**VORTEX**

**ISSUE 120 – February 2019**

**EDITORIAL**

**I CAN’T deny it** – I’m really, really excited about **The Fourth Doctor Comic Strip Adaptations** being released this month! I first came across *The Iron Legion* and *The Star Beast* in reprints, circa 1985, and I instantly fell in love with them.

They mirror the tone of **Doctor Who**’s 17th season on television, but at the same time do something new and original with it, creating a hyper-reality that you could imagine happening had Douglas Adams stayed on as script editor for another year.

I don’t honestly know how many times I’ve read these strips. They’re just so vivid and real in my mind, with lines like, ‘An empty threat, Doctor. Death cannot destroy me. I am death!’ And, ‘Sorry mate, no animals allowed on my bus – except on a lead!’, being ones that immediately spring to mind with ease.

I’d actually go so far as to say that these stories are every bit as real to me as television episodes, or, in the case of adventures like *Underworld* and *The Sun Makers*, even more vivid, as I’ve read these far more times than I’ve watched the TV adventures.

Talking to the people who’ve brought these tales to life has been a real pleasure over the last few weeks. They all have a real passion for the stories, even more than I do, and I cannot wait to hear the finished results.

Also in *Vortex* this month we preview the next **Gallifrey** series, as the conflict in the Time War continues to grow and grow, and the repercussions of resurrecting an old hero from the past are felt in the present. And we feature the latest release in the **Doctor Who** **Main Range**, as Kamelion (voiced by Jon Culshaw) makes his unexpected return. I spoke to Jon just days before Christmas and his love and passion for all things **Who**-related, and indeed, Big Finish, is such a joy and so infectious. During the course of our chat, Tom Baker, Sylvester McCoy, George W Bush and Donald Trump popped in to join the fun. It was definitely one of the best, and most surreal, interviews of my life!

**KENNY**

**COMING SOON**

**CAPTAIN JOHN**

**He’s a swaggering** former Time Agent from the future. He’s a captain with a murky past – and something always happens on his visits to Cardiff…

Yes, we’re talking about the return of Captain John Hart (who did you think we meant?!). It’s been a year since Captain John first appeared in the Big Finish audio, *The Death of Captain Jack*, reunited with John Barrowman’s Captain Jack Harkness.

And in January 2020, James Marsters will reprise the role of Captain Jack’s best friend/arch rival in his own series of adventures set within the **Torchwood** audio universe.

The four-story box set, *The Sins of Captain John*, has been written by David Llewellyn, with the new adventures titled *The Restored, Escape from Nebazz, Peach Blossom Heights* and *Darker Purposes*.

Actor James said: “Recording *The Death of Captain Jack* was incredible! I have missed doing **Torchwood** so much. Beyond being proud of having a part in it, the character itself is a blast to play, and those two TV episodes just weren’t enough.”

Writer David adds: “Captain John is this chaotic, disruptive, insubordinate force of nature; completely amoral and unpredictable, so that gave me a lot of freedom! Writing is often a case of knowing when to hold back, when to tread a more subtle line, but with Captain John it’s the complete opposite. And setting it before **Torchwood** on television meant we were able to go to places where **Torchwood** can’t.”

**CREDITS**

Managing Editor: Jason Haigh-Ellery

Executive Producer: Nicholas Briggs

Senior Producer: David Richardson

Editor: Kenny Smith

Design: Mark Plastow

Copy Editor: Stephanie Hornett

The Big Finish Team: Ian Atkins, Sue Cowley, Emily de Fraine, Karen Parks, Hannah Peel, Alfie Shaw, Paul Spragg

Marketing: Kris Griffin and Paddy Freeland

BFP Administration: Cheryl Bly, Brenda Smith, Alison Taylor

Publisher: Big Finish Productions Ltd.

**STRIPPED FOR ACTION**

**FOR DOCTOR WHO** fans of a certain age there are stories which were never broadcast but are as large as life as anything ever shown on the screen.

In particular we’re talking about a couple of comic strips from the pages of *Doctor Who Weekly*.

In March 2019, Tom Baker will breathe life into **Doctor Who: The Comic Strip Adaptations** when *Doctor Who and the Iron Legion* and *Doctor Who and the Star Beast* are released, adapted by Alan Barnes from the original 1979/80 Pat Mills and John Wagner strips.

Executive producer Nicholas Briggs was delighted to be script editor on the adaptations, which he also directed. He says: “I think it was something that Alan Barnes had mentioned – and we’d all been keen on the idea for ages. They’re very much part of our essential experiences as **Doctor Who** fans of a certain generation, so we were always going to find a way to do these.

“Alan is a comics man by instinct, and he was chomping at the bit to get started. He knows and admires Pat Mills. And Alan’s a brilliant writer. So insightful and smart.”

Alan admits that he has been a fan of these comic strips since he was a young fella, saying: “I wasn’t just a mad keen **Doctor Who** fan, I was a Squaxx dek Thargo – an obsessive *2000 AD* reader, a Friend of Tharg. So the day I found *Doctor Who Weekly* issue two in the newsagents around the corner from my granny’s house (the first issue had passed me by completely) was one of the most exciting days of my young life! It wasn’t just that a **Doctor Who** comic existed, it was that the comic strip was drawn by my favourite Art Droid of all: Dave Gibbons, who did the ‘new’ Dan Dare. And Pat Mills was the Script Droid – whose name I guess I knew best from the amazing six-month-long Judge Dredd epic, *The Cursed Earth*.

