VORTEX

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EDITORIAL

I'VE REALLY enjoyed the UNIT releases so far. Extinction was a fantastic set of four adventures, giving Kate Stewart and Osgood the chance to take centre stage, without a certain Time Lord to help save the day. I've always loved the Autons – Spearhead From Space was my first BBC Video, bought at the Glasgow Garden Festival back in 1988 – and this set really showed why they're one of my favourite baddies.

And it also contained one of the most scary scenes Big Finish has ever done – when Josh Carter undergoes THAT ordeal… oh, it made me shiver.

Series two, Shutdown, was just as exciting, introducing an excellent new adversary in the Tengobushi, with Alice Krige fantastic as Felicity Lime (Alice Krige! The Borg Queen! She's brilliant in everything she does). It's a great series, set in a very modern setting – public private partnerships between governments and business, and it's not too hard to imagine this would happen.

And now we've reached the third box set with Silenced. The Silence were such a clever creation on TV – a monster you forget about as soon as you don't see it? Genius! But how can they work on audio? I can't wait to find out…

KENNY

SNEAK PREVIEWS AND WHISPERS

I AM NOT A NUMBER!

Nicholas Briggs previews volume two of The Prisoner…

Something that's informing volume two is Mark Elstob's remarkable performance. Now I know how he's doing it, I'm writing for him this time. His performance is very difficult to define. In many ways it's very reminiscent of Patrick McGoohan's performance in the original TV series, but if you actually study it and break it down, as I have done – endlessly – it's very much its own thing.

The original TV series was, very often, about hard stares and flickers of expression passing over Number Six's face. That can't happen on audio, so you have to find ways of communicating all that in conversations. That's one reason why I created Number Nine. So he'd have someone to talk to. I'm not too keen on monologues. I'm rather ruthless in my views on them when other writers do them. People talking to themselves for no reason is… a bit lazy, sometimes. On audio, it's occasionally unavoidable. So if you really need to do it, it's best to have a great, realistic reason for it.

And I can exclusively reveal the episodes I'm writing. Yes, this is a Vortex exclusive! All the storylines have been approved by the lovely people at ITV. And it's not quite what I'd planned initially.

The first episode, episode five is entitled I Met A Man Today and is a very loose adaptation of Many Happy Returns. Episode six is entitled Project Six and is an extremely loose adaptation of A, B and C. Episode seven is Hammer Into Anvil, based on the TV episode of the same title, but extremely different. And finally, Living In Harmony borrows a title from the original series, but is, frankly, nothing to do with the original episode. It's not, for example, set in a Western frontier town where Number Six is the Sheriff. It's very… out there. I can't wait to write the script.

And talking of waiting, the horrible truth is that The Prisoner Volume Two is going to be delayed a bit. We're not sure how by how long. But this time last year, all the recording was in the can. This time this year, I've only just started writing episode five… so, I'm behind. The weight of other work I'm doing has pushed it further and further away.

I've been dealing with all sorts of executive producer-ish stuff – there's a new website on the way! And Jason and I agreed that the best way to do podcasts is to do a new one every week. I love it, but it's a brand new hour-long programme every week that I'm writing, recording and editing. Frankly, I'm doing too much and there are times when it seems to be crushing me. But the truth is that I love it all and love all the people I work with.

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Kenny Smith checks the tally marks on his arms, as UNIT prepare to face the Silence...

IT’S OH, SO QUIET

LOVE the Silence," says line producer David Richardson. "I think they're an ingenious creation by Steven Moffat, and they were high on my list of monsters I wanted to work with when we got the new series licence.

"And they were such a good fit for UNIT – not only did it allow us to explore some of the fallout from Day of the Moon, it also meant we could tell a very different kind of story. UNIT are facing an enemy that they keep forgetting are there – and Matt Fitton and John Dorney have used them beautifully. I think these scripts contain real 'punch the air' moments."

Established UNIT TV stars Jemma Redgrave and Ingrid Oliver are back as Kate Stewart and Osgood, along with Big Finish's own series regulars, with Warren Brown as Lieutenant Sam Bishop, James Joyce as Captain Josh Carter and Ramon Tikaram as Colonel Shindi. Director Ken Bentley says: "The main strength of UNIT is our core cast. We'd worked with Ingrid before, and we made sure we worked with Jemma before we knew for sure we had the chance to make UNIT on audio. Then we made sure to cast the rest of our UNIT team from actors we knew well.

"This was a conscious decision since we wanted everybody to feel familiar with Big Finish, so they could all hit the ground running and enjoy bringing these action-packed stories to life. The result is everyone gets on like a house on fire. Three box sets in and I know everybody's happy and confident because they're taking the mickey out of me more and more!"

THIS box set sees Matt Fitton – who has written two stories in each of the first two UNIT series – joined by John Dorney. At first, the idea of writing for the Silence on audio sounds like a tricky one. Matt says: "It was a challenge when David gave us the brief of 'UNIT versus the Silence'. I did have to go and think about it.

"It's a tricky one to do because they have got such a specific role on TV, and it's focused on the Doctor. We had to work out how we could make them work on their own.

"I looked at the logic of it, and myself and Dorney had a chat about how we would divide it up. I wanted to kick it off and have a look at the way the Silence are, as well as their whole ethos.

"Something I was keen to do was have a haunted house story, which would suit their scariness! We knew we were bringing Colonel Shindi back, so I thought we could do a bit of a Rear Window homage, where no one quite believes what he's saying."

But John feels differently.

He explains: "One of the things people forget about is how much the Silence talk. In terms of people looking away, all you need is a quick musical sting.

"It's actually a lot easier than you might think. It never felt like a challenge or something that worried me – it never crossed my mind that it might be a problem.

"The thing that's interesting with them is they almost leave themselves open to audio storytelling. It's a problem if there's one person in a room with the Silence, but for audio, you need two people in a room, having a conversation, and if one of them turns, they see it and that's where it gets interesting. I saw this as an opportunity to have a lot of fun."

