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THE BIG FINISH MAGAZINE



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EDITORIAL

It's a bit busy at the moment. Nick is locked away in a room, writing a new adventure for the Fourth Doctor and Leela. We occasionally let him have some soup and a glass of fizzy pop, but apart from that he is allowed no human contact. We need words, Briggs, more words! (Actually, I'm being silly... Nick has delivered draft one of the script and it's absolutely lovely – after thirty-four years we get to find out what happened immediately after *The Talons of Weng-Chiang!*)

And we're seeing a lot of Tom Baker at the moment – at least, I am, and so is Ken Bentley. Nick, of course, is locked in that room... We've just recorded another episode with Tom, with three more to follow in August, and a whopping seven days to follow after that in early September. And we're having a ball with these. Tom is such a huge pleasure to work with, and he's bringing so much enthusiasm and

dedication to the productions that it feels like something very special indeed.

More details will be announced at the end of August, when most of the season one story titles and writers are revealed. I can promise a mix of stories set in the past, present and future (not necessarily in that order), with new monsters and old monsters, new enemies and old enemies, and new places and old places. Oh, I'm itching to reveal it all – but I can't.

Of course, the series is going to be launched in January, with both Tom and Louise – plus a host of guest stars and behind-the-scenes folk – headlining Big Finish Day 2 on February 11. Please do come – it'll be a great day, and a chance to celebrate this new era for the Fourth Doctor.

David Richardson

SNEAK PREVIEWS AND WHISPERS

Doctor Who: The Companion Chronicles - The Anachronauts

Peter Purves and Emmy award nominee Jean Marsh are reunited at Moat Studios for the second time (after *The Five Companions*) this year for this two-disc **Companion Chronicle** by Simon Guerrier. Taking up events directly from the end of *The Feast of Steven*, the atmospheric tale finds the Doctor, Steven and Sara landing... where? A mysterious island is filled with secrets, while the crew of a crashed time-ship presents a deadly danger to them, and even the future itself...
(Out January 2012)



Terry Molloy (left) returns as Davros, with Colin Baker

Doctor Who: The Curse of Davros

Yes, he's back! After a break of a few years Davros returns, played by the brilliant Terry Molloy. And this time he has an army of Daleks, and is involved with the Battle of Waterloo! It'll be a trial by fire for the Sixth Doctor's new companion Flip Jackson (Lisa Greenwood, who can currently be seen on TV in **The Hour**) who has to deal with the fact that... ah, that would be telling. Suffice to say that *The Curse of Davros* is a clever tale from BF regular Jonathan Morris, and not to be missed.
(Out January 2012)

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GRACELESS

Producer Mark Wright oversees the return of Abby and Zara in *Graceless 2*, alongside a special guest star...

The last time we saw **Graceless**'s wicked sisters, Abby and Zara, they were disappearing off into time and space in search of new adventures, Marek and baby Joy along for the ride. But that was a year ago. Now it's July 2011 and Abby and Zara are back – although as they pull up outside Moat Studios, they look suspiciously like Ciara Janson and Laura Doddington, clutching buckets of Starbucks and catching up on all the gossip.

They're not too happy with me, as I've given them an earlier-than-usual call time to accommodate the schedule of a very special guest star, but it's something of a reunion for the **Graceless** team, who haven't seen each other for nearly a year. Already inside the studio control room is director Lisa Bowerman, going over the day's schedule, and before long writer Simon Guerrier pitches up, followed soon after by Fraser James, returning as Marek.

Amidst the catch-ups comes the arrival of our special guest star. Actor, former **Play School** and **Play Away** presenter and all-round TV legend Derek Griffiths arrives to play Manchu Golding, and suddenly the thirty-something blokes in the room have dopey fanboy grins plastered on their faces – much to Lisa's amusement. With Big Finish regular John Banks rounding off today's cast, it's down to work. We have 21 scenes over 67 pages to get through today, and with Derek having to leave before lunch to return to rehearsals for a new musical, time is of the essence.

Today we're on the industrial backdrop of The Line, a city moving slowly across the planetary divide between light and dark, where Marek will be confronted by a face from his past. At the centre of the series are Ciara and Laura, whose friendship since recording the original



The graceful stars of Graceless 2! Clockwise from top left: Fraser James, Derek Griffiths, John Banks, Ciara Janson and Laura Doddington

has strengthened (ie there's a lot of laughing coming from their sound booths); they work so instinctively together.

