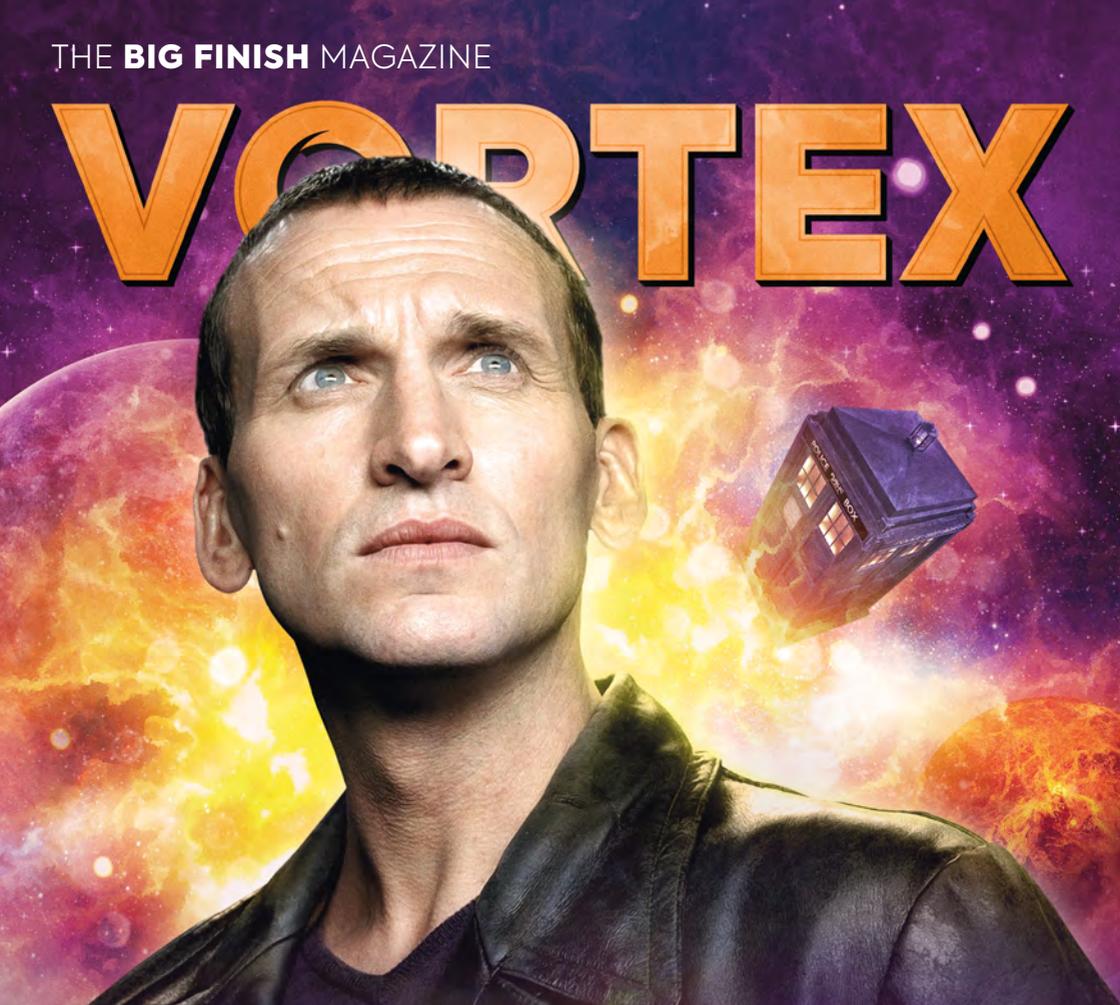


THE **BIG FINISH** MAGAZINE

VORTEX



ADVENTURES IN **SPACE** WITH **NINE**

FANTASTIC! THE **NINTH DOCTOR** RETURNS...

ALSO INSIDE

FRIENDS REUNITED!

TORCHWOOD REACHES A HALF-CENTURY...
AND THE **TENTH DOCTOR** IS TAKING OVER!



ISSUE 146
APRIL 2021
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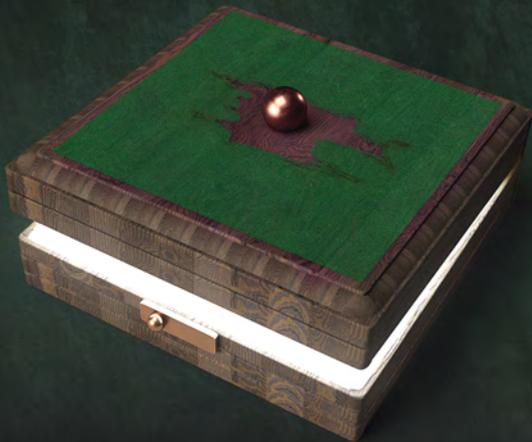
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WHAT'S IN THE BOX?

A CLASSIC EIGHTIES DRAMA IS OPENED UP FOR AUDIO BY BIG FINISH...

IF YOU grew up in the UK in the early 1980s, you may well have seen the television adaptation of John Masefield's 1935 novel, *The Box of Delights*.

Featuring Patrick Troughton as Cole Hawlings, a mysterious Punch and Judy man who comes into the life of young Kay Harker, *The Box of Delights* became an instant classic.

This summer, Big Finish will be releasing a new audio drama of *The Box of Delights* as part of its Big Finish Classics range. Written by Christopher William Hill with additional material by director, Barnaby Edwards, the lead role is played by Sir Derek Jacobi and taking on the part of Kay is 15-year-old Mack Keith-Roach.

Kay is entrusted with the magical box, which gives its user the ability to time travel and shapeshift, as he tries to protect the box from evil magician Abner Brown.

Speaking of the six-disc release, Sir Derek Jacobi says: "I have loved being involved in this new reimagining of *The Box of Delights* and taking on such an iconic role as Cole Hawlings. The narrative, the characters, the amazing way it's been brought to life on audio – it's a perfect slice of storytelling magic!" **VORTEX**

■ RELEASED: JUNE 2021

■ FORMAT: CD/DOWNLOAD

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EDITORIAL

I REMEMBER exactly where I was when I heard that Christopher Eccleston had been cast as the Ninth Doctor. It was the 22nd of March 2004 and I had travelled from my home just outside Glasgow down to Salisbury to visit my partner's parents. They were reading their newspapers, as they normally did, and my soon to be father-in-law commented that Bill Nighy had been cast as the new Doctor. "Oh," I thought. I wasn't expecting that.

And then when I borrowed their computer to check the latest football scores, I had a look at the main news stories and there it was, Christopher Eccleston is the new Doctor. "Ooooooooooooooh," I thought. I wasn't expecting that!

I've been a fan of Christopher's work since the 1994 film, *Shallow Grave*, in which he starred alongside future Obi-Wan Kenobi, actor Ewan McGregor. I was enthused by this **Doctor Who** casting as I loved Christopher's deeper parts and the intensity that he brought to things. Russell T Davies had secured a big hitter.