MATT, who has written the first and fourth parts of this set, enjoyed working with John Dorney on the latest adventures, having previously written the first two UNIT box sets with Andrew Smith.

Matt says: "I've worked with Dorney before on a lot of stuff, where we've script edited each other or been writing things. There are big, action, battle stories, which Andrew Smith excels at, but Dorney's good at bringing in a new angle. with slightly odd things, and it's ideal when he's got these slightly off-kilter ideas which worked for the Silence.

"As I'm doing the opener and closing story, it meant he could do whatever he wanted with the middle two. The logic we came up with was that the human race had been sent to assassinate the Silence, but another generation away meant there were fewer people watching the moon landings as time went by. They wouldn't be pre-programmed to wipe out the Silence.

"That means there's a slight sliver of hope for them, which has allowed them to regroup and come together. That was the starting point for us, really."

John – who collaborated with Matt when he wrote the first and fourth parts of Doom Coalition 3 – continues: "It was a different experience doing the middle parts. It wasn't the same as Doom Coalition 3, with Ken Bentley script editing, as with UNIT Matt and I were script editing each other. Matt had a clear idea of episode one, and I had ideas for episodes two and three. Sometimes you get a little bit selfish about your episodes, but we never really argued about it – we had bits we nicked, back and forth.

"It's always a pleasure working with Matt, as we have a very different dynamic. I'd say this is less of a four disc continuous complete story, as it's more like three stories set over a period of time."

The writers both enjoyed writing for Kate and Osgood, as well as the new audio regulars. John continues: "I'd heard UNIT: Extinction when I was writing this one, and it was very helpful to me. The voices of Kate and Osgood are very distinct so I knew what I wanted to do with them, and there's other rich characters there too, with Sam and Josh.

"It was nice to be able to explore different things to do with them, to play against what had been done in the first series. Writing for an ongoing series is an evolving process – we see what's gone before and then look at what you want to do that's different.

"I wanted to do something that would put Josh through the wringer, and have Sam more to the fore. It's lovely playing with these characters."

Matt agrees: "Osgood and Kate have such distinct voices and even though they are both scientists, they are like chalk and cheese. They work together very well, as you've got Kate who's always in control, while Osgood gets fazed quite easily, but always has solutions, particularly under pressure. It's great to throw them into these situations and see them spark off each other."

For John, there was something special for him when it came to writing for Osgood. He explains: "I've known Ingrid for years, long before she was in Doctor Who."

John took some inspiration from the Silence's TV debut when he came to writing his stories.

He says: "Some fans have criticisms of The Impossible Astronaut and The Day of the Moon, as there's a gap in the middle of several months between the two episodes and you don't find out how the Doctor and his friends discover that the Silence are 'a thing'. When you look into it, it all makes sense and it's not hard to figure out what happens, and there's potential for interesting stuff happening in that situation.

"When I started writing, I did a dramatic reveal which I thought would be very serious, but by the time I wrote it, it was like an Abbott and Costello sketch! I got to put some nice little comedy gags in it."

UNIT stories move at some pace – how does Ken, as director, capture that urgency in studio?

He says: "Mostly everybody's on the ball and knows precisely what a scene needs in terms of energy, but every now and then we might miss an important stage direction and get the energy wrong. Normally just spotting the stage direction is enough to tell us all what the scene needs and the cast deliver the required level of energy. Actors are brilliant. They know when something is or isn't working. And there are no techniques you need to get the right level of energy. It's like flicking a switch. If there's a ticking bomb in the scene they all panic accordingly!

"I do have a rule of thumb though, which I only rarely share with a cast: the higher the page number the higher the stakes!"

The UNIT series has proven to be very popular with fans. Ken adds: "It's so hard to define exactly what makes any type of storytelling popular. As a species we're just addicted to stories! But I think UNIT has an underlying psychological appeal. We all want to feel safe. The world is full of danger and if we stopped to think about it too deeply we might never leave the house! Albeit in a lighthearted and fantastical way, UNIT reassures us that there are people out there watching our backs. I think that might go some way towards explaining the popular appeal of all adventure stories featuring heroes who save the world."

And he admits that he had a personal highlight from Silenced: "For many years I've wanted to work with Nick Day, but the stars just hadn't aligned until now. I love actors such as Nick. Fearless, fun, and effortlessly capable. It was a genuine pleasure to finally work with him, and I hope this is the first of many."

JOINING the cast as the voice of the Silence is Nick Briggs, who some people thought had voiced them on TV. To capture the spirit of the creatures, did Nick try to get into character by mimicking their body language and movements in studio?

"You know I think I did actually try to do the physicality of the Silence when I was playing them for the audio episode. Bizarrely, when they first appeared on TV, a colleague of mine emailed me and said, 'I think I recognised that voice tonight'. He genuinely believed it was me. But no, I didn't do the Silence on TV. I don't know who did. But when we decided to do them, David Richardson obviously thought I was the 'go to guy' for monster voices and I had a lovely time doing them."

John concludes: "Each of the stories are set at least a month apart. It means there's the possibility of fitting other stories in between them – or even entire box sets!

"Silenced has an epic feel to it."

The Third Doctor is back for a couple of adventures this month, as Kenny Smith talks to Katy Manning, Tim Treloar and the production team…

TWO THIRDS

ONE of the most eagerly anticipated releases for the second half of the year has been The Third Doctor Adventures Volume Two.

Fans who listened to the first set were very quickly impressed by Tim Treloar's take on Jon Pertwee's famous role, but producer David Richardson concedes now that there was a bit of a gamble in releasing the first two plays, Prisoners of the Lake and The Havoc of Empires.