Simon is on hand to handle any queries on the script, including an explanation of libration (best not to ask), and Derek asks why one scene makes reference to burning caramel in the sky. It's all to do with the Sugar Wars, Simon helpfully explains.

And then it's lunch and time to say goodbye to Derek amidst questions about **Heads and Tails** and more dopey fanboy grins. Laura, Ciara and Lisa watch with much eye-rolling before it's back to work. And tomorrow we're expecting guest stars Michael Cochrane, Joanna van Gysegham and Daisy Ashford to record *The Flood*, with Susan Brown and Joe Kloska due on day three to tackle *The Dark*.

There's no rest for the wicked sisters...

Graceless 2 is out December 2011



Top: Ciara Janson, Daisy Ashford and Laura Doddington

Above: Derek Griffiths and Fraser James

Left: Michael Cochrane and Joanna Van Gysegham



ABOUT RECORDED TIME!

Colin Baker and Nicola Bryant celebrate the 150th Big Finish main range audio release with Paul Spragg – and look ahead to the 1000th.

Hello Colin and Nicola. You're starring in release 150, *Recorded Time and Other Stories*. How does it feel?

Nicola Bryant: Well, it is a great honour! It's exciting to think that Big Finish has not only lasted that long, but we've been part of it for an awfully long time.

Colin Baker: I hope it doesn't mean that we're not going to get the 1000th. Because if we get the 150th, they might give someone else the 1000th and I'd like to be in the 1000th.

NB: Exactly. They can wheel us in.

CB: It's very nice and it's a kind of validation of the Doctor and Peri, which I can only respond to warmly. Makes you feel wanted.

You've most recently been playing the *Lost Stories* Doctor and Peri; what's their relationship like in this?

CB: They're all the Doctor and Peri; there is a difference from one story to another in the particular author's treatment of a) the story and b) the interaction between our characters, but aside from that there is a difference in where it's located in our timestream, if you like. It's earlier in our relationship, but we choose to make even the ones that are earlier in our relationship a tad later in our relationship because it does away with all that bickering of the first few stories.

NB: It was fine for then, but it's not something you want to repeat ad infinitum.

This release features four single-episode stories. How do they compare to just one story?

CB: They're great fun to do. It's a bit like a cricketer: which do you prefer, Twenty20 or a test match? I enjoy them both. It's a bit brisker. The joy of doing the four stories in one release is that you're being challenged differently in the morning and the afternoon of each day because they're different stories, but I never get bored doing any of the stories.

NB: There's probably less sub-plot going on because there isn't time; it's a story with a good thrust because it has to get through the whole journey in half an hour, and that's great fun to do and it's nice to do the variety of it. But I have been playing Peri for over half my life, so I don't think I could bear the thought of losing Peri now. I've got to carry on playing Peri for the rest of my life, so that is Big Finish's responsibility!

Do you have a favourite in this batch of stories?

CB: I like them all but I love Jane Austen, so being in *Austen World* [in *A Most Excellent Match*], albeit briefly and bizarrely, was great fun.

Where the Doctor plays suitor to Peri. How are you at playing the romantic lead?

CB: My romantic lead? I've lost all contact with that, so I did my humble best!

NB: I think it was a very enchanting position for the Doctor to find himself in; if I remove myself as Peri and I'm just a fan listening to it, I think I'll really enjoy that. I think the fans will enjoy that situation.

And you got to use your own voice, Nicola.

NB: I was allowed to use a bit of my own voice; it's not really my own voice because my own voice has actually got deeper with age, as they do, so there's always that having to remember to go up half an octave. There's always that strange thing in studio when they play back Peri, because it is a young girl you're hearing, a very young girl.

CB: And a very old Time Lord! Thank God he was 900 years old when I did it 25 years ago!

Let's take a look at the others. In *Recorded Time*, the Doctor and Peri meet Henry VIII.

CB: I like the historical ones. I wish there were more historical ones because you don't have to explain as much to the listener. You've got a context immediately because you're set in a period of history and know some of the characters. Henry VIII you know; Anne Boleyn. So it gives you much more opportunity to be subtle in some ways, because in a story where

you're creating an entirely imaginary fictitious world that we haven't entered before, you've got to deliver every piece of information. And also, the Doctor gets to interact with famous historical figures and Peri gets to be lusted after by every monarch that ever reigned on the planet.

NB: I always loved the historical **Doctor Who** that I watched as a child. Whenever there was one that came on, there was this deep satisfaction of totally knowing that Doctor Who really was a part of history. It would give you a reason for the Fire of London or something and as a child it just brought history to life. Whenever you went back to school and you were reading a history book, somehow you would have Samuel Pepys and the Doctor!

