

THE BIG FINISH MAGAZINE

VORTEX



ISSUE 201
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THE FIRST DOCTOR: UNBOUND RETURN TO MARINUS

DAVID BRADLEY is back in the TARDIS for **The First Doctor Unbound: Return to Marinus** being released in January next year.

This sequel to the 1964 television serial *The Keys of Marinus* sees the Doctor and his companions – Susan (Claudia Grant), Ian (Jamie Glover) and Barbara (Jemma Powell) – land on the planet of acid seas and glass beaches once again.

The TARDIS has brought the Doctor and his companions back to the planet Marinus, one century after their previous visit. They are greeted as returning heroes, figures of legend. But something is amiss in the city of Millenius. Everybody lives in peace and harmony... whether they like it or not.

The explanation is obvious. Somebody has reactivated the Conscience Machine and is set on removing free will from Marinus. Somebody – or some old enemies of the Doctor...

Producer and director David O'Mahony says: "For **The First Doctor Unbound** series, we took inspiration from the Peter Cushing films with bold storylines, high-stakes drama and the kind of twists and turns that would have been thrilling in a cinema."

Writer Jonathan Morris adds: "I've always loved *The Keys of Marinus*. The chance to write a sequel story – in glorious, technicolour widescreen – was a dream come true because this is the sort of thing I love. Not only to find out what happened to its people 100 years after that first adventure, but also to revisit its themes and widen the canvas even further. And, if that wasn't enough, it has the Daleks in it too."

VORTEX

THE FIRST DOCTOR UNBOUND RETURN TO MARINUS

- RELEASED: JANUARY 2026
- FORMAT: DOWNLOAD/CD

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EDITORIAL

ONE OF the classic **Doctor Who** fan debates is which monsters are the best – the Daleks or the Cybermen? Both races are, at their core, very similar with a being that originally looked human in appearance then having their body altered and cybernetic grafts added. One is driven by hatred of the unlike, and the other wants to convert other beings to be alike.

I have to admit, I've always fallen into the Cybermen camp (I'm just checking that Nick isn't looking to exterminate me now!). So, when it was revealed that the next War Doctor release from Big Finish was *Cybergene*, a story with EVERY CYBERMAN EVER, it's fair to say I was rather excited.

Take a look at the cover and we can see the Cybermen introduced in the 21st century series, including the models that faced the Tenth, Eleventh, Twelfth and Thirteenth Doctors, as well as old favourites such as the Silver Nemesis and Earthshock varieties, and classics from *The Tenth Planet*, *The Tomb of the Cybermen* and *The Invasion*.

But look further, and you'll spot two of Big Finish's own creations, with the models introduced in the Sixth Doctor webcast *Real Time* and, more recently, the variety which faced the Ninth Doctor in *Monsters in Metropolis*. It's a brilliant piece of artwork by Sean Longmore – I really can't wait to hear it!

VORTEX

Kenny



AS IF THE TIME WAR WASN'T COMPLICATED ENOUGH, THE WAR DOCTOR IS GOING TO FACE...

EVERY CYBERMAN!

JUST WHAT did the Cybermen get up to during the Time War? It's a question that many fans have been asking. We've seen the Daleks and know the Sontarans were desperate to become involved, but what happened to the Doctor's other greatest foe? We're going to discover exactly that in **The War Doctor Rises – Cybergene**.

Written by Jonathan Morris, the new box set sees Jonathan Carley back as the War Doctor in conflict with every variety of the creatures from Mondas.

Producer David Richardson says: "It had always been in my mind that at some point we should do Cybermen in the Time War. It is something that has piqued my curiosity. While the Time Lords and the Daleks were battling it out, what was this other huge universal power up to?"

"Jonny Morris's initial pitch was to use all the different variants of Cybermen in the war. It was an easy commission, something I was really excited about.

"This run of the War Doctor is all writer-led where we're basically

giving a largely free rein to the writers to present the kind of Time War story they want to hear made. So editorially, I'm taking more of a backseat and just offering my trust and support to very experienced people. Jonny is one of our most experienced Big Finish writers, I mean, he dates all the way back to *Bloodtide* in 2001!"

Jonny tells *Vortex*: "I was hugely excited to be involved in this. I've been writing Big Finish audios for a quarter of a century now and in all that time, I've never had a chance to do a Cybermen story. But



Above (l-r): Jonathon Carley
and Mitra Djalili

that hasn't stopped me thinking up lots of cool things I could do with them – most of which have found their way into this series.

"I love the idea of the Cybermen and the body horror aspect of people being turned into the living dead. The odd thing is that watching the old TV stories, you only get flashes of that horror coming through as they're often just treated as generic science fiction robots. But then you have things like *Spare Parts* coming along, putting the horror front and centre, and showing what a brilliant, terrifying concept the Cybermen really are. *Spare Parts* and TV stories like *The Next Doctor* and *World Enough and Time* were a big inspiration when I was writing this."

What was in the brief for this one? Jonny says: "I kind of wrote my own brief. The War Doctor and addressing the question, 'What were the Cybermen doing during the Time War?' A race almost as powerful as the Daleks, even without the capability of time travel, surely they must be been involved somehow? The important thing was not just to have them doing the same sort

I LOVE THE IDEA OF THE CYBERMEN AND THE BODY HORROR ASPECT OF PEOPLE BEING TURNED INTO THE LIVING DEAD.

JONATHAN MORRIS

of thing as the Daleks or the Time Lords, or have them teaming up with either side, but to treat them as a separate faction that is powerful enough to swing the balance.

"My starting point for part one was the image of having some soldiers in a trench in World War I looking across No Man's Land and seeing a load of Cybermen striding out of the mist towards them. It's not set in World War I, it's set on an alien planet, but it does have trenches and it's about the evolution of Cybermen through their different forms. Part two is set on a different alien world over a period of 500 years, and is about a medieval astrologer called Collo-Davius and

how the road to hell is paved with good intentions. That's the story where I've come up with a few new types of Cybermen. And part three is about the last resting place of the Cybermen featuring the ones that decided to retreat into hibernation rather than fight the Time War."