He reveals: "I must admit, we were very nervous about the first Third Doctor Adventures box set. We thought it was brilliant. We thought Tim had done a fantastic job, as did everyone at the studio. But the very concept of recasting such a memorable and loved Doctor was quite terrifying, and we had no idea whether the fans would embrace it or not. And they did, which was so gratifying – and such a wonderful reward for Tim.

"People who listen to these stories will have no idea how much work he puts into it. How much he studies Jon Pertwee's vocal quality in the days up to recording, and how every five minutes in the studio he plays recorded lines of Jon's back, again and again and again. He tortures himself for this role – but the results speak for themselves.

"I've been listening to edits of The Transcendence of Ephros and his work is extraordinary. And Katy too – recapturing all the vitality of Jo, 40 years on. These people are hard grafters, and a joy to be with."

The man with the unenviable task of taking on the role of Jon Pertwee's Time Lord is Tim Treloar, but he admits that the positive reaction from Big Finish fans was a massive boost for him.

He reveals: "I was overjoyed by the reaction to the first set. It's a massive pair of shoes to fill, but the whole point was that I wasn't trying to do an impression of Jon, because I couldn't do that as I'm not an impressionist.

WHat I was trying to do was to capture the spirit of Jon Pertwee's performance, which was very difficult and there were a lot of people who wanted to hear an exact duplication of him. If I had tried to do that, I would have lost some of the acting and it would not have been a truthful performance from me. If all I was concentrating on was doing an exact impression of his voice, the acting would have gone out of the window.

"A lot of people were kind enough to say I was able to capture the essence of Pertwee, on the vocal side of things, while there were things I could pick up on, such as his more siblant S's and the dramatic delivery he had. It probably takes me an hour or so to get into it, but the great thing was having Katy there and being so supportive of me throughout."

And co-star Katy Manning, back as Jo Grant, agrees with Tim about the difficulties of stepping into the shoes of a recognisable star.

She explains: "There's two different ways of doing it – there's people who do incredible impersonations of different people, and people who capture the spirit of another actor.

"I've played famous people, like Bette Davis, and the important thing to do when you're playing them is to make sure you get to the heart of it. If you can find the heart and soul of that character, then it's going to work. That's more crucial to me than getting a perfect vocal performance. You really need the spirit.

"When you are doing anybody famous, you've got to catch all their little vocal things, as well as understanding what it was about their performance that made it work.And that's what Tim does – it's an extraordinary job, as he does a bit of both. He can get the voice, and he gets the spirit of Jon too."

She continues: "From what I've seen on Twitter, everyone really enjoyed the first set, which is good.The fans still love hearing little old Jo, and the fans want more of her – and that's where Big Finish are so good. Somehow, with magic, miracles and a lot of hard work, we're getting there, and at least nine times out of 10, we're hitting the nail on the head.

"What Big Finish have done with these stories is quite extraordinary and brave.

"With Tim, I'm forming a good working relationship and it's getting stronger every time we're in studio. He's so dedicated and you can tell he's been preparing, trying to get the right speech patterns – it's a joy to do."

TIM has been meticulous in his research in trying to capture the spirit of Jon Pertwee's legendary performance.

He has been studying his way of speaking and the dramatic flourishes he brought to the part, and is doing his utmost to recreate those for Big Finish. Tim admits: "When I knew I was being asked back for the second set, I went back to the original episodes I'd watched, The Mutants and Planet of the Spiders, and would say some of Jon's lines from those stories.

"It's like trying to speak with a different accent in Britain – there's always certain key words and phrases you can tap into, which get you there. To be honest, with Jon Pertwee, it does take quite a while to get back into it, as it's not quite second nature yet."

Katy adds: "You know people are sitting there listening and they have their own expectations. I suppose, in a way, I'm doing something similar to Tim. I don't have the voice I had 40 or so years ago, as I don't sound like Jo now. I'm trying to find a 19- or 20-year-old character – I've got to go back to what she was like then and ignore everything we know has happened to her since.

"I need to find that naivety she had and bring that out in the voice – I'm looking back to find all the things that made her so popular back then. And it's not as easy as a lot of people might think!"

THE new box set features two new adventures, opening with The Transcendence of Ephros by Guy Adams. It sees the Doctor and Jo arrive on the dying planet Ephros, where Galactux Power Inc is exploiting the world's remaining resources. But something is stirring beneath the surface…

Guy, who has become an established Big Finish fixture over the past year, was delighted to get a Third Doctor story to do.

He felt it was: "Terribly exciting! I love the Third Doctor, particularly the Earthbound stories. 'Wonderful! I thought, I can pop a Yeti on the loo in Tooting Bec'!"

Of course, things didn't turn out that way, as Guy's brief was: 'To write a story set in space!' "Oh, how the world likes to laugh at me. Though, of course, once I'd thought about it and come up with a story I liked I suddenly realised I was much happier out among the stars than I would have been trapped in the Home Counties so, as is so often the way, David Richardson did me a favour."

Guy particularly enjoyed trying to capture the flavour of the early 1970s. He continues: "That's always the fun of these scripts. To fill them with just enough to evoke the era in which they're set, a warm comfort blanket draped around the shoulders of both the listener and the writer.

"Then, of course, the job is to yank that comfort blanket right off again. It's a balance, I hope this feels very much in-keeping with the period and yet… I hope it has a few surprises too."

The second tale in the set is The Hidden Realm by David Llewellyn. We find out what happens when the Doctor and Jo journey to Bramfield New Town when the husband of Jo's cousin vanishes mysteriously. As magpies circle overheard, the Doctor discovers a terrifying alien plot. Both plays have been directed by Nicholas Briggs.

David Llewelyn says of his writing brief: "It was very open, actually – it usually is! I was asked to write an Earthbound Third Doctor and Jo story. I think there was a bit of batting ideas back and forth. I'd mentioned wanting to set a story in a 1960s/70s 'new town', and then it just went from there.