“*The Creature From the Pit* was on TV at the time... and it was OK, the Wolfweeds were good, but it couldn’t compare to *Doctor Who and the Iron Legion*. Robot Romans! General Ironicus! The Ectoslime! The pages may have been in black and white, but the stories were ten times more colourful than anything on our new Rediffusion telly.

“*The Iron Legion* and *The Star Beast* are still up there in my top 20 favourite **Doctor Who** stories ever. Maybe even top 10! *Iron Legion* is this huge epic adventure – a **Doctor Who** movie, really, the best we never had. And *The Star Beast* is so modern. It’s urban, it’s northern, it’s contemporary, it’s got real, human characters with real human reactions. It’s like *Rose* 25 years early. And yes, *The Woman Who Fell to Earth*, too!

“We’d been talking about doing them for years and originally I was down to script-edit not write them, but when it came to it I had such a clear idea of how I wanted them done, I thought it couldn’t possibly work getting someone else to dramatise them – I’d have been back-seat driving all the way. So I pretty much begged Nick to let me write them, largely because I couldn’t bear the thought of anyone else doing it, and maybe doing them ‘wrong’!”

Did Alan – a former writer of the *Doctor Who Magazine* comic strip as well as numerous Big Finish adventures – have any particular challenges in adapting either of these?

He considers: “Structurally, they feel like they’ve got pretty much the right amount of plot for four 25-minute episodes. But obviously, the comic strip narrative is very much stripped back to its bare essentials – you find yourself having to turn three or four speech balloons into proper dramatic scenes, with their own rhythm. But the characters are so well-drawn, they practically beg to speak more!

“I suppose *The Iron Legion* was the trickiest – it’s very much a linear narrative, following the Doctor all the way through, without a companion. For our purposes it’s not practical to have the Doctor in every single scene, so I needed to find plot threads to run parallel to the Doctor’s story throughout. The solution was to follow the characters taken as slaves by the Legion on the first page of the first episode…”

**IN THE** recording days, there was a feeling with these productions that made them stand apart from the regular Fourth Doctor releases.

Nick explains: “They were different somehow. Tom noticed the change in the style of the scripts straight away. He wrote to me immediately after he’d read them and was clearly a little bewildered by them initially. But then he threw himself into them and really enjoyed it.”

*The Star Beast* introduces a new companion for the Doctor in the form of Sharon Davies, who joined him for several adventures in the comic strips. Was it tough to find an actress to play Sharon?

Nick shakes his head: “Not at all, the moment the production was green lit, Jason told us his friend Rhianne Starbuck would be ideal. Jason has a fabulous track record on casting. He suggested India Fisher for Charley and Sheridan Smith for Lucie. So who were we to question his judgement on this! Rhianne gives a great performance.”

Rhianne says: “It’s one of the first voiceover jobs I’ve done, and everyone was so lovely. The cast were brilliant, Nick Briggs was amazing, and it was so much fun. We didn’t stop laughing – laughter all day long, even through the breaks. The atmosphere was electric.

“Tom was very polite, introduced himself to everyone. He’s very young at heart. He was constantly looking at the script, he’d clearly done a lot of preparation beforehand, and he would come in some days, and he would say, ‘I was reading this, I thought we could do this at this time,’ constantly talking with Nick, bouncing ideas around. He was very involved in the process. And very professional. The whole experience was very playful.”

Sharon, of course, has a hugely important part in **Doctor Who** history, as she was the first person of colour to be a regular in the TARDIS.

Rhianne said: “In terms of character she’s kind of my dream to play as she’s very similar to my real life story. I never had a father figure growing up, she’s northern, she’s mixed race, just like myself. And a really fun character to play. And she’s very strong willed. If she wanted to do something, she did it. There’s no telling her what to do, which again is the same as me!”

The stories are being produced by Jamie Anderson, but he has an admission to make: “I actually came to these not knowing the strips! Isn’t that terrible? As I only discovered **Doctor Who** in the early 1990s the strips passed me by, but I was soon made aware of their iconic status! It’s been great fun throughout. The comic strip element brings a set of new aspects to telling a **Doctor Who** story – bigger, bolder and funnier ideas – so that’s been really exciting.

“Thankfully, we’ve got a fantastic team working on this. Between Alan Barnes’s adaptations of the scripts, Nick’s directing, and Tom – that’s the pressure taken off. And once you mix in a rather marvellous guest cast, then I’m pretty sure we’ve got a couple of fantastic productions on their way!”

Nick adds: “When I’m casting it’s often the case that I’m looking for someone with an intrinsically interesting voice. My old friend Bethan Dixon Bate, who I first worked with in 1996 on a tour of *Brideshead Revisited*, was someone I’d recently bumped into after years of not having seen her. I knew she was a fabulous actor anyway, but she told me she was particularly getting into voice work. I listened to her clips and was reminded of a very particular quality she has in her voice.

“I thought this would give the Meep a really alien feel. And she did a fantastic job, and was easily able to adapt to do other voices in the production too.

“In *The Iron Legion*, my favourite character has always been Vesuvius. I love his crazy way of talking. Funnily enough, I’d always heard his voice in my head as American, but when I asked Alan Barnes what he thought Vesuvius should sound like, he said, ‘Imagine Kenneth Connor from the *Carry On* movies’. Brilliant. All I had to do was utter those words to voice man extraordinaire Toby Longworth and stand back in admiration. Superb!”

