoes of those characters, just because they're played by the same actors. Ruth is what Grace would be like if her life had taken a wrong turning that night in 1999, Charlie is what Chang would be like if he'd been sent to a military academy rather than getting mixed up with gangs in San Francisco.

How did you end up writing multiple different stories with different companions, all in 60 minutes? Masochism?

A sort of masochism. I do enjoy it when I receive a brief and think, 'There's absolutely no way that can be made to work'. I enjoy the challenge. And I like doing something that hasn't been done before, breaking new ground in my own unassuming way.

The original brief didn't stipulate that the companions should be given different stories,



but I thought the only way to make it work would be to give them each their own tale. The difficulty then was that I had to come up with four stories, and find some kind of way of linking them together in the end. It's the sort of thing which can get very complicated very quickly if you try to be too clever, so the challenge was actually to keep things simple.

The brief was to tell a story about a member of UNIT's special ops division, a soldier who goes around after attempted alien invasions clearing things up, recovering any bits of alien technology that happen to be lying around and putting out cover stories. The

story would include cameos from three of the Doctor's companions. This quickly became four companions, and the soldier from the special ops division became two soldiers, one a young man, one a slightly older woman, and both American, so they could be played by Daphne Ashbrook and Yee Jee Tso.

It was my idea to make it an 'anthology'-type show, setting it in a museum of artefacts, and I decided on the selection of the companions. I went for a mix of voices, choosing one companion for each of the first four Doctors.

How difficult is it to get to the essence of a companion in a shorter period of time than usual? Do you have a favourite to write for? Each of the companions has a particular quirk, an idiosyncrasy, and so I used that as a shortcut to get into the character. Jo is quite dotty and clumsy, Zoe is precocious, Romana is haughty and Steven is quick-tempered. I'll admit it was a challenge, both to get the character's voice and to tell a short story, in the time available. I'm reluctant to pick a favourite but if I had to I'd choose Jo, because the character has such warmth and humour.

Would you be interested in a second *Tales from the Vault*?

I'd be delighted to be asked, though I'd be a little nervous at the prospect of having to come up with another four stories; I mean, I have lots of ideas for **Doctor Who** stories, but I'm not sure I want to use them up so quickly! But I think it would be great if we heard more from Ruth and Charlie and learned about some of the other exhibits in the Museum of Terrors; the format of *Tales from the Vault* definitely lends itself to anthology storytelling.

*Tales from the Vault* is out this month



Left - Daphne Ashbrook; Above - Katy Manning and Yee Jee Tso

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