"One thing I realised when I was starting out is that – as much as I love Pertwee – the Third Doctor is possibly the one I'm least familiar with, so it was a bit daunting. I'd seen most of the classic stories, but I still had to go back and re-watch a few of them before I felt confident in writing the character. There's a very specific dynamic between the Third Doctor and Jo – and I was keen to get that right."

There was a particular highlight for Welshman David in the writing process. He laughs: "Re-watching The Green Death was fun. It's such an enjoyable story, and I could listen to Katy Manning say 'Llanfairfach' until the cows come home. And that ending is just so poignant. One of the best companion farewells."

LISTENERS will notice a change in style from the first set of plays, which featured Tim narrating scenes with his own distinctive Welsh lilt, but this time, the linking material has gone, as these adventures are now full cast, akin to the monthly range.

Tim grins: "That was a challenge in itself this time around, because I had the narration to fall back on last time. I was able to use my own voice as the narrator and then slip into doing the Doctor's voice, but this time it was just straight Doctor.

"There's definitely a pressure to it! This is like doing the difficult second album, to use a music analogy, as you're trying to replicate what you did before, and at the same time, you've got to try and bring in something new. For me, it meant getting more of the Doctor's softness in there and the relationship he had with Jo.

"It's all about learning and improving, step by step. Katy's support is just fantastic. She's such a delight to be around and continually giving suggestions on how Jon would have said it, if she thinks it's appropriate. I love that – it shows how much she cares about it.

"When we're in the booths in studio, I'll often look up and see she's giving me the thumbs up, which is great. It's the same with Nick, as the director.

"It's very rewarding when you play a scene and you don't get any notes back. It's a great feeling."

THEY KEEP THRILLING STEED!

Kenny Smith finds John Steed and Emma Peel are back with a vengeance…

ARLIER this year, Big Finish brought four new adventures for The Avengers to life. For the past few years, we've been used to the pairing of John Steed and David Keel on audio, but this time it was Emma Peel who was at the side of everyone's favourite bowler-hatted secret agent.

Julian Wadham and Olivia Poulet established an instant rapport, perfectly capturing the spirit of Patrick Macnee and Diana Rigg's legendary characters. The flirty relationship, playful dialogue and close friendship were all there, right from the word go. Now, Steed and Mrs Peel are back for four new audio adventures this month in The Avengers – The Comic Strip Adaptations Volume Two, with Playtime Is Over, The Antagoniser, The Mad Hatter and The Secret Six.

These are adapted from Diana for Girls comic. In 1967, DC Thomson made an arrangement with ABC Television Ltd to adapt The Avengers into a series of new comic strip serials. The strips ran at two pages a week in issues 199 to 224, and the main artist was Emilio Frejo, assisted by Juan Gonzalez. Then last year, Big Finish announced an agreement with right holders StudioCanal to adapt these eight strips for audio.

Playtime Is Over has been adapted by Robert Khan and Tom Salinsky.

They said: "The basic plot points of the comic strip had to be respected, but within that framework we were given quite a free hand. It had to sound like an episode from the colour Diana Rigg series: some big comedy characters, witty dialogue, but not completely ludicrous. Which, given the comic strip was about circus dwarves dressed as children using deadly toys to pull off jewel heists was pretty tricky.

 "Six pages of comic doesn't give a writer much to go on to generate 60 minutes of rip-roaring audio drama. The best Avengers episodes elaborate one principal theme and so early on we decided to focus on toys rather than circuses. That gave us our new major character, the corpulent toymaker Tiny Tony who would probably have been played by somebody like Robert Morley in 1968. Then it was just trying to take the obvious set-pieces from the comic and create some kind of cause-and-effect plot to link them together.

HAVING adapted two stories for the first box set, Paul Morris and Simon Barnard return for the second series.

They explain: "For The Antagoniser we felt justified in making more structural changes to the comic strip storyline than we had previously.

"To keep the story a mystery we moved the reveal to a later point so that the villain's means and motive were not given away upfront. And by fleshing out the panel of experts present, we were also able to start our story in quintessential Avengers fashion: a string of bizarre murders, each leading our heroes closer to the truth.

"When it came to the scripting, we also had fun adding to the menagerie of enraged creatures with which to assail our heroes. Possibly too much fun."

MATT Fitton turns his hand to The Avengers for the third tale, with The Mad Hatter.

He says: "With these stories being based on the comic strips, they are populated by eccentrics. The strip I've adapted features Princess Helga, a royal from a fictional European country, who becomes the target of a mysterious assassin. The comic strip was just six pages but that works quite nicely as the skeleton to hang things on. You've got the bare bones of the story there but you expand on and develop that world by bringing more emotion, motivations and reactions to it, so everything you see in the strip does happen but we have more of the events leading up to them, as well as dealing with the consequences.

"I'll include some of the original lines where possible, but it's not completely bound to that.”

FINISHING off the set is The Secret Six, by the series script editor John Dorney, who adapted The Norse Code for volume one…

He says: "It was much easier doing it the second time around, as I knew where I was going and how Steed and Mrs Peel would talk because I was used to the personalities. I did feel, very quickly after after doing my first one, that I knew how to do it and felt that this would work. I was really enjoying it, and feel it's one of the most amazing jobs I've done for Big Finish.

"I tried to keep as many of the original lines as possible – I even tried to make the same scenes play out, in the same order.

"In the case of The Norse Code, it's pretty much a case of taking those scenes and recontextualising them, so there's more happening between the frames than you see in the original story.

"With The Secret Six, there's a couple of changes I've made to finesse the story, as it wasn't quite working to its full potential, but I think it's a lot clearer now. But I was very keen to try and keep every line from the original strips, where possible, no matter how ridiculous they sound."

THE COMIC STRIPS

ALSO available this month is Steed and Mrs Peel: The Comic Strips, a collection of eight vintage strips originally published in Diana for Girls 50 years ago.