**BRINGING THE** covers of The Fourth Doctor Comic Strips releases to life is Will Brooks. He tells *Vortex*: “The briefs were fairly... well, brief on this one! Mostly notes on which characters we’d like to feature – but with so many weird and wonderful friends and foes in these stories, the problem was more about which ones you leave off!

“We decided early on to go for something bold and colourful. The original strips were black and white, but they feel so vibrant! When I think of the Iron Legion marching their way across the village green, I picture it in full-blown colour! That’s something I was keen to get across.

“The biggest challenge was trying to capture the characters that fans have known for 40 years. Pat Mills created such brilliant outlandish characters – General Ironicus! Morris! The Meep! – and Dave Gibbons defined their looks so perfectly. They’re proper **Doctor Who** icons in their own way.

“So when you’re making the covers, utilising photographs, you want to try and do the original designs justice. I’ve tried to keep close to the designs we all know and love, but of course there’s my own little spin on them, too. Working with Photoshop and photographs is a very different medium to pencil and paper. But I hope that people will look at the characters on the covers and instantly recognise them.”

And for Alan, how exciting is it for him, knowing Tom Baker is finally bringing these 40-year-old stories to life?

He grins: “Just the biggest thrill! Nine-year-old me still can’t quite believe it’s actually happening!”

**EVERYTHING CHANGES**

**ONE BY ONE,** the Fifth Doctor has been joined by old friends on audio at Big Finish. Turlough, Nyssa and Peri were his initial travelling companions, before Tegan and more recently Adric, joined him in the TARDIS once more. And now with the return of the shape-changing android Kamelion, the reunions are complete.

The decision to bring back Kamelion was taken by script editor Alan Barnes. (Alan is stepping down from the role in the Doctor Who Main Range from June onwards, after taking on the post in 2006 with the Seventh Doctor release, *Red*).

Producer of the trilogy, Scott Handcock, says: “When I inherited these scripts from David Richardson, I asked if he had anyone in mind for Kamelion and he said no. It was still early days, or he may have just been being polite and not wanting to impose anyone on me! Either way, I knew it would be a big thing for fans. I chatted with Nicholas Briggs about it a fair bit, and Ken Bentley who’d be directing, and suggested Jon Culshaw for the role.

“I’d recently worked with Jon on **Cicero** and I loved his Target audiobook readings, so I knew he’d be a perfect fit with the other regulars. Plus I loved the irony of a renowned impressionist playing an android who can change its shape and personality. So, I posed the question to Jon by e-mail one day and got an instant reply. Jon is not only an excellent mimic but he really loves and cares about the material. You couldn’t have asked for more from any actor!”

Kamelion was reintroduced in last month’s release *Devil in the Mist* which saw the TARDIS take the Doctor, Tegan, Turlough and Kamelion to a prison ship with just one prisoner: Nustanu, last warlord of the Zamglitti. The ship then crashes.

Writer Cavan Scott explains: “Alan said that the story had to continue on straight from the TV episode, *The King’s Demons*, and deal specifically with Tegan’s distrust and, to be honest, complete and utter antagonism against Kamelion. Apart from that, the only other thing was that there had to be a monster, so I suggested the return of the Harrigain (war-loving space hippos!) from *The Bleeding Heart* and my run of Ninth Doctor comics at Titan.”

There was another added bonus for Cav as he reveals: “I’ve been wanting to write for Tegan since my very first **Doctor Who** in 2001 so finally getting the chance was a complete joy.

“A good thing about Kamelion is that he completely upsets the team dynamic, so that was fun! Tegan doesn’t trust him and the Doctor is a little bit entranced by him, although he does become a bit tetchy when Kamelion connects himself to the TARDIS data banks. Turlough finds himself in the curious position of having to try to pull everyone together when in the past he’s been the one who’s caused friction.

“I was keen to get some quieter moments in for Tegan and Turlough, showing how close they’ve become despite their on-going differences.”

This month’s adventure comprises two two-parters: *Black Thursday* by Jamie Anderson and *Power Game* by Eddie Robson.

Set in 1902, *Black Thursday* brings the TARDIS to the Welsh village of Abertysswg, where men have worked the black seam for generations.

Jamie says his brief was: “The Fifth Doctor, Tegan, Turlough and the return of Kamelion. I think that was about it! Nice and free... a great opportunity to do *anything*!

“I enjoyed playing on Tegan and Kamelion’s relationship, and I think that was pretty central to making the story work. Alan also worked hard to help me cultivate a sense of Tegan’s frustration with the sexist attitudes of the early 20th century. And I think we got there... but it’s definitely harder to write for more companions!”

In the second story, *Power Game*, Tegan takes part in a deadly gameshow as three brave Earthlings enter the Void Pit in search of strange gems.

Eddie says: “Alan told me the story would go into a set with a fairly grim historical two-parter, so he wanted something contemporary and fun to balance it out. Thinking about that period led me onto thinking about **The Adventure Game**, which I dimly remember watching as a kid, and other

gameshows like **The Krypton Factor** and **First Class** and **The Crystal Maze**, and I built up the story from there.

“It’s a little uneasy when Kamelion’s there – Tegan and Turlough are more suspicious of him than the Doctor is. In fact early in the play when Kamelion is missing, Turlough compares him to a lost digital watch. But the Doctor treats Kamelion as a being in his own right, and refuses to give up on him.”