ACTOR JONATHAN was delighted to get his first clash with the silver giants. He says: "It's become a bit of a tradition now that David taunts me with what is coming next for the

War Doctor at the end of each recording block. This one was 'every Cyberman ever', which is a strong elevator pitch! Who wouldn't be excited by that? But it begged the question of what the story would be and what it might explain or reveal about the various guises of the Cybermen over the years. The Cybermen have almost become conspicuous by their absence in the Time War mythology; the Time War is all about survival whatever the cost after all.

"The Cybermen are such a brilliant concept, possibly controversially, more so than the Daleks. They're slightly more plausible and the idea of the Cybermen never really goes away. They arise from adversity and endure. They are somewhat inevitable. I remember years ago seeing the clip of the Cyberleader in the TV episode *Earthshock*, where they have those transparent chin plates and you can see the humanoid mouth inside, and that really disturbed me. It drove home the fact that there are converted people in them. That idea of being consumed is hugely uncomfortable.

"Science has produced prosthetic limbs and organs and other life-saving technologies which have done great good for many people in the world. But with any technology, there's a potential extreme that may even start with the best of intentions. The Cybermen represent the extremity of survival at the cost of all the things that make us who we are, physically and emotionally. At what point does this survival instinct or strategy take more from us than it offers? When do we lose control? That's very much explored in *Cybergene*."

How did Jonny find writing for



Above (l-r): Glen McCready, Jonathon Carley, Mitra Djalili, Tracy Wiles and Nicholas Briggs



Above: Clive Hayward

the different types of Cybermen? He explains: "Well, they have different voices, for a start. And slightly different speech patterns. *The Tenth Planet* TV episode ones are quite gregarious, while later ones are quite impassive – not that you

can really do impassive on audio. That said, one of my key ideas was to use them sparingly but to make each appearance count. Better to have a Cyberman uttering one word where it's a scary moment than to have a two-minute scene

with two Cybermen discussing their plans for the weekend! With the Cybermen, less is more."

RESPONSIBLE FOR the sound of the Cybermen is executive producer and actor Nicholas Briggs, who has been voicing them for Big Finish ever since *Sword of Orion*. Nick says:

"This was a lovely challenge. I do often worry that some of the Cybermen are quite difficult to understand, especially the *Moonbase/Tomb* type with the electro-layr. And Jonny had mistakenly thought there was a discernible difference between the *Earthshock* style and *Sword of Orion* – the difference is so minor as to be virtually inaudible.

"Not all the voices use the same technology, and not all that technology is available in studio. If it involves a ring modulator, that's fine, I can bring that and plug it into their system. But if it's a digital effect, like the pitch-shift for the 1980s

I'M FROM THAT GENERATION WHEN THE MONSTERS WERE MORE OF THE REASON WHY WE LOVED DOCTOR WHO...

NICHOLAS BRIGGS

Cyberman, then it can't practically be done 'live' because of an annoying thing called 'latency' or 'digital delay'. When you apply a digital effect in real time there is a slight lag between speaking and hearing the result in your headphones. This lag makes it impossible to speak coherently because you can hear yourself speaking a millisecond later. It's very off-putting."

Was it fun, making them all sound so different? Nick tells *Vortex*: "It's always really fun and rewarding doing monster voices. In so many ways, it has defined my life and that makes me very happy. I'm primarily a **Doctor Who** fan because of monsters. I'm from that generation when the monsters were more of the reason why we loved **Doctor Who**; the Doctor was kind of irrelevant! Think back to the first

regeneration into Patrick Troughton. No huge press coverage. The big thing on the *Radio Times* cover for his first episode was 'The Daleks are back!' or something similar. Photos of Daleks, not the Doctor! People forget that now. **Doctor Who** was all about the monsters. Which one will scare us this week? So, yeah, I

It's a very satisfying, clear voice effect. Excellent, in fact!"

JONATHAN ADDS: "The Cybermen have had many looks over the years but also many sounds too. Just hearing them evokes the relevant image and costume. The sing-song lilt

technical and acting focus, and I have a lot of respect for how much he cares about being respectful to all the different eras."

"Working with Mitra Djalili as Nesta has been great on this one. Each **The War Doctor Rises** story teams the Doctor up with a one-off companion for the duration of the story to hold him to account. It's been fantastic to build up those relationships over multiple episodes, and Mitra is no exception. This story is very much Nesta's journey and we get to look at the ethics and intentions behind the Cybermen. She's very capable and she's not afraid to call the Doctor out, which is great stuff. She's no push over. But it's always a joy and privilege to work with such strong, talented and experienced actors like Mitra. It really makes you up your game.

"This has just been a bucket list story. I've done the big three now, Daleks, Sontarans and Cybermen. It's something I wasn't sure I would ever do but I'm so glad I have, and I really hope it scratches that itch for the listeners. Who knows what will happen next – The War Androgums!"

Jonny tells *Vortex* his highlight: "I was in the studio for the recording, and with these War Doctor stories, the highlight is always hearing Jonathon perform. How does he do it? His normal voice is nothing like John Hurt. And yet, when he summons him up, it's absolutely uncanny. And then he has to do a double and act at the same time. Extraordinary." **VORTEX**



Above (l-r): Mitra Djalili and Jonathon Carley

HIS NORMAL VOICE IS NOTHING LIKE JOHN HURT. AND YET, WHEN HE SUMMONS HIM UP, IT'S ABSOLUTELY UNCANNY.

JONATHAN MORRIS

love it. It means the world to me."

Vortex asks if Nick has a personal favourite type of Cyberman voice. He says: "Every time I think of each one, I can come up a reason why it's my favourite! So I can't actually name an outright favourite. I've just done some 1980s-style Cybermen for another production and today I'm rather into them!

immediately conjures up the Mondasian Cybermen. But my favourite voice has to be the *Moonbase*/Telosian Cybermen. It's functional, but completely devoid of emotion or feeling, it's just one level, no shift in pitch or volume. You can just picture that letterbox mouth opening and snapping shut with a ticker tape of words streaming out.

"The fascinating thing for me when recording this was watching Nick in his isolation booth, all kitted up like a one-man Cyber-band. I've seen him voice the Daleks in studio, where he will do a lot of variation just vocally and tweak the modulation slightly. But with the Cybermen he's jumping back and forth from different devices and gizmos in the same scene. It's incredible to watch that level of

THE WAR DOCTOR RISES CYBERGENE



■ RELEASED: DECEMBER 2025
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GAMES WITHOUT FRONTIERS

SOMETHING, OR someone, is playing truth or dare with the people on the Powell Estate. And it's dangerous to play games with a Time Lord.