If you've heard the first four audio adaptations, this is your chance to read the original stories, in Big Finish's first foray into the world of comics. This paperback edition contains the original artwork from Diana magazine, and is the perfect companion to the audio adventures.

Producer David Richardson adds: "The stories were brilliant, full of imagination and wit, and they provided a solid platform with which we went on to make the audio dramas. How wonderful to be able to reprint these strips, and then bring them to life in a different medium too."

The comic strips didn't have titles in Diana, but in this reissue, they have been named after the Big Finish adaptations – Return to Castle De'ath, The Miser, The Golden Dresses, The Norse Code, Playtime Is Over, The Antagoniser, The Mad Hatter and The Secret Six.

As well as full-colour reprints of the comic strips, Steed and Mrs Peel: The Comic Strips has extra material for Avengers fans. There's a Q&A session with Olivia Poulet and Julian Wadham – Big Finish's Emma Peel and John Steed – on what it was like re-creating the iconic characters. Vortex editor Kenny Smith talks to David Richardson, who admits that trying to find someone to play Mrs Peel was the single hardest casting he had ever had at Big Finish, as well as the director, Ken Bentley, and Alistair Lock, who was in charge of music and sound design. He also interviews all the Big Finish writers involved – Paul Morris, Simon Barnard, Paul Magrs, John Dorney, Nicholas Briggs, and Matt Fitton – to find out about the challenges faced in turning a vintage comic strip into an audio adventure.

In these adventures, you'll never guess who you're going to meet next, from jewel thieves, Vikings, and crocodiles to princesses, dwarves and even a phantom piper! But one thing is certain, whatever is thrown at them, Steed and Mrs Peel deal with it with their usual style and aplomb.

The Avengers – Steed & Peel: The Graphic Novel is currently priced at £9.99 in paperback and £4.99 for the eBook – please note that these pre-order prices will be held until the end of the year, at which point they'll go up to £12.99 and £7.99.

Kenny Smith crosses his fingers and hopes to escape the mysterious illness that's ravaging Cardiff…

OUT OF THIS WORLD

THE end of 2016's when everything changes for Big Finish's Torchwood releases – it's the first full-cast box set release. John Barrowman, Eve Myles and Gareth David-Lloyd return to the Hub, as Jack, Gwen and Ianto, to tackle a new menace, set in the gap between the second series of the TV show, and Children of Earth.

Producer James Goss explains: "We said it would be nice to do something a bit like the outbreak of an alien virus. That was it – just something that would allow the team to really shine and to get a bit of the feeling of Children of Earth.

"The writers went away and worked it out between them, and director Scott Handcock and I then said yes to their proposal. It was that simple."

Scott continues: "People have been asking us to do full-team stuff for a while, and we've been working on it from the second we started. But then boring reasons like schedules and availability come into play, and everything takes longer than you expect. But we did it.

"James Goss commissioned a lovely series of scripts from Guy Adams, Emma Reeves and AK Benedict, featuring the Children of Earth team. We checked availabilities, and everyone was free, more or less, back in May. Sometimes it meant people dashing in to studio at 7am, or for a few hours here or there, but it was lovely to have everyone on board for an epic story."

Scott continues: "Torchwood's been exciting from the word go. Every time we invite someone back, it's hugely exciting. Individually, they have so much energy. They're all utterly outrageous. So having more than one of them in the room at a single time achieved a sort of critical mass! Everyone was just so thrilled to be a part of it, and to be playing the parts they fell in love with almost a decade ago. So yes, it was hugely exciting. Hopefully the first of many (subject to availability)!"

THE writing team collaborated closely to craft Outbreak. Guy says: "The email threads were ludicrous actually at times, I once subjected Emma and Alexandra to what felt like a novel-length breakdown of the potential transmission speed of a virus using Ebola as a real world example. I then went on to discuss the allocation of police staffing in the Cardiff area. I'm deeply ashamed of how much boring twaddle I sent them actually. They were far more sensible, emailing lovely pertinent thoughts about character development and dangling plot threads for us all to knit.

"Of course I was the lucky one, I wrote the first script, which was rather like storming into a nightclub, setting the place on fire and then demanding the other two dance in the ruins."

AK Benedict adds: "We chatted all the way through the process, starting with a Skype conversation where we tickled and teased the plot into shape. We then called to each other for help once the writing started, each time met with wisdom, clarity and the kind of jokes that make Torchwood so Torchwoody."

Emma confirms: "We had a lot of contact with each other on this one – via Skype a bit and mostly email – as we worked up the storyline together. It was a privilege to work with these genii."

The writing team, who all had experience of writing for the previous Torchwood releases, were delighted to turn their hand to Big Finish's first full-cast Torchwood plays. AK explains: "It felt thrilling to write a full-cast play. I couldn't quite believe it. I kept giggling maniacally at my sheer luck, which must have sounded strange to the neighbours during my late night writing sessions."

Emma adds: "Doing a full-cast play was awesome. I got to write for John Barrowman, Gareth David-Lloyd and Tom Price for the first time."

But Guy feels: "It actually didn't feel that different to me in a way. I was surprised, but while the monthly releases have always had smaller casts they always feel big to me. Obviously, being able to write for characters I hadn't used before was lovely."

Bringing the scripts to life was a challenge for director Scott. He grins: "That week was mad. Not only were we recording Outbreak in Cardiff, but we then travelled down to London after we wrapped, ready to embark on four days of recording on The Lives of Captain Jack! It was exhausting but, again, enormous fun. We worked seven days straight, from Monday to Sunday. So many different scripts, in strange recording orders.

"But the end results sound marvellous. I'm really proud of what we managed to achieve, and James Goss should be applauded for keeping it all together in one of the most barmy Big Finish recording weeks on record!"

AFTER A hectic week, the finished recordings were passed over to sound designer Martin Montague.

How does creating a contemporary soundscape compare to bringing an alien world to life?