**BRINGING THE** Kamelion trilogy of releases to a conclusion in March is *The Kamelion Empire* by Jonathan Morris, in which we finally discover the origins of the shape-changer.

Jonny says: “The brief was to treat Kamelion as a proper character, rather than a gimmick. When Alan asked me if I was interested, this was my reply:

*‘The interesting thing about Kamelion which never really went anywhere was that he was devised as a weapon. My instant recall of The King’s Demons is not as comprehensive as it once was but I think he was built in a war to do with the Xeraphin or something. I’m not quite sure what use he would be in a war, so finding an answer to that question might be a starting point. Presumably he was built by something or someone? Is he the last of his kind or are there other Kamelions? And so on. I’m thinking maybe he was a spy or undercover agent of some kind, sent to infiltrate the enemy command? An assassin?*

*‘My feeling is that the story would need to be about Kamelion in some way, to make him central to the plot, because just plugging him into a conventional story as a companion wouldn’t work – his shape-changing abilities mean that either he will solve the story by just impersonating the villain or you’ll have to have him not working, which kind of defeats the point of having him there.*

*‘The other thing with Kamelion is that he has the capacity to be very sinister – I think the stuff with him impersonating Peri’s father worked really well. I think perhaps Tegan’s relatives have been comprehensively explored but who else could he impersonate to freak her out? Maybe Tegan as a little girl, wandering the TARDIS corridors like a Shining twin?’*

“This led onto an idea for the final story in the trilogy in which we would discover where Kamelion came from, why he was created, and why he ended up left for dead on Xeriphas – ‘the tool of an earlier invader’. That led me to thinking that it could be a story about the Doctor taking Kamelion home but discovering it is in ruins. I was inspired by paintings by Claude Lorrain, Pierre Patel and others, of peasants living amongst ruins – I must’ve been wandering around the Tate trying to come up with ideas – as well as those paintings of the flight from Egypt where ‘Egypt’ looks like a golf course with a ruined pagoda in the distance.

“What arose from the story was the ‘trick’ of the adventure – that it would be told using only the four cast members, the Doctor, Tegan, Turlough and Kamelion. That meant that it was particularly difficult to write, because I not only had limited characters to play with, but I also had to think in terms of, Okay, so X will have done quite a few scenes with Y, so now I should pair X with Z so that Y gets a rest, and so on. I think I more-or-less-got away with it! So *The Kamelion Empire* could be regarded as an ‘experimental’ story, a four-hander, but hopefully without feeling like it is limited as it’s a story about the rise and fall of galaxy-spanning empires.”

***VORTEX* ASKS** each of the writers how tough it was to write for Kamelion, given his very limited screen time.

Cav says: “Not tough at all to be honest. The great thing about the limited screen time is that we basically had a blank canvas. We’ve never seen Kamelion out on an adventure so we had a lot of freedom with how he’d react. I tried to write him with a real can-do attitude. After all, this is the first time he’s been free.”

Jamie, however, disagrees: “I watched and rewatched Kamelion’s appearances (including his cut scene with Tegan from *The Awakening*) to try to capture his character, but even with that it was quite tough. But strangely I found it more difficult to write for Turlough! I think I have some weird childhood block from when I used to watch him and be constantly frustrated by his duplicitous nature while under the influence of the Black Guardian.”

Eddie was of the same mind as Cavan, explaining: “Not actually that hard because of how I used him here – I can’t really say much more than that! The main thing I took was how he doesn’t just change physically to fit his environment, he also changes his personality.”

However, Jonny points out: “It was kind of tricky, because, as you say, he’s not on screen very much, and as ‘himself’ we’re only talking about a very small number of scenes. So I decided to make a virtue of that and to approach Kamelion as someone who is, essentially, an empty vessel in terms of personality, who modifies their character to reflect who they’re with. We’ve all met people like that! So he has a neutral, submissive personality but – and this is the important thing – he still has motivation, he still has secrets, he can still be craven or brave. As for his dialogue, I just channelled my inner Terence Dudley (writer of *The King’s Demons*), who is never that far from the surface.”

**THE MAN OF A THOUSAND VOICES**

**FROM THE** word go it’s clear that Jon is a big **Doctor Who** fan. He’s a fan like you and I. He knows story titles, and, although it never came up in conversation, you can tell he knows production codes too! And he’s a huge Big Finish fan. Despite being constantly busy as an actor, impressionist and even game show contestant, he was more than happy to talk all things TARDIS.

Jon continues: “I started doing more Big Finish about three or four years ago. Sylvester McCoy is a great pal of mine – we live close to each other and often have a Monday night curry – and he said I should do another one. So he mentioned it to Big Finish and they asked me to come back in – and I’ve been working regularly with them ever since.”

Jon spent plenty of time in studio for Big Finish in 2018 playing Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart in the forthcoming series of **The Third Doctor Adventures**, as well as succeeding Gerald Flood as the Fifth Doctor’s shape-changing robot companion, Kamelion.

Jon admits: “It was a lovely challenge as I was always really fond of Kamelion. He’s a very elegant character with an intriguing look and air about him. When you try to do a shape-changing robot in 1984, technology makes it problematic, but I always thought on the television episodes that the stillness of Kamelion made him all the more mysterious somehow.

“It gave him a mystique, a slightly unnerving edge. Because he was this fixed android shape, bound by technology of the age, it prompted Peter Davison and the others to go in and communicate with him, bringing him to life through their performances. It was an interesting dynamic. I found his elegance very unnerving.