And the 13 episodes that he did were, for want of a better word, *fantastic!* I was hooked when they began airing, recording them onto VHS and watching them over and over again in the days that followed. We were getting new **Doctor Who** episodes every week for the first time in 16 years. I loved his Doctor – his geeky humour, the brooding anger, and the fact he seemed like a fish out of water in the human world.

And this May he's back on audio in *Ravagers*, the first release of **The Ninth Doctor Adventures**. I can't wait for the trip of a lifetime to begin once more. **VORTEX**



A STITCH IN TIME

Big Finish has been saving *nine* as **Christopher Eccleston** is back in **Doctor Who**...

BIG FINISH had always hoped that Christopher Eccleston would play the Doctor once more. When he turned down the 50th anniversary television special, *The Day of the Doctor*, in 2013, we wondered if that was actually that, though we knew he was still following the series.

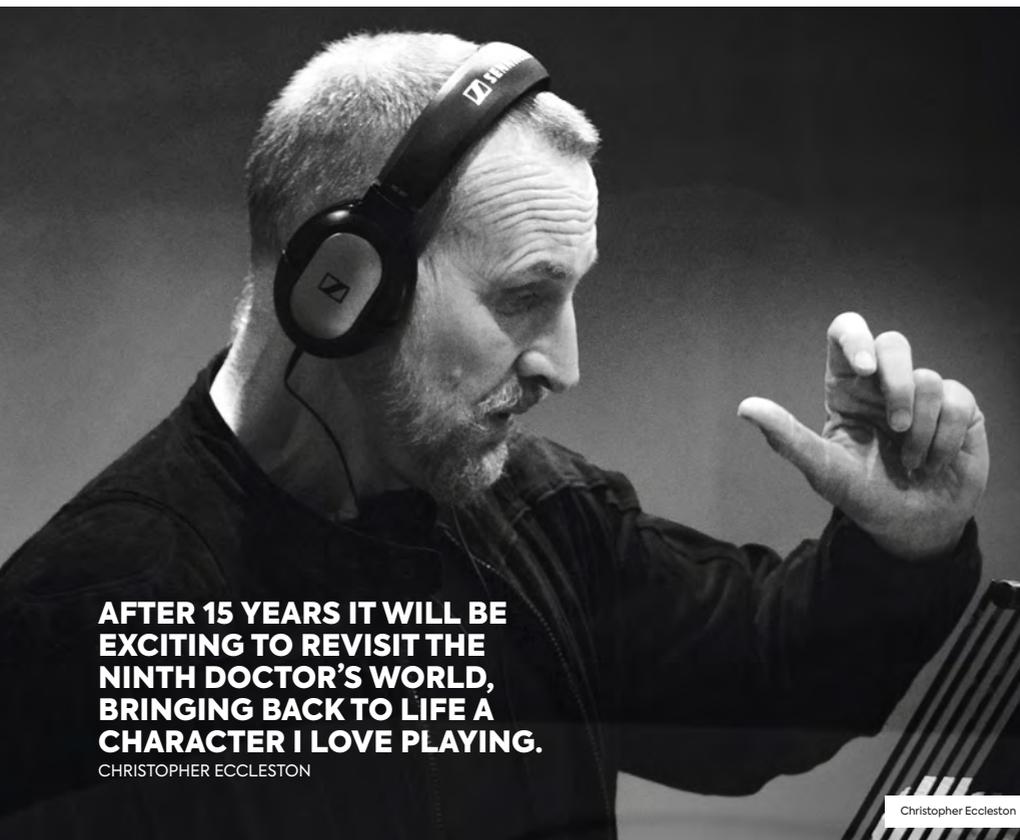
Then in 2018, Christopher attended the London Film and Comic Convention where snippets from camera phones showed him sharing moments with Matt Smith and Peter Capaldi. And participants at the convention made it clear

how much they loved the Ninth Doctor. Fast forward to early 2020 where Christopher and Big Finish chairman Jason Haigh-Ellery were both guests at the Gallifrey convention in America. Jason takes up the story: “We’d contacted Christopher’s agent in the past to see if he would be interested in working with us and it had always been a ‘not at the moment’ answer. I’d just seen the fan reaction to Chris at the convention, and, more significantly, I had seen his reaction to the fans which was so positive, so I thought it was worth asking again.

“I spoke to Jason Joiner, who runs the Gallifrey convention, and asked if he would introduce me to Chris so we could have a chat. Chris was working incredibly hard at the convention, but we managed to find a minute or two.

“I think Chris hadn’t understood just how important he and his Doctor were to a lot of people, and the more he got involved in **Doctor Who** again by doing the conventions, the more he remembered what he loved about the programme and the part.

“Over the following six months, as the coronavirus pandemic gripped the UK, I chatted to Chris’s agent, backwards and forwards, and we agreed on a proposal which Chris and Big Finish are both really happy with.



AFTER 15 YEARS IT WILL BE EXCITING TO REVISIT THE NINTH DOCTOR'S WORLD, BRINGING BACK TO LIFE A CHARACTER I LOVE PLAYING.

CHRISTOPHER ECCLESTON

Christopher Eccleston



Anjella Mackintosh

"Chris is a great actor. He's been in a lot of high-profile series and worked with a lot of brilliant writers. Chris made it clear from the start that he wanted scripts of

the best possible quality – for him, the writing was most important.

"One of the things that drew him to **Doctor Who** in the first place was that Russell T Davies was writing it, and he also loved the work that Robert Shearman and Steven Moffat did, so he wanted scripts of that calibre."

The result of the discussions culminated in an announcement that made the national press in August 2020: it was official – Christopher Eccleston was returning to the role of the Ninth Doctor in twelve Big Finish audio adventures to be released across four box sets.

Chris said: "After 15 years it will be exciting to revisit the Ninth Doctor's world, bringing back to life a character I love playing."

The first of the box sets, **The Ninth Doctor Adventures: Ravagers**, has

been written by Big Finish creative director and executive producer Nicholas Briggs. The set comprises three adventures with the Doctor travelling solo in *Sphere of Freedom*, *Cataclysm* and *Food Fight*.

After learning Christopher was interested in reprising his role as the Doctor, Nick says: "It was beyond exciting – I'd always had a feeling that Chris might do some audio **Doctor Who** one day. He'd never turned us down outright, so I think he was always keeping the option open. But I didn't assume anything until the news was actually confirmed.

"After that I spoke to Chris's agent extensively about the creative side, and submitted a 22-page sample (essentially the first pages of *Sphere of Freedom*) to demonstrate the kind of thing we could do.



Happily both Chris and his agent loved it. His agent asked how we were able to deliver just the sort of thing that Chris wanted to do. My reply was that we'd listened to what she and Christopher had requested, and that's what I'd written! Plus I'd also secretly got some advice from Steven Moffat!"