He laughs: "In some ways it's actually harder because people will know what it should sound like, whereas for an alien world you're inventing it all yourself and have more of an artistic licence. And with this being Cardiff, I needed to ensure that the wildtracks for street scenes sounded suitably Welsh. It may just be background noise, but if the wrong accent pops up, it can distract you on a subliminal level. Thankfully Scott had recorded a number of wildtracks with the Welsh cast, so it was then a case of making sure they sit OK in the mix.

"The challenges that have cropped up have come from unexpected places, such as trying to get the right siren FX for a modern ambulance – fortunately Steve Foxon came to the rescue with that. A key sound effect in this story is wires moving around inside human bodies and we wanted to make it as horrible as possible. There was much to-ing and fro-ing between James, Scott and myself as we tried to get it right. James came up with the idea that it should sound something like worms in swarfega and Scott and I had in mind the thrashing noise that the Dalek mutant makes when its case explodes in The Five Doctors. So that took some time to experiment with a few noises until it sounded right. It can't be too loud or it sounds ridiculous; it can't be too quiet or it's not noticeable enough.

"Similarly all the scratching that comes from the characters who are infected needed to sound as horrible as possible as they scratched their skin raw. In the end the SFX for that came from soaking an old bath towel and scratching furiously at it for a wet sound of blood and flesh being exposed, before tweaking the EQ settings."

And handling the music is Blair Mowat – composer for Doctor Who spin-off Class on TV. He previously worked with Murray Gold on Doctor Who, so has that been of help to him when it came to doing Torchwood?

"Knowing Murray and having worked with him has been invaluable in creating the music for the Torchwood Big Finish series," says Blair. "He's such a talented and creative force who works at an incredible speed. The musical world he set up with Ben Foster for Torchwood is really unique and special, and fun to compose for.

"I sent a few cues to Murray whilst working on The Conspiracy and we talked about the new main theme too as I was doing it. One thing we agreed on was that Torchwood should be quite 'rock'n' roll' when appropriate and he encouraged me to find moments to push that aspect of the score, which I have at certain points – most notably in stories such as Moving Target."

And he admits it's exciting to score the first full-cast episodes of the series for Big Finish.

Blair adds: "It's great to be involved but to me it's just as fun as the solo dramas (which is very exciting!). I love how much character development we've seen on characters like Ianto and Tosh in their solo adventures in seasons one and two. But yes, there's no doubt that it's an epic story and that having all those characters together is just incredibly special. It gives the whole thing a different feel, very dynamic, and we'll be looking to support that musically throughout."

LISTEN AGAIN: DOCTOR WHO

THE BEGINNING

BIG Finish's main celebration for the 50th anniversary of Doctor Who brought together five incarnations for The Light at the End. But, appropriately, the programme's early years were also commemorated with The Beginning.

Producer David Richardson explains: "I wanted to do something very special for the 50th anniversary, and so approached our contact in the Cardiff production office and asked 'Could we tell the very first Doctor Who story ever – the Doctor and Susan's flight from Gallifrey?'

"Thankfully, they said yes and from there we crafted a whole trilogy about Quadrigger Stoyn, the unwilling stowaway aboard the TARDIS. And we had Terry Molloy in mind for the role even before we'd started writing scripts."

Some may have balked at the task of telling the first adventure for the Doctor and Susan, but Marc Platt relished the challenge. He says: "How lovely to be asked! The story was part of the 50th anniversary celebrations, so I felt honoured and a bit scared too. But then every story should be scary!

"There are several alternative versions of how the Doctor and Susan left Gallifrey – I've done a couple myself. There's a definite balancing act of being faithful, but not reverential, to what we already know, and being surprising too. When was the Doctor ever anything else?!

"The story isn't about why they left Gallifrey. It's about what they did once they'd stepped out into the unknown. The one thing I definitely wanted to do was set up the Doctor's first discovery of the Earth, which becomes his second home. And there's also the introduction of Quadrigger Stoyn. A Quadrigger is a Quantum Mechanic – one of those TARDIS technicians in overalls who we see in the final part of The War Games. He's the fly in the ointment, representing the closed minds of the Gallifreyans that the Doctor and Susan hoped to leave behind."

How did Marc find writing for that more alien First Doctor?

"We tend to think of the Doctor and Susan as seasoned explorers of the universe in all its relative dimensions," says Marc. "But when they left Gallifrey, they were absolute innocents. They swan round like tourists with no idea how to deal with aliens or strange new worlds. Even Earth (which Susan has at least read about) is an alien world. They are on a steep learning curve from the start and they'll still be on it when the TV series starts with An Unearthly Child."

David adds: "Long after recording, as we grew closer to release, The Name of the Doctor was broadcast, which actually showed the scene of the Doctor and Susan fleeing Gallifrey – with a little contribution from Clara. So I contacted Cardiff again – could we record a revised sequence that would tie in with this, which would hint that Clara was present in our version too. We got a yes, and also an agreement to be able to use the capsule design of the TARDIS on the cover. It was a small foray into new series Doctor Who – and a taste of exciting things to come!

And Marc adds: "I'd already written one 'departure scene' when the word came through from Cardiff that Clara was having a hand in the departure as well. In the end, only a couple of lines needed changing. Susan hears voices: one is the Doctor, the other doesn't get specified. But the cover had to be changed too – from the pyramid in my first version to the basic pillar form used on TV."

VORTEX MAIL

TRIPPING UP?

It was with some surprise that I read of your plan to release the subscriber exclusive Short Trips to the wider listening public. Whilst I can understand that they are very popular and sadly often unheard, I was also disappointed by the decision as it seems to fly in the face of loyal subscribers. Surely one of the perks of paying the money we do is for such exclusives? Your website even states that they are 'uniquely available' to us. As a company, I think you treat subscribers well for the most part, but this is a decision that smacks mostly of greed and disrespect for those who have paid in advance. Colour this subscriber at least very unimpressed.