“As a small child, I had a phobia about shop window dummies and statues in graveyards – probably started by those plastic Autons! – and Kamelion had that quality about him.

“He’s also got a characterful face. He’s a bit like C-3PO and I’m sure they hang out and drink robotic rum together! I can imagine them having a relationship like Jon Pertwee’s with Patrick Troughton.”

Jon Culshaw, is, of course, famous in Britain for his vocal flexibility, making him ideal casting by producer Scott Handcock, to take on the robotic role.

Jon grins: “It’s quite an interesting symbolism bringing me in, but in the story where there are other actors whose voice Kamelion takes on, it’s voiced by them but given an electronic treatment.

“I have Scott to thank for casting me. We start with the Gerald Flood voice. Gerald’s character was very medieval with a wonderful slurry tone, feeling very Irongron, and I thought a creature such as Kamelion would occupy that for a while. I felt that as time went on he would default back to a more neutral factory setting – the voice he uses when he hasn’t latched on to anyone: a more neutral tone to match the look on his face. A bit of a sat-nav voice – electronic, but polite and quintessentially British, giving freedom for other voices.”

Given that Kamelion’s **Doctor Who** life only extended to the television episodes, *The King’s Demons* and *Planet of Fire*, plus one deleted scene (*The Awakening*), there’s plenty of material regarding him still to be mined.

Jon agrees: “There’s a whole story there to be developed and it was a fascinating background to explore. His TV story was quite mercurial but I think he would be a wonderful character to come back to – imagine what you could do with him now with today’s technology. You could make a whole army of him, walking very slowly, robotically, with his community, with that still look, marching symetrically. With **Doctor Who**, you can do anything!

“*The Kamelion Empire* is a terrific one – it’s a great idea for a character who featured in a more understated way on television to have an adventure like this to show his maximum potential and backstory. There’s everything in this tale that you would want for a character like that, to be in a fascinating world. It’s a beautiful idea they’ve created.

“Listening to the finished story all these months later it feels fresh and new – you find you’ve forgotten some of the moments, and things were recorded out of order. To hear it with all of the production and sound-scaping, all that built on, you easily forget that you were there and you can appreciate the brilliant writing of the story. I’m really looking forward to hearing the finished version.”

**THE ARTICLE OF RASSILON**

**GALLIFREY IS** in a dangerous place as we head into Volume Two of the **Gallifrey** *Time War* range. The temporal conflict with the Daleks has officially begun and the planet of the Time Lords is in crisis.

Things have got so bad that the Time Lords have reached back into their past to resurrect their greatest hero, and, when we left **Gallifrey** *Time War Volume One* in the fourth adventure, *Desperate Measures*, Rassilon was being restored to life.

Producer Scott Handcock says: “We ended the first box seton a cliffhanger – the resurrection of Rassilon – so this volume deals with the fallout from that. It’s a bit like bringing a figure like Churchill back to campaign in the present day. How would a modern society actually deal with politics from the past? Rassilon’s not a tyrant necessarily, but he’s very black and white. He doesn’t mess about or play games, he gets things done, and so this box set explores Gallifrey’s reaction, on a world where some wish to temper Rassilon’s choices, whilst others want only to invigorate them.”

L**ooking at** the series overall, Scott says: “It’s hard to single out too much, but we deal with the fallout of Rassilon’s return, the threat of planetary genocide, and even assassination attempts. Everybody loses in wartime, and this set allows us to focus on the Time Lords and what they may or may not be willing to do in order to defeat the Daleks. It’s as much about the personal and political conflict as it is about the greater war…”

The box set begins with *Havoc* by David Llewellyn, who says: “I’m not sure I thought I was starting from a cliffhanger, to be honest, because by the time I was thinking in more detail about the adventure, I’d already met up with Scott and script editor, Matt, and we’d talked through some of the ideas that we could explore. Obviously, it’s a humdinger of an ending to pick up from, but we decided quite early on to begin this series some time after Rassilon’s return.

“When we were brainstorming ideas, one of the things that came up was the idea of Gallifrey as a police state. The way an apparently civilised society can slide into authoritarianism. My story had to establish that atmosphere of fear and paranoia, and of some characters regretting the decisions they made.

“It’s the beginning of the tipping point. Volume One gave us the start of the war, and the absolute chaos that unleashed. Now the consequences are beginning to unfurl. There are dark days ahead!”

Scott adds: “As well as Romana and Narvin, we also have Livia and Trave from the previous volume returning, and new additions to the **Gallifrey** world. Samuel Clemens makes his debut as Mantus, Rassilon’s right-hand man in many respects; whilst Samuel Gosrani takes on the role of Eris, a new agent for Narvin to deal with at the Celestial Intervention Agency. Lucy Robinson, Jessica Hayles, Rebecca Root and Nicholas Khan also join the Gallifreyan ranks, with Abra Thompson, Stephen Critchlow, Carlyss Peer and Silas Carson playing a number of off-worlders.”

Script editor Matt Fitton says: “One of the first things Rassilon does is to set up his own secret police, headed by Mantus. He’s a very self-serving politician; Mantus does everything he can to keep himself close to the seat of power.”

Samuel Clemens, playing Mantus, adds: “It was an absolute delight to play and I was very humbled to be asked to do it. Mantus is hungry for power and willing to do whatever it takes to get to the top, he sides with whomever he needs to in order to get there. He is very like Iago from Othello, very manipulative. I approached playing him like a cross between Ian McDiarmind’s Emperor from *Star War*s but on his way up the Sith ladder and Anthony Hopkins’s Hannibal Lecter in terms of his stability and drive to succeed no matter what.