Plus you got to sing *Greensleeves*, Nicola...

NB: Oh, yes, *that* you can fast forward!

CB: Guess who wrote it... Interestingly, there's an area that the new series is going into that **Doctor Who** never went into in our time, which is that a spaceship crashes into Big Ben and people know about it. People in the real world that **Doctor Who** is in know that this has happened in London. Whereas we, the viewer, can see that it hasn't happened so it's, in that one sense only, moving away from the world we live in. Whereas the historical ones, they are very much part. We haven't changed the past, we can't of course, we're not changing anything that we know. But we are interacting with something that already exists. And there's part of the modern **Doctor Who** that doesn't do that because London did not have Big Ben crashed into it by a spaceship and the whole population is not aware of Daleks.

Well, we are.

CB: But in a very different way. There's a deliberate choice there, and it's perfectly acceptable, in the same way that we all accept **Spooks** bears absolutely no relation to the world in which MI5 and MI6 operate, but we love it because it's drama.

The Sixth Doctor drops in a few literary quotes in these stories, a trademark from the TV series which he's not done for a while on audio.

CB: [On the show] I asked that the Doctor have a passion for language because language is all about communication – so, verging on the pedantic; loved the multi-syllabic words. I, Colin, love language, so quite softly and deliberately I said, "What I would like is, every now and then, for the average viewer to go, "What does that



Anthony Howell and Lizzie Roper take on *The First Sontarans*

word mean?" and go and look it up. Because it means a word has gained an extra bit of currency. Everyone says 'What's the point of using long words when a short one will do?' Plenty of point. You'd never have great literature if we all thought like that.

I learnt quite a lot of big or unusual words from Target **Doctor Who** novelisations, especially from the villains.

CB: 'A catharsis of spurious morality'; that's one of the ones that fans all adore, isn't it?

On to *Paradoxicide*, where the Doctor and Peri have a mind-bending encounter on a ship.

CB: I love paradoxes.

One of my favourite programmes years ago on television was

Sapphire & Steel, which Big Finish also do, and that was just paradox interlaced with paradox. And if ever there was an opportunity to employ paradox to its ultimate, it's **Doctor Who**, somebody who travels through time. Because it's quite rare that that is used – for obvious reasons – in the television programme, because it's all too damned easy to change everything if you keep going back and changing things. But it's nice every now and then to investigate how that can be manipulated to tell a good story.

And finally *Question Marks*, where the Doctor and Peri awake alongside several other people, and everyone is suffering from amnesia.

CB: That's a nice conceit as well. It was a really nice idea, and I thought it was a lovely story.

NB: I like the thing of 'Who are we without our memories'; that sense of us coming together and discovering and questioning, which is a dilemma we all think about: what am I without the memories that I have, who am I? It's hard to imagine anything much more scary than waking up and not knowing who you are or where you are or anything. Who do you trust?



Nicola Bryant and Colin Baker, celebrating 150 releases of Big Finish's Doctor Who main range!



What can you tell us about the **Lost Story** you're recording today, *The First Sontarans*?

CB: It's like *Genesis of the Daleks*, only Sontarans! Where did it all start?

This series will be split between multiple Doctors; is it more relaxing when you're not doing all eight, like the first series?

CB: I'd love another twenty, please! I'd happily do a couple of Big Finishes a week for the next year.

NB: It's just heaven. And the reality is, I don't think we've ever been bored, I don't think we've ever thought, 'Oh, not another one'. It's an absolute joy, and it might be a bit tedious for people to keep hearing us say this – 'Come on, can't they have had a fight by now? Can't they hate each other?' But the reality is, we just love it.

Nicola, you've been able to fly free a bit doing your own **Companion Chronicle**.

CB: That was fun, *The Piscon Paradox*. I liked that.

NB: You were so funny in that. There were a couple of scenes I found so hard to get through because just the sheer situation, played with your wonderful authenticity of frustration, was really, really funny.

What were your favourite aspects of it?

NB: It was an absolute dream to play both of the Peri. To actually have the opportunity to play a mature Peri, and it was great the whole way that character unfolded. Every part of it I owned and felt was completely right for Peri; there wasn't

anything that I thought, 'Ooh, I don't think we're taking that in the right direction' but what I do love is it's opened another ten doors! You can go in any direction now.

You're now a multiverse of Peris.