Sticks and stones may break your bones, but words can REALLY hurt you.

That's the scenario for *Dare You*, the next audio adventure for the Ninth Doctor and Rose starring Christopher Eccleston and Billie Piper, with Camille Coduri featuring once more as the beloved Jackie Tyler.

Dare You follows on from *The Last Days of the Powell Estate* and Rose has returned home to spend time with her mum after the events of television episode *Father's Day*.

The range is produced and scripted edited by Matt Fitton, who was delighted to commission Lisa McMullin to write this adventure.

Matt says: "This one was interesting as Lisa's pitch keeps the story on the Powell Estate. We're starting to hear forces being drawn to the estate, strange

things are happening and the Doctor's interest and curiosity is being piqued as well. Something seems to be pulling more and more darkness towards the estate.

"Dare you has the brilliant conceit of something as simple and silly as releasing your mental safety catch and having people start to act on impulse. They do things they know they shouldn't do. It starts off quite naughty, and then becomes darker and darker. We know if this force acts on the Doctor, then releasing



Above (l-r): Lisa McMullin, Helen Goldwyn and Christopher Eccleston

completed a page in a sticker book!
"Matt asked us to suggest ideas for several potential settings, one of which was the Powell Estate. I came up with a few ideas and this was the one he thought was the best fit with the other stories."

Asked to sum up what the adventure is about, Lisa says: "People are acting oddly on the Powell Estate. They're behaving childishly, impulsively. Then Jackie Tyler gets in trouble for wreaking havoc in

HE'S A SUPERB ACTOR AND A LOVELY BLOKE. AND WAY TOO KIND ABOUT MY WORDS.

LISA McMULLIN



Above (l-r): Jack Ayres, Harry Myers, Camille Coduri, Beverley Klein and Dan Starkey

the mini-mart. Luckily the Doctor and Rose are on hand to investigate. Something mischievous has set up shop in the precinct, and it's all fun and games until... well, until it isn't.

"This is a story about the difference between thinking something and actually saying it out loud. And the difference between thinking something and actually doing it. Thoughts and words and deeds get conflated so easily these days. And people feel bolder to say out loud what, perhaps, they ought to keep to themselves. Sometimes the consequences are dangerous. "Sticks and stones may break my bones but words can never hurt me." Except words can hurt – and often they lead to actions which can kill. It's a cautionary tale, I guess. Freedom of speech is important but so is thinking before you speak and act. Ooh that all sounds very deep! It's also a fun adventure with an alien!"

CHRIS HAS previously praised Lisa's Ninth Doctor scripts. Matt says: "Chris loves Lisa's writing. He always happy when it's one of her stories."

Lisa adds: "Chris has always been an acting hero of mine (from way before **Doctor Who**). To write for him in any capacity is a dream.

his safety catch is going to be a very, very dangerous thing to do."

For Lisa, writing *Dare You* was a dream come true as it meant that she could bring together three characters she'd previously put words into the mouths of separately.

She explains: "Getting to write for Chris AND Billie AND Camille felt like I'd finally located all the pieces of my jigsaw puzzle. I've written for each of them before but never managed to put all three in one story until now. I feel like I've

He's a superb actor and a lovely bloke. And way too kind about my words."

Director Helen Goldwyn continues to oversee the Ninth Doctor range in studio, having worked with Chris and Billie on previous Big Finish recordings. *Vortex* asks how much she enjoys coming back to this TARDIS team? Helen says: "Working with Chris and Billie is always a treat and a thrill. Despite the fact that we're all familiar with each other now, it doesn't take away

CHRIS AND BILLIE ARE ALWAYS GOING TO BRING PASSION AND COMMITMENT TO THE JOB...

HELEN GOLDWYN



Above (l-r): Billie Piper and Camille Coduri

that this is a collaboration that **Doctor Who** fans would probably love to witness, so I don't take my proximity to it all for granted!

"We know how to work together now and I think there's a lot of trust between us. Chris and Billie are always going to bring passion and commitment to the job, and I know we're always going to have a laugh together, particularly on breaks!"

Helen has assembled a great guest cast with Jack Ayres (Davey), Beverley Klein (Polly Pemberton) and Harry Myers (Baz/The Hellion). She tells *Vortex*: "In terms of casting *Dare You*, I knew immediately who I wanted for the guest roles as the voices were so clear in my head. I

was thrilled to be able to bring in the wonderful (musical theatre legend) Beverley for Polly as her voice is so distinctive and deep, and she has the most brilliant flair for comedy. Jack is always incredibly good as someone who's super-versatile and can also convincingly play a teen boy, and Harry is a Big Finish veteran who can create pretty much any extreme monster voice we need."

MATT ADDS: "In our previous release, *The Last Days of the Powell Estate*, we had a small guest cast but it's a bigger group in *Dare You*. We're building up the Powell Estate neighbourhood which feels like a

proper community with its characters and eccentrics.

"Helen brought in Beverley because she'd worked with her in *Fiddler on the Roof*. Jack was also Helen's suggestion as a new voice to audio – he did some great stuff as Davey. And it's always a joy to work with Harry. I've just been listening to lots of very old **Bernice Summerfield** releases and of course he's there as Adrian Wall, who's the father of Benny's son Peter. Harry's got a great voice, very gruff and a bit of a geezer, so it's perfect to have him as a Powell Estate resident. He also did wonders as the Hellion which is a goblin-like gremlin creature. He shifted his voice completely to create that."

Lisa adds that her highlight was: "Finally getting to a recording with Chris, Billie and Jackie. This was the first time I'd been in studio with any of them. I love hearing actors work – it's magic!"

Recalling the studio session, Helen says: "Highlights on this episode include all of us singing 'Happy Birthday' deliberately out of tune for scene one, and hearing Chris deliver his epic, poetic incantations to both summon and subsequently banish evil."