“It was such a joy to do and I did relish in trying to undermine or side with certain characters in the episode. Mantus reminded me a little of Wormtongue in *Lord of the Rings* but with higher aspirations. Scott did a wonderful job in crafting the episode and we all had such fun bringing it to life. It was definitely one of the greatest highlights for me personally as an actor in the Big Finish universe.”

Rassilon is performed by Terrence Hardiman, playing an incarnation of the great Gallifreyan before his Timothy Dalton incarnation.

Scott explains: “We only saw a small slice of the Time War on screen, and it would be very easy to squeeze it all down and connect all the dots in a linear way, but let’s be honest: the Time War is meant to be massive. We knew Rassilon would have to come back at some point, but there’s also plenty of time before we need to get to the sheer fury of Timothy Dalton’s incarnation. It’s more interesting to see how the Time War shapes Rassilon as well as our other characters, so we’d always planned on an earlier incarnation for Volume Two.

“I did ask about Don Warrington as he was previously established as Big Finish’s Rassilon, but sadly he was abroad filming for a big chunk of the year. I’d worked with Terrence previously and having grown up watching **The Demon Headmaster** on TV, I had a gut instinct for how terrifying his voice could be. So I mentioned him to Nicholas Briggs, Lalla Ward and a few others, and everyone agreed he’d be a great fit. He brings a wonderfully serene menace to affairs that lets you know he’s absolutely in control.”

David adds that writing for Rassilon was: “Lots of fun because it’s Rassilon, but also kind of intimidating because it’s Rassilon! It’s a bit of a tightrope walk, giving him dialogue that doesn’t sound too ‘panto villain’ or pretentious, while still having the right amount of gravitas and menace.”

T**he second** story of the set, *Partisans* is written by Una McCormack, who explains: “The original idea was to have Narvin and Romana trying to recruit allies which the War Council saw as cannon fodder. We ran in particular with the latter part, about a world which has strategic significance in the Time War. That allowed us to explore the differences between our heroes and the War Council in their conduct of the war.

“Narvin becomes involved in a partisan war on a planet that one day will become crucial to the outcome of the Time War. But he’s not the only one intervening in the world’s conflicts... I hope that’s enough to be intriguing without giving anything away!”

Una admits she enjoyed writing for a Gallifrey undergoing huge political change: “Well, that kind of setting is right up my street! Lots of backroom dealing and conflicting agendas and clever people trying to outwit each other. Lovely stuff.”

She added that her highlight was: “Working closely with Matt and Lisa McMullin to make the middle two scripts work together, and to give the whole series its arc. I love being in a writers’ room with other authors: it always makes the work so much better.”

In the third story, *Collateral* by Lisa McMullin, the effects of Rassilon’s return are felt more strongly.

Lisa says: “They wanted to explore the idea of the resurrected Rassilon’s megalomania and increasing ruthlessness with nobody to check him; to see how far he would go to ensure that Gallifrey prevailed. Make Gallifrey Great Again?

“And then to look at which characters might make a stand against him and how.

“In *Collateral*, Rassilon is willing to destroy an entire planet just to stop a parasitic race called the Sythes getting their hands (claws/tentacles/pincers?) on a fuel source. Romana is determined that won’t happen and takes measures which may spark a resistance movement against the Time Lords.

“It was thrilling to find myself on Gallifrey slap bang in the middle of the Time War – and slightly frightening to be part of an uprising against Rassilon (I mean you don’t really want to get on his bad side). Writing Romana and Narvin was a dream – why can’t they take charge here on Earth?!”

The final play in this box set is *Assassins* by Matt Fitton. Matt grins: “*Assassins* originally had the working title *Rassilon Must Die!*, but that didn’t quite feel like a **Gallifrey** series title, so I changed it in the end.

“By this point, it’s very much a case of Gallifrey having to deal with the result of its actions in bringing back Rassilon to do a particular job, but they’re finding he’s doing it in a more brutal and dictatorial manner than they expected.

“Livia is back to account for her actions, even though she had hoped to get away scot free, while Romana and Narvin are hanging on at the CIA. We visit another planet’s history in episodes two and three, and because of what happens, Romana decides she needs to take more direct action.

“Romana feels responsible for everything that has happened on Gallifrey with the Time Lords, and decides that if no one will do what’s needed, she will have to do it – even at the cost of her friends and home planet. Narvin is initially horrified by the idea, and in *Assassins*, we will see how Romana begins thinking the unthinkable.”

O**ne noticeable** absence from this series is Louise Jameson as Leela has departed after her encounter with the War Master, with Braxiatel and Ace also leaving.

Scott says: “We knew their fates from elsewhere so used Volume One to clear the decks going forward: Leela had been separated from the others in **The War Doctor** audios, and Ace was due to return to Earth, so we thought this would be a good opportunity to set all that up. I heard a few people say, ‘Well, they’ll be back next box set’, but they’re not! It would really undermine the impact of those stories if they instantly popped up again – though they’re not forgotten. But no, now it’s just Romana and Narvin on a world without any allies... which makes for interesting times.

“Even though we didn’t have Louise with us, Lalla and Seán have such a strong dynamic together, it still felt like family, and they got to work with some brilliant material. These are, I think, some of the strongest **Gallifrey** scripts I’ve had to work with, and everyone really delivered, every step of the way.”