NB: I am! Exactly. And I like the fact that a horrible set of questions are answered and a whole new set appear. So yes, I'd love to do more with the Peri that we met. I think that would be an interesting thing. It was great fun to do what I did. But the **Companion Chronicles**, great to do. As long as you've got a good story to sit and tell, which it was, then I think they work equally as well as the multi-character dramas.

It helps if you have a decent co-star, of course.

NB: And I had the best so I was very, very lucky.

CB: It's just struck me that Peter Davison, Colin Baker, were Peri Docs. Like a pair of Docs. I don't know why I said that, it just came into my mind. We're the Peri Docs. The Peri Docs Paradox.

And on that unlikely note, thank you both.

CB: Do I have to go home now, nurse?

NB: Yes, come along darling.

CB: I had a nice time out.

NB: Oh, you did, didn't you?

Doctor Who: Recorded Time and Other Stories is out this month



Nicola Bryant and Colin Baker relax between recording sessions

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Summer Listening

Whether you're off to the Caribbean, planning a round-the-Outer Hebrides cruise, heading for Ibiza or merely staycationing near or at home, there's one thing that summer holidays give us: ample time. So why not fill that time with some audio excitement? While away the hours travelling to your destination, or as you're sunning yourself on a beach, with some of our biggest releases this year. Wherever you'll be, here's a rundown of our top picks to keep you happy and relaxed...



THE EIGHTH DOCTOR ADVENTURES

When we announced we were bringing the Eighth Doctor's adventures to a close, there was outcry. And then there was acceptance, and then shock upon shock upon surprise twist as people listened to the fourth season unfold. The arrival of new companion Tamsin, played by the brilliant Niky Wardley! The Meddling Monk meddling once more, in the guise of former Goodie and frequently **Clue**-less radio panellist Graeme Garden! The return of Lucie Miller! A wrenchingly powerful finale! The fourth series has it all. But if you've never tried **The Eighth Doctor Adventures** before, why not start at the beginning with *Blood of the Daleks*? But be ready for anything, including some especially fine work from series stars Paul McGann and Sheridan Smith.



DOCTOR WHO SPIN-OFFS

There are few things more satisfying than a **Doctor Who** spin-off. The TV series has done it, and so have we here at Big Finish audio. After three series, it seemed to be all over for **Gallifrey**, but as the Free Time virus rages across the planet, President Romana, Leela and K9 seek help from unlikely sources: other versions of their homeworld. Featuring the return of a lot of familiar faces, often in unfamiliar roles, it's a chance to discover the woulds, coulds and should-never-have-beens of Gallifrey as our heroes wonder if they'll find the answers they're looking for. And if they can't, where does that leave both them and the Time Lord homeworld? Epic adventure on a grand scale.

If you prefer something more down-to-earth, why not give the critically acclaimed **Jago & Litefoot** a try? First

seen in *The Talons of Weng-Chiang* and mooted for their own spin-off back in the seventies, Henry Gordon Jago and Professor George Litefoot make for the perfect partnership. Brought together by the



Fourth Doctor, they're now investigators of infernal incidents in their own right, seeking the truth behind occurrences of ghoulies, ghosties and things that go bump in the night. Aply assisted by the adventurous Ellie, the third series finds the Victorian gentlemen joined by another blast from their past, Leela, who has arrived under Doctor's orders to help them investigate and eliminate serious chonal anomalies. And in the shadows hides a dark presence...

Elsewhere in the wider **Who** universe are Abby and Zara. First encountered by the Fifth Doctor when he was forcibly teamed up with

Abby (then Amy), a human Tracer who could locate the segments of the Key to Time, Abby and her sister are now off having their own solo adventures. Abandoned by The Grace, the powerful beings who created them, the pair are trying to make sense of a dangerous universe in which they have limitless – and dangerous – potential. Find out how they get on in **Graceless** (clue: not well) and get up to date before the sequel, coming in December.

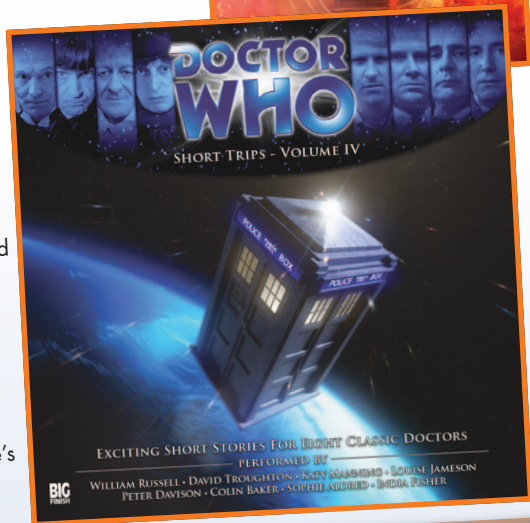
If you prefer something with the Doctor very much in the picture, you can't go wrong with our Season 27 **Lost Stories**.