Eagle-eyed readers of *Vortex* may have noticed the name of the character played by Harry Myers. But Lisa stresses: "The Hellion in this story has *nothing* to do with the Hellion in the TV episode *The Interstellar Song Contest*. And I wrote my adventure first!" **VORTEX**

THE NINTH DOCTOR ADVENTURES DARE YOU



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TIMESLIP THE AGE OF THE DEATH LOTTERY



Above (l-r): Spencer Banks and Cheryl Burfield

HOW MANY of us buy a lottery ticket every week in the hope that it will change our lives? Sometimes, though, there are consequences if you win and that's definitely the case with

Timeslip: The Age of the Death Lottery.

In May 2020, in the year of the series' 50th anniversary, Big Finish revived the ATV series on audio, with its original leads Spencer Banks and Cheryl Burfield as Simon Randall and Liz Skinner.

Producer David Richardson recalls: "Timeslip was a science fiction television series broadcast as part of ATV's children's schedule, but its tone was remarkably mature. It was ahead of its time in terms of the themes it encompassed. I'm sure this is the first time that TV told a

story about global warming, and the same goes for cloning and longevity treatments. Most importantly, it was a show that centred on its characters, delving into their pasts and futures. I absolutely loved it.

I HAD THE OPTION – A CONTINUATION OR A REBOOT? I CHOSE BOTH!

DAVID RICHARDSON

"In bringing the series to audio I had the option – a continuation or a reboot? I chose both! Liz and Simon are back, 50 years later, and we find out what became of them and ultimately take them on trips through the time barrier. Plus, we introduced an ensemble of characters to take **Timeslip** in new directions, and yet these directions ultimately remained faithful to what went before."

JOINING THE established cast were new younger characters, Jade (Amanda Shodeko) and Neil (Orlando Gibbs). Andrew Smith wrote the first story which tied in with the second, Marc Platt's *The War That Never Was*. Andrew recalls: "My story sets up Neil and Jade coming through the barrier and meeting up with Simon and Liz. Simon hears a report of a young couple who appear out of thin air on their hands and knees in Crystal Palace Park, and they realise it

could be the time barrier they went through in their teens. From that we finish up going through the time barrier into an Earth of the future, where in 2042 it's a police state, and there's this thing called the Death Lottery.

"We were asked to think of a theme, a disaster or natural threat, which was what the TV series dealt with, and I went with overpopulation which quickly led me to the Death Lottery. Earth is overpopulated and the solution is that everyone in the world has a lottery number. If your number is called, you are put to death, humanely. I put a lot of thought into it and wrote a lengthy rationale for myself of why people would accept it. What would be the things that would make it work? What would the situation be that would make people think this is a good idea instead of other measures? How would you keep people from running away? I found answers to all of that quite quickly. "It's something I think is very credible, that, if in certain circumstances such as a food crisis to exacerbate the overpopulation, people would see they have to go along with it. It's a lovely dramatic device, that the Death Lottery becomes a public event with viewcreens." **VORTEX**

TIMESLIP THE AGE OF THE DEATH LOTTERY



■ RELEASED: MAY 2020
■ FORMAT: DOWNLOAD

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LIV, HELEN AND THE EIGHTH DOCTOR ARE
FACING NEW DANGERS IN THE SHADOWS...

MONSTROUS ALLURE

SINCE OCTOBER 2015, the Eighth Doctor (Paul McGann) has been travelling with Liv Chenka (Nicola Walker) and Helen Sinclair (Hattie Morahan).

They first came together during the events of the *Doom Coalition* series and now, a decade on, they're still having adventures. This latest release, *Empty Vessels*, pits them into two new tales encountering one of the Doctor's old foes.

Vortex asks producer David Richardson how much he enjoys bringing this team back together? He says: "They're a perfect fit, this

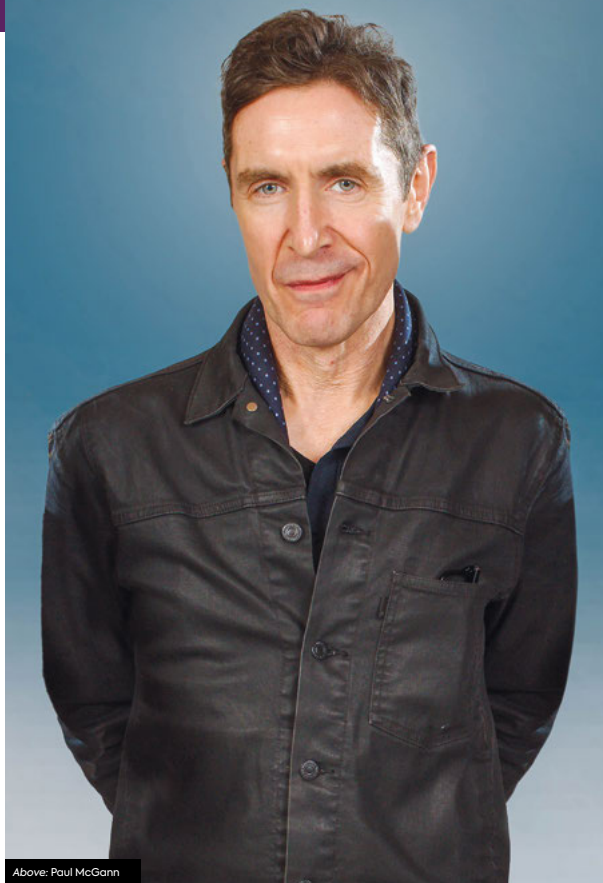
trio, not just as characters but also as actors. All three of them are so accomplished and always very busy, but they make time to get together to appear in the further adventures of the Eighth Doctor, Liv and Helen. I think we will always come back to this ensemble, though there might be some gaps and changes in direction along the way. That's all I can say right now..."

Eos Falling by Matt Fitton opens the set. *The Doctor, Helen and Liv find themselves on an abandoned spacecraft, hurtling towards an inhabited world. The crew have vanished – but the TARDIS travellers*

are not alone on this empty vessel...

David says: "This is top notch stuff from Matt. Not just a brilliant, atmospheric outer space thriller but also a lovely character piece. We already know how Liv eventually leaves the Doctor and *Eos Falling* offers a few breadcrumbs concerning Helen's future. We have a plan for the Eighth Doctor which we've been chipping away at over the years, and things are falling into place. This time next year that plan will be a lot clearer to listeners..."