Producer David Richardson adds: "I've been a fan of Chris's work for years. I think I first saw him in the film *Shallow Grave*, and then I made sure to watch any films or TV shows that he starred in. So when he was cast as the Doctor one of my favourite actors became the lead in one of my favourite TV shows. Chris's incarnation of the Doctor is amazing; he really captures the vibrant and modern tone that Russell T Davies brought to the show's return.

"Discussions about Chris playing the Doctor went on for some months, and as you can imagine for us all here it was a nail-biting time! But when he signed up, it was a huge reason to celebrate. A chance to work with someone we admire so much, and also create a whole run of new stories for this great Doctor."

RECORDING FOR the first box set took place in December, revealed when Christopher shared a picture of himself on Instagram, holding up the front cover of his script. Nick tells us more: "Chris came to the recordings fully prepared and very enthusiastic, saying he was impressed by the scope and complexity of the adventures. Having worked with Chris on the TV series all those years ago and

studying what made his Doctor tick, really helped in getting the speech rhythms and vocabulary right in the scripts. Chris thought I'd really captured his Doctor, which was a lovely complement.

"The first box set is unique in this series in that it's three episodes that make up one long story. *Ravagers* begins on the *Sphere of Freedom*, the centre of an 'Immersive Reality' gaming empire, where everyone is hooked into an advanced form of virtual reality. Although loving 'IM' himself, the Doctor has discovered there's something nefarious going on, and in the first few moments of the story he is gloriously triumphant in stopping this.

"However, something goes horribly awry. Essentially, this is the story of how the Doctor discovers, bit by bit,

IT WAS BEYOND EXCITING – I'D ALWAYS HAD A FEELING THAT CHRIS MIGHT DO SOME AUDIO DOCTOR WHO ONE DAY.

NICHOLAS BRIGGS

just how much he's got wrong. He's on the back foot and struggling to survive and put things right the way the Doctor always does. But where would the drama be if he always succeeded at every stage of the story?

"Along the way he meets a diverse group of characters. A futuristic galley chef called Nova who's got a terrifying left hook, a couple of mildly incompetent army officers from 1959, and a Roman centurion from AD60 who always assumes he's in a fight to the death – even when he isn't."

THE WORLDWIDE pandemic meant that the casts were unable to gather in one studio, so instead remote recordings were employed.

Nick explains: "We recorded remotely because of COVID-19 restrictions and advice, with Chris and another member of the cast in a studio and everyone else – including me – working from home. We communicated

CHRIS RECAPTURED THE DOCTOR FROM THE VERY FIRST LINE, AND HE IS JUST SUCH A JOY TO WORK WITH.

DAVID RICHARDSON



Above and left: Christopher Eccleston

through a system called Cleanfeed, where we can all hear (but not see) each other perfectly.

“There were a few technical glitches, as there often are in remote recordings. But nothing major, and Wilfredo Acosta, a veteran sound engineer, was always on hand to help solve problems. The atmosphere was great right from the offset, mostly due to Chris. It was clear he was here to do his absolute best, to have a good time and to help keep everyone happy. He made us all laugh a lot and did quite a surprising amount of singing. Chris is passionate about music so there was a lot of chat about that, especially when he discovered that Camilla Beeput, who plays Nova, is also a singer.”

David adds: “Chris worked mainly alone at The Soundhouse with our engineer, who then linked in the guest cast and production team from their homes. My ears were across every second of the recordings, and they were an absolute joy to listen to. Chris recaptured the



Doctor from the very first line, and he is just such a joy to work with. His energy and enthusiasm are infectious, and he was interested in everyone and everything. We’ve done a large number of sessions with Chris now, and they have been the happiest of times.”

THE RECORDINGS were passed to Iain Meadows who is responsible for the sound design, with Howard Carter on musical duties. How did he feel to be asked to work on this series? Iain broadly grins: “Incredibly

excited is the short answer! Just before last summer David asked if I would be happy jumping on something that was a longer project than you might typically expect – but that he couldn’t give me any details at that moment! I was very intrigued and quite happy to get stuck into whatever it was going to be. When the announcement was made about Chris, I didn’t pick up David’s email to me confirming it was the Ninth Doctor until I got back from a day out with my wife (as was permitted back then). I remember my heart seeming to stop for just a moment then a rush of adrenaline... it was, to borrow *that* word – fantastic!

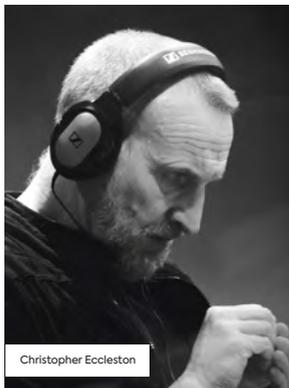
“Challenges are really just opportunities to shine aren’t they? In all seriousness, I think one big challenge was not to let the enormity of it all get to me. That might sound silly but I made the mistake of looking at a forum and seeing some of the comments about how anticipated these box sets were and suddenly I began to feel the pressure because of



course you don't want to let anyone down. You have to then just get a grip and get on with it and work on it as you would any project.

"In terms of the actual sound design, because some actors are recording in less than ideal environments, making sure the audio ends up sounding just as good as if it was all recorded in the same studio is something that has to have close attention. Then there was one direction which made me think, how am I going to do that? But I found a solution!"

As he worked on the audios, Iain had to source certain sound effects to capture the era authentically. He reveals: "Well, I'm not sure these are unusual – or maybe they are though because probably not everyone has a coat in the style of the Ninth Doctor – but I do, and so that and a toy version of the Ninth Doctor's



Christopher Eccleston

sonic screwdriver for handling effects, do feature in the foley!

"I also needed an unusual sound for the underlying atmosphere of a place called Freedom Square.

I wanted it to sound industrial without being recognisably industrial (that makes sense to me!) so I built a landscape and then filtered it in various ways to come up with something that I felt suited."

ONE OF the guest stars in *Ravagers* is Dan Starkey playing Gallius. Dan, known for playing Strax the Sontaran, has previously worked with David Tennant, Matt Smith and Peter Capaldi in the TV series of **Doctor Who**. Dan tells *Vortex*: "I was delighted to be asked to be in the first

THESE BOX SETS ARE GOING TO GIVE US SOME OF WHAT WE MISSED OUT ON WHEN IT COMES TO THE NINTH'S TENURE.

IAIN MEADOWS

run of **The Ninth Doctor Adventures**. Nick really captured the Doctor's tone on the page very well, and it was great to hear it being lifted even further by Chris's performance.

"Gallius is a Roman Centurion – not too far away from a Sontaran in his constant belligerence. He's a fearsome opponent, but by the end a doughty ally too. I was scowling away fiercely in my home voice cupboard..."

"It was great to hear Chris back in the role, and a delight to work with him; it's just a shame that it wasn't in person! The nature of remote recording makes it difficult to chat away as there are about ten other people you're holding up by doing so. Chris was very committed and focussed, and it was a pleasure to listen in on what he was doing before jumping into my scenes.