Picking up where *Survival* left off, it follows the Seventh Doctor and Ace on four brand new action-packed adventures, during which they pick up a new travelling companion in the shape of safe-cracking cat burglar Raine.



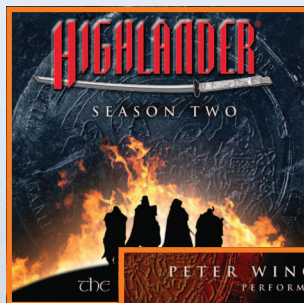
To instil as much authenticity as possible, we've enlisted Andrew Cartmel, the script editor when the series ended, to oversee the new stories. So if you've ever wondered how those much-mentioned scenes of the Doctor in a safe and Ace in charge of a spaceship play out, what happened to Brigadier Bambera after *Battlefield* or what the Ice Warriors were up to in 1960s Russia, now you can find out!

Also available now are the first four volumes of **Short Trips** audios. Each two-disc release contains eight stories, one featuring each of the first eight Doctors, written by old hands and newcomers alike. Read by iconic voices from each Doctor's era, namely William Russell (Ian), David Troughton (King Peladon and son of Patrick), Katy Manning (Jo), Louise Jameson (Leela), Sophie Aldred (Ace) and India Fisher (Charley), plus the unmistakable Peter Davison and Colin Baker, the stories have a wide range of styles and content, meaning there's something for everyone!



HIGHLANDER

If it's action, adventure and time travel you want, don't overlook **Highlander**. Still retaining a hefty cult crown 25 years after the release of the first movie, the second season of audio adventures sees a return to **Highlander: The Series**, and specifically the Four Horsemen. The very definition of evil, Kronos, Silas, Caspian and Methos bestrode the world like immortal colossi for centuries, but it's now time to tell of their secret past, the man who made them what they were – and the price he paid as a result. With stunning performances from Valentine Pelka, Richard Ridings, Marcus Testory and Peter Wingfield, ably assisted by Toby Longworth, Tracy-Ann Oberman and John Banks, it's four discs of murder, madness and mayhem across the centuries – and even if you're new to **Highlander**, you'll be able to jump right in and follow it perfectly. It's our personal guarantee.

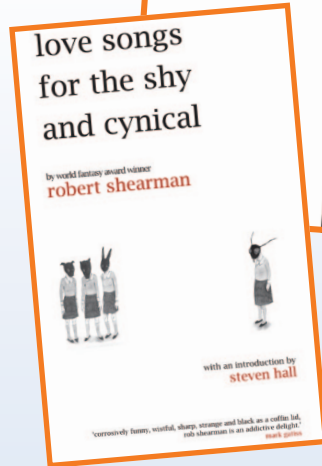
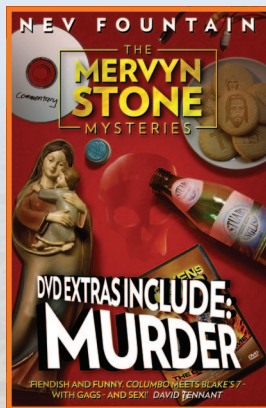


BOOKS FOR THE BEACH

Of course, there's nothing better on a long journey than a book, and we've got some of the best. The ever-unpredictable Rob Shearman has crafted a brand new volume of linked short stories entitled **Everyone's Just So So Special**, in which he tells the history of the world in 384 pages in his own inimitable style, through the eyes of some unlikely people. As weird, wild and wonderful as people have come to expect, it's another masterpiece and is already attracting the attention of the award-givers.

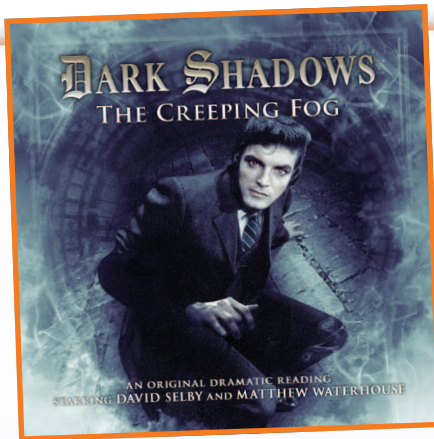
And if you've not yet caught up with Rob's previous offering, **Love Songs for the Shy and Cynical** is now available as both a paperback and an audio CD, the latter featuring six of the book's best tales, read by Jane Goddard, Toby Hadoke and India Fisher.