Matt tells *Vortex*: "Sometimes production schedules change and plans fall through. At one point



Above: Paul McGann

when working on **The Eighth Doctor Adventures**, I had to step in and come up with a storyline quite quickly for something that might have been needed for a gap in the schedule.

"My go-to idea that I really wanted to do was a haunted spaceship. It's something that's got a really atmospheric feel to it, with the pitter-patter of ghostly children and the mystery of a deserted ship that's flying, falling and potentially crashing into a world and causing disaster. That was the seed of it. This was in my drawer of ideas of things I was keen to write, and I knew once I started it, I could finish it quite quickly.

"But, as it happened, it was put aside for a while until now when I came back to it with fresh eyes. It's good to have a break from a story, to be able to come back and see where

THEY DUPLICATE SOMEONE, BUT THEN HAVE TO LIVE THAT PERSON'S LIFE.

MATT FITTON

it's working and where it's not. And then you can add new elements and thoughts that you might have on how things can be changed. That's what happened here, really. The strand of family came through a bit more on my second approach."

Having been involved with writing for this TARDIS crew since its genesis, Matt says: "I love writing for the Eighth Doctor, Liv and Helen. They've been in my brain for so long now, in any situation I can hear their voices and their

dialogue. I'm looking at my wall and there are little cartoons of them stuck there! They are a much-cherished team as they just work so well – they really click together.

"I've said it before, but you can bring out different dynamics in the trio. It's always fun to do that. You've got the relationships between the two companions, and the relationships between them and the Doctor as each of them works differently with him. And then you can put the three of them together. There are lots of different angles to explore.

"With Liv and Helen, post-*Stranded*, we've got these continuing adventures and we know that eventually Liv will return to Earth solo to be with Tanya. There's a very subtle arc going on with things chugging along in the background, and it comes to the fore a little bit more now. We'll hear, in time, how that that story plays out."

LURE OF the Zygons is a two-part tale by Roy Gill. A distress call draws the Doctor, Liv and Helen to a remote world and a crashed ship, where Captain Elhan is searching for her lost sibling... As the storms close in, the two crews must investigate the wreck together. In the darkness, the Zygons are waiting...

Matt tells Vortex: "This is a brilliant use of the Zygons from Roy. It's all about the themes of identity – who you are, who you might pretend to be, who you're trying to be and who you'd want to be. It all plays into that.

"There's something unique about the Zygons as a monster in that they duplicate someone, but then have to live that person's life. It was a really interesting area to explore and Roy's done a brilliant job. It's one of my favourites."

What was the lure of the Zygons for the writer? Roy explains: "Iconic' is an overused word, but I'm going to use it anyway! The Zygons are an iconic **Doctor Who** monster with a brilliant design that made a huge impact back in 1975. They thrilled me when I got my paws on the VHS, and they continue to be exciting and relevant now. It's always fun to be asked to come up with a story for one of **Who's** classic monsters!

"I think the Zygons are well



Above (l-r): Maddison Bullement,
Nisha Nayar and Ben Arogundade

determined space captain and her team on a quest for her long-lost sibling, while in the darkness the Zygons lurk, watching and waiting...

"I don't want to say too much about the story. I've tried to evoke some of my favourite things about *Terror of the Zygons*: the sense of creeping danger and mystery, while hopefully bringing in something contemporary for 2025. Zygons are shapeshifters at heart, so the sort of stories we can tell keep changing too..."

Roy enjoyed the challenge of working on this script. "Every

I'VE TRIED TO EVOKE SOME OF MY FAVOURITE THINGS ABOUT *TERROR OF THE ZYGONS*...

ROY GILL

Big Finish commission requires a synopsis to be worked out by the writer and approved. So by the time you start scripting, you have the plot ready and waiting. But it's not necessarily as simple as just methodically translating a compressed outline into full scenes with dialogue and sound effects – at least, it never is for me!

"There are usually extra details and bits of plot logic that only fully reveal themselves as I write... Quite often characters turn out to be different to what you were expecting, once you've given them a voice and they've come alive... They have a habit of jumping ahead, or having a crush on the wrong person, or just being generally awkward! I think it's your job as a writer to be responsive to that. My favourite part of script writing generally emerges from these moments, even if it can feel more than a bit nerve-wracking as you go..."

ROY LISTENED to the recording remotely. He reveals: "I had given a casting suggestion, Maddison Bullement as Wren Elhan, and I was so pleased that director Ken Bentley and David were happy to go with them. Maddison came in



Above (l-r): Matt Fitton, Orlessa Altass,
Molly Harris, Thomas Michaelson,
Hattie Morahan and Holly Jackson Walters

suited to audio too: they have such a distinctive voice and rich SFX ambience to their environment and technology."

Roy has previously written for this TARDIS crew in *UNIT Dating*, *The Keys of Baker Street* and *Albie's Angels*. He says: "I'm always going to say 'yes please!' to this team. Paul, Nicola and Hattie's relationship and

dynamic as the Doctor, Liv and Helen are well established and rightly loved by the fans, but also ever evolving... Every time I write for them, I know there's a rich past of interactions to draw on, and I feel lucky if I get to discover a little bit more.

"A strange, fractured distress call draws our heroes to a desolate planet and a crashed spaceship. There's a



Above: Nicola Walker

full of ideas, enthusiasm and energy: they absolutely gave me the Wren I'd hoped for and lots more.

"There was also a lot of fun in the moments with the Doctor confronting the Zygon leader, Wodenarr. I get the sense that Paul enjoys scenes where his Doctor is quick, sarcastic and smart. And Nicholas Briggs is great at playing that sort of frothing, seething alien indignation in response. I reckon John Woodnutt would be proud!

"Plus, you know, any story with sneaky, stealthy monsters involves a certain amount of sudden terror and horrible death so the actors get a chance to give it all they've got... I don't know what it was like in the studio, but my ears were

ringing in the headphones!"

David adds: "I said to Roy, 'This is the best Zygon script I've read'. It's not just a clever, twisty-turny adventure, it's also got plenty to say about humanity and our identity. This really needs its two 50-minute episodes for the breadth of characterisation and rich ideas."