"And I'm very pleased to be working with another Doctor! I remember the first recording day with Tom Baker, nearly ten years ago now, and the sound of his Doctor coming back to life through the headphones as we recorded. It's great to have that feeling again, hearing Chris recreate the Ninth Doctor over the cans."



fun day of recordings, Chris gave a podcast interview in which it was clear he'd had a great time and loved my script. My heart swelled with pride. Yes, I am a sinner!

"And then after Chris had been so nice, I said something very cringeworthy and self-deprecating that it makes me blush to think of it! It was something like, 'I've manipulated you into saying exactly what I wanted to hear'. I think it's because all of us who write and create come from a standpoint of self-doubt so that we always have to quantify praise

MY PERSONAL HIGHLIGHT IS JUST HEARING CHRIS SAYING HIS VERY FIRST LINE OF DIALOGUE.

DAVID RICHARDSON



Ben Lee

WITH THE release of *Ravagers* imminent, *Vortex* asks the production team what their highlight has been so far. David reveals: "I guess my personal highlight is just hearing Chris stepping back into the role and saying his very first line of dialogue. Nothing can beat the sense of excitement when an actor returns to the role of the Doctor and there they are in your

ears again. It's been 16 years since Chris made his debut as the Doctor – one forgets how much time has passed. That's the amount of time that passed between *An Unearthly Child* and *The Stones of Blood*! But suddenly it's 2005 all over again, and it's time to 'Run'!

"It's been so enjoyable creating a whole new era for the Ninth Doctor, and I think Nick's script really succeeds in defining that bold new start. We are talking the Ninth Doctor pre-Rose. These are the adventures some time after his regeneration, travelling alone, starting to discover himself after all that time being the War Doctor."

Iain says his personal highlight is: "Honestly, the whole thing! Firstly, the scripts are just brilliant, all of them, but these opening episodes from Nick just capture the Ninth beautifully and the story is intricate and exciting as it weaves its tale. Then you have the absolute delight of a knockout cast and Chris. These box sets are going to give us some of what we missed out on when it comes to the Ninth's tenure."

And Nick adds: "For me it was when, having finished a really

in the context of, 'it can't be true'. But looking back, Chris really did love the scripts and that level of praise from someone who we'd wanted to work with for so long is something that feels unquantifiably glorious to me."

Jason concludes: "I've listened to parts of the finished recordings and it is amazing! Chris really has been brilliant. He's enjoyed doing it and been so positive about the process. We're really looking forward to working with Chris on the next sets." **VORTEX**

DOCTOR WHO: THE NINTH DOCTOR ADVENTURES – RAVAGERS

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AVALON PROJECT

FULL-CAST ADVENTURES FROM THE **BLAKE'S 7** UNIVERSE – WITH A DIFFERENT REBEL LEADER AT THEIR HEART...

SINCE THE sad passing of lead actors Gareth Thomas, Paul Darrow and Jacqueline Pearce, **Blake's 7** audio dramas have been few and far between in recent years. But now producer John Ainsworth will be guiding us into the wider **Blake's 7** universe which was created by Terry Nation. New release, **Avalon**, will see Olivia Poulet return as the rebel leader who first appeared in the television episode *Project Avalon*

(played by Julia Vidler). Olivia took on the role of Avalon in Big Finish's 40th anniversary audio special **Blake's 7: The Way Ahead** in 2018.

The first volume of **Avalon** is set for release in May 2021 and the second volume in June 2021. Each box set comprises three new stories featuring familiar characters and voices. John tells us: "In the past few years we've very sadly lost some of the original stars of **Blake's 7**, with the passing of the two leading men in Gareth Thomas as Blake, and Paul Darrow as Avon, as well as the wonderful Jacqueline Pearce as Servalan.

"We took the decision straight away that we would not be recasting these roles, and we've since been carefully working out how we can continue to

work in the **Blake's 7** universe and tell stories from some of the characters we met on television, as well as situations we've heard mentioned.

"In **Avalon 1**, we go right back to the beginning of **Blake's 7** to discover what else was taking place at the same time Roj Blake was being framed and exiled to penal colony, Cygnus Alpha, for a crime he didn't commit.

"Avalon is such an interesting character to work with as we know that she met Jenna Stannis before her appearance on TV. Straight away that gave us something to work with as we learn she started rebellions on several planets.

"In our new series, **Avalon** is brought to Earth by Jenna to rekindle the fight against the Federation. The



Above: Olivia Poulet
Below: Sally Knyvette

ruthless Captain Travis is despatched to quash any insurrection, but finds that his actions in the past will come back to haunt him.

"Terry Nation created a dark, dystopian future which presents lots of opportunities to tell new stories from different points of view. It's been a great pleasure to explore the **Blake's 7** universe beyond the *Liberator* and once again work with Olivia Poulet as she reprises the role of Avalon."

THE FIRST tale is *Terra Firma* by Steve Lyons. He says: "The brief was to follow Avalon on her crusade against the Federation. Unlike Blake, she wouldn't have an alien spaceship or a chatty

super-computer, nor would she have a regular crew about her, but she would have contacts throughout the galaxy to call upon when needed.

"I worked out the story arc for all six episodes, plus I'm script-editor on the four I didn't write. I suggested starting out on Earth, prior to Avalon's first TV appearance. I thought it'd open up some interesting possibilities for us in terms of tying in with the wider **Blake's 7** universe."

Writing the opening story of the set presented Steve with some interesting challenges. He explains: "There was a lot of groundwork to establish, about who Avalon is and how she operates – though of course we have met her before which helped a lot. I also didn't want to overlook our special guest. Avalon needed to be the star of this story but Jenna, played by Sally Knyvette from the original TV series, had to shine – and I was introducing other important characters too.

UNLIKE BLAKE, SHE WOULDN'T HAVE AN ALIEN SPACESHIP OR A CHATTY SUPER-COMPUTER... STEVE LYONS

"*Terra Firma* takes place simultaneously with the events of TV episode, *The Way Back*. The resistance on Earth has been broken and Blake is in a cell, awaiting trial. Avalon comes to Earth to help pick up the pieces, enlisting the help of notorious smuggler, Jenna Stannis."

THROWBACK BY former Big Finish producer Gary Russell, is the second story of the set. Steve tells *Vortex*: "I did use my newfound script-editing power to make things easier for myself as I palmed one very important character off to Gary, to be introduced in episode two..."

Gary reveals: "Out of the blue there was a round-robin email and we had a lovely chat back and forth, and I said I'd like to write the two-hander with Travis interrogating someone.



Steve said, "Yes, we'll pencil you in for it". I really wanted to work with actor Stephen Greif as I've known him since I was 14 – and I love Travis. Then Steve told me the person being interrogated was Madison and I was introducing him. Oh, and can you reintroduce Dev Tarrant too! So it's a play with more than two characters but its central premise is the interrogation and why Madison wants to be questioned by Travis.