If you prefer something with a little more detection, Nev Fountain's **Mervyn Stone Mysteries** are fresh out in paperback. **Geek Tragedy**, **DVD Extras Include: Murder** and **Cursed Among Sequels** find former TV script editor Mervyn getting embroiled in murder investigations, a far cry from his former job on eighties sci-fi show **Vixens from the Void** and his current role: going to conventions and reliving old times, whether he wants to or not. Hilarious, witty and unpredictable, once you've got the first book you'll simply have to own the others! Or, for those extra-long flights, why not just take all three?



DARK SHADOWS

If it's stars of **Doctor Who** that perk up your ears, check out our latest series of **Dark Shadows** audio dramas. 'What?' we hear you cry. Well, the latest run has featured not only the ever-brilliant **Dark Shadows** cast, in this run Roger Davis, Jerry Lacy, Lara Parker, David Selby, Nancy Barrett and Kathryn Leigh Scott. It's also included such luminaries as Nicola 'Peri' Bryant and Matthew 'Adric' Waterhouse! And let's not forget star of classic sixties series **The Invaders**, Roy Thinnes!



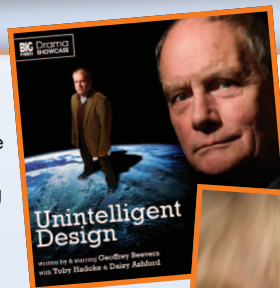
The latest batch of terrifying tales from Collinwood is designed as a jumping-on point for new listeners, delivering scary stories first and foremost while also neatly tying in to the continuity of the series. If you've never tried **Dark Shadows** before, this is where you can jump on board. And there's a special treat coming this month too, as a wealth of

Dark Shadows alumni join forces for the biggest dramatic reading we've released so far: *The Crimson Pearl*. A celebration of 45 years of the show, it features almost twenty cast members, all in one time-spanning, epic CD.

DRAMA SHOWCASE

If more contemporary drama is your thing, we can cater for that too. **Drama Showcase** gives four authors the chance to do something a little different, a little 'out there' – and you'll certainly never see Katy Manning the same way ever again! She writes and stars in the first story, *Not a Well Woman*, in which she plays Pansy Maude, a disastrously short-sighted woman who has more than her fair share of unusual adventures. Part autobiography, part flight of fancy, you won't know what's coming next.

Pulling Faces finds Helen Goldwyn writing and Louise Jameson starring in a tale about ageing, plastic surgery and the effects of both, then Nigel Fairs takes the listener to the darkest of dark places for *In Conversation With an Acid Bath Murderer*, his award-winning play examining the life and crimes of John George Haigh. The final release in the series, out this month, is *Unintelligent Design*, written by and starring Geoffrey Beevers alongside his daughter Daisy Ashford and *Robophobia* star Toby Hadoke, in a tale about Earth, its inhabitants and all our strange foibles.



All these items are available now from www.bigfinish.com

Happy listening (or reading), and enjoy the summer holidays!

Paul Spragg XXX


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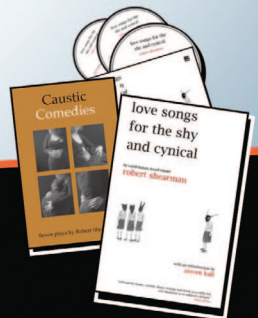
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Contains adult material

Also available from the author:

Love Songs for the Shy and Cynical
Love Songs for the Shy and Cynical – Audiobook
Caustic Comedies



FORTHCOMING RELEASES

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*

Dark Shadows: *Music from the Audio Dramas Volume II*

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 Reification of Hans Gerber* (2.2)

DECEMBER 2011

Doctor Who: *Army of Death* (155, 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*

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Bernice Summerfield: Book (title tba)

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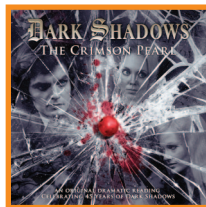
Doctor Who: TBA (160, Fifth Doctor, Tegan and Nyssa)

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ROCKET

John Dorney takes us through the process of writing Ian Chesterton's latest Companion Chronicle...