Ken says: "It's always a treat to work with Paul, Nicola and Hattie, even more so now we get together less frequently. They enjoy each other's company and there's an infectious energy in the studio. You need a critical mass of people having fun and once they are, then it gives everybody else permission to have fun too. It's just a great vibe – and who doesn't need that these days?

"I tend to find actors I work with a lot don't need me to finish a sentence – they know me so they're happy to interrupt and say they know what to do! It's a combination of things; they know their roles inside out, and they know the world of the play and the style of the stories we tell. I love it, it feels like telepathy! I can just think what the scene might need and before I take a breath they're already doing it. It has nothing to do with me, I know that. They're just brilliant and

IT'S NOT JUST A CLEVER, TWISTY-TURNY ADVENTURE, IT'S ALSO GOT PLENTY TO SAY ABOUT HUMANITY...

DAVID RICHARDSON

they enjoy spotting opportunities and bringing the plays to life.

"I finally managed to work with Orlessa Altass which I've been trying to do for years. And I got to work with a number of other people for the first time – Nisha Nayar, Ben Arogundade and Eric Stroud. I'm very aware when I'm casting that I'm offering people work. Times are hard right now and it's a genuine privilege to be able to do that. It's a part of the job that brings me a huge amount of satisfaction, and I try to give as much work to as many people as I can."

VORTEX

THE EIGHTH DOCTOR ADVENTURES EMPTY VESSELS



■ RELEASED: DECEMBER 2025
■ FORMAT: DOWNLOAD/CD

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THEY MIGHT BE DALEKS

THE SECOND Doctor, Jamie and Zoe are set to battle their greatest enemies once more.

The Potential Daleks, the next release in **The Second Doctor Adventures**, picks up from where 2024's box set *Conspiracy of Raven* ended.

The Doctor (Michael Troughton), Jamie (Frazer Hines) and Zoe (Wendy Padbury) – along with the Doctor's Time Lord supervisor Raven (Emma Noakes) – have been investigating the mysterious Kippers and the

space-time “archive” known as the Vanishing Point. Now, they've discovered a Dalek plot that threatens the whole universe.

Producer and script editor Mark Wright says: “We felt it was time to bring things to a crescendo – but not a finale – and *The Potential Daleks* has our time travelling quartet facing a true invasion of time. The three stories in this box set follow a cosmic trail from 19th and 20th century Earth to a lush forest world, before a return to the Vanishing

Point for a final reckoning.”

Script editor, director and Dalek voice Nicholas Briggs adds: “This set opens with Skaro materialising everywhere in space and time. The Daleks seem to have forced their way back into reality after their destruction in *The Evil of the Daleks*. But, spoilers, the Doctor manages to halt that.

“For the whole of the last box set, strange things called ‘Kippers’ keep appearing, making everyone's brains go fuzzy. This time, we're



Above (l-r): Wendy Padbury and Frazer Hines

about to discover what they really are, how they got here and why they're called Kippers — which, I'm proud to say, is the daftest alien name I've ever come up with. But there's a reason it's daft, honest!

"Mark and I have had a great time working together. We've a great mutual trust. He's always committed to lots of other freelance projects so sometimes it's my job just to push ahead, so I wrote broad outlines for each of the stories — including his! I set him a load of problems to solve and he really went to town on it, making *Secret of the Daleks* one of the most exciting Dalek stories I've ever worked on. The first part is a really spooky, intriguing set-up, then the second part is just one life-threatening situation after another, with a countdown to disaster right from the beginning."

Mark adds: "It's been a really lovely way of working and I think our styles complement each other well. I have a habit of being quite chaotic, throwing lots of crazy ideas into the mix, and Nick has this brilliant knack of shaping my excess into something that makes more logical sense."

Humpty Dumpty by Nicholas Briggs opens the set. Mark says:

"The Doctor, Zoe and Raven are at the Vanishing Point, presented with projections of Skaro at every point of time. Jamie is still missing and the Doctor must follow a trail through time to track down the Daleks."

Nick says: "It's all a bit quirky. I wanted to solve the conundrum of why these things are called Kippers, and as I worked out the details of what I'd been thinking, I realised the whole story was going to be strange. So, it's set in 1877 Southampton in a boarding house with a strange invention that shouldn't be there, and in the 1950s near Southampton in an old people's rest home. It's both ends of a very significant character's lifetime."

The second adventure is *Secret of the Daleks* by Mark Wright.

FOLLOWING THE lingering trail of the Daleks' space-time corridor, the time travellers are surprised when the TARDIS arrives on a tropical forest world. Taking refuge with the population of a peaceful village, the Doctor wonders if he has finally defeated his most terrible enemy.

Mark says: "The TARDIS crew land on a lush forest world, the

Doctor expecting to find himself on Skaro for a final reckoning — but the Daleks are nowhere to be found. It allows us some character introspection as the foursome spend time with the local villagers. But, obviously, it's not that simple!"

War of the Morai by both Mark and Nick concludes the set.

Nick tells *Vortex*: "Mark came up with the title some time ago. He's great at that, our Mark! He'll suddenly say, 'I don't know why, but I think it should be called...' I wrote the script, because Mark was committed elsewhere, and then Mark did a few rewrites which really enhanced it and brought the whole thing together."

Mark says: "It's a real privilege to be given such a canvas to work on with a lot of freedom to take it in different directions."

Nick adds that his highlight was: "Hearing Michael, Wendy and Frazer working together. They really loved it, and have been so welcoming to Emma playing Raven, our other member of the top team. I could listen to those characters misunderstanding each other in the TARDIS forever!"

"Such beautiful performances, and they've really taken hold of the characters and helped Mark and I to define them. Michael deserves a special mention because he's really embraced playing his father's role. He has such an enthusiasm for it and is so lovely to work with. One of life's most positive and nourishing people to be with. A truly wonderful man." **VORTEX**

THE SECOND DOCTOR ADVENTURES THE POTENTIAL DALEKS



■ RELEASED: DECEMBER 2025
■ FORMAT: DOWNLOAD/CD

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Sergeant Andy Davidson would like to believe he's perfection...

ABSOLUTELY FLAWLESS

WHO WOULD have thought that a pile of VHS tapes would prove to be a menace in the 21st century?