"I wanted to make Madison someone who would be a **Doctor Who** or a **Blake's 7** fan. He has an eidetic memory and is fascinated by lists and numbers, and his job is important. He walks into his office and immediately has to tidy it because of the mess it was left in by



Stephen Greif

THE POLITICAL SET-UP AND THE WAY THE ADMINISTRATION IS RUN IS WHAT'S FASCINATING.

GARY RUSSELL

the previous person on duty... he can't work unless everything is at the correct angle (that's based on seven years of living with someone who did that!).

"I was always fascinated by Earth Central and the administration. I'm not hugely interested in a *Liberator* going to another planet story-of-the-week, for me the political set-up and the way the administration is run is what's fascinating. In the TV episode, *Seek-Locate-Destroy*, Travis becomes the Space-Commander again – he gets his old rank back. But at this point in *Throwback*, the idea is of someone who has been a Space Commander and now has the equivalent rank of shovelling out the sewers! He is a captain and has to interrogate someone."

CONCLUDING THIS first set is *Black Water* by Trevor Baxendale who says: "Using Avalon is a great idea for a new **Blake's 7** series. Avalon originated in a classic TV episode that had all the core elements in place: the

Federation, Servalan, Travis and of course the original crew of the *Liberator*. It's very Terry Nation, and **Avalon 1** goes right back to the basics of the first series.

"I came up with an adventure about a Federation agent working within Avalon's group on Earth. It fitted in very well with the cast of characters John and Steve intended to use, and the main part of the brief in that sense was that it would be the final episode of the first set, bringing things to a head.

"It's tense, hopefully! It's a spy story in a way, about an undercover agent's life unravelling as the net tightens. It's about trust, and how difficult that must be when you're working in a high pressure situation which requires both absolute trust *and* the acceptance of the possibility of betrayal – a betrayal that could be fatal."

Trevor admits his highlight was: "Exploring the habitat dome we see at the very start of **Blake's 7** in *The Way Back* – how ordinary people live there; what the Federation presence is really like. A lot of the population don't really think about being oppressed – they're too busy getting on with their lives. It's the old 'at least the trains run on time' thing. Plus I got to create a new character who may have the opportunity to return, which is nice..." **VORTEX**

THE WORLDS OF BLAKE'S 7 AVALON 1

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HAPPY WILDTHYME AND PLACES

ECCENTRIC ADVENTURER

Iris Wildthyme, is back on board her old Number 22 bus, as five new audiobook releases are timetabled for this year under the **Iris Wildthyme and Friends** range. Read by Louise Jameson and Katy Manning, the five adventures are adaptations of original novels by Paul Magrs published between 2011 and 2017. Author Paul says: "I'm chuffed that these are coming out in audiobook form, and I love that they are coming out under the banner of **Iris Wildthyme and Friends** – because all my novels interconnect in no end of subtle and loopy ways.

"Characters wander from one book into the next, or characters from one universe visit a planet introduced in another novel altogether. There's a world of connections, and Iris is one of the many people zig-zagging across that universe. Also I love the fact that it's Katy and Louise reading these. Having these wonderful storytellers drawing you into the adventures with all kinds of pop

stars, poets, sinister spies, professors, vampires, booksellers and killer poodles is amazing. The whole thing is like a psychedelic dream – and you have to experience all of it!"

Out this May, Louise narrates two tales from the worlds of **Iris Wildthyme**, in which demons from different dimensions mix with dons, and books have minds of their own. *Fellowship of the Ink* is set in the 1930's and in the medieval university town of Darkholmes, Professor Cleavis and his literary friends, the Smudgelings, are conjuring up witches, demons and gargoyles. Also being released is *666 Charing Cross Road*, in which New Yorker Elizabeth Bathory is given the address of a very special bookshop in London. She orders a book with a mysterious dark bloodstain marking the pages, and soon New York is infected with vampires.

In October, Katy Manning reads three more Iris Wildthyme audiobooks, taking our heroine to magical places – and back to Earth

with a bump. *Enter Wildthyme* sees a mysterious glass jar stolen by dog pirates from a spaceship orbiting Earth, so Iris and her new friend Simon go in pursuit of it. *Wildthyme Beyond* sees Iris and her friends stranded on the magical world of Hyspero, a place where seemingly anything can happen. And finally, *Iris Wildthyme and the Polythene Terror* sees Iris exiled to Earth by her own people in 1976, where she and companion, Panda, find the streets of London filled with rubbish, and deadly plastic rubbish men terrorising innocent citizens and causing chaos. **VORTEX**

IRIS WILDTHYME AND FRIENDS

- RELEASED: MAY 2021
- FORMAT: DOWNLOAD

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MORE INFO: bgfn.sh/snudgeling 

666 CHARING CROSS ROAD

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FRIENDS REUNITED

The **Torchwood** monthly range is about to make a half-century...

IT'S HARD to believe that the Big Finish **Torchwood** range is about to celebrate its fiftieth monthly release. On May 3rd 2015, John Barrowman made an announcement on his Magic FM radio show to say that Captain Jack Harkness would be coming back in a new series of audio adventures. The 21st century was about to change on audio forever.

In September that year Big Finish released **Torchwood: The Conspiracy**, the first of its **Torchwood** monthly range and this May, John is back as Captain Jack in *Absent Friends*, the 50th monthly **Torchwood** audio adventure from Big Finish.

To mark the special occasion, which coincidentally also marks the 15th anniversary of the **Doctor Who** spin-off, John is teaming up with David Tennant as the Tenth Doctor. *Absent Friends* also features Gareth David-Lloyd as Ianto Jones.

Director Scott Handcock set the wheels in motion for the story, and he reveals: "It's funny. This story came about because I was just a bit cheeky, really! It was still quite early in lockdown when I directed David for the **Time Lord Victorious** vinyl release, *Echoes of Extinction*, and I happened to mention some of the other ranges I was working on, as you do.

"I knew David and John were good mates so, once we'd finished recording, I suggested to Jason Haigh-Ellery, Nicholas Briggs and David Richardson that maybe Big Finish could do a special release with the Tenth Doctor and **Torchwood**, especially as I saw the fiftieth monthly adventure looming on the schedule. We then sounded out the actors, David, John and Gareth, all of whom were keen – and the brilliant James Goss wrote an adventure that manages to celebrate **Torchwood's** history while embracing the Tenth Doctor's presence."

James, who also produces the **Torchwood** range, continues: "This one is all down to Scott, it was his idea! I was deep in the middle of the BBC **Time Lord Victorious** project and Scott was working with David and



(l-r): John Barrowman
and Gareth David-Lloyd

THERE HAS TO BE AN ANSWER AS TO WHY THE DOCTOR DOESN'T ALWAYS FEATURE IN **TORCHWOOD.**

JAMES GOSS

said, 'I might have a day where I can spare David Tennant. What if I can get John along...?'. So we got approval from Big Finish and had a hasty chat about what it could be and then away we went. I wrote it, Tim Foley script edited it and Scott directed and produced it. Our most ambitious production ever and I let Scott do all the hard stuff while I sat in bed writing it and eating Jaffa Cakes!"