John

Nick: I'm very sorry indeed and saddened that you think we're greedy and disrespectful. Our aim was, after quite some time of exclusivity, to make these available to a wider audience. It's a tricky balance for us to give as much exclusivity to our subscribers as well as taking into account those who cannot, for various reasons, subscribe. We are very grateful for our subscribers, who have always, as I've said many times, been the backbone of Big Finish's support. We'll continue to offer exclusives to subscribers and will consider policy changes even more carefully in the future. The saddest thing for us is that when we limit availability of some productions to subscribers, those who choose to illegally upload and download our productions seem to see this as giving them some sense of extra entitlement.

BLAKE'S HEAVEN

I have been a subscriber for many years across multiple ranges and have been a particular fan of the Blake's 7 audios. The Liberator Chronicles were a fantastic extension of the original series developing characters and themes much further. Are there future plans for the range and if so can we have a hint what they might be?

Will Joyce

Nick: There are indeed future plans for Blake's 7 to have a long and exciting future with Big Finish. Keep an eye out for announcements.

DAVROS GOES FOURTH?

I've still not given up hope of a Fourth Doctor encounter with Davros. Tom is really in his stride now in the audio range, and Terry Molloy has to be one of the greatest audio villains of them all. Long overdue another outing. It can be done continuity wise after Destiny, and by having the crippled one imprisoned again at the end. Go on, make my day Big Finish, and get to it. Keep up the good work by the way on all the ranges, love 'em.

Rob Cope

Nick: No plans at the moment, Rob, but it's a great idea that we've discussed many times.

WELCOME ABOARD

In the absence of Doctor Who on TV, I decided to take a listen to the audio dramas. I'm so glad I did… it has been wonderful to hear the adventures of the Eighth Doctor. I got a kick out of the new stories with the Tenth Doctor and Donna. And the River Song Diaries – all excellent. Over time I hope to go back to the Fourth Doctor as this was the Doctor I first saw as a child. Thank you for bringing these new dimensions to Doctor Who.

James Norcotte

Nick: James, we're so grateful you decided to try us out. I can, of course, only encourage you to go back to all the Doctors.

SOUNDING OFF?

I've been enjoying the recent Doctor Who releases, and have been really impressed by the high production values Big Finish have had lately. The behind the scenes interviews are always interesting too. However, there is something I must take issue with! Why aren't the sound designers or music composers ever interviewed. Given that these are audio stories, and given the sterling work the designers/composers do in bringing these thrilling episodes to life, I'd like to hear more of their thoughts, and more about how they realise the stories.

Steve Tattersall

Nick: Well, Steve, it's not true to say that they're never interviewed, but I do take your point that they're hardly ever interviewed. The reason is a practical one. The interviews are done during the studio sessions, before the sound designers and musicians are involved. By the time the production is finished, there's always such a rush to get it out on schedule that there's rarely time to record interviews with that talented bunch of geniuses! We must do something about that.

RELEASE SCHEDULE

NOVEMBER 2016

DOCTOR WHO: ORDER OF THE DALEKS (218, SIXTH DOCTOR AND CONSTANCE)

DOCTOR WHO: SHORT TRIPS: THE MAN WHO WASN'T THERE (6.11, EIGHTH DOCTOR AND CHARLEY POLLARD, DOWNLOAD ONLY)

DOCTOR WHO: THE EARLY ADVENTURES: THE RAVELLI CONSPIRACY (3.3 FIRST DOCTOR, VICKI, STEVEN)

DOCTOR WHO: THE THIRD DOCTOR ADVENTURES: VOLUME 2 (THIRD DOCTOR AND JO)

SURVIVORS – SERIES 5: BOX SET (FULL CAST)

THE AVENGERS – STEED AND MRS PEEL: THE GRAPHIC NOVEL

THE AVENGERS – STEED AND MRS PEEL: THE COMIC STRIP ADAPTATIONS (VOLUME 2)

UNIT: THE NEW SERIES: SILENCED (3, KATE STEWART)

TORCHWOOD: OUTBREAK (BOX SET, JACK, IANTO, GWEN, RHYS, ANDY)

DECEMBER 2016

DOCTOR WHO: ABSOLUTE POWER (219, SIXTH DOCTOR AND CONSTANCE)

DOCTOR WHO: QUICKSILVER (220, SIXTH DOCTOR, CONSTANCE AND FLIP)

THE NEW COUNTER-MEASURES: SERIES 1

DOCTOR WHO: SHORT TRIPS: THE HESITATION DEVIATION (6.12, SEVENTH DOCTOR, BERNICE SUMMERFIELD, DOWNLOAD ONLY)

DOCTOR WHO – THE NOVEL ADAPTATIONS: ORIGINAL SIN (SEVENTH DOCTOR, ROZ, CHRIS)

DOCTOR WHO – THE NOVEL ADAPTATIONS: COLD FUSION (FIFTH DOCTOR, ADRIC, TEGAN, NYSSA, SEVEN DOCTOR, ROZ AND CHRIS)

DOCTOR WHO: THE EARLY ADVENTURES: THE SONTARANS (3.4, FIRST DOCTOR, STEVEN, SARA)

DARK SHADOWS: HAUNTING MEMORIES

DAN DARE: THE AUDIO ADVENTURES: VOLUME ONE (BOX SET)

JANUARY 2017

DOCTOR WHO: THE STAR MEN (221, FIFTH DOCTOR, ADRIC, TEGAN AND NYSSA)

DOCTOR WHO – FOURTH DOCTOR ADVENTURES: THE BEAST OF KRAVENOS (6.1 FOURTH DOCTOR, ROMANA II, K9, JAGO & LITEFOOT)

DOCTOR WHO: SHORT TRIPS: THE WORLD BEYOND THE TREES (7.01, EIGHTH DOCTOR AND LIV CHENKA, DOWNLOAD ONLY)