Where to start? That question is the bane of the writer's life. When I'm asked for writing tips by people under the mistaken belief I've the faintest idea what I'm talking about, I always say two things. One is 'start it'. The other, incidentally, is 'finish it'.

I've heard it called 'the tyranny of the blank page' and that's exactly what it feels like. You stare at this empty whiteness and are aware that you have to fill it. With something. Somehow. As I'm doing now.

Doctor Who fans have long been critical of how John Nathan-Turner would often give his writers 'shopping lists' of elements to include in his story – the Master and Concorde, for example – but I think this misses the point. If a dodgy story results from a shopping list, that doesn't mean the concept is flawed – it means the writer hasn't been able to turn it into something good. A shopping list at its best is a great thing. It's a starting point. There's no tyranny of the blank



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page because something is already written on the paper when it's handed to you. Ask anyone to come up with a story off the top of their head and they'll stumble. Tell them to come up with a story about an elephant and they'll be able to make something up much quicker.

Companion Chronicle *Solitaire* was a case in point. The brief was Charley/The Toymaker/all dialogue/playing a game. Maybe the Doctor as a dummy. Restrictive, yes, but it focuses the imagination. Whereas the *Rocket Men* brief was two words: Ian Chesterton. And that's much tougher. Which brings me right back to that initial question: where do you start?

The answer is, quite simply, that you build in those restrictions yourself. One of producer David Richardson's initial suggestions was a Nostradamus story. As it turns out, we wouldn't have been able to do this as *The Doomsday Quatrain* was being developed around the same time, but I was reluctant anyway. It struck me we'd had two Ian stories – Jac Rayner's beautiful *The Transit of Venus* where Ian met Captain Cook, and the magnificent epic Lost Story *Farewell, Great Macedon*, where Ian met some hammy ginger bloke pretending to be Alexander the Great. So we'd done an Ian 'celebrity historical' (to use the new series term) twice... and for me that was more a Barbara thing. Ian was the science teacher. It had to be futuristic.

I looked at the sci-fi that might have influenced the writers of the early seasons, and I went straight for the pulpy republic movie serials of the thirties and forties, the sort of thing you could imagine those sixties writers having devoured in their formative years. And what leapt out at me most were the stories about Rocketeer-type figures. Suited men with jet-packs. An iconic image that feels very much part of the milieu of those early seasons and yet, mystifyingly, was something **Doctor Who** has never actually done. And the moment you pick on that, the title is pretty much a given. So I had a name. Now I just needed a story.

Who were the Rocket Men? Goodies or baddies? Where were they? The last question was the one that got answered first. I watched an episode of Professor Brian Cox's TV series **Wonders of the Solar System** covering the gas giants and it seemed a setting made for what I had in mind. Rocketeers shooting through the sky, billowing clouds behind them – what's not to love? And that led me to a rough idea for a cliffhanger (there's one you basically have to do given the set-up) and other elements I wanted to incorporate (which became the last half of episode two).

But still no real plot. I had thought of a science version of *The Aztecs*, where Ian's knowledge manages to disrupt the future somehow... but my own lack of expertise in that area scuppered the idea. It was getting on for four or five months since I was given the brief and I was aware I'd have to be getting a shift on if I was going to be able to deliver it in time.

And then suddenly, in the shower, the cliffhanger shifted slightly, involved someone different, and a line popped into my head. It's the last two sentences Ian delivers in the play (rather than narrates). And with that it all came together. I knew the plot, I knew the characters, I knew what they wanted. And, more importantly, I knew what the story was actually *about*.

Sure, I then proceeded to make a rod for my own back by taking a relatively simple plot, structuring it in an insane manner and adding a couple of stylistic quirks. One of which was probably vital to aid the listener, but the other two were essentially self-indulgence. But that was for the future. For now, I had the plot, an emotional core I loved and an opening line. I could begin.

Where do you start? With these four words: 'When do you know?'

But you'll have to buy it to find out the answer to that one...

The Rocket Men is out this month

Having listened to recent podcasts, some listeners have bought up the topic of signed CDs for overseas subscribers, as living overseas it is a bit hard to attend a signing or Big Finish Day, etc. So I was wondering: have you thought about doing a subscription where you pay a little extra and get a couple of the CDs signed, with the thing being you wait a little longer for that CD than the release date so it gives a chance for whichever actor to sign it. I mean, how cool to get your CD in the post and be signed by Colin Baker or Sophia Aldred or even Tom Baker? Anyway, just a suggestion.