How difficult was it to write a **Torchwood** story with the Doctor as a guest character, rather than a **Doctor Who** story with Jack?

James says: "We put a lot of thought into it because there has to be an answer as to why the Doctor doesn't always feature in **Torchwood**. We haven't cheated, but we do sort of show in several different ways why it's not a good idea for the Tenth Doctor to team up with **Torchwood** – he has a very different style of working and it might not necessarily do him that many favours."

On a dark and stormy night in Cardiff, the city is in danger, and

the Doctor's put himself in charge of Torchwood in order to save it. In a sealed recording studio, the voices of the dead have been playing for 17 years. Was it the project of a madman, or is this the site of something terrible? Torchwood has been hunting for the Doctor since 1879. And now they've found him. They may regret it.

OF BRINGING the dynamic duo together again, John Barrowman said: "Listeners have been asking for this for a long time. And now the wait is over and it's great to have the Doctor on board. There's an interesting dynamic going on here

because Jack still wants to follow the Doctor but yet wants to impress on him that he's still the leader."

David Tennant added: "Because this isn't a **Doctor Who** story, the Doctor doesn't have to be ahead of everything and saving the day. What's interesting about this story – from the Doctor's point of view – is he sort of messes up. It's a story about the Doctor being a bit imperfect, which is nice to see now and again actually."

Scott reveals: "The recording session was as raucous as you'd imagine it to be. More so than usual actually, and we had to record entirely out of sequence due to everyone's availabilities. Quite often we record John on his own from Palm Springs but everyone was so keen to work together on this one, I ended up organising the schedule for staggered starts throughout the day.

"So we kicked off around lunchtime working through into the evening, with John joining in mid-afternoon (the crack of dawn in California). Everyone was really accommodating. I mean, it was terribly confusing to be leaping back and forth, but

it's my job to keep track of that and if it meant all our cast could record their scenes together – even out of sequence – it was worth it. And having heard the edits now, it really flows.”

been incredible. And it's lovely how every release is different. We've had some really dark, horrific episodes; light-hearted romps; sci-fi thrillers; emotional character pieces... and every single one



(l-r): Scott Hancock, John Barrowman, Gareth David-Lloyd and James Goss

James Goss has been producing **Torchwood** for Big Finish since the series began. *Vortex* asks how he feels to have reached 50 adventures in the monthly range.

He grins: “Actually, just really old! It's an amazing accidental achievement and it's been enormous fun. We've just kept on enjoying it so much and not counting, and it's lovely that we've got here. I remember when the **Doctor Who** main range reached 50 and *Zagreus* was all I could think about for months. This sort of crept up on us, but that's no bad thing.

“We've been able to work with some of the nicest people in the industry. We've made some really, really fun stuff and the listeners have been lovely.”

Scott adds: “I love **Torchwood**. It feels strange to think that six years ago we were kicking off the range with *The Conspiracy* and weren't entirely certain there'd be an audience for it. But obviously, we should never have doubted. The response from listeners has

feels authentically **Torchwood**. As a director, it's a gift to get something different every month.

“I can't pick out a single favourite title, we've achieved so much. We've managed to bring back all the original leads; revisited characters like Bilis Manger, Captain John and Martha Jones; and even introduced new operatives like Norton Folgate into the fold. Not to mention overlapping with elements from the **Doctor Who** universe. Never mind the Tenth Doctor – what about Jo Jones, the Fendahl, Slitheen and giant maggots? Oh, and Sirs Simon Russell Beale and Michael Palin. How do you narrow it down to just one thing?!” **VORTEX**

TORCHWOOD
ABSENT FRIENDS

- RELEASED: MAY 2021
- FORMAT: CD/DOWNLOAD

ORDER NOW: bgfn.sh/takeover



APRIL SEES the release of **Torchwood: Gooseberry**, a team-up between Burn Gorman's Dr Owen Harper and Tom Price's PC Andy Davidson.

Andy has a girlfriend. She's called Cate, and she's utterly lovely. And then she meets Owen. Owen finds out that Cate has a secret. One that he's desperate to understand. But the more he discovers, the more dangerously close to Cate he becomes. What's going to happen when Andy finds out?

Producer/writer James Goss says: “It was Burn's suggestion – doesn't Andy deserve a girlfriend and won't Owen ruin it? And this story is basically that. We've always been a bit chary of 'girlfriend of the week' episodes, but Burn's pitch was so interesting! We've all been

personality for a character like Caite. Caite is very much her own person but projects herself in such a way that you can understand how Andy and Owen would be drawn to her.”

The Owen/Andy dynamic was established in 2017's *Corpse Day*, when the duo teamed up and

IT'S A BIT LIKE WATCHING A CAT CONVINCE A DOG TO GO AND PLAY IN TRAFFIC...

JAMES GOSS

discovered women breeding with a weevil in Cardiff. Of the double act, James adds: “It just works and I'm in love with them both! Burn and Tom are so good together, it's a bit like watching a cat convince a dog to go and play in traffic – poor Andy keeps lolloping back for more.”

Scott concludes: “We've sort of hit a rhythm now with lockdown recordings. True, even on a good day, the process takes longer than it might in a studio. Plus, you have to engineer downtime differently to how you would when the cast can sit in a green room. But James especially as producer, has cottoned on to how to best structure things to make the most of people's time, and I'm careful with my schedules to try to avoid leaving people sitting around, twiddling their thumbs.

“We work hard to keep the sessions as enjoyable as possible in spite of the unusual circumstances, and we're very lucky to have a cast who not only feel relaxed but help our newcomers settle into things too. That trust really helps with the performances and every session feels that little bit more special because of it.” **VORTEX**

AND OWEN MAKES THREE...

there, your best friend starts dating someone and either you don't like them or they don't like you, or you like them too much and it all goes horribly wrong. And this is that story but with a **Torchwood** twist.

“We're lucky that Owen's dead so can't actually try it on with Caite, but we end up with a really tricky situation, and hopefully as you listen your allegiance will switch sides. Owen ends up in a horrible mess and knows he's got himself into it, and – listening back to it this morning – it's agonising! When he was script editing it, Tim Foley put in lots of suggestions for moments to make the scenes even more cringe-inducing!”

Director Scott Handcock adds: “Like all the **Torchwood** cast, Burn and Tom are a joy to work with

individually but it's an even greater joy when they are bouncing off one another. It's strange to think how this pairing came together. *Corpse Day* was Burn's first drama for Big Finish – and it was still early days for Tom – but the characters instantly clicked and every adventure we've thrown them together on has helped cement their relationship further. They're both so fun and generous in studio, it makes the process a lot more enjoyable for the crew and the rest of the actors alike.