DOCTOR WHO – THE DIARY OF RIVER SONG: SERIES 02 (BOX SET, RIVER SONG, SIXTH DOCTOR, SEVENTH DOCTOR)

TORCHWOOD ONE: BEFORE THE FALL (BOX SET, IANTO, YVONNE)

GRACELESS: SERIES 4 (BOX SET)

THE AVENGERS – THE LOST EPISODES: VOLUME 07 (BOX SET)

PATHFINDER LEGENDS: EDGE OF ANARCHY – CURSE OF THE CRIMSON THRONE (3.1)

FEBRUARY 2017

DOCTOR WHO: THE CONTINGENCY CLUB (222, FIFTH DOCTOR, ADRIC, TEGAN AND NYSSA)

DOCTOR WHO – FOURTH DOCTOR ADVENTURES: THE ETERNAL BATTLE (6.2 FOURTH DOCTOR, ROMANA II AND K9)

DOCTOR WHO – NEW SERIES: THE WAR DOCTOR VOLUME 4 (4. WAR DOCTOR, LEELA)

DOCTOR WHO: SHORT TRIPS: GARDENERS' WORLDS (7.02, THE THIRD DOCTOR AND JO GRANT, DOWNLOAD ONLY)

DAN DARE: THE AUDIO ADVENTURES: VOLUME TWO (BOX SET)

PATHFINDER LEGENDS: EDGE OF ANARCHY – SEVEN DAYS TO THE GRAVE (3.2)

MARCH 2017

DOCTOR WHO: ZALTYS (223,FIFTH DOCTOR, ADRIC, TEGAN AND NYSSA)

DOCTOR WHO – FOURTH DOCTOR ADVENTURES: THE SILENT SCREAM (6.3 FOURTH DOCTOR, ROMANA II AND K9)

DOCTOR WHO: SHORT TRIPS: HOW TO WIN PLANETS AND INFLUENCE PEOPLE (7.03, THE FOURTH DOCTOR, SARAH, HARRY AND THE MONK, DOWNLOAD ONLY)

DOCTOR WHO: DOOM COALITION 4

CHARLOTTE POLLARD: SERIES 02 (BOX SET)

TORCHWOOD: VISITING HOURS (3.01)

THE OMEGA FACTOR: SERIES 2

PATHFINDER LEGENDS: EDGE OF ANARCHY – ESCAPE FROM OLD KORVOSA (3.3)

APRIL 2017

DOCTOR WHO – SPECIAL RELEASES: SPARE PARTS (LIMITED VINYL EDITION) (FIFTH DOCTOR AND NYSSA)

DOCTOR WHO –PHILIP HINCHCLIFFE PRESENTS: THE HELM OF AWE

DOCTOR WHO – SHORT TRIPS: FLASHPOINT (7.04, THE EIGHTH DOCTOR, LUCIE MILLER, DOWNLOAD ONLY)

DOCTOR WHO – MAIN RANGE: TBA (224, TBA)

DOCTOR WHO – FOURTH DOCTOR ADVENTURES DETHRAS (6.4, FOURTH DOCTOR AND ROMANA II)

JAGO & LITEFOOT: SERIES 13 (BOX SET)

TORCHWOOD: THE DOLLHOUSE (3.02)

PATHFINDER LEGENDS: EDGE OF ANARCHY A HISTORY OF ASHES (3.4)

MAY 2017

DOCTOR WHO – SHORT TRIPS: FALLING (7.05, THE FIRST DOCTOR, POLLY, BEN, DOWNLOAD ONLY)

DOCTOR WHO – MAIN RANGE: TBA (225, TBA)

DOCTOR WHO – FOURTH DOCTOR ADVENTURES THE HAUNTING OF MALKIN PLACE (6.5, FOURTH DOCTOR AND ROMANA II)

UNIT – THE NEW SERIES TBA (BOX SET 4, KATE STEWART AND OSGOOD)

TORCHWOOD: TBA (3.03)

PATHFINDER LEGENDS: EDGE OF ANARCHY – SKELETONS OF SCARWALL (3.5)

JUNE 2017

DOCTOR WHO – SHORT TRIPS: TBA (7.06, TBA)

DOCTOR WHO – THE COMPANION CHRONICLES THE FIRST DOCTOR VOLUME 02 (11.0, TBA)

DOCTOR WHO – MAIN RANGE: TBA (226, TBA)

DOCTOR WHO – FOURTH DOCTOR ADVENTURES SUBTERRANEA (6.6, FOURTH DOCTOR AND ROMANA II)

SURVIVORS – SERIES 6: BOX SET

THE LIVES OF CAPTAIN JACK

TORCHWOOD: TBA (3.04)

PATHFINDER LEGENDS: EDGE OF ANARCHY CROWN OF FANGS (3.6)

JULY 2017

DOCTOR WHO – CLASSIC DOCTORS NEW MONSTERS: VOLUME TWO (BOX SET)

TORCHWOOD: TBA (17, TBA)
DOCTOR WHO – SHORT TRIPS: TBA (7.07, TBA)
DOCTOR WHO – MAIN RANGE: TBA (227, TBA) N DOCTOR WHO – FOURTH DOCTOR ADVENTURES THE MOVELLAN GRAVE (6.7, FOURTH DOCTOR AND ROMANA II)

TORCHWOOD: TBA (3.05)

AUGUST 2017

DOCTOR WHO – MAIN RANGE: TBA (228, TBA)

DOCTOR WHO - FOURTH DOCTOR ADVENTURES THE SKIN OF THE SLEEK (6.8, FOURTH DOCTOR AND ROMANA II)

DOCTOR WHO – SHORT TRIPS: TBA (7.08, TBA)

TORCHWOOD: TBA (18, TBA)

THE PRISONER: VOLUME TWO (BOX SET)