David Goodram

Nick: It's a great suggestion, David. But in that suggestion lies a lot of organising and extra work. We are flat-out producing our CDs at the moment. Anything on top would probably break David Richardson into tiny pieces.

With *Freakshow* being released in the **Companion Chronicles: The Specials** box, I was wondering if there were any plans on re-releasing any of the other ones?

Miken Ayers

Nick: Not quite sure what you mean, Miken. Other **Companion Chronicles** or other *Doctor Who Magazine* releases? We are currently releasing podcasts contain *DWM* free CD stories.

Congratulations on securing a license to produce **Blake's 7** audios. While I quite enjoyed the previous **B7** audios, they just didn't quite grip me in the same way as yours. **Doctor Who, The Tomorrow People, Sapphire & Steel**: all iconic TV shows from the past given new life by Big Finish.

Keep up the good work.

Graham

1. I have noticed that some selections are not available to buy as downloads (examples: *The Maltese Penguin* and **Sarah Jane Smith: Comeback**) Are these available just on CD? If there are

ways to purchase these for download I do not see them listed anywhere on the Big Finish website.

2. Were the audio dramas starring Colin Baker, Sylvester McCoy and Peter Davison from the early years of the **Doctor Who** monthly series intended to be listened to in a particular order like the ones starring Paul McGann when he started to participate? I'm asking primarily to make sure I follow the story arcs as the authors intended.

Frederick Ortiz

Nick: If a CD is not available as a download, it's either because contracts for downloads have not been signed by one of the key participants (usually a writer, director or producer) or that the contracts have not yet been issued. I, for example, am perfectly happy for *Return of the Daleks* to be released as a download, but because of a backlog of clerical work at Big Finish, I have not been sent a release contract to sign. As for the order of the early years of monthly releases, although there is not a definite, developing story arc, there were themes developing in the stories, so it's probably best, but not essential, to listen to them in release order.

If you folks at Big Finish are familiar with Jean-Marc L'officier's **The Nth Doctor**, that book details all the various attempts to do a **Doctor Who** feature film. Have you folks considered adapting these stories as one-off, alternate universe things for your **Lost Stories** series?

Chris Casino

Nick: Personally, I am not familiar with this book. It's a nice idea to adapt the stories, but possibly a long haul to get permission and then get the ideas approved by BBC Wales.

Rat Trap was the best-written main range **Doctor Who** you've had in ages. Please have Tony Lee write some more. (I'd ask for more from Rob Shearman too, but I imagine he's moved on from **Doctor Who** audios, although not Big Finish.)

More like *Rat Trap*, and I'll probably renew my subscription when it expires.

Allen Wright

Nick: Dear Allen, you are clearly Tony Lee in disguise!

Hello, sadly I didn't go to Big Finish Day as it was in Barking and I am from Nottingham (and I'm 15). My parents won't let me go to a convention that is outside of Nottingham. So I was wondering, if you ever do another Big Finish Day, can you have it somewhere in Nottingham? Thank you for reading this.

PS: Your podcasts are amazing as well as your audio dramas.

Curtis Lowe

Nick: Hi Curtis, sorry we weren't in Nottingham. I'm afraid that, because our Big Finish Day conventions are organised by Tenth Planet Productions, and they mostly do their conventions in Barking, that's where the second Big Finish Day is going to happen. Nothing against Nottingham. Since 1997, I have been performing regularly at the Theatre Royal there. I will be there for most of August in some thrillers... why not pop along and say hi?

I've been meaning to ask this question for some time: would you ever consider a three-story subscription (including any various **Companion Chronicle** if applicable) now that you are issuing three stories at a time? During the current climate I would prefer to pick the three-story arcs I'm interested in rather than a set of six or twelve in a row, plus the odd **Lost Story/Short Trips** collection. Please let me know your thoughts

Andy Kirwan

Nick: Hi Andy. Completely understand your reasoning and the current situation, which is affecting all of us. The point of us encouraging subscriptions is to raise enough funds in advance so that we can go into production in time for the CDs to be written, approved, recorded and released. A three-CD subscription isn't likely to help generate enough funds. Having said that, we are always reviewing these decisions, so we'll keep an eye on this.

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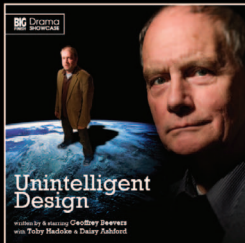
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