“It was James who first suggested using an actor who had a Celtic lilt to their voice and Lois Chimimba sprung instantly to mind the moment he said that. She'd come in to work for us on last year's **Bernice Summerfield** box set, *Lost in Translation*, and she has just the right warmth of

TORCHWOOD GOOSEBERRY

- RELEASED: APRIL 2021
- FORMAT: CD/DOWNLOAD

ORDER NOW: bgfn.sh/caite 



THE THIRD DOCTOR IS BACK
IN A NEW BOX SET... AND IT'S
ADVENTURE WITH A DIFFERENCE!

THIRD IS THE WORD

SINCE BIG Finish's **The Third Doctor Adventures** range began, we've had Katy Manning, Richard Franklin and John Levene featuring with Tim Treloar, who has slipped with much acclaim into Third Doctor Jon Pertwee's shoes.

And now, for the seventh volume of adventures, we've two exciting new stories featuring the characters of Liz Shaw and Sarah Jane Smith. The family ties are there, with Daisy Ashford and Sadie Miller taking on the roles originally performed by their mothers. And Jon Culshaw

brings Brigadier Alistair Lethbridge-Stewart to memorable life once more. Producer David Richardson says: "There was a hard call to make on this box set as it's the first volume without Katy Manning playing Jo. Katy is such an intrinsic part of the Third Doctor team and so



Tim Treloar

wonderful after being in lockdown to be able to actually go to a studio and work with him in person – with all the necessary precautions of course.

“We were in separate booths but could see each other from behind the glass. The rest of the cast were either in another studio in Liverpool or recording from home, but we were all connected over the headphones, so it felt like we were together. It is a brilliant script, with lots of action and peril to overcome which is always so much fun to play. Tim was, as ever, cheeky, funny, naughty and brilliant as the Third Doctor. Close your eyes and Jon is there instead, I don't know how Tim does it!”

THE UNZAL *Incursion* by Mark

Wright opens the set: “The brief from David Richardson was to come up with a Third Doctor adventure that's ‘so season seven it hurts!’. I love season seven, but it's atypical in **Doctor Who** terms. It's not quite **Doctor Who**, not quite **Quatermass**, not quite **Bond**, it's that wonderful



Sam Benjamin



Daisy Ashford

instrumental in its success, that it was a difficult decision to make a whole volume without her character.

“However, we have two whole eras of the Third Doctor to explore for the first time, with Daisy Ashford as Liz in a television season seven story, and Sadie Miller as Sarah Jane in a season eleven story. The series changed a lot over those four years, so it was fun to put two very contrasting stories side by side.”

Tim Treloar tells *Vortex*: “It was very strange recording these two episodes without Katy as I've got very used to having her by my side. But it was lovely to work with Daisy and Sadie, and when we started recording, you could just hear their mums' voices there – it was a great experience doing them.”

Daisy said: “I really loved working with Tim again on this latest Third Doctor Big Finish release. It was

THE MELANCHOLY OF A DOCTOR REACHING THE END OF HIS LIFE, AND THE EXCITEMENT OF A COMPANION JUST BEGINNING HER ADVENTURES...

TIM FOLEY

cocktail of different styles and influences as the production team work out what **Doctor Who** is again, eventually pulling it back to centre when you get to season eight. But here, it's all to play for, which is exciting and daunting all at the same time in story terms.

“*The Unzal Incursion* is a fast-paced action adventure set in the heady world of espionage and technology, with an overarching

alien threat. There are shades of things like *The Tpress File* in there, that slightly unsettling sense of paranoia that was still very evident in 1970. UNIT is front and centre, but it's also a chance to push Liz Shaw forward as a brilliant scientist in her own right. Everyone calls Liz *Miss Shaw* but she's a doctor: I wanted to address that a little bit.

"Plus it's a great opportunity to look at the Doctor and the Brigadier's relationship in more



Jon Culshaw



Sadie Miller

THAT SLIGHTLY UNSETTLING SENSE OF PARANOIA THAT WAS STILL VERY EVIDENT IN 1970.

MARK WRIGHT

detail. I deliberately threw them closer together so we can see them interact during that brittle phase of their early relationship."

SARAH JANE Smith makes her **The Third Doctor Adventures** debut in *The Gulf* by Tim Foley. He says: "I think the Third Doctor and Sarah are such an underrated duo. There's the melancholy of a Doctor reaching the end of his life, and the excitement of a companion just beginning her adventures – I think that's a

crossroads ripe for exploration. I developed the story initially for a different Doctor and companion but it was such a good fit for this pairing. It was a simple, generous brief – I think my only guidance was 'something in outer space' – and I drew on my experiences of being a playwright-in-residence for an isolated theatre.

"As soon as we settled on the Third Doctor and Sarah, we then worked out how the story best served these characters. I like it when the Third Doctor rails against a corporation

and a system, and I wanted Sarah to experience something wondrous whilst also wearing her investigative journalist hat. We're on an alien ocean planet, on a decommissioned spindrift – a concrete rig floating on a poisonous ocean. The galaxy is at war, but this former industrial site has been transformed into an artistic retreat – led by the fabulous Marta Malvani. The Doctor and Sarah arrive after a strange incident, and life aboard the spindrift starts to get a little creepy." **VORTEX**

**DOCTOR WHO:
THE THIRD DOCTOR ADVENTURES**
VOLUME SEVEN

- RELEASED: MAY 2021
- FORMAT: CD/DOWNLOAD

ORDER NOW: bgfn.sh/fulcrum



BOOK CLUB



TIME REAVER

IT'S ALWAYS a huge thrill when it comes to hearing a television Doctor reprise the role. It's hard to believe but it's been five years since David Tennant stepped back into his (metaphorical) Converse shoes for the first three **The Tenth Doctor Adventures** at Big Finish. When it was revealed that the Tenth Doctor was coming back on audio, the sense of joy was shared by Jenny T Colgan, who wrote the second of the 2016 episodes, *Time Reaver*.

After being asked to write for fellow Scot, David Tennant, Jenny recalls: "I never believed that people really jump for joy but I did actually hop around the kitchen a little bit. And then I was so terrified I'd tell someone I got horribly paranoid! But it was an extremely exciting moment."

"I pitched a few ideas and Big Finish chose *Time Reaver*. Funnily enough it is quite traditional sci-fi – featuring a

mechanical interchange planet like a massive interplanetary King's Cross [train station]."

Actor David said at the time: "It's great to have a big, proper sci-fi story on an alien world but as with the other stories we've recorded, you think it's going to be one type of adventure about gun runners or this terrible weapon that's going to destroy everything, but it's even more interesting than that. It's about a civilisation that doesn't quite operate on the same moral framework as everyone else."

Joining the guest cast was Terry Molloy as Rone, making a change from playing his best-known role as Davros. Terry tells us: "It was lovely to be at the microphone with David again – we worked together back in the 1990s on a radio version of Edward Bond's play, *The Sea*. In *Time Reaver*, the studio fizzed with the energy and pace he always brings to the Doctor, and of course the interplay

between him and Catherine Tate was fast, furious and very funny!"