**VORTEX MAIL**

**THE FINAL MEASURE?**

I really enjoyed **The New Counter-Measures** – *The Hollow King*, but from what I’ve read online it seems like this is the final sign-off for the series. It’s a shame as I’ve followed it from day one. I love the characters of Gilmore, Rachel, Allison and Sir Toby – could we see them popping up elsewhere from time to time, as they’re too good a team to lose?

**Colin James**

***Nick:*** *It’s that old bugbear of economic necessity, Colin. We love* ***Counter-Measures****. Many of our listeners love* ***Counter-Measures****, but just not enough of them to cover the costs of continuing to make the episodes. A shame indeed. But yes, the team will be returning in other contexts over the next year or so.*

**TIME OF THE DALEKS?**

I’ve recently gone back and relistened to the complete run of **Dalek Empire**. Wow! I’d forgotten just how epic and galaxy-spanning it is. We’ve got awesome lead characters, and have the Daleks ever been this evil, without the Doctor to stop them? No! Great work, Mr Briggs! It got me thinking – now that we’ve had stories set during the Time War with the War Doctor, War Master, Gallifrey and the Eighth Doctor, would a new series of **Dalek Empire** be possible, set at the same period, but showing things from the Daleks’ point of view in the war? That would just be cool.

**Aaron Bechtloff**

***Nick****: That is almost exactly the idea we’re currently planning to do, Aaron. Very early stages, though. And this is the first time I’ve mentioned it in public. So don’t tell anyway. Actually DO tell everyone!*

**BLAKE’S 7TH HEAVEN**

Just had to drop you a line to say how much I’m enjoying the most recent **Blake’s 7** box sets. The stories have all been top notch, and the cast really do sound as if they’re enjoying themselves. Everything about them is so good – the scripts, the dialogue, and the music is so evocative of Dudley Simpson, to my ears. Well done to all involved! Keep up the great work. I just wish you had access to series D. Who knows? Maybe in the future.

**Alan T**

***Nick****: Ho, ho, D. Who indeed. But huge thanks, Alan. I shall pass this on to our great* ***Blake’s 7*** *producer, John Ainsworth. It really makes a massive difference to all of us that the work we do is loved by listeners such as yourself.*

**UNITED AGAIN**

Now that we’ve got a new Third Doctor team reUNITed (gettit?) at Big Finish, with Jon Culshaw as the Brigadier, could we maybe have a **UNIT** series set in the 70s with the Brig, Yates and Benton fighting off aliens without the Doctor? You’re producing so many spin-offs that are female led – how about a set with the original men from UNIT?

**Jeff Fraser**

***Nick:*** *No plans for that yet, Jeff. But it sounds like fun to me. Hmmm… (the sound of my brain whirring, once again).*

**BIG FINISH BOOK CLUB**

**TORCHWOOD: GHOST NATION**

**HE APPEALED** to Gwen Cooper several times on TV, and was finally given his chance in Big Finish’s audio drama, *Ghost Mission*.

However, two big problems faced him. Not only did he have to deal with an ancient being awakening as monsters roamed Cardiff Bay, but he was also paired with a Torchwood assessor by the name of Norton Folgate – who just happened to be a ghost.

*Ghost Mission*, released in May 2016, was written by Big Finish’s **Torchwood** producer James Goss and directed by Scott Handock. James explains the story’s starting point was: “The recording for **Doctor Who**: *Nightshade*. We’d got Tom Price in to cameo a policeman and Samuel Barnett was in playing Ace’s love interest – and both actors were delightful. I’d been trying to come up with a ‘proper’ Sergeant Davidson story for **Torchwood**,and at the same time Sam was just so, so fun. After recording I said to Scott, “Imagine if a gay ghost comes from 1950s **Torchwood** to haunt Sergeant Davidson!”

“Sergeant Andy Davidson is nice. It’s a loaded word is nice, but it fits him perfectly. It’d be easy to show him either having ‘nice’ adventures, or reveal a grim and gritty side to him. Instead, we’ve teamed him up with Norton and given him a series of thoroughly miserable, but utterly fun outings. Poor bloke.

“Honestly, it’s a dream to write for the two of them together. When I wrote the first scene of the audio drama *Goodbye Piccadilly* last year and sent it to Scott, we both laughed and laughed at the idea.”

Scott adds: “Norton Folgate was written with Sam in mind. I’d cast him as Robin Yeadon in our adaptation of *Nightshade* – Mark Gatiss’s **Doctor Who** debut, back in the 1990s – and during recording of that, between takes, Sam occasionally put on the clipped 1950s telephone voice that impressed producer James Goss enough to write a script to showcase it. I’d already worked with Sam on a few other things, so I didn’t need any convincing to have him back. He’s an absolute delight!”

James agrees: “It was always Sam. His sense of humour has a vicious twinkle to it. Norton is very much a mixture of Joe Orton’s diaries, Julian and Sandy, and a bit of Murray Melvin in the film, *A Taste of Honey*.”

For those who haven’t heard Norton yet, how would James sum up his character? He smiles: “Norton is outrageous and ambiguous. He may be evil, he may be good, he’s certainly out for his own ends, and, in any situation he always says the most hideous thing; he seems spontaneous, but he’s also always seven moves ahead. He’s the kind of character who’d set fire to a carpet if he didn’t like a room, but it’d turn out that he was doing it to reveal a hidden trapdoor.”