Martin Binns is dead. He leaves behind a pile of video tapes and a warning on the walls of his flat: "He Is Coming".

Sergeant Andy Davidson's boss is keen to write the death off, but Andy's been around Torchwood too long to let it go. The tapes contain the rushes of an unfinished horror film. Hidden in it is a forgotten crime and a terrible warning. He. Is. Coming.

The Flawless Man is the latest release in the ongoing **Torchwood** series written by the husband-and-wife team of Lauren Mooney and Stewart Pringle.

Producer James Goss says: "I'm thrilled that Lauren and Stewart have pulled off another bit of gorgeously edgy folk horror. Please someone give them an actual horror movie to write! There's a great sense of building menace through this script, and a lovely mystery as to whether there is, or is not, a monster going on."

Tom Price returns to play everyone's

favourite police officer from Cardiff.

James continues: "It's lovely to see how well Sergeant Andy works in almost any setting. He's the everyman we all wish was our friend."

Unlike previous scripts where the producer asked the writers to work to a brief, this saw Lauren and Stewart left to their own devices.

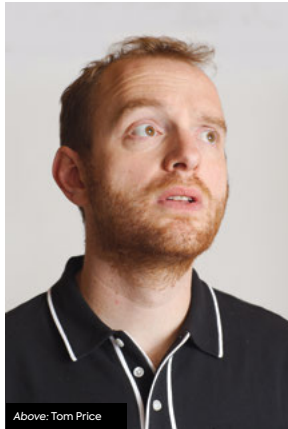
Lauren says: "We've written several **Torchwoods** now so James was happy for us to pitch a few very open ideas. One of the real joys of writing this range is its scope – every episode is so different from the last – so for

writers it feels like it's a very safe place to bring your weirdest ideas.

Torchwood is the first range we wrote for. *Grey Mare*, released back in the depths of the COVID-19 pandemic, was our maiden Big Finish voyage. We've learned so much from working with James as our script editor, it's always a joy to come back."

Vortex asks the pair to sum up the plot. Stewart says: "At its heart it's the story of something from childhood, something terrible and half-buried, worming its way back into the world when everyone who was involved has grown up.

"It's inspired by a non-horrible but quite strange period in my childhood when a friend and I were messing around with amateur black



Above: Tom Price



magic, trying to build a kind of effigy that we could breathe life into, a sort of Golem to do our bidding. Fortunately it didn't work... unless there's some terrible creature about to tear its way back into my life!"

"The idea started life as a found footage story," continues Lauren, "being told through some old films Andy has found and becomes obsessed with – in the vein of the horror film *Ringu* and things like that.

"James is really encouraging for us to push what audio can do and we've enjoyed writing playful things like *The Lincolnshire Poacher* so that was the initial instinct here. But this was a story we ended up reshaping and rethinking several times, and it's actually ended up with much more of

a procedural form than we anticipated. To be honest, this was new to us as writers and probably even more of a learning curve than it would have been to write something weirder!"

HOW DID the duo find writing for Sergeant Andy in a folk horror setting? Lauren tells *Vortex*: "We love writing for Andy. He's a great journey character because he just feels real – in so much of the world we recognise – and there's something slightly wet and pathetic about him that really fits with the tone of our writing. Plus, of course, Tom is such a brilliant, funny performer that you know you can trust him to do anything.

"Our previous story for this character, *Dog Hop*, pushed Andy out of his comfort zone a bit but kept him pretty grounded in reality – so this was a chance to really spin him off into a full-blown folk horror nightmare..."

Director David O'Mahony's cast features Bharti Patel as DI Priya Sharma, Matthew Woodyard plays Daniel Swanson, Rhys Jennings is Martin Binns, Arthur Hughes brings Iwan Jones to life and Ulrika Butt plays Sara Davies.

Lauren concludes: "*The Flawless Man* ended up being a real challenge to write; we had to rethink and rejig it a couple of times to get it to work. But I like redrafting, I find it quite rewarding, so it was a really instructive process – but the relief when you finally get something to click is huge. It sounds churlish to say that the highlight of the writing was 'finishing writing', but there really was a big sense of achievement with this story!"

Stewart adds: "You can never tell which stories are going to be the tricky ones. The highlight for me, I think, was in introducing a new character – an archivist – late in the writing process. Sometimes you can end up feeling a little hemmed in by the situation and the cast of characters you've developed, and the answer is to bring in a whole new energy. These scenes, which are a bit of comic relief during what is a pretty brutal story, are some of my favourites." **VORTEX**

TORCHWOOD THE FLAWLESS MAN



■ RELEASED: DECEMBER 2025
■ FORMAT: DOWNLOAD/CD

ORDER NOW: bgfn.sh/tapes





**BERNICE
SUMMERFIELD'S
BID TO FOIL THE
NEW DALEK
MASTER PLAN
REACHES ITS
CONCLUSION...**

OUT OF TIME

PROFESSOR BERNICE

Summerfield has been fighting evils, minor and major, for more than a quarter of a century at Big Finish. But never before has she had to encounter a Dalek plan for universal conquest. Gone is the comfort of sanctuary in the Eternity Club, the home of the greatest explorers.

Vortex asks producer James Goss how much he's enjoyed creating this set of stories for Benny?

James says: "*The Dalek Eternity* has been a fun challenge. Tim and I both grew up haunted by *The Daleks' Master Plan* (Tim actually

has the vinyl release which I both covet and fear him for!) and we wondered if there was a way to tell a similar sort of epic but with Benny.

"So we threw Benny off on a quest around the universe with her friends from the Eternity Club, trying to thwart a new Dalek Master Plan. We enjoyed putting in all the various classic tropes such as slave mines, Dalek saucers and doomed rebels, and seeing how Benny would react, all the while processing her own inner terror of the Daleks. It's ended up being everything we imagined."

The previous series, *The Eternity Club*, introduced a new format

of storytelling for Benny with each adventure lasting around 30 minutes. James explains: "It's a huge storytelling challenge for authors. There are two options – either to dash through a story breathlessly or use the slot to just tell a small chamber piece. Either is equally valid."

This concluding release *The Dalek Eternity 4* opens with *Vizier* by Patrick O'Connor.