David worked previously for Big Finish ten years before recording this trio of releases.

Chairman Jason Haigh-Ellery tells *Vortex*: "You know what, it didn't feel like David had been away for a decade – that's just unbelievable. It felt like he'd only been away for a year or so! David was lovely on the recording days, he slotted right back in. He has an amazing memory and always remembers everyone's name. He just walked in and went around saying hello to everybody. He was wonderful." **VORTEX**

DOCTOR WHO: THE TENTH DOCTOR ADVENTURES

TIME REAVER

- RELEASED: MAY 2016
- FORMAT: CD/DOWNLOAD

ORDER NOW: bgfn.sh/reaver



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AND USE **VORTEX MAIL** AS THE SUBJECT

VORTEX MAIL



MASTER PLANS?

Can I just say that the **Torchwood** audios continue to be some of the best content I've ever listened to.

Often I feel some of the characters introduced (like Fawzia from *Drive*) would be perfect to recruit for the team, but sadly we know they never are. Perhaps someday we'll get a character who'll turn up again later in the **Torchwood**

– **The Story Continues** range. Also, I just had a quick question regarding the Master. In the **TV Movie**, we had the incarnation who gets executed by the Daleks. Any chance of bringing Gordon Tipples onboard to do some audios?

DRE

Nick: Glad you're loving Torchwood, Dre. It really is at the cutting edge of audio drama, with some incredibly innovative storylines coming out month after month. We have no plans to bring that briefly-seen version of the Master back, not yet anyway!

FINDING THE LOST

I'm loving the new **The Lost Stories** audios that have been released.

But I'm wondering, will the range adapt any unmade modern **Doctor Who** stories? I would love to hear Stephen Fry's *The 1920s* story and Mark Gatiss's *The Suicide Exhibition* get audio adaptations.

JOSHUA DUFFY

Nick: There's no sign of that at the moment, Joshua, but as you know we never say never! We will be releasing the Russell T Davies script, Mind of the Hodiad, later this year though.

APP-Y EVER AFTER

I'm in the process of backing up my Big Finish account onto an external hard drive as recommended on your

website. This is great as it means I can play any release I like straight from the hard drive. However, I notice the releases are split into tracks rather than episodes and when I play them there is a slight pause in between each track, making it an irritating listen. What do you recommend as the best way to backup and play Big Finish releases from a PC? I've tried a few options, including editing the individual tracks together, but the issue is still there. Would love to seamlessly play your releases on my PC in an evening.

PETER

Nick: Hi Peter, unfortunately gaps can occur in the mp3 files if they're not played via the Big

Finish App. You could download the 'audiobook' option which gives you each story in one big file.

TOP KAT

Since the release of *Daughter of the Gods*, there has been an appeal from listeners to hear more of Katarina and it would be great to have her return. Unfortunately, due to how limited her appearances were and her eventual demise, it would seem impossible for her to appear in more adventures. I hope you might consider having Ajjaz Awad return as Katarina.

VITAS VARNAS

Nick: We certainly will keep that as an option, Vitas, I'd love us to do more with Katarina. **VORTEX**



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"Fake rabbit! Real snake!"

BIG FINISH RELEASE SCHEDULE

Please note that due to factors beyond our control, Big Finish is currently operating a digital-first release schedule. Our warehouse remains open but the mail-out of collector's edition CDs may be delayed. However, all physical purchases of new releases will unlock a digital version that can be immediately downloaded, or played on the Big Finish app from the release date.

FOR FULL DETAILS AND UPDATES VISIT:

bgfn.sh/whatsnew

APRIL 2021

DW | THE TENTH DOCTOR
ADVENTURES: *Dalek Universe 1* (BOX SET)

DW | THE TENTH DOCTOR
ADVENTURES: *Dalek Universe 1*
(LIMITED VINYL EDITION)

DW | THE FOURTH DOCTOR
ADVENTURES:
Dalek Universe: The Dalek Protocol
(THE FOURTH DOCTOR)

DW | TIME LORD VICTORIOUS:
Echoes of Extinction
(THE EIGHTH DOCTOR, THE TENTH DOCTOR)

DLO

DW | THE FIRST DOCTOR ADVENTURES:
Volume 5 (BOX SET)

DW | THE LONE CENTURION
Volume 1 (BOX SET)

TORCHWOOD: *Gooseberry* (#8)

THE AVENGERS – THE COMIC
STRIP ADAPTATIONS:
Volume 5: Steed & Tara King (BOX SET)

BIG FINISH IN CONVERSATION:
Carolyn Seymour **DLO**

MAY 2021

DW | THE NINTH DOCTOR
ADVENTURES: *Ravagers* (BOX SET)

DW | THE NINTH DOCTOR
ADVENTURES: *Ravagers*
(LIMITED VINYL EDITION)

DW | THE THIRD DOCTOR
ADVENTURES: *Volume 7* (BOX SET)

IRIS WILDTHYME AND FRIENDS:
Fellowship of Ink (AUDIOBOOK) **DLO**

IRIS WILDTHYME AND FRIENDS:
666 Charing Cross Road
(AUDIOBOOK) **DLO**

THE WORLDS OF BLAKE'S 7:
Avalon 1 (BOX SET)

TORCHWOOD: *Absent Friends* (50)

JUNE 2021

DW | OUT OF TIME 2:
The Gates of Hell
(THE FIFTH DOCTOR, THE TENTH DOCTOR)

DW | THE WAR DOCTOR BEGINS:
Forged in Fire (BOX SET)

DW | THE ROBOTS: *Volume 4* (BOX SET)

DW | JAGO & LITEFOOT:
Series 14 (AUDIOBOOK) **DLO**

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TORCHWOOD: *The Five People You Kill in Middlesbrough* (5)

BIG FINISH CLASSICS
The Box of Delights (BOX SET)

JULY 2021

DW | THE TENTH DOCTOR
ADVENTURES:
Dalek Universe 2 (BOX SET)

DW | THE TENTH DOCTOR
ADVENTURES: *Dalek Universe 2*
(LIMITED VINYL EDITION)

DW | THE AUDIO NOVELS:
Scourge of the Cybermen
(THE THIRD DOCTOR)

DW | LADY CHRISTINA:
Volume 2 (BOX SET)

BIG FINISH ORIGINALS: CICERO
The Crossroads **DLO**

TORCHWOOD: *Madam, I'm* (52)

DLO = DOWNLOAD ONLY • DW = DOCTOR WHO

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VORTEX



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TORCHWOOD REACHES A HALF-CENTURY...
AND THE **TENTH DOCTOR** IS TAKING OVER!

ALSO INSIDE

ADVENTURES IN
SPACE WITH NINE
THE **NINTH DOCTOR** RETURNS!



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APRIL 2021
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STORIES