Since making his debut in *Ghost Mission*, Norton has become a big part of **Torchwood** at Big Finish, most recently joining the cast of *God Among Us 2*, out this month.

James admits he never thought his creation would play such a major part: “No, not really. I mean, I’m delighted he has as Sam is just so lovely to work with, and Tom and Sam are the dream team – just two brilliant people it’s great to spend a day with. Russell T Davies emailed Scott and me to say, ‘Put Sam Barnett in everything’, and so I think that’s now our plan!”

**UPCOMING RELEASES**

**FEBRUARY 2019**

**DW • THE MONTHLY ADVENTURES:** Black Thursday/Power Game (248, FIFTH DOCTOR, TEGAN, TURLOUGH AND KAMELION )

**DW • THE FOURTH DOCTOR ADVENTURES:** SERIES 8B (8.B, Fourth Doctor, Ann Kelso AND K9)

**DW • THE FOURTH DOCTOR ADVENTURES:** Time’s Assassin (8.5, Fourth Doctor, Ann Kelso AND K9)

**DW • THE FOURTH DOCTOR ADVENTURES:** Fever Island(8.6, Fourth Doctor, Ann Kelso AND K9)

**DW • THE FOURTH DOCTOR ADVENTURES:** The Perfect Prisoners PartS 1-2 (8.7, Fourth Doctor, Ann Kelso AND K9)

**DW • THE FOURTH DOCTOR ADVENTURES:**The Perfect Prisoners PartS 3-4 (8.8, Fourth Doctor, Ann Kelso AND K9)

**DW • SHORT TRIPS:** THE ASTREA CONSPIRACY (9.02)

**DW • MISSY:** SERIES 1 (Box Set)

**THE AVENGERS • THE COMIC STRIP ADAPTATIONS** VOLUME 3(STEED AND TARA KING)

**TORCHWOOD:** GOD AMONG US 2 (Box Set)

**MARCH 2019**

**DW • THE MONTHLY ADVENTURES:** THE KAMELION EMPIRE (249, FIFTH DOCTOR, TEGAN, TURLOUGH AND KAMELION )

**DW • THE COMIC STRIP ADAPTATIONS:** VOLUME 1 (1, FOURTH DOCTOR)

**DW •** THE EIGHTH OF MARCH

**DW • SHORT TRIPS:** DOCTORS AND DRAGONS (9.03)

**GALLIFREY:** TIME WAR 2

**BERNICE SUMMERFIELD:** The Doomsday Manuscript (AUDIOBOOK)

**TORCHWOOD:** NIGHT OF THE FENDAHL (25)

**APRIL 2019**

**DW • THE MONTHLY ADVENTURES:** THE MONSTERS OF GOKROTH (250, SEVENTH DOCTOR and MAGS)

**DW • Eighth Doctor Adventures: Ravenous 3** (Box Set)

**DW • SHORT TRIPS:** YEAR OF THE DREX OLYMPICS (9.04)

**UNIT: THE NEW SERIES:** INCURSIONS(Box Set)

**BERNICE SUMMERFIELD:** The Gods of the Underworld (AUDIOBOOK)

**TORCHWOOD:** THE GREEN LIFE (26)

**DARK SHADOWS:** BLOODLINE: VOLUME 1

**DARK SHADOWS:** BLOODLINE: EPISODEs 1–13

**MAY 2019**

**DW • THE MONTHLY ADVENTURES:** THE MOONS OF VULPANA (251, SEVENTH DOCTOR and MAGS)

**DW • THE TENTH DOCTOR ADVENTURES:** NO PLACE (3.1 Tenth DOCTOR AND DONNA)

**DW • THE TENTH DOCTOR ADVENTURES:** ONE MILE DOWN (3.2 Tenth DOCTOR AND DONNA)

**DW • THE TENTH DOCTOR ADVENTURES:** THE CREEPING DEATH (3.3 Tenth DOCTOR AND DONNA)

**DW • THE TENTH DOCTOR ADVENTURES:** VOLUME 3 (Box Set)

**DW • THE THIRD DOCTOR ADVENTURES:** VOLUME 5 (Box Set)

**DW • SHORT TRIPS:** TBA (9.05)

**TORCHWOOD:** SYNC (27)

**DARK SHADOWS:** BLOODLINE: VOLUME 2

**JUNE 2019**

**DW • THE MONTHLY ADVENTURES:** AN ALIEN WEREWOLF IN LONDON (252, SEVENTH DOCTOR, ACE and MAGS)

**DW • THE COMPANION CHRONICLES** THE FIRST DOCTOR: VOLUME 3 (BOX SET)

**DW • THE PATERNOSTER GANG:** Heritage 1 (BOX SET)

**DW • SHORT TRIPS:** TBA (9.06)

**TORCHWOOD:** SARGASSO (28)

**TORCHWOOD:** GOD AMONG US 3 (Box Set)

**SURVIVORS:** SERIES 9 (Box Set)

**CALLAN:** Volume 2 (Box Set)

**JULY 2019**

**DW • THE MONTHLY ADVENTURES:** TBA (253)

**DW • THE Legacy of Time** (BOX SET)

**DW • THE War Master:** Rage of the Time Lords (BOX SET)

**DW • Eighth Doctor Adventures:** THE Futher Adventures of LUcie Miller(BOX SET)

**DW • SHORT TRIPS:** TBA (9.07)

**TORCHWOOD:** TBA (29)

**BLAKE’S 7:** Restoration 2 (Box Set)