The true leader of the Daleks has been revealed. A vast army has been unleashed. The Eternity Club has gone missing. Bernice Summerfield is running out of time. Patrick says: "I wrote a *Torchwood* for the Ood



Above: Lisa Bowerman

trilogy and James asked me if I'd write for Benny next. I like the different versions of Professor Summerfield, and I like the new format used in *The Eternity Club*, so it was an easy yes.

"I was tasked with setting up the finale. This required me to research everything that went before (including some elements of the first season) and liaise with Ash Darby to make sure I had everything in the right place for them. It's like a complex game of chess, but the Daleks are firing at your pieces one by one."

Asked to sum up the events of the story, Patrick says: "The fight for the Eternity Club is on! And you can't rely on anyone..." And as for a person highlight, he adds: "Writing for Lisa Bowerman. She's the real Vizier of Big Finish."

Emperor by Ash Darby is the final story of the set. *The galaxy is burning, civilisations are falling and the Dalek army grows. In a cell deep inside Dalek Command, a*

I TOLD MYSELF THAT THIS WAS A SIX-PAGE SCENE BUT FOUND A WAY OF WRITING IT IN ONLY TWO.

ASH DARBY

woman waits for her execution.

Vortex asks Ash how exciting it was to write a season finale? Ash explains: "It was complicated, thank you very much! There were a lot of scenes to fit in. Sometimes I would have liked to have had a moment to draw breath but there was good fun to be had... I told myself that this was a six-page scene but found a way of writing it in only two. Which meant you were never waiting for doors to open but started with people charging through them..."

"It is important to keep the story action-packed, but I also like having emotional characters. I realised you can have people talk

about their feelings at the same time as something exploding – and that saved me no end of time."

How difficult is it putting someone as lovely as Benny through a real wringer like this? Ash says:

"I was lucky to read the other episodes and they all put her to the flame in different ways – some nasty, some healing. I wanted *Emperor* to be her trip for ice cream afterwards. I think she has done the hard and horrible work, and she can show off a bit now."

Summing up the story, Ash says: "I wanted to ensure that Benny wins despite everything, simply for the reason that she is Bernice Summerfield. And giving a happy ending to everyone who deserves a happy ending – nasty deaths for everyone else! The opposite of real life."

"Episode seven set up a lot of stuff that I enjoyed picking up and weaving in. I was very pleased to discover a use for 312's scarf, and I was allowed to create one extra happy ending. Normally I'm told to make everyone very miserable, but the world of Benny has different rules."

James concludes: "The cast have been an absolute joy. Lisa is impossible to take for granted and she works so well with Simon Kane, Dan Starkey and all. It's been a privilege getting Niamh Cusack in, and it was wonderful getting actual Nicholas Briggs in studio doing live Dalek voices." **VORTEX**

THE NEW ADVENTURES OF BERNICE SUMMERFIELD THE DALEK ETERNITY 4



■ RELEASED: DECEMBER 2025
■ FORMAT: DOWNLOAD/CD

ORDER NOW: bgfn.sh/vizier



VORTEX MAIL



BOOKLET REQUEST

Is there any chance of digital versions of the booklets that appear in the physical CD releases being made available to download? I enjoy reading the scripts of **The Monthly Adventures** as I listen to the story. Apart from scripts for the odd release here and there (e.g. **The Tenth Doctor Adventures – Volume 1**), will the scripts for other ranges ever be made available as downloads when purchasing the relevant title?

Richard Coles

Nick: Since *The Monthly Adventures* ended, Richard, we haven't evolved a policy on including scripts in the releases – my hope is that we can issue a clear statement on this. As for digital versions of the booklets, this is something I favour. There has, for example, been an extensive digital booklet released for *Short Trips* recently. Discussions are ongoing.

NO TO TWO

I know that the three-disc box set format ties your hands a bit but do we really have to have box set after box set of two-part stories? Five of the Sixth Doctor box sets since the transition to three-disc box sets have been three two-parters, the last two Second Doctor box sets, two of the Fourth Doctor box sets from the past two years and two of the Seventh Doctor box sets have been three two-parters as well (*Past*



Above: Daniel Anthony

Forward was a four-parter split by a two-part story in the middle basically making three two-parters). And now, after all those box sets full of two-part stories, you're giving us another two box sets of two-part stories in *Wicked!* and *The Potential Daleks*. Some of us are actually capable of following longer stories and prefer them.

Myles Cook

Nick: I answered a similar email from you on the Big Finish Podcast, Myles, and it's clear you and I will have to agree to disagree. There are now more long-form stories being released by Big Finish than ever before. I understand you have something against two-part stories

because that duration wasn't common or typical during the run of the classic series, but I judge stories on the basis of what they're about and how effectively they unfold, not solely on how long they are. I think the two-part format works really well, particularly on audio. Also, some of our two-parters, especially the Second Doctor episodes, actually form part of a longer story. So, for example, although *The Potential Daleks* features three two-parters, in many ways it's actually a six-parter. I would urge you not to focus on judging stories in this way as it's clearly spoiling your enjoyment, and we have no plans to change policy.

CHAMPIONING CLYDE

I was wondering if Big Finish would ever do a run of stories focused on Clyde Langer? The character has been well loved since he first appeared in *Revenge of the Sliitheen* nearly 20 years ago – right the way through the **Rani** box sets and *Tales of the TARDIS* on iPlayer. In was in his *Tales* appearance, as well as *Here Today*, that we see Clyde's struggle with his self-confidence as he says that he “just creates comic books”, alongside his panic over incoming parenthood. His identity has been shaped by Sarah Jane, Rani and Luke etc.

Andalucia Armstrong-Squires

Nick: We currently have no plans to do this, Andalucia, but it's a nice idea and Daniel Anthony is a brilliant actor who we've worked with before.

BLASTED OFF?

I really loved the Big Finish re-imaginings of **UFO** and **Space: 1999**, and was disappointed when I learned that these series have been put on hold for now. Is there any possibility that we could hear more from the team at SHADO, and what happens next on Moonbase Alpha?

Terry

Nick: Those of us who worked on these series really enjoyed them. I would have loved to have created more, Terry, but sadly diminishing sales meant that we couldn't continue. **VORTEX**



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